

## ELCA Draft Social Statement: My Response to “Women and Justice”

*by Pr. Cathy Ammlung, Lutheran CORE Secretary*

I was tasked by the Board of Lutheran CORE to formulate a response to the [ELCA draft social statement, “Women and Justice.”](#) These are my own impressions and thoughts, however, and ought not to be construed as The Official Stance of Lutheran CORE on this statement.

### Observations

I begin with two editorial observations. First: For a statement that is centered on justice, and which mentions the word justice several hundred times, it’d have been helpful to put the definition right up front at the beginning, not simply hyperlinked to the glossary entry. After the first few dozen repetitions, “justice” becomes a blur-word.

Second: The brief section on immigration touches on timely concerns but is almost perfunctory.

Next, I have a few observations that don’t fit neatly in the categories I’ll use shortly.

### Interchangeable or Not?

The document rightly complains that female bodies and physiology were often ignored in medical studies. But transgenderism, which it supports as a related “justice category,” posits an almost ontological change, as if male and female bodies *are* interchangeable. The document wants to have it both ways. If women are assumed to be “just like men” but that doesn’t fit a narrative, it is a sign of sin and injustice. If women are discerned to be “not just like men” but *that* doesn’t fit a narrative, it’s also a sign of sin and injustice.

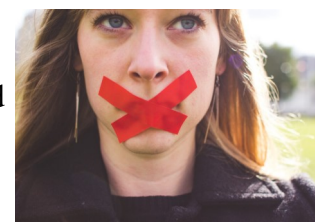
**The document wants to have it both ways.**

Next: Although “justice” becomes a blur-word, there are a few exceptions. In lines 999-1025, the discussion of “gender justice” speaks of living out our faith in God by love for neighbor, with God’s grace healing and covering all our brokenness. Similarly, in lines 522-530 there’s a reasonable description of “neighbor justice.” (Although how this differs from the Golden Rule, aside from trendier language, is unclear). It’s hard, though, to see in this draft how God’s revealed Word is greater than the sum of feminist, intersectional, and “gender/sexual justice” language. It’s as if the ELCA is trying to improve on what God SHOULD have said and commanded, if he’d just been as “woke” as the This Church.

**It’s as if ELCA is trying to improve on what God SHOULD have said and commanded, if he’d just been as “woke” as This Church.**

### Explicit Silence?

In the list of sins and injustices committed primarily against women, sex trafficking and sexual abuse are rightly condemned. Oddly, neither prostitution nor pornography are explicitly mentioned. Granted, they are specific examples of the objectification, abuse, and commodification of women’s bodies, but they are also the most lucrative, widespread, and pernicious examples thereof. Perhaps the drafters wrestled with how they might have to treat a pronouncement of This Church’s “public theologian,” Nadia Bolz-Weber, who recently opined that there is such a thing as “ethically sourced porn” which can be enjoyed and commended.



**Perhaps the drafters wrestled with how they might have to treat a pronouncement of This Church’s “public theologian.”**

### Inside this Issue:

ELCA: Women and Justice .....	<a href="#">p. 1</a>
March for Life in 2019 .....	<a href="#">p. 5</a>
CiT: Three Scenarios .....	<a href="#">p. 6</a>
ELCA Church Council and Reality .....	<a href="#">p. 7</a>
ALPB Forum and Forum Letter .....	<a href="#">p. 8</a>
Looking Back at 2018 and Forward to 2019 ..	<a href="#">p. 9</a>
Rekindle Your First Love Flier .....	<a href="#">p. 10</a>
Coming Events .....	<a href="#">p. 12</a>

# ELCA Draft Social Statement ...

continued from [page 1](#)

## Scriptural Imposition

The draft statement names real evils that injure real people. Lines 1013-1014 properly state, “Being freed in Christ involves being freed from all that tries to replace Jesus Christ as Lord in our lives....” The document then names

“systems of patriarchy,” apparently all of them, as examples of sinful bondage. It lifts up, as an example of the justifying freedom in Christ, being “freed to recognize God’s work in creation through... human expression through gender. We are enabled to see that humans are not simply gender-based opposites and that we are not created in a hierarchy.” Elsewhere (Section 3) the document states: “We believe God creates humanity in diversity, encompassing a wide variety of experiences, identities, and expressions, *including sex and gender*” (emphasis added). “Contemporary science” and “neurological research” are trotted out to debunk “idolatrous” distortions of Scripture, especially a binary interpretation of “male and female He created them.” There is no citation from Scripture explaining how “God’s diversity in creation” includes multiple sexual orientations or gender identities. This notion is being imposed on Scripture for ideological purposes.



**There is no citation from Scripture explaining how “God’s diversity in creation” includes multiple sexual orientations or gender identities. This notion is being imposed on Scripture for ideological purposes.**

## Stand Under Scripture

This leads to the final section of this essay: more “thematic” critiques. A fine theologian and churchman (can I still say that?), the late Lou Smith, warned of the perils of simply trying to understand Scripture, rather than to “stand under” it. The *former* puts us in control, using our own criteria for dissect-

**“Women and Justice” belongs firmly in the former camp.**

ing, analyzing and judging Scripture. We treat it as a “dead letter,” or as a merely human document, subject to our standards for approval, critique, and judgment. The *latter* reminds us that Scripture is God’s Word, sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing heart and soul, mind and flesh, revealing our sinfulness and God’s remedy. It’s therefore something that has authority over us, whether we approve of it or not.

“Women and Justice” belongs firmly in the *former* camp.

## Problems within the Scriptures?

Section 16 states: “While God’s Word of Law and Gospel speaks through the Scriptures, there are words and images, social patterns, and moral beliefs in them that reflect the patriarchal values of the cultures and societies in which they arose. Their continued misuse contributes to maintaining hierarchies and patterns of inequity and harm.... Our tradition’s complicity in patriarchy and sexism is connected to such biblical interpretation and to the nature and focus of some of the Lutheran theological tradition. *We confess that there are problems within the Scriptures themselves* and that our theological tradition has led to a theological understanding of humankind that is overly male-identified. These problems even become idolatrous as deeply rooted but false beliefs” (emphasis added).



The statement comes perilously close to declaring much of Scripture to be sinful, or at least to aiding and abetting the sins of idolatry and patriarchalism. It doesn’t quite cross the line, as it identifies sinful material as the product (and hobby-horse) of misogynistic males, intent on preserving their privilege and thereby contaminating, obscuring, or defying God’s intent.

**The statement comes perilously close to declaring much of Scripture to be sinful.**

## Scriptural Authority

This does considerable violence, though, to any notion of Scriptural authority. Section 16 continues:

continued on [page 3](#)

## ELCA Draft Social Statement ...

continued from [page 2](#)

“The Word of God is first and foremost Jesus Christ, God incarnate. Secondly, we encounter the Word as Law and Gospel in preaching and teaching. The Canonical Scriptures are the written Word of God, which proclaims God’s grace and sustains faith in Jesus Christ.... The Word of God is living and active, and we take the written form of the Word of God as the authoritative source and norm for faith. In its use as Law, it provides guidance and reveals human brokenness. In its use as Gospel, it reveals God’s love and promise.”

### Jiggering the Parameters

Once again, the statement tries to have it both ways. Yes, Scripture is held “within the ELCA” as authoritative. But apparently the only way to discern “authoritative Scripture” is to jigger the parameters. God’s Word *speaks through* Scripture. Law is contrasted with Gospel love. “Guidance” softens “God’s will.” Sin is recast as “brokenness.” In this diminished and muted framework, the Gospel is reduced from “forgiveness of sin, and life from death” to “God’s love and promise.” The upshot is that the social statement jettisons anything that a feminist/intersectional arbiter might declare to be offensive, misogynistic chaff from the “real” Word of God. This is [Marcionism](#) for the Woke Generation.

**This does considerable violence, though, to any notion of Scriptural authority.**

**Once again, the statement tries to have it both ways.**

**... the social statement jettisons anything that a feminist/intersectional arbiter might declare to be offensive, misogynistic chaff from the “real” Word of God.**

### Shockingly Incurious

There is another problem with the philosophical and theological underpinnings of this social statement. The drafters are shockingly incurious. They show no interest in asking, “If patriarchy is universally evil, why did God routinely work within it? God *explicitly* condemned many evil practices. Why not this one?” They do not wonder if at times, patriarchy might be “the best of a bad lot” of options for sinful and broken human beings to live as a commu-

nity of men, women, and children.

They insist the scandal of Jesus’ particularity as a male has no bearing on his work. They do not ponder why Jesus routinely used “Father” language. There is no engagement with any rationale for “male images” for God the Father, except to warn of abuse and misuse by those who are so in bondage to the sins of patriarchy and sexism that they clearly think of God the Father as literally male: genitalia, patriarchal privilege, and all: “When Christians rely almost exclusively on male images and language for God, the images and language become literal understandings of God. This is poor theology because God always exceeds human understanding. Taking male images of God literally can also lead to idolatry, meaning we idolize or hold onto only the male images” (lines 966-973).

### God is Opposed to Idolatry

There is no discussion of how God’s self-revelation in Scripture repudiates the blatantly sexual, copulating deities of surrounding cultures, or of how the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” stands adamantly opposed to the [idolatry](#), fertility cults, and sacred prostitution that were rampant in the Middle East and entirely too seductive to the people of Israel.

No one examines how relationships within the Trinity help us learn right relationships with others, male or female. There is no discussion of the nuptial imagery used for the relationship between God and Israel, or Christ and the Church, except to tie it to oppression, sexism, and patriarchy. The possibility that this divine/human intimate relationship could challenge, purify, and be a model for marriage and family life is not on This Church’s radar.

### Victimhood Instead of Justice?

There is no exploration of how Father language for God might transform the sinful ways human fatherhood and masculinity are sometimes expressed. No thought is spared for how matriarchies might foster other, equally harmful pathologies, or how intersectional feminism might be a form of idolatry, detrimental to women and men. No one seems to wonder

**They show no interest in asking, “If patriarchy is universally evil, why did God routinely work within it?”**

**No one examines how relationships within the Trinity help us learn right relationships with others, male or female.**

continued on [page 4](#)

# ELCA Draft Social Statement ...

continued from [page 3](#)

whether [intersectionality](#) perpetuates victimhood instead of promoting justice.

## Still Idolatry

There is no interest in exploring why sexual sins in Scripture *are* deemed real, even deadly sins. In the Bible, rape, incest, fornication, adultery, homosexual activity, and prostitution are flatly condemned. They are linked to idolatry. Why? Surely this is not simply another instance of male hegemony!

In lines 570-575, we read, “We must continue the task of embracing our unity and diversity so we welcome and uplift people of every sex and gender—indeed, every body—in our work together as the Body of Christ in the world. God’s love feeds the Body of Christ so that it might live in love.” No one

**No interest in exploring why sexual sins in Scripture are deemed real, even deadly ...**

questions whether gender dysphoria or same-sex attraction should ever be considered anything other than God’s intention and good gifts, to be celebrated and incorporated into the Body of Christ without comment except “it’s all good.” No one wrestles with the possibility that “God’s love” be more than sheer affirmation and welcome, with no dying to self, repentance, forgiveness, or transformation involved (except for the sins of male privilege and the failure to rejoice in the marvelous diversity of sexes and genders in God’s wondrous creation). I ask what, apparently, none of the drafters or leadership in the ELCA has asked: *what if This Church has gotten this all wrong?*

## “De-privileged” Scripture

It may be a lack of curiosity. Or it may be the determined resolve to brand such questions as dangerous manifestations of patriarchal privilege. There’s certainly no attempt to wrestle with difficult passages of Scripture, much less to consider whether any of them might reflect the will of God. They’re merely “de-privileged.”

**No one questions whether gender dysphoria or same-sex attraction should ever be considered anything other than God’s intention and good gifts.**

## Egregious Examples

Additionally, only egregious examples of sexism

are cited as entirely representative of most of the early church fathers. Church history, liturgy, and ministry are seemingly unrelieved by non-misogynistic practices and pronouncements. “The Christian Church as an institution, including the Lutheran tradition, has been complicit in these sins” (lines 440-441). Even the classically Lutheran notion of the “theology of the cross” is deemed problematic because it might be perceived as abusive, demanding subservience and suffering - especially by women.

## Blanket Condemnation

As far as I can tell, there is not one “positive” citation from the early church fathers, the history of the Western church, the theological “Great Tradition” that encompasses orthodox Christian thought, or much of Lutheranism (except for the somewhat convoluted parsing of Law and Gospel, and of justification by grace through faith, mentioned earlier). Even with qualifying phrases (“continued misuse,” “can also lead to”), it’s not hard to read the statement as a thoroughgoing condemnation of Scripture and Tradition from the earliest stories of the Old Testament until the #metoo moment.

**The “theology of the cross” is deemed problematic because it might be perceived as abusive, demanding subservience and suffering - especially by women.**

## Contradictions

This leads to some genuinely contradictory statements. For example, in lines 367-372, a perfectly fine observation is made: *“The differentiation of humankind into male and female, expressed in Genesis 2, communicates the joy found in humans having true partners, true peers: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23a). God creates community and family, not a hierarchy...”*

**What if This Church has gotten this all wrong?**

## Dishonesty

But then it goes awry: ... “not a hierarchy based on race and ethnicity, ability, social or economic status, or sex (*what our bodies look like biologically*) or gender (*how people express themselves*)” (emphasis added). The document rightly states that the very possibility of family is grounded in God-given sexual differentiation between peers. *But didn’t the writers remember that they’d identified science as the proper arbiter of sexual and gender identity and insisted that both are fluid human constructs?* God’s Word, or

continued on [page 5](#)

# ELCA Draft Social Statement ...

continued from [page 4](#)

science: which is given precedence? And is it not simplistic and misleading – to the point of intellectual and scientific dishonesty – to state that sex is defined as “what our bodies *look like*” and gender as “how people express themselves?”

Additionally, there are two sidebar graphics (see lines 727-747 and 1048-1060), illustrating how societal attitudes, religious beliefs, and laws, policies and practices lead either to gender injustice or justice. It’s presupposed that societal attitudes precede and shape religious beliefs. Together, they shape unjust or just laws and politics which create communities of injustice or justice for women and sexual minorities. Referring to lines 1048-1060, on forming a just society: “Working together, we can begin to transform the circle of injustice.... Individuals and groups can challenge harmful social attitudes and practices, reject sexist religious beliefs, and work to change laws and policies that justify and reinforce patriarchy.”

**Why is the revelation of God’s word never ... the starting point for transformation of society?**

## The Obvious Question

Nobody seems interested in what to me was an obvious question: If we believe that God’s Word truly is “lively and active,” the “source and norm of faith and life,” as this document states, *then why is the revelation of God’s word never considered the starting point for transformation of society?* Why is “religious belief” always secondary? How does all This Church’s earnest language about Scripture as foundational allow the Word of God to COME FIRST to challenge, forgive, and transform sinful human attitudes, and then to change unjust laws and create a just community?

Let me conclude with this: If the Draft Social Statement on Women and Justice is approved by the ELCA, then This Church neither understands, nor stands under Scripture. And the tragedy is, it seems incurious and unconcerned about what that means for the very real women and men it purports to care about, and for.

**If the Draft Social Statement on Women and Justice is approved by the ELCA, then This Church neither understands, nor stands under Scripture.**

# March for Life 2019

by [Pr. Steve Shipman](#), Former CORE Director and Editor

The annual March for Life is Friday, January 18. We encourage all Lutherans to meet and march together. More ELCA pro-life people could increase pressure on that denomination to live up to its social statement on the topic (imperfect, but better than most realize).



## NALC LIFE Conference

All Lutherans are very welcome at the NALC LIFE Conference the day before the March, Thursday, January 17, starting at noon with lunch at Trinity Lutheran Church, 276 Cleveland St., Warrenton VA. *And you can’t beat the registration cost: Free!* It would be nice to call them and let them know you will be there so they can prepare for lunch. The event concludes by 5:00. It is a great place to connect and have your questions answered before heading into the city the next day.

## Where to Begin?

The best way to begin the day of the March is by attending the National Memorial for the Preborn and Their Mothers and Fathers. Christian believers and clergy from numerous denominations, including Fr. Frank Pavone of Priests for Life, will gather for this event at historic Constitution Hall in Washington, DC, 1776 D St., NW (18th and D St) on the morning of Friday, January 18, 2019. The interdenominational service will take place from 8:30 a.m.-10:30 a.m. Fr. Pavone will deliver the sermon. *Admission is free*, no tickets are required, and large groups are welcome. Fr. Mitch Pacwa and Sandra Merritt will be our special guest speakers and we will welcome Joyce Im Bartholomew as our musical guest. See [National-PrayerService.com](#). Clergy are invited to vest and sit on the stage (arrive by 8 if you want to participate).

## Text Me

The city will be crowded. You are welcome to text me at 570-916-7780. But be patient; I often can’t hear calls or don’t respond to text messages immediately. Lutherans tend to gather at 12th St. and Constitution Ave to set up their banners and prepare to march the 1.3 miles to the Supreme Court building.



# Congregations in Transition: Three Scenarios

by Pr. Don Brandt, Congregations in Transition Organizer and Former CORE Board Member

## Three Scenarios

Perhaps one of these three scenarios applies to you or your congregation.

1. You are a Boomer pastor approaching retirement. Like literally hundreds—if not thousands—of Lutheran pastors, retirement is looking pretty enticing. You’ve faithfully served as a pastor for thirty or forty years, and it’s time. And when you begin to waver about this your spouse confirms what you know, in your heart, to be true, and says, “Honey it is time.” But you’re concerned about what the future might hold for your congregation. Even in normal times a transition like this can present significant challenges for churches; especially when their solo pastor departs. But these are not normal times. There is a developing clergy shortage among Protestant denominations, and this shortage might soon become a true crisis. Boomers (like you) are retiring in increasing numbers, and seminary enrollment is rapidly declining. It’s beginning to look like the “perfect storm.” So you’re worried about how long it would take for your congregation to find the “right” pastor.

**Honey, it is time.**

2. Second scenario: You are a lay leader in a congregation where your solo pastor *has already left*. Maybe you are on the church council, or the recently organized call committee. You are just beginning to see how difficult this search process will be. Perhaps you’ve discovered that the minimum financial package needed for a new pastor could be 25 to 40% more than what your previous pastor received. (You keep hearing that college student debt has become a common issue.) Or maybe you sense that available pastors are unlikely to be interested in living in your local small-town or rural community. They are more interested in suburban congregations. In some cases there is the issue of the pastor’s spouse needing to live where she/he can pursue his/her chosen career.

**Lutheran CORE can help, and help in meaningful, practical ways.**

3. Or the third scenario: You are on a call committee that has already been meeting and working for many months. You and your committee are beginning to get discouraged, if not pessimistic. And making matters worse is an increasing sense of ur-

gency. This prolonged interim is beginning to impact worship attendance and congregational giving. Some of your once active members are drifting into inactivity. Perhaps your congregation was not able to secure the services of an interim pastor; at least not a full-time one. And this has had a profoundly negative effect on your congregation’s ministries and morale.



## Lutheran CORE Can Help

Do any of these scenarios apply to your situation? If so, Lutheran CORE can help, and help in meaningful, practical ways. We are training a group of recently-retired, confessional Lutheran pastors to consult with congregations like yours. And these pastors, by the way, are *volunteering* their time, so the only cost to your congregation is the actual travel expenses for one initial visit to your community, and a nominal sign-up fee (\$150) to cover CORE’s administrative costs. But know this: That initial on-site visit to your community will only be the beginning of a six to nine-month (or longer) phone and online relationship with key congregational leaders chosen by your church council. The primary purpose of all this? To help you address the immediate ministry challenges of your transition.

## Loss of Momentum

Here is the tragic irony for many congregations in transition: Their search process can be so prolonged that they lose essential ministry momentum. This lost momentum then, in turn, jeopardizes their financial ability to find and call a competent pastor. Just one hypothetical example: After a twelve to eighteen month search process a congregation’s financial giving suffers and they find they can no longer afford a full-time pastor’s salary and benefits package.



This new CORE ministry is called *Congregations*

continued on [page 8](#)

# 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+

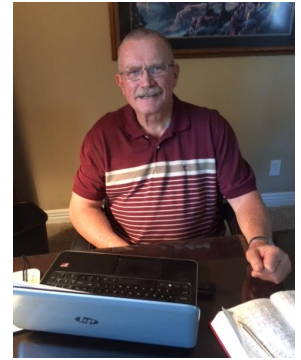
**The synod in which I was rostered ... balances the budget by spending money obtained by selling the buildings of closed congregations.**

**ELCA: Advocates for justice; acts unjustly; claims to be inclusive; consistently excludes, diminishes and dismisses.**

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*



**I do not see how the Church Council could call the ELCA well-governed, connected, and/or sustainable.**

**Bishop Eaton refuses to speak publicly about movements within the ELCA that are out of control.**

continued on [page 8](#)

## CiT: Three Scenarios

continued from [page 6](#)

*in Transition* (CiT), and we'd like to help you navigate a transition process often characterized by challenges that could put your church's health and future stability at risk. However, it is not just about minimizing risks, it's about capitalizing on ministry opportunities. That's right, *opportunities*. Opportunities to mobilize your lay leaders, renew your church's spiritual life, and embrace the full potential of what God has in mind for your congregation and its mission.

### Contact Us

So if any of the above scenarios resonate with what your faith community is facing, contact Pastor Don Brandt, or CORE Executive Director, Pastor Dennis Nelson. Coach training is scheduled in early April, but CORE is already signing up a limited number of congregations. Any and all of our thirty-two written CiT resources are available to you; at no cost and with no obligation. (Or if that's too many, we can email you some samples.) Also, Dennis and Don are available to answer any questions.

We hope to hear from you. Never underestimate what God can accomplish in and through your congregation; even in this time of transition.

Please contact either Don Brandt at [pastordonbrandt@gmail.com](mailto:pastordonbrandt@gmail.com) or Dennis Nelson at [dennisdnelsonaz@yahoo.com](mailto:dennisdnelsonaz@yahoo.com).

**Lost momentum can jeopardize a congregation's ability to find and call a competent pastor.**

**CORE is already signing up a limited number of congregations.**

## ALPB

Please consider subscribing to the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau's Lutheran Forum, a 64-page quarterly journal, and Forum Letter, an 8-page newsletter.

See <https://alpb.org> and <https://alpb.org/forum-package/>

Click [here](#) to purchase online or call Donna at (607) 746-7511.

## ELCA Church Council ... Reality?

continued from [page 7](#)

*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.**



# Looking Back Upon 2018 and Forward to 2019

by [Dennis D. Nelson](#).

As Lutheran CORE seeks to be a VOICE FOR BIBLICAL TRUTH and a NETWORK FOR CONFESSING LUTHERANS, we look back upon 2018 with thanksgiving and forward to 2019 with eager anticipation. We thank God for His many blessings, and we thank our friends for their faithful and generous prayer and financial support.

## 2018

- As a VOICE FOR BIBLICAL TRUTH during 2018 we challenged the ELCA to live within the boundaries of what was actually approved by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly and to live up to the commitments that were made at that gathering to give a place of honor and respect also to those who hold traditional views on human sexuality.
- We wrote to the presiding bishop of the ELCA as well as to all sixty-five synodical bishops to confront them with the fact that *lifestyles that were never approved were promoted at the summer youth gathering and the traditional view was called a lie*. (See [article](#) in the September #5 issue of CORE Voice.)
- We alerted faithful members of the ELCA to the amount of power and influence that have been given to the LGBTQIA+ community as we reported on the way in which that group was able to force the firing of a seminary president simply because she held traditional views twenty years ago. (See articles in the [Lent #2 issue](#) of CORE Voice and the [June Letter](#) from the Director.) We also alerted people to the kind of strange, even heretical, and radical leftwing agenda teachings that are being given to future pastors who are attending ELCA seminaries. (See articles in the [August Letter](#) from the Director and the [November # 6 issue](#) of CORE Voice.)
- As a NETWORK FOR CONFESSING LUTHERANS we worked with call committees of ELCA congregations to help them find an orthodox, Bible-believing, and outreach-oriented pastor to be their next pastor.
- We held our annual Latino ministries [Encuentro](#) (Encounter) at an ELCA church in northwest Chicago. This was a day of information, fellowship, encouragement, and renewal for pastors and congregations who are already involved in, as well as for those who are considering becoming involved in, Spanish language and bilingual (English-Spanish) ministry and outreach.
- We offered resources on our [website](#) such as dai-

ly devotions, prayers of the church, and hymn suggestions for each Sunday of the year.

## 2019

- We will be a VOICE FOR BIBLICAL TRUTH in 2019 as we continue to expose the ways in which the [Women and Justice social statement](#), which will be voted on at the 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, rejects the authority, reliability, and truthfulness of the Bible as it promotes its radical feminist agenda. (See [article](#) in this issue, as well as in the [July # 4 issue of CORE Voice](#).)
- We will alert faithful members of the ELCA to the ways in which the leaders of that church body are refusing to stand up to movements within the church that are in direct violation of what the ELCA claims to believe. (See [article](#) in this issue of CORE Voice about the recent meeting of the ELCA Church Council.)
- As a NETWORK FOR CONFESSING LUTHERANS during 2019 we will hold an event for pastors on May 1 in northeast Virginia that will be a day of inspiration, encouragement, and renewal as we ask God to rekindle our first love for Christ, for the church as the body of Christ, and for mission and ministry as the work of Christ in the world. (See [flier](#) in this issue.)
- We will partner with NALC pastor Don Brandt to offer an at-cost coaching and consulting ministry called Congregations in Transition (CiT). In early April we will hold an event in the Phoenix area for (mostly retired) Lutheran pastors to train them to become coaches who will walk with congregations through the transition process between pastors. (See [article](#) in this issue of CORE Voice.)
- We will work to provide a network of encouragement and prayer support for students with traditional views at ELCA seminaries as well as for recent graduates with traditional views.
- As we begin a new year we will continue to ask God to direct, guide, bless, and use our efforts for His Kingdom as we thank our friends for their faithful and generous prayer and financial support.





# REKINDLE YOUR FIRST LOVE

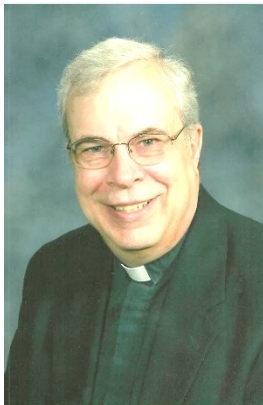
A Day of Inspiration, Encouragement, and Renewal for Pastors

**Wednesday, May 1, 2019**

Trinity Lutheran Church  
276 Cleveland Street  
Warrenton, Virginia 20186

**Begins at 9 AM** and includes lunch and dinner

Evening Options Include:  
fellowship, personal ministry time,  
silent or small group prayer



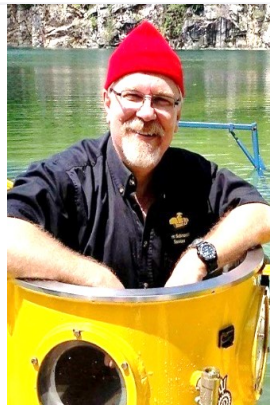
**Pastor Tim Hubert**  
(NALC)

“Rekindling Your  
First Love  
for Christ”



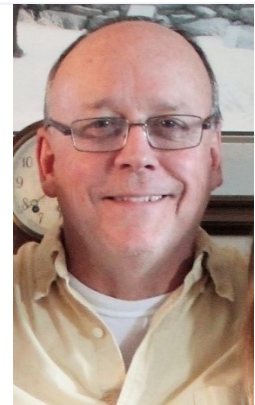
**Pastor Wendy  
Berthelsen**  
(NALC/LCMC)

“Rekindling Your  
First Love  
for the Church as  
the Body of Christ”



**Pastor Brian Hughes**  
(ELCA)

“Rekindling Your First  
Love for Mission and  
Ministry as the Work  
of Christ in the World”



**Pastor Craig  
Moorman**  
(NALC/LCMC)

“Next Steps:  
From Rekindling to  
Re-establishing *the Fire*  
of Our First Love”

### Registration: \$40

Includes Lunch, Dinner, and Snacks

#### Ways to register –

- Call Lutheran CORE at  
1-888-810-4180
- Email Lutheran CORE at  
[lcrowebmail@gmail.com](mailto:lcrowebmail@gmail.com)
- Send a check made payable to

**Lutheran CORE**

P. O. Box 1741, Wausau, WI 54402-1741

Be sure to indicate it is for Rekindle Event.

### Blocks of Rooms Available Under “Rekindle Event”

Holiday Inn Express and Suites  
540-341-3461  
\$115.00 per night plus tax

Baymont Inn and Suites  
540-349-8900  
\$79.99 per night plus tax

#### Call for Rates/No Block Available

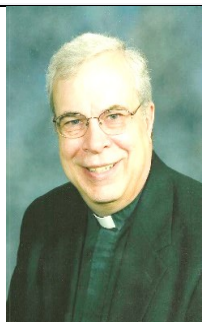
Hampton Inn  
540-349-4200

## REKINDLE YOUR FIRST LOVE

At the end of his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul commended that church for their undying love. A generation later in Revelation 2 when John writes to the church in Ephesus he tells them that they have lost their first love. Many pastors – because of the demands of ministry, the painful experience of being hurt and even betrayed by congregational members and having to deal with so much conflict – have lost their first love. In addition, all of us need time to get away for spiritual, emotional, and relational refreshment and renewal. We invite you – we urge you to come and join us for a day of inspiration and encouragement.

**Come to rekindle and regain your first love.**

This gathering will take place on **Wednesday, May 1, 2019 at Trinity Lutheran Church, 276 Cleveland Street, in Warrenton, Virginia** and will be a full day of spiritual and emotional renewal for pastors. It will include presentations, processing, prayer, fellowship, worship, determining next steps, and personal ministry time.



**NALC Pastor Tim Hubert** will talk about “Rekindling Your First Love for Christ.” Describing himself as “someone who continually needs to return to Jesus,” Tim has been a pastor for over thirty-five years. During the last dozen years he has served as an intentional interim pastor for severely conflicted congregations. He tells his interim congregations to look for a pastor who loves Jesus first and them second. Pastor Tim says, “This is a time to experience His love through prayer, song, and conversation. This is a time for the Holy Spirit to heal our souls so we can continue to be a blessing to others.”



**NALC/LCMC Pastor Wendy Berthelsen** will speak on “Rekindling Your First Love for the Church as the Body of Christ.” Wendy has served through the highs and lows of ministry for thirty-six years, thirteen of those years as an ordained pastor. She has worked with her pastor-husband at Hope Lutheran Church in Cedar Hill, Texas, and currently serves as interim pastor for the Lutheran Church of the Risen Lord in Odessa, Texas. Wendy is co-founder of Call Inc., a non-profit teaching mission dedicated to mobilizing ordinary people “called” by Jesus to “incorporate” His call into all of life.



**ELCA Pastor Brian Hughes** will address “Rekindling Your First Love for Mission and Ministry as the Work of Christ in the World.” Brian has served churches in several places, including for the last sixteen years in Columbia, Maryland. He will lead us in exploring a tool known as “the landscape of life” as we delve into how each of us has been uniquely shaped to hear the Gospel and what Jesus wants us to do with it. With an earned doctorate in Family Systems, Brian loves to ride his Harley and explore the ocean depths in his personal submarine.



**NALC/LCMC Pastor Craig Moorman** will help lead us in identifying the personal takeaways from our time together and develop them into a realistic plan for implementation. It is Craig’s hope that each of us will leave here renewed--*rekindled and on fire*--and re-establish our *first love* for Jesus Christ, His Church, and the Mission of Christ through specific action items.

Craig has served congregations in Maryland for thirty-two years both as a pastor and mission developer. In fact, he currently serves in both capacities – as a mission developer in Mt. Airy, Maryland, and as an interim pastor in Dundalk, Maryland. He was also part of the start-up Mission Team for the NALC.

## Sponsoring an Event?

### We Would Love to Help You Get the Word Out

If you are planning an event that you believe Lutheran CORE members would want to know about and that is consistent with the [Common Confession](#), please let us know. Brief articles and pictures are always welcome. We also can share them on our website and our Facebook and Twitter feeds. Contact CORE's editor, Kim Smith at [kss01ohio@gmail.com](mailto:kss01ohio@gmail.com).

## Coming Events

<b>NALC Life Conference</b>	Trinity Lutheran Church, Warrenton, VA	Jan.17, 2019	Noon—5 p.m.	<a href="#">Click here.</a>
<b>March for Life 2019</b>	Washington, DC	Jan.18, 2019	“Unique from Day One”	<a href="#">Click here.</a>
<b>SPLS / Georgia Fellowship: Theological Conference and Retreat</b>	Jekyll Island, GA	Jan. 21-22, 2019	“By My Own Understanding or Effort”	<a href="#">Click here.</a>
<b>Lutheran CORE: Coach Training for Congregations in Transition Initiative</b>	Carefree, AZ	Apr. 2-3, 2019	Training Lutheran pastors to be coaches who will help churches thrive in the transition period.	<a href="#">Click here</a>
<b>Lutheran CORE: Rekindling Your First Love Retreat</b>	Trinity Lutheran Church, Warrenton, VA	May 1, 2019	For pastors who need to regain their first love.	<a href="#">Click here</a> <a href="#">Register</a>
<b>NEXUS—for high school students</b>	Grand View University, Des Moines, IA	June 23—28 & July 7-12, 2019	“Where God’s call meets your life”	<a href="#">Click here</a>
<b>ELCA Churchwide Assembly</b>	Milwaukee, WI	August 5-10, 2019	“We are Church”	<a href="#">Click here</a>
<b>Lutheran Week</b>	Indianapolis, IN	August 5-9, 2019	Election of a new NALC bishop	
<b>LCMC Annual Gathering</b>	Omaha, NE	Sept. 29 - Oct. 2, 2019	TBD	<a href="#">Click here.</a>

### We Are Very Grateful

We are very grateful for all of our friends – individuals as well as congregations – who support our work. This is the time of year when many congregations are determining their benevolence budget and mission dollars recipients for the new year. *We urge you to speak with your pastor, and, pastors, we ask you to speak to your church council about including Lutheran CORE in the list of missions which will receive financial support from your congregation this year.* Thank you, and God bless you.

Donations can be sent to our Wausau office  
PO Box 1741 Wausau, WI 54402-1741  
or online at [www.lutherancore.org](http://www.lutherancore.org).  
Click [here](#) to make an online donation!

### Regular Website Postings

- \* CORE connects confessing congregations and pastors on its [Clergy Connect](#) page.
- \* CORE posts a [daily devotion](#).
- \* Check out our Worship page to see what Pastor Cathy Ammlung has posted for [Prayers of the Church](#), [Hymn Suggestions and Scriptures](#) and [Hymn and Liturgy Paraphrases](#).

### CORE Voice

Published by Lutheran CORE  
[Kim Smith](#), Editor  
Read older issues [here](#).

Please copy and share widely  
[www.lutherancore.org](http://www.lutherancore.org) or 1-888-810-4180