

Greasing the Skids?

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



In This Issue:

- A mother’s years of prayer for her son
- Tears of gratitude
- Will we move out of our comfort zone for the sake of the Gospel?
- Crisis options
- Unfair, unjust, questionable and manipulative
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In our January and February 2022 publications I wrote a two-part article which explored the question of how the LGBTQ+ agenda and community were able to be so successful in completely taking over the ELCA and in such a short time. Here are links to that two-part article, which I entitled, “How Did It Happen?” – [LINK](#) and [LINK](#).

I described the strategies and principles of Community Organizing as outlined in a resource from ReconcilingWorks, "Building an Inclusive Church Toolkit" (BIC). Here is a link to that Toolkit - [Building an Inclusive Church - ReconcilingWorks](#).

On its website ReconcilingWorks describes its mission in this way. “Since 1974, ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation has advocated for the full welcome, inclusion, and equity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual/aromantic (LGBTQIA+) Lutherans in all aspects of the life of their Church, congregations, and community.”

The Toolkit outlines steps to take to gain the support of Early Adopters, the Early Majority, and enough of the Late Majority in order to achieve the 75% approval vote that is required by Reconciling-Works for an organization to become Reconciling in Christ (RIC).

I am a retired ELCA pastor, rostered in the Grand Canyon Synod.

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Reviving Monica

by [Pr. Brett Jenkins](#), Pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and Dean, NE Mission District, NALC

In his article in the February issue of *First Things*, “The Rise and Fall of Gay Activism,” Scott Yenor details the various waves of the gay liberation movement that, beginning around the time I was born, as an outgrowth of the sexual revolution both created and defined what has been the defining pastoral and theological issue for my generation of pastors. Yenor’s article is a deep-dive on the subject, detailing the thinking and strategies that took same-sex relationships from forbidden, to fringe, to fraught, to front-and-center. Same-sex attraction has in both the popular and scholarly imagination, gone from disordered to desirable in the space of living memory. Indeed, among many young people it is seen as in many ways more desirable than heterosexual attraction, as it does not carry with it two great risks; the risk of navigating the natural divide between male and female ways of encountering and engaging reality and the risk of the life-changing effects of pregnancy and parenthood, which necessarily involves the curtailing of one’s own desires for the sake of the children.

“The love that dare not speak its name” is not only shouting it from every height and corner of the culture, but all who do not add their enthusiastic endorsement are publicly regarded with the scorn and opprobrium once reserved for Nazis and the KKK. When I reposted a link to former New Atheist Aayan Hirsi-Ali’s now-viral essay “[Why I Am Now a Christian](#),” all a high school friend, once a devout Roman Catholic, could reply in response was, “But Christianity still has no place for gay people.”

It was not worth responding to her that Christianity has all the room in the world for people who think of themselves as gay, it just has no ability nor authority to condone or bless same-sex sexual behavior... just as it has no room to do so for much (most?) of the behavior engaged in by heterosexual couples since the sexual revolution. It was not worth saying that the church is full of sinners who struggle to live out, live up to, and live into the fullness of God’s revealed intentions for not just sex, but the whole panoply of human

The Church can be infinitely patient with sinners, but it cannot redefine sin, for if we do, we end up proclaiming nothing but our faith in our own contemporary judgments...



behaviors.

There was no point in responding because social media is not a place to do pastoral counseling or theology, but rather to engage in rhetorical pugilism and gather an observing crowd whose primary purpose is not to thoughtfully listen and reconsider their own position, but to cheer for the point of view they already espouse.

In such contexts, truth is not the point. A generation ago, in a book that still stands without peer or persuasive reply, Robert Gagnon’s *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* demonstrated using historical-critical exegesis that orthodox, Biblically-based Christianity not only cannot endorse same-sex behavior, but that there were few moral perspectives in the Scripture more consistently attested to in both Testaments.

Christianity also cannot endorse the central claim of the sexual revolution, the claim that sexual orientation and expression is central to human identity and flourishing. Biblical Christianity insists that true human flourishing can only be found when one identifies themselves as “in Christ,” and that the human soul is only finally and properly ordered when it regards “everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus [as] Lord” and gladly suffers “the loss of all things and counts them as rubbish, in order that [it] may gain Christ.” (Phil 3:8)

As a colleague once helpfully summarized, “The problem is not just what the Bible says about sex, it’s what ignoring that does to Biblical authority.” Put plainly, what it does is gut Biblical authority. This may be why on a recent podcast, an ELCA pastor who is a top-notch systematic theologian with a high regard for Biblical authority confessed their dismay

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“Facing What Might Be Your Congregation’s Upcoming Existential Crisis”

by [Pr. Don Brandt](#), Director of Lutheran CORE’s [Congregational Lay-Led Initiative \(CLI\)](#)

While I have written about the clergy shortage in the past, my concern continues to grow for churches who are, or soon will be, dealing with a pastoral vacancy. If I could be convinced that this shortage has plateaued and would be corrected within the next few years, I would stop obsessing.

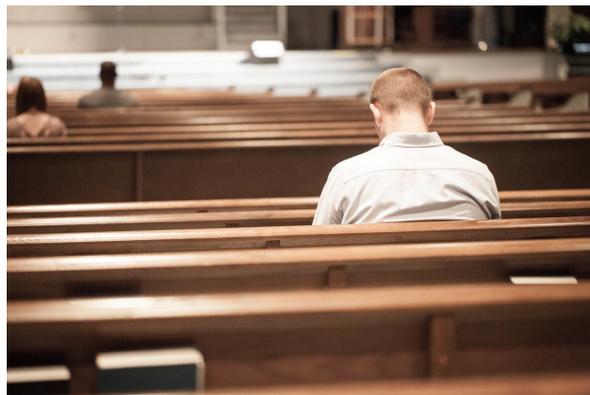
However, it has *not* plateaued and continues to grow more severe. For example, consider the two largest Lutheran denominations in North America. I am referring to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS). An ELCA internal study released in early 2025 stated that each year twice as many ELCA pastors retire as there are seminarians graduating. (And keep in mind that the ELCA still has seven seminaries!) Moreover, Portico Benefit Services, the ELCA’s retirement fund, estimated in 2025 that forty percent of ELCA pastors would be retiring within five years. The LCMS, the second largest Lutheran denomination in North America, reported that, as of 2019, they had approximately 6,000 serving pastors. Their forecast, based on trends in 2019, was that by 2034 they would only have about 3,000 serving

Many of you reading this belong to either an NALC or LCMC congregation. If so, perhaps you are thinking, “Wait a minute; since the above statistics and forecasts are for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, they certainly do not apply to NALC and LCMC congregations.” Well, don’t fool yourself. *The current clergy-supply crisis is not only national; it’s cross-denominational.*

This means that every year that passes we are dealing with an increasing number of call committees seeking a pastor from among a rapidly shrinking number of clergy.

Also, even though national church bodies and seminaries are aware of this growing clergy-supply crisis, I’m not convinced they are able to do enough to effectively address it. And if I’m right, it means that—in most cases—**congregations** will need to take the initiative to secure their long-term pastoral leadership. And *that* will require “thinking outside the box,” especially when considering how U.S. Lutheran congregations have filled their pastoral vacancies over the last 100 years.

What’s needed in 2026 and beyond will be many



congregations taking full ownership of the pastoral supply process by enlisting and “calling” their future pastoral leaders from among their own church members. To explain this ministry strategy more fully, consider a hypothetical scenario at Grace Lutheran Church in the American Midwest.

Grace Lutheran’s Scenario

Grace Lutheran is in an economically stable, small city in the upper Midwest. The congregation was and is financially sound and has just over one hundred worshipers attending on a typical Sunday. A few years ago Pastor Olson announced that he would be retiring within one to two years. This came as a surprise to many of Grace’s members since Pastor Olson is active, in good health, and had served the congregation for twenty-two years. In his announcement Pastor Olson explained that he was willing to stay the full two years if needed.

The Council at Grace immediately got to work as a “transition team” to address their upcoming pastoral vacancy. Then, within six months, the Council recruited a Call Committee and secured congregational approval for these new Committee members.

Due to the extreme shortage of available ordained Lutheran pastors, the Call Committee, after nine months, began to think that the “right” pastor might not be out there. This was true both for a candidate for their long-term “permanent” call and for finding a short-term interim pastor. As the search process dragged out to a full year, Call Committee and Council members became disheartened and demoralized. They had applicants for their position. However, the few that applied were either unqualified for Grace’s call or interviewed with multiple call committees and eventually withdrew their names from consideration. The two-year deadline until Pastor Olson’s retirement began to loom on the horizon.

As an LCMC congregation, Grace Lutheran started to think outside the box in terms of securing their future long-term pastoral leadership. They became aware of two complimentary ministry strategies

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Moving Beyond the Lull

by [Pr. Douglas Schoelles](#), NALC Pastor in Indiana and Lutheran CORE Board Member



In Ten Years?

Who is going to be sitting in the pews in ten years' time? Ryan Burge, a Baptist pastor and professor, does statistical analysis about religion in America.¹ The research he does shows that 40% of Generation Z, ages 18 to 30, have no professed religious faith. "In 1972, about 2/3 of folks who were raised in a non-religious household switched to a religious affiliation in adulthood."² Today nearly 80% of young adults who grew up in non-religious households remain without religious affiliation. This means that when the GenZ have kids they will be raising atheists. So a growing number of unbelievers will be raising more unbelievers which will decrease the number of Christians in our society.

On the other hand, as the older generations go onto the Church Triumphant this will also decrease the number of Christians in our society. The Church in the United States has been in a lull for about a decade where congregations are declining but still able to conduct their ministry. But this won't be the case in another 10 years because very quickly many, many congregations will so diminish in size they will not have the numbers of people necessary to conduct evangelistic ministry. The language Ryan Burges uses to describe the inevitable decline of most Protestant denominations is "free fall".³ Now, St. John's has been blessed so we have a better distribution of ages than many congregations. But still . . .

Who Sets the Agenda?

The question for your church and many other congregations is, "Do we feel compelled enough for our continued existence and for the sake of the Gospel to get out of our comfort zone to reach the unchurched?"

Admittedly, the selfish motivation of reaching new people for the purpose of a congregation's continued existence is not particularly inspired and actually comes across as manipulative. But maybe, the fear of our decline might cause us to look Jesus' way.

Jesus would tell us that a more compelling motivation for reaching new people and raising up disciples is that Jesus is for sinners. In other words, the whole purpose of Jesus' ministry is to reach and save sinners.⁴ The supply of those never runs out.

The first challenge for every congregation is who owns the church and gets to set the direction of the church. Congregations fight about this all the time. The strange truth, however, is that this question has been settled. Jesus asserts over and over again that he is Lord and sets the agenda.

He tells Peter that He Jesus will build the church and that the church will be able to take down demonic barriers.⁵ Paul repeatedly reminds us that Jesus Christ is the head of the Church.⁶ Until one of us dies on the cross and is raised from the dead, the church is bought and paid for by Christ. Even more, Christ and His Spirit sustain the Church. So we can claim no ownership.

Rather we are servants of the most high Lord. Jesus doesn't ask nicely if we want to do his work. He commands. "Follow me." "I will make you fish for people." "Go and make disciples." Jesus doesn't ask "please?" He is Lord of the Church and he commands us. "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you."⁷

"I Am Going to Send You"

We do not have to worry though because Jesus our Lord doesn't send us empty handed or even to rely upon ourselves. Consider this passage from Luke 24.

⁴⁴ He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

⁵⁰ When he had led them out to the vicinity of

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Online Confirmation: A Faithful Way to Form Young Disciples

by [Pr. Teresa Peters](#), Director of Youth & Family Ministry, Winnipeg, MB, Canada



One of the joyful and fruitful youth ministry efforts the NALC has developed in recent years is our Online Confirmation Program. What began as a practical response to a real need has become a meaningful way to help congregations form young people in the Christian faith.

Across the NALC, we have many small congregations, congregations without pastors, and congregations with only one or two confirmation-age students. In many of these settings, offering a full confirmation program can be difficult. Yet the need remains the same: young people must be grounded in God's Word, taught the faith faithfully, and prepared to live as baptized children of God within the life of the Church.

That is where the Online Confirmation Program has proven to be such a gift.

Four years ago, we launched this ministry with just seven students. Last year, that number grew to thirty-five. This growth reflects both the need for the program and the value it has already shown in the lives of students and congregations.

The NALC Online Confirmation Program is a two-year course of study that meets weekly during the school year. Together, students work carefully through the Bible **and** Luther's Small **Catechism**, building a solid foundation in Christian faith and discipleship. Classes are held on Zoom, allowing students from many different places and time zones to learn together regularly.

But this program is about much more than convenience.

From a Lutheran perspective we know, confirmation is not simply a graduation from Sunday School

or a cultural rite of passage. It is part of the Church's work of catechesis, teaching the faith into which young people have already been baptized. In Holy Baptism, God places His name on us, forgives our sins, unites us to Christ, and gives us the Holy Spirit. Confirmation instruction helps students grow in the knowledge of those gifts so that they may trust God's promises, confess the faith, and live as disciples of Jesus.

One of the strengths of the NALC's online program is that it connects teaching, mentoring, and congregational life. In addition to weekly class sessions, students are expected to meet regularly with a mentor in their congregation and to serve actively in congregational life at least twice a month. This is deeply important. The Christian faith is not learned only in a classroom; it is lived in the Church. Students need not only instruction, but also relationships, encouragement, and opportunities to practice serving others in Jesus' name.

This is one of the greatest benefits of the program: it supports the work of the local congregation rather than replacing it. Even though the teaching happens online, students remain connected to their own congregation through worship, service, and mentoring. In this way, online confirmation becomes a tool to strengthen congregational life while also providing consistent and faithful instruction.

Another strength is the team-teaching approach. Each class has a minimum of four instructors, allowing students to hear from different NALC pastors and lay leaders. This gives students the benefit of different teaching styles and voices while still receiving instruction that is rooted in the same Lutheran confession of faith. It also reminds students that they are part of something larger than their own congregation. They belong to the wider Body of Christ.

Students themselves have spoken about how valuable this experience has been. One student shared:

"Online Confirmation has been an incredible experience. Even though our confirmation class at my church is small, having the opportunity to meet online with other students my age from different places has made it feel much bigger and more connected."

That same student also appreciated hearing from different teachers:

"Hearing from different leaders gives us a variety of perspectives and helps me understand my faith more deeply."

Another student, who is the only young person in their congregation, reflected on the relationships

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Greasing the Skids?

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I attended one of the recent Spring Conference Assemblies. At the gathering it was mentioned that a motion will be coming to the 2027 Synod Assembly that the Synod become Reconciling in Christ and (typical of the ELCA) that there be a full year of study and discussion leading up to the vote. It was also said that ReconcilingWorks is no longer a one-issue organization. It is no longer focused solely on the welcome and inclusion of all forms of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. It is also concerned for the full welcome and inclusion of people of all races as well as differently abled people.

With their approach of building relationships and capitalizing on shared values, I immediately recognized Community Organizing.

I wrote to the Bishop of my Synod, stating that I found the presentation to be **manipulative, questionable, unfair, and unjust**.

What is manipulative is adding the inclusion and welcome of people of all races and differently abled people to the meaning of being Reconciling in Christ. I assume that is being done in order to “grease the skids” and gain support for a more widespread acceptance of the inclusion and welcome of people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.

What is questionable is the statement that the focus of being Reconciling in Christ has been expanded from being merely LGBTQ+ welcoming and inclusive to also being welcoming and inclusive of people of all races and as well as differently abled people.

The website of ReconcilingWorks does not speak so clearly of such an expansion of concern. Here is a link to their website - [Home - ReconcilingWorks](#).

True, the description of "Our Vision" and "Our Values" in the purple rectangles on their Home Page does not restrict their attention solely to LGBTQ+ persons as the purple rectangle "Our Mission" does, but still it appears that the local, Grand Canyon Synod task force - I assume following the principles of Community Organizing as outlined in the Toolkit and in order to gain wider support - is misrepresenting what it means to be Reconciling in Christ by giving their own, expanded definition and version of Reconciling in Christ. If the local task force has a definition and meaning of being Reconciling in Christ that is not the same as the definition and meaning of ReconcilingWorks as a whole, then the local task force should not use the term Reconciling in

Christ.

I clearly remember a few years ago the tensions between the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) LGBTQ+ community and the non-BIPOC LGBTQ+ community within Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries after the dust up in the ELCA's Sierra Pacific Synod regarding former bishop Megan Rohrer (the ELCA's first transgender bishop). I would be surprised if there is now such peace and harmony between these two groups that the LGBTQ+ community is willing to share equally the spotlight with the BIPOC community.

That is what is manipulative and questionable. **What is unfair and unjust** is the way in which people who are welcoming of all races, are concerned for differently abled people, and hold traditional views on marriage and sexuality who therefore vote No on the resolution that the Grand Canyon Synod become Reconciling in Christ will then be made to appear as racist and uncaring. People who hold traditional views on marriage and sexuality will be further isolated and stigmatized. For example, the “Building an Inclusive Church Toolkit” calls those with traditional views Laggards. (Which does not sound inclusive to me.) Once again, the truly marginalized in the ELCA will not be the LGBTQ+ community (who constantly claim that they are marginalized) but those who hold traditional views.

Either way – whether ReconcilingWorks as a whole is now expanding its focus to include people of all races and differently enabled people or the Grand Canyon Synod Task Force is coming up with its own version of what it means to be Reconciling in Christ – either way this is an example of the strategy of Community Organizing. ReconcilingWorks – either as an entire organization or at the Grand Canyon Synod level – is setting people up so that if they are open and welcoming to all races and differently abled people, then they certainly will be just as open and welcoming to all forms of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

Reviving Monica

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at the confession of several ELCA seminarians that most of what they learned at seminary “bashed” the Bible, clearly seeking to undermine its witness in every way.

My purpose in this article is not to re-adjudicate the theological disputes that have divided not just the Lutheran communion in this regard, but every Christian communion functioning in the West. It is also not to outline tactics or strategies to win the erst-while “culture war”—Yenor does that in his article, and besides, in my estimation, Christianity has been decisively on the back foot culturally since it accepted what social historian Barbara Dafoe Whitehead termed “expressive divorce” thirty years after the legalization of no-fault divorce.

My purpose is rather to point out that the Church needs to be not only teaching faithfully what Christian life entails, it must be preparing her

members for the distrust, resistance, revulsion, and sometimes betrayal of those they love because of it, particularly in the area of sexual behavior. I have had more than one person to whom I ministered and who at one time both embraced and professed the Christian faith reject that faith so that they could embrace a “sexual identity” or demonstrate public support for behaviors that are clearly at variance with the requirements of Biblical Christianity in the realms of sexual identity, sexual behavior, and the related area of the sanctity of human life. Occasionally, such people have gone so far as to excoriate me publicly or cut off contact with me.

This hurts, and we do nobody any favors by pretending that it doesn’t. In fact, we must prepare people as we teach them not only the negative demands of God’s Word regarding sexual issues, but also the exhortations of God to ongoing faithfulness and trust in that Word and the promises of God that He will both help us in that steadfastness and reward us for it in the fulness of time.

What this means is that the Church needs to be catechizing her congregants on how to be resilient, long-suffering, and loving toward those who reject them or their faith. We must be teaching our people to have the trust and steadfastness of purpose that Monica, the mother of Augustine, showed for the

twenty seven years that she prayed for her son’s conversion from sensualism and Manichaeism. Augustine ultimately became one of the greatest theologians in Church history, but he did not get there without the Lord working through his mother’s prayers. We must teach our people to be a Monica for every Augustine in their lives... especially when they despair of that person ever changing.

What we can be sure of is this; learning to face persecution, pray unswervingly, and love those who scorn us is the very essence of becoming more Christ-like in our character. As an Orthodox friend once said to me (Orthodoxy has a rather more fraught regard for Augustine’s theology than Lutheranism), “We are pretty sure Augustine was a saint... we are POSITIVE that his mother was!”

The church’s pastoral ministry has always been long-suffering when it comes to helping people live into the Christian standards of chastity outside of heterosexual, monogamous marriage, and most pastors I knew prior to *Obergefell* and the concomitant liberalization of ecclesiastical disciplines that began to be officially enacted around that time were caring and deeply sensitive in their pastoral work with their LGB (T’s and Q’s were beyond the horizon as of then) members. The Church can be infinitely patient with sinners, but it cannot redefine sin, for if we do, we end up proclaiming nothing but our faith in our own contemporary judgments—and such affirmations are deficient in their ability to console or instruct when sin, death, and the devil inevitably come knocking, for they lack the substance of revealed truth, which is the heart of the Word of God.

For the sake of the wellbeing and comfort of both Her members and those who do not yet call Christ Lord, the Church needs to be preparing its members for misunderstanding, resentment, and even persecution from those who reject “the faith once for all delivered to the saints,” especially the people closest to them and especially in regards to sexual issues. To do less is spiritual malpractice... and it will mean the eventual caving of orthodoxy to the spirit of the age.

...the Church needs to be ... preparing her members for the distrust, resistance, revulsion, and sometimes betrayal of those they love ... particularly in the area of sexual behavior.

To do less is spiritual malpractice...and it will mean the eventual caving of orthodoxy to the spirit of the age.

Facing Upcoming ... Crisis

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which helped bring clarity to this challenge.

One strategy was Lutheran CORE's Congregational Lay-leadership Initiative (CLI), and the other was the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) "Contract Call" option. The church Council, the Call Committee, and even Pastor Olson began to consider new and exciting possibilities for identifying, enlisting and "calling" their next pastor.

The LCMC "Contract Call" model was (and is) described on their national website. It was part of the LCMC website's "Call Packet" and was described in detail in the "Glossary/Definitions in the Call Process" section on pages 19 and 20.

Portions of this definition included the following: "Congregations may call an individual to serve in their congregation with a **contract call**. LCMC respects the freedom of each congregation to call pastors they discern are most appropriate for their ministry. A congregation may enter into a **contract call** arrangement with any person who will subscribe to LCMC's Statement of Faith and Pastoral Admonition, including the characteristic practices of the sacraments in the Lutheran tradition...**Contract call pastors** are strongly encouraged to be in an ongoing mentoring relationship with a certified LCMC pastor and to receive basic training for pastoral ministry and Lutheran theology...LCMC encourages all pastors to continue their education and specifically encourages **contract call pastors** to continue education with consideration of certification." (And possibly pursuing a Master of Divinity degree.)

The second ministry model the Grace leaders discovered was Lutheran CORE's Congregational Lay-leadership Initiative (CLI). CLI provided a step-by-step process to identify, enlist, train, educate and call one or more of their own lay leaders to begin a process of taking online seminary courses; and possibly working toward becoming an ordained Lutheran pastor.

The "working toward" process would include serving in a part-time pastoral ministry role at Grace Lutheran while also beginning to take online seminary courses that could lead to a Master of Divinity degree. The "steps" for this ministry model were (and are) found on the [CLI slider](#) on the Lutheran CORE website. And the primary written resource on that slider was (and is) entitled, "[How Your Congregation Can Identify, Enlist and Train Part-time Lay Ministers.](#)"

As the Grace Lutheran Council and Call Committee members began to explore this new vision for

securing their pastoral leadership, they also began studying New Testament passages that emphasized the (Lutheran) understanding of the "priesthood of (all) believers" as referenced in 1st Peter chapter 2; and the ministry gifts of the Holy Spirit as described in 1st Corinthians chapters 12 through 14, Ephesians chapter 4, and Romans chapter 12.

And all of this discussion and study was accompanied by prayer. This was especially true when the discussion topic was, "Whom among our active members might God be calling to the pastoral ministry?" In the context of these prayers and discussion two Grace Lutheran lay leaders came to mind; both with a long history as active Grace members. In addition, these two members exhibited a deep personal faith, and had the requisite pastoral ministry gifts. Finally, both candidates knew the majority of Grace Lutheran members on a first-name basis. They decided to extend a "call" to them; knowing that the congregation would be fortunate if even one accepted, and twice-blessed if *both* said yes.

Grace Lutheran was fortunate because both Natalie (an empty-nest mother) and John (an active, recently-retired teacher) accepted the "call" to become contract pastors at Grace Lutheran. All that remained was to work out—with each of them—the details of their employment contracts (including the number of pastoral-ministry hours they would work in a typical week, the stipends they would be paid, and their specific responsibilities). Also negotiated was the congregation's expectation as to which online seminary courses they might take. (Tuition for these courses would be paid by the congregation.) Finally, Pastor Olson agreed to mentor both John and Natalie—at least until his official retirement. After his retirement the Council would seek an LCMC pastor to mentor John and Natalie online.

I want to point out three things:

1. Since this is a hypothetical model that assumes a congregation's total ownership of the process, your LCMC church can customize it to address both your congregation's specific expectations, *and* the needs and gifts of your future contract pastor(s).
2. If your church belongs to the NALC, the ELCA, or the LCMS, you must work within your denomination's guidelines and expectations.
3. Finally, **I am available—by email, phone or online**—to answer any questions you might have which I do not address in this article.

Pastor Don Brandt

Lutheran CORE's Congregational Lay-leadership Initiative (CLI)

pastordonbrandt@gmail.com

503-559-2034

Moving Beyond the Lull

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Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them.

⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵² Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

⁵³ And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God. ⁸

We learn:

- That Jesus is the fulfillment of all of God's promises and that God continues to fulfill the promises in Christ in and through His Church.
- That the LORD opens up our minds so we may understand the Scriptures and faith be born in us. This should encourage us to pray the LORD will open the minds of new people to see Christ is their Savior through the Word.
- That God works in people through the proclamation of the Word to produce repentance and gives the forgiveness of sins that implants new life.
- That Jesus commands his disciples to spread this gospel to all people, not just where they are comfortable, like in Jerusalem.
- That He has clothed his Church with power from on High as the Father promised. We have received the Holy Spirit to carry out this mission.
- That the Ascended Lord blesses his Church as he reigns in heaven over all of creation.
- That we his earthly Church are to worship and praise God with great joy.

The challenge for us is to take Christ Jesus at his word. To follow and obey him. To rely on His Word and His Spirit to do this mission. To see the Ascended Lord as our savior and master. To devote our lives to joyfully worship and praise God with our every breath.

Jesus has promised if we will live according to his Word, he will grow his church. If we will live joyfully worshipping and relying on the LORD we will have something to share with this sin-soaked society.

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you all a spirit of unity with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 15:5-6)

Your servant in the Gospel, Pastor Douglas

Full article with citations: [click here](#).

Online Confirmation Program

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formed through the program:

“Through participating in Online Confirmation, I have been able to connect with other people from different areas... I have learned a lot about God's Word through online confirmation and I really have enjoyed the past year and a half of learning and building connections.”

These comments capture an important part of the program's value. For students who may feel isolated in their own congregation, online confirmation provides not only teaching, but also fellowship. They are reminded that they are not alone. They are part of a larger church body, learning and growing alongside other young Christians.

In a time when many youth are surrounded by confusion, competing ideas, and shallow understandings of faith, clear catechesis matters. Students need more than vague spirituality. They need the Scriptures. They need the Catechism. They need to know what God has done for them in Christ and how that shapes their lives.

As Lutherans, we confess that the Holy Spirit works through the Word of God to create and sustain faith. That remains true whether students are gathered in one classroom or connected across many places. What matters most is that they are being drawn more deeply into the life of Christ through His Word, His promises, and His Church.

And that is exactly what this program seeks to do.

We will resume classes for returning students in September. At this time, we are planning to offer the second-year class on Monday evenings and the first-year class on Thursday evenings. We encourage congregations to begin considering whether this program would be helpful for their students. We would also like new students to register by the end of August.

If you have questions or would like more information, please contact:

Pastor Teresa Peters
Director of Youth and Family Ministry
tpeters@thenalc.org

If Yesterday ...

by [Pr. Kevin McNamara](#), retired NALC pastor in Pennsylvania

...was the last time in the Pulpit,
The last time serving Holy Communion,
The last time preaching the love of Christ,

Then I am humbled to have been
Called to serve Your People, Lord.
I count it all joy!

Thank you, Lord, for Your Holy Word.
I know you were there, Lord of Mercy,
In that Country Church.

You were there in the faith of the people.
In the music. In the liturgy. In Holy Communion.

All is good. I have been so blessed.

If now is the time to step back
to enjoy Your Stillness, O Lord,
To embrace Prayer as a Call to
Ministry in my Sunset years...

...To Pray for a Revival in Your Church
With tears of Gratitude in My Heart,
Thank You for the Years.

I pray for Wisdom, Lord.
I ask not to be that Old Pastor
Tripping and Falling
On the Church Steps. Again.

I ask for Clearness of Mind,
Not to be irrelevant.
Mis-speaking the words,
Repeating myself; Staying too long.



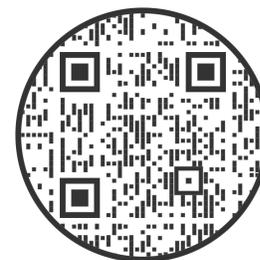
If it is Your Will, let your servant gently
fade away as Your Light Shines On
Brighter and Brighter into the future.

Lord, please bless the time remaining:
Bless My Family. If now is the time
to step back, it was all worth it.

With Gratitude in My Heart,
All Glory be to the Triune God:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Amen and Amen.

*Written by Pastor
Kevin McNamara
February 9, 2026*

**Aim your phone's
camera at the QR code to
the right to bring up the
link to Lutheran CORE's
website.**



Coming Events

- **NALC Continental Youth Gathering 2026**, Roanoke, VA, July 7-10, 2026. Register by April 15th; there are only 350 spots! Click [here](#).
- **LCMC 26th Annual Gathering & Convention**. Lutheran Church of Hope, West Des Moines, IA, October 4-7, 2026. Click [here](#).

CORE Voice Newsletter

Published by Lutheran CORE;
Kim Smith, Editor

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