

Twenty Years of Faithfulness and Blessings

by [Pr. Mark Chavez](#), first Executive Director of Lutheran CORE, currently serving Reformation Lutheran Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania (NALC)



***Executive Director's Note:** We thank God for His faithfulness and blessings as we observe the Twentieth Anniversary of Lutheran CORE. Many thanks to Mark Chavez, first Executive Director of Lutheran CORE, for his many years of providing inspiration, guidance, and leadership for our ministry. Pastor Chavez also previously served as Director of the WordAlone Network and NALC General Secretary and now serves Reformation Lutheran Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania (NALC).*

We also thank him for writing this account of the sequence of events that led to the formation of Lutheran CORE. As we think of the passion, commitment, and hard work of so many, including Mark Chavez, retired ELCA bishop Paull Spring, and Jaynan Clark, former president of the board of the WordAlone Network, we are reminded of the words of the writer to the Hebrews. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." (Hebrews 12: 1-2)

Lutheran CORE formed in November 2005, but the seeds for its formation were planted many years prior. The seeds were sown in 1982 when the Lutheran Church in America, the American Lutheran Church and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches established the Commission for a New Lutheran Church (CNLC). Seventy representatives from the three churches developed the proposal for the

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Lutheran Theological Refutation of the ELCA Social Statement “Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All”

by [Mr. Paul Flemming](#), Fredericksburg, VA



Rather than repeat Pastor Nelson’s comprehensive review of the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, I focus on the social statement “Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All” and its resolutions. This document represents a significant attempt to reshape Lutheran public witness within contemporary American civic engagement. As someone committed to the Augsburg Confession and the Book of Concord, I see this statement as indicative of the ELCA’s growing theological accommodation to secular ideologies, often undermining historic Lutheran doctrine, Christian liberty, and the two-kingdoms approach. Below, I offer a Lutheran theological rebuttal, addressing the document’s most serious theological issues and providing a confessionally-rooted correction.

Confusing the Two Kingdoms

At the heart of the ELCA’s statement is a blurring—often, a collapse—of the Lutheran distinction between the “right-hand” spiritual kingdom (*regnum gratiae*) and the “left-hand” civil kingdom (*regnum politicum*). The document’s language routinely invokes public service, advocacy, and “civic life” as vehicles for the realization of “shalom,” the biblical vision of justice, well-being, and wholeness. While Lutherans affirm that God works through both “kingdoms,” the Confessions strictly delimit their means and goals: the Church is constituted by the ministry of Word and Sacrament, calling sinners to repentance and faith; the State orders external affairs and restrains evil by the sword (Augsburg Confession XVI, XXVIII; Romans 13). By asserting that “God’s people are called to both engage in bringing about a

better world and be vigilant in regard to any earthly arrangement,” the document opens the door to a confusing activism where the proclamation of the gospel is practically subordinated to the Church’s civil agenda. This is not God’s unique gift to the Church (Word and Sacrament), but a giving over of the Church’s authority to temporal ideologies and causes, however well-meaning.

Erosion of the Doctrine of Sin and Justification

Lutheran theology begins all social analysis with the acknowledgment that even the noblest human efforts—political, economic, or philanthropic—remain shot through with original sin (*homo incurvatus in se*). The ELCA document affirms a general brokenness but shifts quickly to systemic theories of oppression, power, and identity, echoing contemporary sociological frameworks more than biblical anthropology. Furthermore, its soteriology is social, not christological: the Church’s role is cast as “seeking justice and reconciliation,” with little mention of Law and Gospel or the unique necessity of Christ’s atoning work. The Augsburg Confession teaches that the Church alone possesses the means of grace for forgiveness and new life (Augsburg Confession V; Apology IV). In contrast, the ELCA’s focus risks distilling Lutheran teaching into general moral uplift and activism, undermining both the necessity of Christ for sinners and the Church’s saving mission.

Instrumentalization of Doctrine and Liturgy

Repeatedly, the proposed statement invokes baptismal vocation as a calling to “public advocacy” or “prophetic presence” for contemporary social causes (especially DEIA, as noted throughout the Assembly). While all Christians are called to serve their neighbor, confessional Lutherans insist this flows from justification by faith—never as a requirement or condition to secure justice in this age (Formula of Concord, SD VI). Instrumentalizing baptism and liturgy as tools for social transformation shifts their meaning from divine gift to human project. The document thus confuses the orders of creation and redemption, attempting to effect spiritual change through law-oriented means.

Undermining Christian Liberty and Congregational Autonomy

The social statement’s call to centrally program civic engagement, advocacy, and even curricular

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D.E. Incurvatus In Sei: Navel Gazing and the Narcissist

by [Pr. Kevin Haug](#), ELCA Pastor in Texas



No man is an island,
Entire of itself.
Each is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thine own
Or of thine friend's were.
Each man's death diminishes me,
For I am involved in mankind.
Therefore, send not to know
For whom the bell tolls,
It tolls for thee. —John Donne

I remember reading and discussing this poem during my freshman year of college at a Lutheran university. The professor, and many of us students, lauded Donne's insight into our connectedness. But as time has passed, and, hopefully, as wisdom has grown, I now look at this poem differently.

As someone who has conducted many funerals (which Donne is referencing with the tolling bells), I can confidently say that the bell is not tolling for me. It is tolling for the deceased person, and to somehow try to include myself in that tolling is nothing less than diminishing the life and memory of the person for whom the bell tolls. To put it into another manner, I do not attend a funeral to grieve myself; I am not the center of attention.

Interestingly enough, Donne is trying to convey

that point in this poem, but he actually concludes with the very thing he wishes to avoid: self-centeredness.

As I contemplate the ELCA's continued foray into DEIA initiatives, I believe the results are the same. There is a good intention to bring about a church that reflects the world and the communities in which churches reside, but the end result is simply self-centeredness; self-focus; an inward turning of the heart (*incurvatus in sei*).

To steelman the DEIA argument: in theory, DEIA initiatives will help the church become more diverse in parallel with the communities around. In theory, the church will first look outside, observe the diverse nature of individuals in its community, look inward to see what the church looks like, and then strive to make the inside of the church look like the outside of the church. The pathway to this is to place as many individuals of "under-represented groups" in as many positions of leadership and power as possible. With more of these individuals in places where they are seen, churches will draw others from their communities until the church's demographics match the community's demographics.

That's how it's supposed to work. But the question is: how does it actually work?

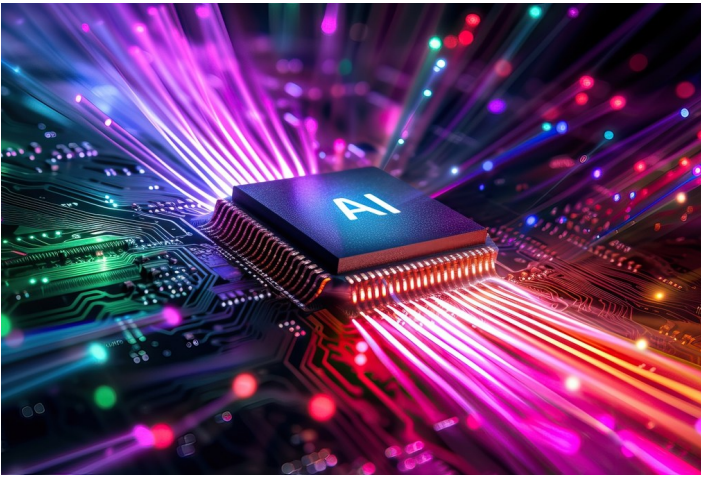
I've been in the ordained ministry for 25 years, and I still remember the ELCA's inception in the late 80s. I remember how excited some in the church were because we had placed a mandate on ourselves to become more diverse—to have at least 10% of our membership be people of "under-represented groups", although the terminology certainly was different back then. The national church plucked as many leaders as possible from "under-represented groups" and placed them in positions of leadership and power. Although it was not called such, we have had almost 40 years of DEIA initiatives in practice.

And the results have been? Well, we are still right around where we were back then as far as membership demographic is concerned. And we are still looking at ourselves and bemoaning the fact that we look nothing like the rest of the country. We have not become outward focused at all; in fact, we are constantly looking inward and taking stock of what we look like. Narcissus did exactly that when he kept looking in the mirrored pool until he died. And since the ELCA's membership is less than half of what it was in its inception, arguably we are doing the same exact thing Narcissus did. In short: nearly 40 years of DEIA has been a miserable failure. Good intentions have produced awful results. There is a desperate need to change focus.

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The Reformed Church Is ...

by [Pr. Brett Jenkins](#), NALC pastor from Pennsylvania and former board member of Lutheran CORE



It is 2025—an auspicious year. We are a quarter way into the 21st century. The Lutheran Reformation is just beginning to essay its second half millennium, and just as the printing press projected the ideas of a firebrand priest named Luther across the continent before a decadent hierarchy could crush him as they did Jan Hus a century before, so now the internet can empower the Church to reform and retool for the changing challenges of ministry.

I know, I know; from shadow-banning, to AI, to the identity crisis in young people, to the manipulation of the masses through algorithmic engineering, the internet actually seems to be the *source* of most of our ministry challenges. Fair enough. I do not mean to downplay any of the challenges theological or pastoral that this new and increasingly ubiquitous reality presents to the proclamation of the gospel, the cultivation of genuine Christian discipleship, and ultimately, the salvation of persons. The kinetic component of the spiritual warfare that has always been the province of the Church now seems to be moving at a dizzying speed that is dizzying and whose geographic boundaries are less clear; the narratives the Church would historically recognize as spiritual propaganda used to largely be “over there,” as the world was divided into Christendom and the mission field. Now we carry these narratives around in our pocket via the raucous voices of not just traditional pundits, but social influencers and YouTube “experts” whose probity and veracity are vouched for primarily by the number of subscribers they can capture and retain.

Complicating the picture further is the fact that this technology was born in the bosom of Western culture precisely at the moment that Nietzsche’s “death of God” made all things possible and French post-structuralism was teaching anyone college-educated

that right and wrong were merely social constructs meant to obscure what was in fact the raw exercise of power, and that this logic informs the programming of not only the Artificial Intelligence about which we are all concerned, but the search engines we use to learn about them. Social observer Ted Gioia estimates that we have at most twelve more months within which the average, well-educated person will be able to tell what is real from what is computer-generated in their news feed, and historian/social philosopher Mary Harrington has noted that *functional* literacy—the ability to focus on, digest, and synthesize information gained through long-form reading—is already plunging so precipitously that it will soon be at medieval levels, despite the ubiquity of text in our lives. Clergy may shortly become “clerics” once again, an elite defined by their competency with written language.

“Where is the good news in this?” we may well ask. It is that the Church has some unique opportunities before Her at this time. This past weekend, like an incarnation of Robert Jenson’s prediction in his October 1993 First Things article [How the World Lost Its Story](#), a couple from a Pentecostal background visited my church for the first time precisely because they discovered on our worship stream solid Biblical preaching married to the singing of the *Kyrie* and *Gloria*. The husband had been discovering through YouTube videos what he may never have discovered even 20 years ago, when the only spiritual voice was that of his pastor; he was learning that the mode of worship he had grown up with was novel, not apostolic, and he was seeking a firmer foundation for himself and his family. For my part, I am excited at the prospect that the fervent piety that characterized their upbringing might leaven the at-times stolid, business-as-usual daily demeanor of central Pennsylvania Lutheranism. I am hopeful that it can do this without fueling Lutheranism’s historic pendulum swing from Pietism to Neo-Orthodoxy since they come seeking, not escaping from, the liturgical, Sacramental life of the historic Church.

Can you imagine what the fervency of such piety married to orthodox Biblical faith grounded in profound liturgical formation might look like? I can. Think Polycarp, Maximos the Confessor, Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther...

There is much more to say in future articles about the opportunities that this historical moment affords the Church, but one at least is the healing of some of our historic divisions through wider mutual knowledge and appreciation. John Paul II prayed that the 3rd millennium of Christianity would be the millennium of healing our divisions. Wouldn’t it be just like God to use what is seemingly a great weapon in the hands of our ancient Enemy to accomplish that seemingly impossible task?

Believers to Followers: Come and See!

by [Pr. Megan Ann Shaffer](#), NALC pastor in Pennsylvania



Why is it that a group of unlikely people can spread the Gospel to others, while we, with all our Bible knowledge, struggle to do the same? The disciples had no formal education or Bible classes. We have catechesis, weekly sermons preached to us, and many other tools at our disposal. Yet, despite our understanding, the mere thought of bringing up faith, Jesus, or even God in a conversation strikes fear into our hearts. Even if we're willing to try, how do we actually do it? That's the big question.

I remember the first time I turned on my new computerized sewing machine. As the computer booted up, it made a cacophony of unfamiliar noises that honestly scared me. It took me ten minutes to figure out how to use the automatic threader, even though I've been sewing for over twenty years! Now that I have had it for a few weeks, the process of starting up the machine and beginning a project feels natural. Did I know how to use all of its features at first? No. So I watched YouTube videos of people sharing their knowledge as they demonstrated the functions. They helped me to apply my knowledge and turn words and concepts into action.

If we step back and look at how Jesus taught his disciples over his three-year earthly ministry, we see that he began by teaching just a few. As the disciples gained more knowledge, he took them with him as he ministered to the lost. If we look at the feeding of the five thousand, we see yet another transition of Jesus empowering his disciples to begin doing the work of the Kingdom. Lastly, after his resurrection, he released them to carry on the message of the Gospel, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

From there, we can see the fruit of their three-year apprenticeship in the example of St. Paul. After his conversion, Paul (then Saul) was taken to Damascus, the city where he had planned to persecute followers of Jesus Christ. It was there that Paul not only experienced his own healing, but also witnessed everyday people sharing stories of what their lives looked like before Jesus healed them and afterwards. Empowered by his own experience and with the stories of others, he set off to share the Gospel of Christ whenever and wherever he was.

I have to admit, it took me a while to commit to intentionally being discipled by others. I grew up in a Roman Catholic family that rarely attended church and talked about God even less. Across the alley from my grandparents' home in Hazleton, Pennsylvania, was St. Gabriel's, their parish church. Back then, churches could leave their doors open without fear of vandalism, and with a very active congregation, it was common for there to always be something happening inside. I vividly remember following a few kids through an unlocked door into the side chapel where their mothers were gathered in prayer. When the parents saw me standing awkwardly outside the chapel door, they kindly asked if I wanted to come in and join them.

As Christ invited those he encountered to 'come and see,' I received the same invitation. A few decades later, I heard that invitation again, this time as a seminarian, and it was to watch and listen as a pastor shared what had transpired in his congregation of everyday people whose lives were transformed by the Gospel to such an extent that they were sharing their stories with others. As I listened, I grew increasingly curious.

Even though I was reluctant, a friend of mine was not. The pastor invited her to join him at a community event, where they handed out cookies and talked with passersby. When they returned, she eagerly told me how they had spoken to a few people who openly shared their struggles. What surprised her was how the pastor offered to pray for them right then and there. Not the generic, 'Oh, I'll pray for you,' that we often say. Instead, he said, "Why don't we take a moment to pray about that?" She shared her amazement at his willingness and the positive responses they received. My friend was so excited that she couldn't wait to go again. Over the next few weeks, I saw her start to pray for others she engaged with in everyday conversations, including me! Five years later, I've begun to see how lives change as believers take those first steps to follow Jesus Christ and invite you to come and see for yourself.

What Your Congregation Can Do to Find Your Next Pastor

by [Pr. Don Brandt, Congregations in Transition](#) and [Congregational Lay-Led Initiative \(CLI\)](#)



By now most of you are probably aware of the current clergy supply crisis, and the fact that this shortage is unprecedented in our lifetimes.

Just one factor—among many—contributing to this crisis was highlighted in a *Wall Street Journal* article this last month. And while this article was not specifically about clergy, it was definitely relevant to what churches are facing when they have pastoral vacancies. The article was about the *lack of mobility among American households*. The August 17th, 2025, *WSJ* article began with this subtitle: “Nobody’s buying homes, nobody’s switching jobs—and America’s mobility is stalling.” Another quote: “Americans are stuck in place.” Even more specifically, this article stated that, “Those who bought homes when mortgage rates were low or have stable white-collar jobs (which would, of course, would include clergy colleagues) are clinging to those jobs.”

This article included the following statistics:

1. In 2024 home sales fell to their lowest level in almost thirty years.
2. In the 1950’s and 1960’s 20% of Americans would typically move each year. In 2024, only 7.8% moved.
3. In one study, “Couples where both people work have the lowest levels of interstate mobility of any group.”

Of course our current clergy shortage is not just about economic realities and housing. We are also dealing with a significant drop—over the last 30 years—in the number of seminary graduates. And we still have large numbers of currently-serving Boomer pastors reaching retirement age.

Now there are three caveats to this mobility crisis

and whether or not it impacts *your church*:

a. If a pastor you call is not currently a homeowner that might simplify his or her relocation to your community.

b. Also, if your congregation owns a parsonage then there would be time for a new pastor to relocate and wait until mortgage interest rates drop before buying a home in your community.

c. Third, if your congregation is located in a metroplex your next pastor might already be living in your area and could commute to “work.”

However, the primary point of this article is indicated in my title above. And here is the bottom line: It’s time for congregational leaders in many congregations to consider the long-term implications of this clergy shortage, and adopt a strategy to insure they will have competent pastoral leadership in the future. This new strategy is especially imperative for churches who currently have fewer than one hundred worshipers on a typical Sunday—which is the majority of LCMC, NALC, and ELCA churches. If this describes *your* congregation then this is what you need to consider: *That you will likely not be able to find and call a competent, ordained full-time pastor when your current pastor retires or departs to accept a new call.* In fact, the traditional operating assumption that your next pastor will be moving to your community from a different region or state is becoming extremely unlikely.

But why is this issue something that especially needs to be addressed by smaller congregations? Three reasons:

1. For smaller congregations there is a limit to how long most of them will remain stable and viable without an ordained pastor leading them. Is this because pastors are, on a practical level, always indispensable? Not at all. But unfortunately, a significant percentage of life-long Lutherans *perceive* this is the case. As a result this could mean a significant drop in worship attendance over time. And *that* would threaten the viability of a small congregation’s ministry.

2. Congregations of this size can no longer necessarily count on their national church body to somehow provide them with their next pastor. Why? Because the shortage of ordained and competent pastors is simply too severe to be effectively addressed and overcome by our national church leadership. And it’s not that they aren’t aware, or aren’t trying to address this crisis. It’s due to the continuing exodus of retiring Boomer pastors and how full-time seminary enrollment over the last 20 to 30 years has plummeted. In other words, this crisis cannot realistically be

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What Your Congregation Can ...

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solved from the “top down”; at least not over the next five to ten years.

3. And while the clergy supply crisis will also have an impact on larger congregations, odds are that qualified pastoral candidates—when they are considering calls to more than one church—will often end up accepting calls to the larger congregation.

So what can smaller congregations **do** given these challenges? Pray? Definitely pray. Prayer helps. But I suggest one particular prayer request: **That God would help “raise up”, from among your active members, your congregation’s next pastor.** In other words, it’s time for churches to take full ownership in addressing this worsening clergy shortage by identifying and enlisting one (or two) members willing to be educated (online) and trained (in-house) to provide future pastoral leadership for your congregation. This is nothing less than a strategy where your church *takes ownership*—on a practical level—to insure your future long-term viability as a congregation.

Now for some *good* news. The great majority of seminary courses are now available online. This means that a seminary education does not require that your future member-pastor leave your community to pursue her/his studies. Also, eventually hiring and calling an active member means that your future pastor has already been thoroughly vetted in the best way possible; as one of your active members and lay leaders. Furthermore, your pastor-in-training can be trained in-house by being employed by your church part-time while taking seminary courses part-time.

Finally, the biggest single challenge in this strategy is to identify and enlist the right active member who is willing to consider pastoral training. And the smaller your congregation, the more difficult this might be. So “cast a wide net”. Consider members of various ages who are in various life stages; whether active retired, empty nest, nesting stage, young adult, single or married. Also, consider an active member who might have to be bi-vocational; in other words, continue his or her current job while serving your church as your *part-time* future pastor.

For a more detailed description of what this strategy might look like, click [here](#). And if you still have questions, by all means contact me directly.

Pastor Don Brandt

Lutheran CORE’s Congregational

Lay-leadership Initiative

pastordonbrandt@gmail.com

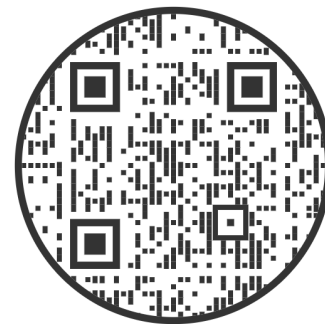
Video Ministries: Tools For Worship Planning — Part Two

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



Many thanks to NALC pastor Cathy Ammlung for this second in a series of videos intended to provide congregations - especially those with temporary and/or longer-term pastoral vacancies - with some tools for worship planning. A link to Cathy’s video can be found [HERE](#). A link to our YouTube channel, which contains sixty-one reviews of books and videos on topics of interest and importance, can be found [HERE](#).

In this video, Cathy discusses the church year and festivals. She looks at the rhythm and logic of the secular year, as broken unofficially into various seasons and as punctuated by special holidays, as a way to think about the church year cycle. She gives some suggestions for how the church year can help you plan a season of worship as well as some simple examples of using the season or day of the church year in your congregation's life. Next session will focus on understanding and using the lectionary as you do your worship planning



Aim at the QR code above with your smart phone’s camera to bring up Lutheran CORE’s website address.

Twenty Years of Faithfulness ...

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new church, now known as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

The 70 leaders were almost evenly divided on the authority of Scripture over all matters of faith and life. Some upheld the authority of Scripture and others put themselves in authority over Scripture. The proof of that came in February 1984 when the CNLC met in Minneapolis, MN to work on the draft constitution for the new church. A layman representing the AELC proposed editing the first sentence in the draft Confession of Faith. It read, “On the basis of sacred Scriptures, the Church’s creeds and the Lutheran confessional writings, we confess our faith in the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. . .” He proposed substituting “faith in the triune God” for “faith in the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” He opposed using masculine language with reference to the persons of the Trinity, thereby rejecting God’s revealed, proper name.

His motion was supported by 30 CNLC members, and opposed by 33. Thus the three churches forming the new church were each internally divided on the authority of Scripture. It was an ominous sign of how deeply divided the ELCA would be at its start in 1988, and in fact the division surfaced quickly.

The ELCA Conference of Bishops issued a pastoral letter in 1989 admonishing ELCA pastors to baptize only “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” The bishops were alarmed that a growing number of pastors, taught by a growing number of seminary professors, were intentionally baptizing using words without masculine references to the Trinity.

The next year the ELCA appointed a sexuality task force with 16 members in favor of sexual relationships well beyond the biblical norm of one man and one woman for life. Only one member, the Rev. Dr. Larry Yoder, supported the biblical norm, and he was a late addition to the task force.

The warning signs were so obvious that in 1990 more than 1,000 ELCA members – bishops, pastors, theologians and lay leaders – attended “Call to Faithfulness,” a theological conference sponsored by three independent Lutheran theological journals affiliated with the ELCA at St. Olaf College in MN. Almost all the attendees were concerned that the Word of God was being silenced in the ELCA.

A longer account would provide more details of the fundamental division in the ELCA, and attempts by a number of groups and individuals to call attention to the crisis. For now it is sufficient to note that

it was only a matter of time before a reform movement like Lutheran CORE would emerge in the ELCA.

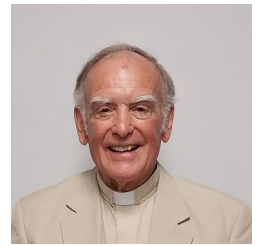
Jumping ahead to 2003, one man, retired ELCA Bishop Paull Spring, planted the seed that would become Lutheran CORE. He was a visitor at the August 2003 ELCA Churchwide Assembly (CWA) in Milwaukee, WI. The leaders of the WordAlone Network were also visitors at the Assembly. Bp. Spring approached Pr. Jaynan Clark, WordAlone President, and asked if the WordAlone Network would be interested in forming a coalition to oppose the ELCA’s sexuality recommendations that would be presented at the 2005 CWA in Orlando, FL.

The ELCA, as it had done in 1990 with the first sexuality task force, stacked the second sexuality task force heavily in favor of approval of sexual relationships beyond the biblical norms in 2002. The task force was charged with making recommendations to the 2005 CWA, so Spring knew the recommendations would oppose the authority of Scripture.

Bp. Spring’s initiative was remarkable because he had been one of the most prominent ELCA leaders in support of the full communion agreement between The Episcopal Church USA (TEC) and the ELCA. WordAlone led the opposition to the full communion agreement, first at the 1997 CWA in Philadelphia, and then the 1999 CWA in Denver, where he and Pr. Clark were on opposite sides.

However Bp. Spring knew that he and WordAlone agreed on the authority of Scripture. He met Pr. Clark in fall 2002 at a Christian sexuality conference hosted by Ruskin Heights Lutheran Church in Kansas City, MO. About 350 people were at the conference. WordAlone members accounted for a third of the attendees. The main concern of the attendees was upholding the authority of Scripture in the ELCA as the norm for sexuality and sexual relationships.

Clark accepted Spring’s offer to form a temporary, single issue coalition that would address only the sexuality recommendations going to the 2005 ELCA assembly. They agreed to invite significant ELCA members to a meeting to see if it were possible to form a coalition across the line of division over ecumenism. Bp. Spring invited the leaders he thought should be there and WordAlone did the same. The people invited were retired bishops, theologians and pastors. They represented all the confessional Lutheran camps in the ELCA, from the high



Pastor Mark Chavez

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church Evangelical Catholics to the low church charismatic Lutherans.

More than 35 people were invited, 25 of whom attended the meeting at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN September 19-20, 2003. Despite their disagreements on some matters (ecumenism, worship style and piety), within 90 minutes there was strong consensus that they could work together to form a coalition that would work only until the conclusion of the ELCA's 2005 CWA. The coalition was named Solid Rock Lutherans, and the Rev. Dr. Roy Harrisville, III, was chosen to serve as its Director.

Solid Rock was successful in organizing opposition to the sexuality recommendations presented to the 2005 CWA in Orlando, FL. The recommendation to approve of ordained and lay ministers in same-sex relationships was defeated 490 – 503. However, an ambiguous recommendation on the blessing of same-sex unions was approved 670 – 323, which was a strong indication of where the ELCA was headed on the sexuality issues.

Though Solid Rock was focused only on the sexuality issues, as people in the coalition got to know each other, they realized they shared other concerns about the ELCA. One concern was the ELCA's Renewing Worship project, which also made recommendations at the 2005 assembly. People in Solid Rock Lutherans called attention to the editing of the Psalms and hymns to avoid using masculine pronouns with reference to the three persons of the Trinity in the Renewing Worship materials. Voting members associated with Solid Rock Lutherans at the 2005 CWA called for a delay of considering the Renewing Worship project until the 2009 CWA. However the CWA overwhelmingly approved moving forward with the project, which eventually led to the new hymnal, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.

Because of the good experience in Solid Rock Lutherans, after the 2005 CWA Bp. Spring asked if the WordAlone Network would be interested in forming a new coalition that was not single issue and not temporary. He proposed a coalition for reform that would address the major biblical and theological errors in the ELCA. WordAlone responded positively, and invited Spring and other leaders in Solid Rock Lutherans to its Fall Theological Conference in Brooklyn Park, MN, November 6-8, 2005.

Prior to that conference, Solid Rock Lutherans held its final meeting at Ruskin Heights Lutheran Church in Kansas City, MO September 27-28, 2005. Spring's proposal for a new coalition generated much discus-

sion and debate. There was still a fair amount of suspicion and distrust of the WordAlone Network because of the disagreement over the full communion agreement with The Episcopal Church. The conversation was candid and healthy. Working through the disagreement was critical because Spring's intention was to form a coalition "with and within the WordAlone Network." (Dec 2005 letter from Lutheran CORE steering committee)

Bp. Spring had gained the trust of all at the meeting, so his leadership was crucial in convincing people to move forward with the new coalition. Spring came to the WordAlone conference in November with a resolution calling for a coalition for reform. His proposal was nearly unanimously endorsed by the attendees, which included WordAlone members and leaders from Solid Rock Lutherans. Lutheran CORE was formed as a coalition of pastors, laypeople, congregations, and reforming movements within the ELCA with the goal to reform the church under the Word of God and according to the Lutheran Confessions. Lutheran CORE or a movement like it might not have emerged without Bp. Spring's foresight and leadership. His initiative to form Solid Rock Lutherans was critical in bringing together disparate reform groups within the ELCA. Many of the people in those groups had never met the people in the other groups. Solid Rock Lutherans brought them together, creating the trust and good will needed to form Lutheran CORE. Praise the Lord for Bp. Spring's leadership.



Left to right: Bp. Ken Sauer, Bp. Spring, Rev. Dr. Benson Bagonza, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania at Bp. Spring's installation as the NALC's first bishop.

Lutheran Theological ...

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recommendations for all congregations and ministries reflects a form of ecclesial coercion foreign to Lutheran doctrine of Christian liberty (Galatians 5:1; Augsburg Confession XXVIII). The binding of conscience—especially by making DEIA or any other social framework mandatory within the Church—contradicts the very heart of the Lutheran confessional principle: “It is not necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be the same everywhere” (Augsburg Confession VII). The uniform imposition of such agendas threatens both the diversity and the spiritual freedom of congregations.

Conclusion

The proposed ELCA social statement on civic life is marked by theological accommodation, confusion of Law and Gospel, and a radical collapse of the Church’s spiritual calling into political activism. Lutheran theology calls for faithful two-kingdoms engagement, proclamation of Christ’s atoning work, and the preservation of Christian liberty—rejecting all attempts to transform the Church into an agent of political or social revolution. The world, not the Church, is the field for partisan experiment; the Church must remain free to preach Christ crucified for sinners, for “to him alone belongs the glory” (SD II, Luther’s Small Catechism).

Note: The Social Statement as amended was approved 762-16.

The **2026 Pro Ecclesia** conference is coming up fast. Keynote speakers include Marcus Plested, Matthew Levering and Kevin Vanhoozer. Click [here](#) to register.

Coming Events

- **Cross Country Mission III**—September 15-20, 2025—Return to Burnsville, NC (the area damaged by Hurricane Helene). Click [here](#).
- **Global Confessional and Missional Lutheran Forum**—September 23-25, 2025, in Nairobi, Kenya
- **LCMC 25th Annual Gathering & Convention**—Lakeville, MN. October 5-8, 2025. Click [here](#).
- **Nicaea Pro Ecclesia: The Status and Potential of Our Nicene Heritage in Christian Catechesis and Ecumenical Dialogue**—Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, Birmingham, AL. January 12-14, 2026. Click [here](#).

More events: <http://lutherancore.website/events/future/>

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There are multiple ways to change focus to get the ELCA out of this inward focused reality, but I would like to name two. First: a reorientation towards the Gospel of Grace. God’s justification of undeserving sinners by grace through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ changes a heart from inward to outward focused. It brings about a death of self so that one lives for God and then for neighbor. Then, living that life leads one to become Great Commissioned focused to reach out to anyone and everyone with the Gospel. I have personally seen and experienced many non-denominational and Pentecostal churches do exactly this, and their diversity far, far exceeds the ELCA’s. (When I pointed this out to my bishop, she didn’t exactly have much to say.)

Which brings me to my second point: changing our view of the church so that we are not simply defining ourselves by individual congregations or individual denominations. We need to understand the church in its universal sense. While our individual congregations (or denominations) may not look representative of the society, the Church catholic does. There needs to be no existential angst at the fact that we are not representative of the entire society—in fact, I am sure the African Methodist Episcopal Church (and others) are losing no sleep over not having enough white members in their midst. We can serve God and seek the lost as best as we can knowing that integrative change comes very, very slowly.

We know that institutions that look inward die. That is an established fact. We’ve actually been trying DEIA for a very long time. It hasn’t worked. It has only led us to look inward. It’s time to stop navel gazing and instead actually reform. Perhaps one day, we in the ELCA will actually add the rest of the clause to *semper reformanda*. *Secundum. Verbum. Dei*. Great Commission focused churches that adhere to the Word of God will see much quicker demographic transformation than those caught up in the

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Kim Smith, Editor

To contact Lutheran CORE, please email
lcurewebmail@gmail.com or
call 1-888-810-4180