

Why Is the ELCA So Negative? An Analysis of ELCA Worship Resources for the Semiquincentennial

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



The ELCA developed worship resources for the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. As expected, right from the start, the ELCA made this observance into something negative. It introduced these resources as ones that “both celebrate and lament our nation’s history.” [HERE](#) is a link to the resources.

Certainly there are many things in our nation’s history that were done wrong. Racism is wrong. Slavery followed by decades of racial discrimination were wrong. The way that indigenous people were treated was wrong. Any form of oppression of the weak and vulnerable is wrong. But why can we not just give thanks for this great country that we have been privileged to live in as we re-commit ourselves to continuing to work for “liberty and justice for all”?

What would it be like if my wife and I were celebrating a milestone wedding anniversary and she were to tell me all the things I have done wrong during our years of married life? Before I retired I served as pastor of the same congregation for forty years. What would it have been like if on my final Sunday there I had told the congregation all the things that they had done wrong and all the ways I had been treated badly? And what if the congregation were to invite me to return some

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Pastoral Transitions: It's About Planning Ahead

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

Since the median age of serving Protestant pastors is now estimated to be sixty, this means that fifty percent of pastors will most likely be retiring in the next five to ten years.

Now even if I was writing this article back in 1990, and the median age was this high, it would still be alarming. But not *quite* as alarming as it is in 2026; for at least four reasons.

1. In 1990, unlike today, the Baby Boom generation was in the nesting stage. As a result, there were many more parents and children in worship, and *that* meant thriving youth groups, full Sunday school classes, and larger confirmation classes.
2. In 1990, unlike today, large numbers of Lutheran congregations were experiencing growth in their worship attendance.
3. In 1990, unlike today, our denominations were usually in a position to help when a congregation's pastor was retiring, because there were significant numbers of graduating seminary students available for call.
4. And in 1990, unlike today, there was an abundance of ordained, serving pastors available and willing to at least consider the possibility of accepting a call that involved their relocating and moving to a different part of the country.

So when it comes to pastoral transitions, what are we facing now, in 2026?

--In 2026 Baby Boomers might still make up the majority of your active members, but their median age is seventy-one; and their children have most likely moved away and are no longer attending church.

--In 2026 a mainline congregation would be an "exception to the rule" if it had a thriving youth ministry, and a strong and healthy Sunday school program.

--In 2026 the majority of our congregations are plateaued or declining in worship attendance.

--In 2026 our denominational leaders are likely to warn call committees not to "get their hopes up" when it comes to how long it will take to find their next pastor.

--And, in 2026 the number of pastors retiring is twice as high as the number of seminary graduates. This means that for each of the next five to ten years it will become even *more challenging* to find your next



pastor.

All of these realities mean, not surprisingly, that pastoral transitions have become more challenging than ever.

This article is, in particular, for congregations that, in all likelihood, will be dealing with their pastor's retirement within the next decade. However, I especially want to "speak" to congregational leaders—and their pastors—if that retirement will probably happen within the next five years.

How can you know exactly when this retirement will take place? For most of you, you cannot; at least not "exactly". First of all, pastors themselves do not typically know; at least not more than one to two years in advance. Also, some pastors are not convinced that members necessarily need to know more than a few months before their retirement. (But that is, in my opinion, a misnomer.)

Here is the "bottomline": **It is almost always to a congregation's benefit if lay leaders can plan ahead for an upcoming pastoral transition.** Moreover, it is ideal if the retiring pastor can be involved in at least the early part of this advanced planning.

It is imperative that retiring pastors and congregational leaders not underestimate the challenges involved in achieving a healthy pastoral transition. In fact, as I mentioned in my previous article, author and church consultant Karl Vaters claims that, "*Pastoral transitions are dangerous and traumatic times for churches. Other than (when new churches are first being planted) more churches close due to pastoral transition than for any other reason.*"

Also, the risks and challenges involved with pastoral transitions are amplified and exacerbated due to some factors in addition to those I listed above. They include:

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Law and Gospel in Everyday Life: Why the Christian Life is Not Meant to Be Exhausting

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



I appreciated Jeffray Greene's devotion on Mark 13:37 and found much wisdom in his call for Christians to live intentionally and remain spiritually alert. His reminder that our faith is not merely a reaction to circumstances but a life guided by the Holy Spirit is both timely and encouraging. As I reflected on his words, however, I found myself considering a question that many Christians, especially those who have walked with Christ for decades, wrestle with from time to time: How do we faithfully hold together the many biblical calls to trust, watch, pray, rest, persevere, and remain alert without becoming spiritually exhausted? The following reflection grew out of that question and out of gratitude for the conversation Jeffray's devotion prompted.

Many Christians know the feeling. Scripture calls us to trust God completely, yet it also calls us to be watchful and alert. We are told not to worry about tomorrow, yet we are warned about temptation, false teaching, and the dangers of this world. We are called to rest in Christ while also being called to pray, serve, repent, study God's Word, and remain faithful.

At times the Christian life can feel like a spiritual tug-of-war. One moment we hear commands to be vigilant. The next we hear promises of peace and rest. Was the Christian life really meant to feel this exhausting?

From a Lutheran perspective, the answer is no. Much of this exhaustion arises when we lose sight of the proper distinction between Law and Gospel.

Martin Luther called the distinction between Law and Gospel the highest art in Christendom. The Law

reveals God's holy will and exposes our sin. The Gospel proclaims what God has done for sinners through Jesus Christ.

The Law says:

- Be alert.
- Watch and pray.
- Love your neighbor.
- Turn away from sin.

These commands are holy, good, and necessary.

The Gospel says:

- Christ died for your sins.
- Christ is risen.
- Your sins are forgiven.
- You are justified by grace through faith.

These promises reveal God's saving work for us in Christ.

Problems arise when Christians begin to treat God's commands as conditions for earning or maintaining salvation. Instead of hearing the Law as God's instruction for the redeemed life, they begin to hear it as a checklist for remaining in God's favor.

The focus then shifts from Christ to self.

Am I trusting enough?

Am I praying enough?

Am I doing enough?

Luther knew this burden well. Before the Reformation, he devoted himself to every spiritual discipline available. Yet the harder he tried, the less peace he found. Everything changed when he discovered in Scripture that righteousness is not achieved by human effort but received through faith in Christ.

As St. Paul writes:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

As Martin Luther insisted, the Gospel is not about what we must do, but about what Christ has already done. Christ has already fulfilled the Law. Christ has already borne our sin. Christ has already secured our forgiveness. The Gospel is given, not earned. It is received by faith, not achieved by effort.

This truth helps us understand passages that seem to pull us in different directions. Jesus says, "Do not be anxious about tomorrow" (Matthew 6:34), while Peter writes, "Be sober-minded; be watchful" (1 Peter 5:8).

There is no contradiction. Jesus is addressing anxiety. Peter is addressing vigilance.

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What Would It Take for You to Believe?

by [Mr. Steve Humphrey](#), Secretary of the board of Lutheran CORE

A question you don't hear every day, but that is what popped into my thoughts after reading John 20:19-31.

We must take a step back to understand Thomas' reaction. Thomas was despondent after Jesus' death, and who wouldn't be? They all were. They had been following him for 3-4 years, watched him perform miracles, heal the sick and lame, raise people from the dead! And then Jesus is crucified...a horrible, traumatic death.

If we go back a little farther in the Gospel of John, we read that John and Peter are told by Mary Magdalene that Jesus is no longer in the tomb. They run there and see the tomb, confirm it is empty, see the linen clothes and the face covering in the tomb—John believed!

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus catches up with two disciples (Cleopas, and ???); they were kept from recognizing Jesus. As they were walking and talking, they were amazed that he (Jesus) did not know of the recent events in Jerusalem. Jesus interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:25-27).

As they got closer to Emmaus they urged him to stay with them. Because it was evening the roads would get dangerous. He took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them...AND THEIR EYES WERE OPENED, and they recognized him...and he vanished. Only then did they admit/understand that their hearts burned while he talked about the Scriptures. Not like heartburn from bad food...burning like desire for more TRUTH.

For BELIEF!

They rose and returned to Jerusalem, found the eleven telling them "The Lord has risen indeed...!"

Now, let's go forward to later that evening. Mary had seen the risen Lord; John, and Peter had seen the grave clothes (and face covering); Jesus had appeared on the road to Emmaus. There was a lot to talk about! As they were discussing this, Jesus appears. Imagine their surprise. First, the door was locked... They were behind a locked door because they were afraid. Afraid because they were followers of Jesus...afraid because they did not want to suffer the same fate.

Jesus enters and brings Peace...Gives Peace...and then He sends them...to forgive sins (or retain them). He breathed on them and said, "Peace be with



you.” Then the Holy Spirit opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. NOW THEY BELIEVE!

In Luke, again He questions their unbelief. “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? (Luke 24:36-40, NRSV).

What would it take for them to BELIEVE? They were witnesses to the miracles and the crucifixion. How could He be alive?

Jesus shows them his hands and feet, lets them touch him so they CAN BELIEVE, and then, does a very human thing...He asks for food and eats.

Thomas missed the first visit so when the disciples tell him, “We have seen the Lord,” he does not believe. Hence the name Doubting Thomas.

But can you blame him? The others had seen Jesus! He had breathed on them and they had received the Holy Spirit! They definitely had an advantage.

Let's think again...WHAT WOULD IT TAKE FOR YOU TO BELIEVE?!?

Best friends, whom Thomas has been with for several years, tell him that they have seen Jesus. He doesn't believe them. How could it be true? The other disciples didn't initially believe (or understand) when Jesus told him that he must die and will return in three days, so why should Thomas believe? But they had witnessed so many miracles that Jesus performed. Saw him walk on water and feed 5000 from 5 loaves with 12 baskets left over, feed 4000 with 7 loaves and 7 baskets left over, and raise people from the dead!

Although we were not witnesses to these miracles or the resurrection, we have a Bible! A written account of Jesus, not to mention, Adam and Eve, Noah, David, and more. Once we receive faith from the Holy Spirit, we are able to acknowledge the Truth of the Gospel and start living a new Life in Jesus! Know Christ. Grow in Christ. Live Like Christ, Serve Like Christ, Share Christ, Have Fellowship with other Christians, and Lead others to Christ!

Swimming Against the Current

Pr. [Megan Ann Shaffer](#), NALC pastor in Pennsylvania and Dean of the Northwestern Mission District of the Atlantic Mission Region.



‘He is at it again.’ Every time I hear this phrase, I cringe. Since arriving at my parish, I have heard my congregants comment on the social media antics of a local parish leader. Sadly, this person considers it appropriate to weaponize the Bible against the theological traditions of nearby parishes that belong to different denominations. Initially, I responded by encouraging my flock not to pay lip service to the leader, to ignore their behavior, to pray for them, and to simply move on. However, it is easier said than done.

Over the past two years, these attacks have continued, and at times, I feel like a fish in a river struggling to swim upstream against the current. It has begun to wear on me, too. All I want is to find an eddy behind a rock in which I can rest.

What really digs at my heart is that this person organizes our Lenten ecumenical services, during which various churches host midweek services and luncheons.

The sinner in me wants to walk away and have nothing to do with this. Yet my soul says these luncheons were designed and organized for the good of the community, and we mustn’t forget that.

This past Lent was hard. As I saw more and more hateful behaviors from this “leader,” I found myself asking ‘How can I continue to work with someone who attacks not only my brothers and sisters who are a part of a neighboring flock but also those of my own?’ Yes, those condemning social media attacks also painfully hit home for my congregants.

Just before the annual organizing email went out, this leader posted another attack on social media, prompting me to *phone a friend*: a pastor with a long-standing relationship to our town as a community event organizer. I needed another Christian with rock-strong values who was also neutral in the situation to talk to about my struggles, who would offer constructive criticism if my reaction was off base.

As I explained the issue to that pastor, he saw the social media posts and, having known my flock for a

few decades, understood why my flock and I were hurt. From our phone call, it became evident that the defunct ministerium for our community needed to be revived. Later on, I reached out to another fellow pastor who has known this leader for a long time, and he suggested following Christ’s instructions to speak with the pastor one-on-one, and if he is not receptive, bring it up to him in front of the Ministerium.

This past Lent, did we host a midweek service and luncheon? Yes. I was thrilled to see nearly 60 people attend and hear my ecumenical message on the importance of unity within the body of Christ. In case you were wondering I did call the leader in question, left them a few voicemails asking them to call me, and received no response. Thus, the current is still flowing swiftly.

Fast forward a few months, and I cringed once again. This time, someone who usually doesn’t say anything about the aforementioned leader’s antics said something. Just like that, I found myself back in the stream. Where I once thought I was getting some respite in an eddy, this new attack washed me out and back to fighting against the current.

In the past week leading up to yet another cringe, I began reading John C. Maxwell’s book [Becoming A Person of Influence](#). The book’s premise is that leaders can have a positive or negative effect on those they lead, and this must remain at the back of a leader’s mind at all times. As parents influence their children, so too do pastors shape the habits and character traits of their congregants.

I carry a great responsibility as a called and ordained minister in the Church of Christ to be a positive role model. My vocation is to demonstrate to people what it means to live out their calling as disciples following Jesus Christ. Admittedly, the sinner in me does want to respond similarly to this pastor’s claims of condemnation. However, what message does that send about my character to those who look to my leadership? If I did that, I would be a hypocrite.

I’ve heard, ‘If the devil can’t destroy or defeat you, he will distract you.’ He enjoys keeping us busy or making us tired. When we are entertained or overwhelmed by something else, that thing draws the followers of Christ away from what he has called us to do through the Great Commission. The devil will use distractions, lies, and discouragement against us, to which we must remain vigilant. Those attacks fit the description.

As our solid rock, we can stand on the Word of Christ to guide us, or, in my case, He is the eddy in which I find respite from the current that repeatedly attempts to drown me.

An Obvious Attempt at Damage Control: An Analysis of the Study Guide for the Reconsideration of the Human Sexuality Social Statement

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

The task force that is reconsidering the 2009 ELCA social statement, “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust,” has released a study guide that focuses on the whole issue of bound conscience. They are asking for responses by September 30.

[HERE](#) is a link to an article I wrote which described the two reconsiderations that are a part of the process as directed by the 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. The first reconsideration was approved by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly by a vote of 742-46 and consisted of changes which the task force described as “simply editorial.” In the article I argued that the changes are not “simply editorial.” Rather they amount to no less than a most radical full embrace of every form of sexual orientation and gender identity. The second reconsideration, which is being worked on now, is being described as “substantive.” It is a reconsideration of the whole issue of “bound conscience.” That is the term which the 2009 social statement uses to describe the fact that people in the ELCA hold different views on same sex relationships.

[HERE](#) is a link to the study guide. It is a series of readings and questions which congregations and individuals can use to reflect on the issues. The process is set up to consist of two sessions of one hour each, though there is also a way to divide it into four sessions. This schedule can be found on page 8.

2026 — The task force publishes study materials for congregations.

2027 — A draft of revisions to the social statement will be released for public comment. The task force will consider these comments in revising the draft.

2028 — The ELCA Churchwide Assembly will take action on any proposed revisions.

On page 7 there is a statement that for me has no credibility. “The end of the process is not pre-determined.” Leading up to 2009 and ever since 2009 there has been continually less and less space for traditional views. Why would we expect that the vote in 2028 will be anything other than another step in the same direction?

As part of the discussion of the first



reconsideration at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly a motion was made to remove the phrase “to be a covenant between a man and a woman” from the language “The Christian tradition has historically defined marriage to be a covenant between a man and a woman, as reflected in the language of Genesis.” The rationale for the amendment was that the current wording is harmful to LGBTQ people and does not correspond to their lived experience. The claim was that merely reminding people that marriage between one man and one woman has been the historic teaching of the church was traumatic and upsetting. The maker of the motion argued that rather than waiting three more years when bound conscience will be considered, something could be done then to make the social statement less harmful. The amendment to the amendment was adopted by a vote of 552-211, and the revised social statement was approved by a vote of 742-46. Two things were going on in this vote. First, a re-writing of history to eliminate what some people find traumatic, upsetting, hurtful, and harmful. Second, making truth conform to certain people’s liking and lived experience.

ELCA youth gatherings are grooming events for LGBTQIA+, transgender, and non-binary ideology. Synods post on Facebook the ways in which they celebrate June as Pride Month. ReconcilingWorks has a voice but no vote position on the ELCA Church Council. Why would we think that this reconsideration process also will not result in great gains for the LGBTQIA+ cause and community? The only question is how much will they gain.

And yet the study guide tries hard to do damage control, emphasizing church unity as it seeks to limit potential losses as a result of the vote on this reconsideration. For example –

Page 10 – Focusing on God as the source of the church’s unity as well as on our shared vocation “can open our hearts to the many things we hold in

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Why is the ELCA so Negative? ...

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Sunday and I were to repeat the same list of grievances? Would I be invited again? And yet that is what the ELCA consistently does. It has even made worship resources for the 250th birthday of our nation into a time of criticism of our country and “white-dominant Christianity.”

And then the next thing I want to talk about is the order of confession and forgiveness in the proposed worship service. The order of confession is as follows -

“God of all mercy, we have sinned against you, our neighbors, and your creation. Within ourselves and our communities, our desire to do what is good is at war with the evil that dwells in us. We lament the evil that holds us captive. We repent of the evil we have done, and the evil done on our behalf. Rescue us, forgive us, and restore us for lives of compassion and courage through our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.”

What word is used four times? Evil. Evil that dwells in us, evil that holds us captive, evil that we have done, and evil that has been done on our behalf. Evil is a very strong word. Is evil the word that most accurately describes how we have lived and how our country has been for the past 250 years?

In contrast to the wording of the confession, compare the wording of the absolution -

“All-merciful, Almighty God forgive you all your sins through the grace of Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit’s power strengthen you in doing what is good. Amen.”

If evil is the primary word that describes my and our country’s spiritual condition, then I need far more than just forgiveness and strength to do what is good. I need someone to deliver me from and break the power of evil.

In the Second Reading for July 5 from Romans 7 the apostle Paul talks about the struggle taking place within himself. He does use the word evil twice. But then what he calls out for is not just forgiveness and strength to do good. He begs for deliverance. “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7: 24-25)

But I am not convinced that the ELCA really wants us to be rescued from “this body of death.” Rather it seems to want to continually be able to call on us to grovel and repent of the same things - racism, sexism, patriarchalism, white supremacy, male dominance, and so on. I am not convinced that the

ELCA really wants there to be forgiveness and really wants Someone to break the power of evil because then the ELCA would have no authority and right to continually call on me to grovel over and repent of the same things if they have been forgiven and the power of evil were to be broken. There is real power in claiming to be in a position to continually call on others to grovel and repent, just as there is real power in claiming to be one who has been victimized and oppressed. If I were to forgive, then I lose my power over the one whom I claim has offended me. If the power of evil were to be broken, then I would lose my power over and my vindication for putting my foot on the neck of the one whom I claim has victimized and oppressed me.

The words of the third verse of the hymn, “When Peace, Like a River,” are as follows -

“He lives – oh, the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin, not in part, but the whole

Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!”

That is a gift that I am not convinced that the ELCA actually wants people and our nation to have. Because if our sins truly were nailed to the cross and we bear them no more, then the ELCA would have no right and authority to keep on calling on us to grovel over and repent of the same things.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about the article that comes after the sample worship service. It is written by an ELCA pastor and is entitled, “Preaching the Lectionary on the Occasion of the US Semiquincentennial.” Because it is included with these resources, I take it to be an accurate reflection of the position of the ELCA.

The first thing I notice is that it is overwhelmingly negative. Right from the start it talks about all the awful things that were happening in our country during the time leading up to our nation’s Bicentennial.



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Then it makes these comments –

“On this day, Lutheran preachers in particular are called to reject outright the temptations and claims of Christian nationalism. At this moment in the United States, we are faced with a political movement that has married Christianity with an embrace of hardline authoritarianism and glorification of violent masculinity, casting Jesus in the role of a warrior. We have seen a political Christian movement that has attempted to demonize empathy and love of neighbor, recasting ‘neighbors’ as only those who share the same ethnicity and cultural background.”

“In today’s gospel (from Matthew 11), we hear. . . the call to repentance for a church that has celebrated America without acknowledging the role its dominant (white Christian) culture has played in enslavement, abuse, and terrorization of non-white, non-Christian Americans, and all are (sic) who are most vulnerable, including women, children, and the poor.”

White supremacy, violent male dominance, and Christian nationalism are all wrong. The United States is a great place to live, but it is not the Kingdom of God on earth. And yet are the bad things rejected in this article actually concerns and values held by the typical ELCA member of a typical ELCA congregation? Rather I believe they are issues raised by a certain group because it makes them feel powerful and better to do so. At the heart of much extreme left political activism is an intense sense of self-righteousness.

The introduction to these resources says that they are intended to “unite the diverse body of Christ for the life of the world.” With their negative, inflammatory language they do just the opposite.



Law and Gospel in Everyday Life

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Christians are not called to live in fear because God is in control. At the same time, Christians are called to remain spiritually awake because evil is real.

The believer therefore lives neither in panic nor in carelessness.

A simple summary of the Christian life is this:

Trust God completely.

Do your duty faithfully.

Leave the results to Him.

This is not a formula for salvation. It is the fruit of faith.

The Lutheran Confessions remind us that even faith itself is God's gift. Luther writes in his explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed:

"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel."

That truth brings great comfort. The Christian life does not rest upon the strength of our faith but upon the faithfulness of Christ. The Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith through the Gospel and Sacraments.

This means the Christian life is simpler than many imagine. We remember our Baptism. We hear God's Word. We pray. We serve our neighbors in the vocations God has given us. When we sin, we repent. When we fail, we return to Christ. When we are weary, we rest in His promises.

The center of the Christian life is not our performance.

The center is Christ.

The Christian is alert because Christ has saved him. The Christian is not anxious because Christ has saved him. The Christian serves because Christ has saved him. The Christian perseveres because Christ has saved him.

The foundation never changes.

The burden of maintaining salvation does not rest on our shoulders. It rests on Christ's shoulders. Our task is not to carry Him. Our task is to be carried by Him.

That is the freedom, comfort, and certainty found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As our Lord Himself promises:

"Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Pastoral Transitions ...

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- a. The longer your retiring pastor has served your congregation, the more important it is to **plan ahead**.
- b. If your congregation is dealing with internal conflict, then the more important it is to **plan ahead**.
- c. The smaller your congregation, the more likely your search process will be longer than you anticipate; and the more crucial it is to **plan ahead**.
- d. The more geographically isolated you are (for example, rural), the more difficult it will be to find a candidate willing to relocate for your call. And, needless to say, this makes it more important that you **plan ahead**.

I recently read two articles on the subject of planning for pastoral transitions. The first was a published interview, in the *Leading Ideas* newsletter, with pastor and author Lee Kricher. The second article was from *Leadership* magazine, entitled “Planned Transitions Lead to Better Outcomes.”

The occasion for Pastor Kricher’s interview was the recent publication of his book, “Seamless Pastoral Transitions”. The word “seamless” captures the over-riding emphasis and theme of this book; which is a transition where the retiring pastor and congregational leaders plan for an “overlap” where both the retiring pastor and the new pastor serve together. (Note: This would typically not be a recommended strategy when a congregation is dealing with major internal conflict. In that case a church would definitely need the services of an interim pastor.)

Some of you might immediately dismiss this idea of an “overlap” as nothing less than a “pipe dream.” And some mainline denominational executives would dismiss this kind of a transition strategy as ill-advised. And some of you might not be able to imagine that your retiring pastor—and/or the new pastor—would be comfortable with this idea. Also, there is the question of whether a congregation could afford to compensate both the retiring pastor and new pastor simultaneously; even if the retiring pastor would be willing to work, for a short period, on a part-time basis. However, consider some quotes from Pastor Kricher:

“If a church has positive momentum, if a church is making a positive difference in the community, why put a gap in place between leaders that could jeopardize that momentum? The most powerful outcome is that the momentum and mission of the church is not compromised because of an unnecessary gap between pastors.”

Pastor Kricher points to the biblical account of

Moses handing over leadership over the Jewish people to Joshua. “Moses listened to his father-in-law Jethro, (Exodus 18) and he started to raise up other leaders. Moses started to share leadership not just with judges but with people like Joshua and Caleb, so that when it was time to choose a successor there were ready leaders available.”

On what is most helpful from the *retiring* pastor, Kricher says: “Sharing leadership is asking the question of what I can do to elevate the leaders around me and give them opportunities to gain experience.” This would ideally include the opportunity to elevate the pastor’s successor.

On a major “pitfall” for congregations facing a pastoral transition: “Dismissing the need for a detailed transition plan.”

Now for quotes from the *Leadership* magazine article, “Planned Pastoral Transitions Lead to Better Outcomes”. “When a transition is planned in advance, more than half of outgoing pastors stick around, whether they step back to continue on staff or withdraw to a lay role.” Also, “Planned transitions tend to produce positive results.” Another quote: “As a general rule, the higher the degree of congregants’ involvement, the more positive they feel about the final outcome” (of the transition).

Lutheran CORE offers two ministries which both offer coaching support for pastoral transitions: Congregations in Transition (CiT), and the Congregational Lay-leadership Initiative (CLI). If your congregation will be dealing with a pastoral transition in the next few years, these ministries can make a significant and positive difference in helping you navigate this major milestone in the life of your congregation. Details for both ministries are available on the Lutheran CORE website. The cost for my services is minimal, and I will continue to partner with you, in your transition, for “the duration”. If you have any questions, contact me directly by email: pastordonbrandt@gmail.com

--Pastor Don

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



An Obvious Attempt at Damage Control

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common and to the behaviors and values that will support trusting and life-centered relationships.”

Page 13 – “What effect do you think it would have on our conversations about sexuality if we made these core beliefs the glue that holds us together even amid disagreement?”

Page 27 – “Even in disagreement, there is still much upon which this church agrees regarding how we relate to one another.”

Page 35 – “The social statement does not try to solve disagreements but to guide the church in living together amid disagreement.”

Page 14 introduces the example of Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, which they described as focusing on what unites us and being honest about what divides us as it fostered dialogue and renewed relationships.

Page 16 – “The joint statement reflects yearning for unity, but neither the Lutheran church nor the Catholic church lets go of its deepest beliefs. Dialogue across disagreement does not mean that either side must come to a quick or easy compromise. . . . The joint statement recognizes that these deep disagreements still exist and notes that the two churches commit to remaining in relationship, learning from each other.”

However, there is a huge difference between Lutheran-Catholic dialogue and the ELCA’s reconsideration of bound conscience and same sex relationships. Because of this huge difference I do not see any relevance in the comparison. In Lutheran-Catholic dialogue both parties come to the table from a position of strength. It is a conversation between two fairly equal parties – where neither party is at risk. That is not the case with ELCA discussions regarding human sexuality. There is great discrepancy between the strength and resources of the two sides. One side – those with traditional views – has been continually losing ground. The other side – those who are working relentlessly to advance LGBTQIA+, transgender, and non-binary ideology – is continually gaining ground. For one side – those with traditional views - the question is how much will they lose and will there be any kind of place remaining for them. For the other side the question is how much will they gain. And even if they do not gain everything they want this time, they will certainly gain some and there will always be a next time.

Finally, there are many references in the study guide to the importance of mutual respect. For example –

Page 32 – “The social statement calls upon us to live out the moral principle of ‘mutual respect’ amid our disagreements.”

On page 33 we find a section from the social statement which includes these statements –

“In our Christian freedom, we therefore seek responsible actions that serve others and do so with humility and deep respect for the conscience-bound belief of others.”

“This church . . . encourages all people to live out their faith . . . with profound respect for the conscience-bound belief of the neighbor.”

“Regarding our life together as we live with disagreement, the people in this church will continue to accompany one another in study, prayer, discernment, pastoral care, and mutual respect.”

I have already mentioned how ELCA youth gatherings have become grooming events for LGBTQIA+, transgender, and non-binary ideology. At the 2018 youth gathering Nadia Bolz-Weber, ELCA pastor and the ELCA’s first “public theologian,” led 30,000 young people in a chant rejecting traditional views on human sexuality as a lie from Satan. With the masterful way in which she structured and gave her presentation, she got the response that she wanted.

For me, until and unless the ELCA officially apologizes for and distances itself from this highly manipulative action by and these highly inflammatory comments from Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber, there is no credibility to the ELCA’s talking about mutual respect.

Page 38 provides a link where people can respond to a survey. The link will close September 30, 2026. Additional comments and questions can be sent to the task force at Reconsiderations@ELCA.org. You can follow the process by visiting ELCA.org/Reconsiderations.



Video Ministries—July 2026

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



Many thanks to AALC pastor James Hoefer and NALC pastor Cathy Ammlung for providing the latest videos for our YouTube Channel. A link to our YouTube channel, which contains sixty-nine videos on books and topics of interest and importance, can be found [HERE](#).

“WALKING WET: GOD’S BAPTISMAL PROMISE”

by James Hoefer

Pastor James Hoefer has reviewed his latest book, “Walking Wet: God’s Baptismal Promise.” A link to his review can be found [HERE](#).

In this book Pastor James clearly states that baptism is God’s saving work – not our work of obedience and testimony. God does not start with our faith in Him, our witness to Him, or our efforts for Him. Rather He starts with His promises to us – promises He made and gave long before you or I could ever do anything to earn them. Our faith in Him, witness to Him, and efforts for Him would never be enough. They could never give us a solid foundation for life, a sure and certain sense of who we are, and security in our relationship with God. All these are given to us through God’s promises through baptism.

Dennis Nelson, executive director of Lutheran CORE, writes –

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Kim Smith Editor

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call 1-888-810-4180

This book is clearly written with many very interesting and relevant illustrations. It reflects a pastor’s heart and is theologically solid. I was deeply honored to have been invited to write the Forward for this book. James and I were roommates in seminary and have been good friends ever since. I have always known him to have a deep love for Jesus, a passion for ministry, and a heart for global mission, especially in the Third World.

“TOOLKIT FOR WORSHIP PLANNING – PART FOUR”

by Cathy Ammlung

Pastor Cathy Ammlung has released the fourth in a series of videos intended to provide congregations - especially those with temporary or longer-term pastoral vacancies - with some tools for worship planning. A link to her latest video can be found [HERE](#). A link to the full manuscript of her latest video can be found [HERE](#).

In this video Cathy covers more traditional hymnody and the most common Lutheran hymnals. In her next video she will address hymn selection in contemporary worship.

Cathy writes -

In the present video, we’ll talk about why selecting hymns can be difficult and examine some of the tools the hymnals themselves provide for assisting you. Make sure you have an LBW (Lutheran Book of Worship), ELW (Evangelical Lutheran Worship), or LSB (Lutheran Service Book) in hand so you can follow along. In addition to navigating the lectionary information in the front of hymnals, we will also look at several of the indexes. We’ll use a popular hymn tune as an example as we examine the indexes and give a practical example of how that can be helpful. Finally, we’ll wrap up with some additional “helpful hints” and strategies for selecting hymns, swapping out tunes, teaching and introducing new hymns, and helping people really sing their faith

In the first video in this series Cathy discussed the importance of worship planning. In her second video she talked about the church year, including festivals. The third video covers the lectionary.

Coming Events

- **NALC Online Convocation**—August 7, 2026. Click [here](#).
- **LCMC 26th Annual Gathering & Convention**. Lutheran Church of Hope, West Des Moines, IA, October 4-7, 2026. Registration deadline is September 10th. Click [here](#).