



Looking out toward the Pacific from the peak of Diamondhead, Oahu, Hawaii.

***The Augsburg Lutheran District
is reaching in to Lutherans
and reaching out to all the nations
with the gospel message—
sinners are put right with God by
faith alone in Jesus Christ.***

***As a beacon of light to those still
trapped in chaos and confusion,
we preach Christ crucified . . .
the cross alone is our theology.***

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Elk Horn Lutheran Church, Elk Horn, Iowa,
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Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ.*

Why we left ...

By Mike Williams

Preface

The question begs itself: What could possibly have happened that could persuade a congregation with a rich history of Lutheran and denominational support to sever its ties with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)? If you are one of those who are asking the question, the following is a summary of those issues that brought this pastor and congregation to the judgment and decision to leave the ELCA. It is hoped this pamphlet will promote understanding and assist its readers in becoming aware of these profound issues.

This pamphlet is a summary of the reasons and issues that caused Elk Horn Lutheran congregation and its pastor to leave the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. These issues are sometimes complex and need further reflection and study. Others are so incredibly bizarre that it leaves one bewildered and dismayed. Our decision did not come without the painful task of study, discussion, and lots of prayers. However, a vote of 96% to leave the ELCA gives us reason to believe we made the right decision. As Frederick B. Meekins wrote: "If nothing else, at least we have stated for the record that the platitudes hailing tolerance and invoking unity serve as little more than a smokescreen for a crafty, yet pervasive, form of ecclesiastical despotism."

I pray the information enclosed will benefit the reader as the material is digested. This work will be worth all the hours, if even one person stops to reflect the beauty of the Lutheran message and begins to appropriate it for himself. It is given to you with the hope that you will become discerning in the spirit of the age.

I want to dedicate this little work to my wife Amy, my children Christopher, Eric, and Lynn, without whom I would not be writing this forward, and to the Elk Horn Lutheran family whose lives are so intimately bound to mine, and who provided prayer and counsel during the writing of this material. To God be the glory.

Pastor Mike Williams

The Precipitating Event

Before we examine these issues, we need to make the following clear. On October 23, 2001, bishop Michael Last, on an accusation of pastoral misconduct, suspended the Pastor of Elk Horn Lutheran Church (Elk Horn, Iowa). This accusation came from someone who does not live here and was based on the accusers' own opinion. Without investigating, without proof, without speaking to anyone, including the letter writer, the other person, or staff, with only this letter in hand, Bp. Michael Last asked for the pastor's resignation.

As a matter of fact, Bp. Last spent the better part of two hours trying every way he knew how to force the pastor's resignation. He did not ask if the accusation was true. He never checked the credibility of the accuser. Nothing. When Bp. Last could not secure the pastor's resignation, he suspended him for a period up to nine months.

What pushed this church over the edge was when Bp. Last stated that "in this church," (I'm assuming he meant the ELCA) "you are guilty until you can prove yourself innocent," and Bp. Last told the pastor and his wife, he "would return to let the council know that they had the choice of paying the pastor's salary, continue living in the parsonage, paying health and pension, or not." The council moved that very night to leave the ELCA. Regrettably, the defense of the synod has been to deny that they did anything wrong. On the other hand, a retired bishop begged to differ. And, when a friend talked to the presiding bishop of the ELCA, Mark Hansen, he was distraught at how this was handled and said, "I always made very sure an accusation was absolutely true before taking any action."

Unfortunately, in the face of criticism at the synod assembly, Bp. Michael Last used his so-called intervention as the reason for Elk Horn Lutheran's departure. Bishop Last reported in his annual report to the 2002 synod assembly:

Regrettably one of our one hundred and seventy-three congregations of the synod has voted to leave the roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Initially a response to the Bishop's intervention with regard to an allegation of pastoral misconduct, the resolve expanded to include disagreement with receiving the Historic Episcopate (H.E.), and later the perceived direction of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Clearly, the bishop feels that this congregation had no issues with the ELCA until the initial charge of Pastoral misconduct was brought. This bishop assumes that this congregation would not have left if the bishop had not suspended the pastor. Furthermore, the bishop made verbal statements at the synod assembly that were either untrue or a gross distortion of the truth.

Completely false

Bishop Last's statement, "the resolve expanded to include disagreement with receiving the historic episcopate, and later the perceived direction of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America..." is completely false.

Because no one from Elk Horn Lutheran was present at the Synod Assembly, these accusations could not be defended. Therefore, we want to set the record straight.

Elk Horn's Lutheran Church's disagreements with the ELCA had "expanded" long before the bishop's meeting—they had been studying confessional issues within the ELCA for over two years! The congregation had already joined the WordAlone Network and redirected benevolence monies to specific ministries in the ELCA. Elk Horn Lutheran Church hosted the constituting convention of the Augsburg Lutheran District, the first district formed in the new confessional association, Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC), and holds its district office. When national secretary Lowell Almen ruled there could be no dual rostering in the ELCA, the Elk Horn Lutheran leadership began to prepare itself for the eventual challenge of belonging to both LCMC and the ELCA.

This preparation helped us challenge Bp. Last, and the process he used last fall. Our church constitution says a pastor cannot be removed or suspended without consent from the council; however, Phil Harris, chief counsel of the ELCA wrote: "In connection with the formal disciplinary process of this church, a synodical bishop may temporarily suspend a pastor from serving as provided by Bylaw 20.21.23." The message is quite clear: the ELCA constitution supersedes the congregation's constitution. However, the state recognizes our constitution, since we are incorporated and the members of the congregation are themselves the owners. Who then, owns the congregations and whose constitution rules when a conflict arises? Apparently, Phil Harris is telling us that the congregational constitution matters little if a

conflict arises that includes the church beyond the local congregation. Mr. Harris went on to warn the congregation that following its own constitution could cause disciplinary action against it: "The deliberate refusal of a congregation to cooperate with a temporary suspension of the pastor could subject the congregation itself to disciplinary action in accordance with Bylaw 20.31.01."

The bishop's actions pertaining to the pastoral misconduct accusation only demonstrated this congregation's opinion that the ELCA is well on its way to becoming a hierarchical church filled with bureaucrats rather than pastors. The bishop was way out of line in saying anything at the synod assembly except to report our leaving the ELCA. Any commentary on his part is at best hearsay and at worst, slander on the names of good and faithful people. I believe Ezekiel had something to say about the same situation in chapter 34. This is a good example of the kind of situations that caused Luther and the reformers to refuse to allow bishops any authority except that of word and sacrament.

In an interesting turn, following his failure to remove the pastor from his call to Elk Horn Lutheran, Bp. Last placed before the synod board of ministry the following procedural steps for occasions when he receives an allegation:

1. An allegation is made. There is discussion between the bishop and person making the allegation to discern credibly:

My comment: Bp. Last's answer to my question if he talked to the accuser was, "I have not talked to her, or anyone else." Apparently Bp. Last didn't even follow his own guidelines before he visited the pastor in Elk Horn. In addition, at the synod assembly, Bp. Last said that he had talked to Phil Harris prior to his visit at Elk Horn, which contradicts his earlier statement. Either way, Bp. Last has not been truthful either to me or to the synod assembly.

2. ...If deemed credible, the allegation is put in writing and signed.

My comment: Credible? According to Bp. Last when asked if he had any corroborating evidence his response was, "All I need is this letter." I guess this means anyone can write a letter of accusation and use it to force a resignation. First, the accusation could not have been signed if he never spoke to the person first. Secondly, how can you deem anything credible without an investigation prior to the intervention? Did he talk with another person? No! I am assuming that the scriptures are

correct when Paul in 1 Timothy 5:19-21 specifically reminds Timothy not to so much as receive an accusation against an elder without at least two or three corroborating sources. Elders are to be protected from such harm to their ministry by a prior examination of evidence. Otherwise, even when an accused is innocent, the results can and do cause real damage. I believe this congregation and those of us attacked illustrate precisely what Paul feared. In short, what we have experienced is a draconian measure of dictatorial power.

3. An appointment is made by the bishop to meet with the rostered leader at the ministry site.

My comment: The ELCA constitution 20.12 states: "...due process means the right to be given specific written notice of the charges against any person or entity of this church..." This procedure was not followed and formal charges were never filed. First, the bishop replied to our request for the accusing document that we could not have the letter since no charges were ever filed. Excuse me, but the bishop did not come to my office to ask if the accusation was true but to insist it was true based on this very letter. Bp. Last then continued to ask for my resignation even when I told him the person who wrote the letter was wrong. Then came the veiled threat, "...even if you are proved innocent you could no longer serve Elk Horn Lutheran, and another call might be hard to come by since your reputation would be in question." My lawyer challenged the national church by asking why my resignation was asked for when no charges were ever filed. We never did get a satisfactory response.

Secondly, Bp. Last said a hearing would take place in the next nine months (which is too long according to the ELCA constitution), therefore, we should prepare our defense. Yet, the letter of accusation never was released to us because, apparently, Bp. Last was more worried about Elk Horn leaving the ELCA than he was to prove his accusation true, which he never attempted to do.

4. One of the last steps is more a comment than requirement: It is important to remember that this is a church matter, not a civil matter.

My comment: This is a technique in which the pastor is isolated with no representation. Once again, however, Bp. Last did not follow his own steps when he warned me that I should retain a lawyer immediately. I have to admit, this is one piece of advice I did follow, and it made all the

difference. When in fact the synod realized that they had tried to accuse, try, and convict a pastor on the basis of one letter, no eye witness, nor any victim account, they did their best to back out of the situation.

I believe this is true because Bp. Last did absolutely nothing to stop us from leaving. Although he sent a letter letting us know he wanted to meet with us as proscribed in the constitution, our inquiries asking him to set a date went unanswered.

If Bp. Last had made a few inquiries, none of this would have happened. However, Bp. Last's actions and behaviors were extremely unloving and abusive. As our lawyer said, "Last didn't even follow his own procedure. And even if he did, you would still be removed from your parish. In the end, you are guilty either way."

An Opening statement:

When Martin Luther wrote his 95 Theses, he was calling for debate on the issue of indulgences. His vision was to pull a lumbering legalistic hierarchical church back to its own roots of sin and grace, freedom in the Gospel. Paul in Galatians best illustrates it: "For freedom did Christ set us free; stand fast, therefore, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage." Instead of debate, Luther became a target. Jon Eck, a German Catholic theologian, attacked Luther and charged him with "spreading the Bohemian virus" (Cath 41.430-31). The Reformation is about an entrenched and powerful class of professional clergy willing to go to great lengths to arrest the reformers. The Lutheran faith stands as a movement of religious and spiritual freedom. It was a revival of early Christianity and a deeper understanding of the gospel than had been known for centuries.

In the seventh volume of his History of the Christian Church, Philip Schaff writes: "There are three fundamental principles in the reformation: (1) the supremacy of scripture over tradition, (2) the supremacy of faith over works, and (3) the supremacy of the Christian people over an exclusive priesthood."

While the world needs this message of justification, the following will show how the ELCA has intentionally dismantled these reformation principles and moved itself back to a medieval theology, while at the same time sweeping away the moral context of the faith. The following information represents two years of study, discussion and personal struggle.

I. The authority of scripture.

The Lutherans in the 1500 's wanted to remove abuses from the church. At issue was the pure word of God and Christian truth. "We pledge ourselves to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments as the pure and clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true norm according to which all teachers and teachings are to be judged and evaluated." (Book of Concord 503-504:3)

The Premise: The ELCA, however, no longer views the scriptures as normative, but only one of many sciences that inform.

The Evidence:

"Inclusive" vs. Biblical Language for God

The following is from a student of Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio in 1993. She writes:

The inclusive language policy stated, among other things, that references to God should not use only the masculine, as this limits our understanding of God....

What did this really mean? When I was called on in the Old Testament class to answer a question, I began by saying, "Well, I think God was trying to teach Abraham something. He was trying..." At which point my instructor, jumped in. "He WHO?" she quizzed me. Me, stupidly (not yet getting it): "Uh, God. He was trying to..."

"He WHO?" said the professor again. At which point light dawned in my brain. I stopped, and said quietly, "God."

"Thank you," she said. "Don't forget about the inclusive language policy here."

Once again, I had the creepy sensation of being, not in a seminary, but in a concentration camp. This same Orwellian scenario was played out with several other students and with me two other times as well, since in the midst of talking, I would "forget" to speak correctly and need to be reminded. The last time, it came as a warning, that "grades would be affected" unless we students learned to refrain from referring to God as Father, He, Him or using any masculine designation.

New Age Themes

The Reforming Church Conference (Nov. 17-19, 1994): This conference brought together 700 participants to Central Lutheran Church in

Minneapolis. Throughout the three-day event, homosexuals and lesbians demanded the right to engage in homosexual and lesbian sex without apology. Barbara Lundblad, Elizabeth Bettenhausen, and Diane Jacobsen, all Lutheran professors, spoke. Craig Lewis, a former assistant to the National Bishop of ELCA, led a Bible study on Acts 8 in which he claimed the conversion of the Ethiopian implied that open unrepentant homosexuals should be welcomed into the church. Bettenhausen said, "We've got a church that says you can preach the gospel only if you use your genitals in a certain way, and I think that's about as un-Lutheran as you can get."

Re-Imagining Revival November 4-7, 1993: this event drew 2000 participants. 313 Lutherans attended the conference, including approximately 20 churchwide staff from Chicago. The following prayer was offered at the conference:

Our maker Sophia, we are women in your image; with the hot blood of our wombs we give form to new life. With the courage of our convictions we pour out lifeblood for justice. Sophia, creator God, let your milk and honey flow...shower us with your love. Our sweet Sophia, we are women in your image. With the nectar between our thighs we invite a lover, we birth a child; with our warm body fluids we remind the world of its pleasures and sensations...Our guide, Sophia, we are women in your image: With our moist mouths we kiss away a tear, we smile encouragement. With the honey of wisdom in our mouths, we prophesy a full humanity to all the peoples.

During a panel discussion about Jesus, Delores Williams of Union Theological Seminary, said: "I don't think we need a theory of atonement at all. I think Jesus came for life and to show us something about life. I don't think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff ... we just need to listen to the God within."

I don't think you have to be a rocket scientist to know how unbiblical this stuff is! The entire weekend retreat was like this and caused a firestorm among many mainline denominations.

Although the ELCA declined to give a financial accounting of its contribution to the Sophia Conference, it is estimated that the ELCA provided more than \$22,000 given generously by trusting Lutheran Christians.

Sexual Issues

The October 20, 1993, release of a social statement draft titled, "The Church and Human Sexuality: A Lutheran Perspective," drew over 20,000 angry phone calls. Newspaper headlines highlighted the most controversial parts of the document: Lutherans Endorse Masturbation, Condoms, and Gay Unions. The ELCA withdrew the draft the next day.

Homosexual Agenda

In 2001, the Churchwide Assembly mandated that the ELCA engage in a study on homosexuality and a study on sexuality. The first task is to deal with the blessing of same-gender unions and allowing persons in committed gay or lesbian relationships to join the clergy roster. The second task is to lead to the development of a social statement on sexuality.

Dr. James Childs, chairperson of the ELCA's Study on homosexuality said,

The ELCA will consider the witness Scripture, Lutheran biblical and theological tradition, the insights of science and the experiences of gay, lesbian and heterosexual persons in a free and open process to present a recommendation to the church in three years.... It is exciting. It is like starting out to write a book without knowing the ending.

Even though the ELCA prohibits ordaining non-celibate unmarried pastors, several have been ordained with minimal or no discipline. Bp. Bob Mattheis has refused to file disciplinary charges against University Lutheran Chapel, Berkeley, for having a gay pastor who rejects celibacy. Bp. Charlie Maahs censured Abiding Peace in Kansas City, MO for willfully calling and ordaining Donna Simon to serve as Pastor, despite the fact that she has refused to comply with the ELCA standards. (To be censured is little more than not being allowed to be a synod officer.) Bp. Mark Hanson allowed St. Paul-Reformation to be served by Anita Hill, who lives with her partner, Janelle Bussert, a religion professor at Augsburg College. As punishment, Bp. Hanson censured the congregation, but it did not take affect until after Hill was allowed to serve as a delegate to Churchwide Assembly in Indianapolis, voting to approve the sexuality study now under way.

By the way, more than 200 clergy members, from Roman Catholics to Presbyterians and

Baptists—even a rabbi and a Buddhist—crowded six-deep around Hill as she knelt at the altar for the laying on of hands. One might ask, in which religion is Hill ordained?

Regardless of what the ELCA members believe or the scriptures say, the agenda is set, and the ELCA is pulling out all the stops to see resolutions to “bless same-sex marriages” and “ordain homosexuals” pass at a churchwide assembly. In part, ELCA coercion is demonstrated by the types of books made available through its publishing house, Augsburg Fortress—ever try to find books that present the other side of the argument of the gay agenda? For example: The ELCA study book, *Talking Together About Homosexuality*, claims that to restrict marriage to heterosexual couples is “discriminatory” (p.55).

Former ELCA bishop Herbert Chilstrom and Lowell Erdahl just published a book, *Sexual Fulfillment for Single and Married, Straight and Gay, Young and Old. Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches*, Edited by Walter Wink. Quoting from chapter 8: “There is no denying that at least one writer of the New Testament, Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, condemned certain sexual practices that he thought were perversions. Men committed shameless acts with men (Rom. 1:27). But should what he condemned be given the name homosexuality? At the least, it is anachronistic to impose a modern word on an ancient document.”

The book, *The Church and Homosexuality: Searching for a Middle Ground*, by Dr. Merton Strommen, a research psychologist and founder of the Search Institute, was not published by Augsburg Fortress. Dr. Strommen, well known in ELCA circles, had to go to Kirk House Publishers to publish his book. The Lutheran Magazine published a gay activist's blast against Strommen (5/02, p.56), but gave Strommen no opportunity to respond. The ELCA agenda seems very obvious as they continue to silence any opposition.

Nine ELCA synods and more than 100 congregations have voted to be designated as “Reconciled in Christ.” These congregations are allowed to perform rites to “bless same-sex marriages.” The ELCA does not have any rules prohibiting “same-sex marriage.”

Rev. Mark Alan Powell, associate professor of New Testament, Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio said, “The church has the authority and duty to determine how closely or loosely the laws of the Bible apply today to

Christians. The Bible has examples of Jesus forbidding his followers to borrow money, take each other to court, swear an oath and save money. The church says those rules apply loosely today. The Bible condemns same-sex sexual relations, but the church has the authority to define acceptable homosexual behavior and to decide whether or not to bless same-sex unions.” (ELCA NEWS SERVICE March 17, 1997)

Personal Comment: As I write about the same-sex issue I am keenly aware that this subject is fraught with dangers. The debate in the church (not just the Lutheran church) grows hot and personal. And yet, the scriptures do speak about it, and in the end it is about how God views the subject of love and relationships. Much of the following comes from Robert Gagnon's book, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*.

1. The first danger is to be labeled as homophobic. This means that those against same-sex relationships have some inherent psychiatric disorder. This is a tactic of those dissenters who would demean and belittle those who do not agree. It is neither honest nor helpful.

2. The second is being labeled intolerant. How often do I hear pastors accuse church members of being conservative, narrow-minded, etc? While tolerance is a noble thing, according to scripture, love and tolerance are not necessarily the same thing. The Bible describes a God who is love, but he is not very tolerant of sin; see Rev. 2:20.

3. Another danger is for people to say anti-same-sex language promotes violence. Promoting violence is not Christian. No one I know would purposely promote such acts. But those who promote this lifestyle need to take a look at the way Jesus dealt with violence against the weak in John 7:53-8:11. Despite the fact that the woman caught in adultery faced violence, Jesus neither backed down his opposition to adultery or the violence she faced.

4. Finally, this discussion will bring pain to people who are or have family members who are homosexuals. For me personally, this is very difficult. I am in one of those families. Robert Gagnon says it better than I can. “When a homosexual holds out hope that something in the teaching of Jesus or in the Bible generally speaks positively about same-sex erotic unions, naturally there is going to be disappointment and sadness upon the discovery that nothing of the sort exists.” p. 32.

Abortion

The ELCA supposedly has a solid pro-life statement on this issue, but the ELCA does an about face when it agrees to pay for abortions on demand in its own health plan. I have heard ELCA leaders defend themselves by suggesting it is Blue-Cross' policy. However, having talked to Blue-Cross about this, they say that it is the policyholders' choice. If the ELCA chose not to pay for abortions, it would be omitted from the policy. Obviously, the ELCA does not want to stop paying for abortions, which makes its anti-abortion statement ring hollow.

The writers of scripture make no bones about putting forth an objective truth. However, the church is in the midst of a grand illusion. Good biblical interpretation has been given over to toleration, acceptance, feeling and special interests to the point of rewriting the meaning of clear biblical precepts.

II. The supremacy of faith over works or Justification by Faith.

Reformation day, October 31, 1999, saw the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by Lutheran and Roman Catholic leaders. The declaration states that Catholics and Lutherans agree that sinful human beings become right with God through God's grace alone. Human accomplishments do nothing to gain salvation. It was signed with fanfare and hoopla. Lutherans and Catholics shared hugs and told the press the two churches had finally come to an agreement on this prickly doctrine.

Immediately following the warm fuzzies, the Vatican issued the BULL OF INDICATION (meaning indulgence) OF THE GREAT JUBILEE OF THE YEAR 2000. To receive this Jubilee indulgence one must, "... make a sacred pilgrimage to the Cathedral Church or to other Churches or places designated by the Ordinary, and there assist devoutly at a liturgical celebration or other pious exercise, and there spend some time in pious meditation, ending with the Our Father, the profession of faith in any approved form, and prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary." You can find the document on the Vatican website.

It must always be remembered that the Declaration does not condemn, change, or limit the decrees of the Council of Trent. The Council of Trent of 1545-1563, was in response to the growing reformation movement by the Roman Catholic Church, and remains the official dogma

of Rome and it rejects the scriptural doctrine of justification in no uncertain terms:

If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will, let him be anathema (meaning condemned. (Trent, Ses. VI, Canons 9).

Political Agendas

Benevolence in the ELCA is often appropriated for political action advocacy rather than the spread of the gospel. Actually, the ELCA believes political action and social statements are the gospel. The presiding bishop as well as the Division for Church in Society continually represent themselves as speaking on behalf of all 5 million ELCA members. The presiding bishop writes letters to members of the government on such issues as the President's tax cut plan, Israeli-Palestinian relations, third world debt, gun control and a host of other political topics, none of which represent the ELCA in entirety. Outside the headquarters, the ELCA maintains advocacy office in Washington D.C. and 18 other states, staffing them with many political advocates and lobbyists. This has only eroded the theology of the cross and caused us to become a church of glory, resulting in fewer missionaries and mission churches.

When the ELCA presiding bishop speaks on the subjects of policy, it appears he speaks on behalf of the entire ELCA, yet we know that the ELCA is made of a plethora of political opinions. Neither this bishop, nor any other, can speak on behalf of anyone when the subject is how best to govern an entire people. The reformers well understood this, since many bishops acted on behalf of the Holy Roman government. They addressed this issue in Article 28 of the Augsburg Confession.

Therefore, ecclesiastical and civil powers are not to be confused. The power of the church has its own commission to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments. Let it not invade the others function, nor transfer the kingdoms of the world, nor abrogate the laws of civil rulers, nor abolish lawful obedience, nor interfere with judgments concerning any civil ordinances or contracts, nor prescribe to civil rulers laws about the forms of

government that should be established. Christ says, My kingdom is not of this world, and again, Who made me a judge or divider over you. Paul also wrote in Phil. 3:20, Our commonwealth is in heaven, and in 2 Cor. 10:4-5, The weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy arguments, etc." Tappert Edition.

I find the comments of Rev. Dr. Michael McDaniel, former Bishop of the LCA and ELCA North Carolina Synod very interesting:

Not surprisingly, for a church whose constitution can point no higher than service in the world as its raison d'etre, within a short time, programs were being pressed upon synods and congregations bearing the sanctimonious humbug of peace, justice, and the care of the environment. Under this pious Jolly Roger, congregations were urged toward the absurdly presumptuous goal of meeting the world's needs, by lobbying and advocacy instead of such ministry to Word and Sacrament as would define the world's real needs. Thus the ELCA emerged as subservient to relevancy in the kingdoms of this world, but indifferent to revelation from the kingdom of heaven.

According to Luther, a work-righteous saint would be intolerable, not to say inconceivable. Luther writes: "I want to be and remain in the church and little flock of the faint-hearted, the feeble, and the ailing, who feel and recognize the wretchedness of their sins, and who believe in the forgiveness of sins, and who suffer persecution for the sake of the Word which they confess and teach purely and without adulteration" (LW 22, 55).

God Within

The post-offering prayer in the Lutheran Book of Worship says: "...With them we offer ourselves to your service and dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that you have made." Where do we get the audacity to believe we have anything to do with the redemption of this world? If anything, we sinful human beings are the reason this world groans so. As Lennart Pinomaa wrote in his Faith Victorious, "Man pretended to do what only God alone can do." And yet, it makes perfect sense if we have shelved the theology of justification.

III. The supremacy of the Christian people over an exclusive priesthood.

"Thank God, a seven-year-old child knows what the church is, namely, holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd...Its holiness does not consist of surplices, tonsures, albs, or other ceremonies of theirs which they have invented over and above the Holy Scriptures but it consists of the Word of God and true faith" (Martin Luther, Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article 12).

The Smalcald Articles are considered by many Luther's last will and testament. They give us his mind about the future church days before he died. The days of the monarchical church were past, and the church of the people had been resurrected. Luther put the priesthood where it belonged, in the hands of trusting believers. From that group came ministers who preached the gospel and administered the sacraments.

The Premise: The ELCA simply has pushed aside the theology of justification and the priesthood of all believers for a very old ecclesiology of priests, who will, because of their ordination, protect the church and its mysteries.

The Following is the Evidence:

Ordination

The best evidence of this shift in Lutheran Doctrine is the shift in the meaning and purpose of the ordained clergy. When Jesus commissioned his disciples to preach to all the nations, he was, in fact, grounding the ministry in the Word. For it is the proclamation of the Gospel, the sending if you will, which subordinates the minister to the ministry, or the person to God's office. The problem arises when the church turns the word upside down and lifts the ordained above the word. I believe this occurs whenever the church finds it necessary to prove the ministry by anything other than the great commission. Thus, the Catholic Church began to look to Apostolic Succession as a means to give the ministry legitimacy. And yet, nowhere in scripture does it mention ordination as necessary for baptism and the preaching of the gospel. It's obvious that if ordination were regarded as necessary, then the ordained would certainly be regarded as privileged with powers which others would not have, and authority. The only reason for ordaining ministers is so that Christ's work of salvation is extended into the whole world.

By the time Martin Luther was ordained a priest in the Roman Catholic Church, the prevalent theology said that with the laying on of hands Luther was given an indelible character. This special character distinguished Luther the priest from the laity. It meant that Luther had received special grace to make the sacrament of Holy Communion work. It meant that Luther, the priest, could mediate between God and the laity. And, no worship is valid without a priest with this special grace.

Called to Common Mission (CCM), the ecumenical agreement between the ELCA and the Episcopal Church in the USA is built upon a desire to return the Lutheran church ministry to a distinctive pre-reformation order. In order to achieve full communion with the Episcopal Church, the ELCA must adopt an historic episcopate as a condition for unity. This historic episcopate refers to bishops, in the historic episcopate, making new bishops in succession through prayer and physical touch (laying-on-of-hands).

This agreement only helps to solidify the change in Lutheran doctrine. Martin Marty, an author of the agreement said about the Historic Episcopate, "Lutherans do not have to believe it, just do it." However, most of us would agree, if we do it long enough, it will become a fixed theology.

Called to Common Mission was sold to the church on the basis of unity and why would anyone be against unity? But, the end result has been anything but unifying. It was never about unity. It was, however, about conformity and people know conformity when they see it. Called to Common Mission is a failure because the message that is proclaimed intending to promote unity is, by its very nature, divisive! Legalism demands conformity. Every point of belief and practice becomes a life-or-death issue, and it brings more death than life. Every person, according to the legal approach, must know, understand, and do everything that one or the other church demands. Called to Common Mission could easily been swallowed if the two churches would have agreed to accept each other for who they are and what they believe. But the Episcopalians were not about to give up the fourth essential that, for them, makes a church legitimate: the historic episcopate. Now, since we have this fourth article, will it mean we too will not have a valid church without it?

We have asked many times during our study, "Why has the ELCA risked so much to conform to a system that is unlike any other in the

Lutheran faith?" The answer seems fairly simple -- power. As much as we try to ignore it or deny it, or refuse to believe it, there are those who want power. Pastors want control of parishioners, bishops want control of pastors, and the hierarchy wants control of congregations, and everyone is at risk.

Freedom to Speak, Not!

For example: ELCA bishop Michael Neils (Grand Canyon Synod) contacted bishop Duane Danielson (Western North Dakota), raising all sort of red flags about Professor Walter Sundberg (Luther Theological Seminary) speaking to a group in the Grand Canyon Synod. Professor Sundberg has been a critic of Called to Common Mission and apparently, not wanting Professor Sundberg speaking in his territory, Neils wrote Danielson about a matter of pastoral ethics and asked Danielson to request Sundberg to back out of his speaking engagement. Danielson wrote to Sundberg asking for his thoughts on how bishops should monitor (my emphasis) the speaking engagements of ELCA professors who accept invitations to independent Lutheran groups. Hmm! They want to monitor the speaking engagements of ELCA professors.

First the Historic Episcopate! What Next? Prayers to Mary?

Already we hear of Lutheran pastors who believe that at their ordination there is a transference of spiritual power from God through the bishop, coming dangerously close to becoming a third sacrament in the Lutheran church. There are Lutheran pastors who desire to be called Father rather than pastor.

Bishop Harold Usgaard of the Southeast Minnesota Synod offered up prayers to Mary and the saints during the ordination service at St. John's Lutheran Church in Northfield, MN. Only after people complained did the bishop admit that praying to Mary and the saints had been a big mistake. Of course, it isn't like the bishop was surprised, as he had the service in hand days before the ordination. Of course, one of the theological tenets of the Historic Episcopate is "bishops are a sign of unity in the church." Bishops must ordain new pastors. Before Called to Common Mission, Lutheran bishops presided at ordinations but could delegate that authority to another pastor. The difference? It is the word, must.

According to Called to Common Mission, bishops must be fully interchangeable. Most people in the ELCA believe with the signing of the agreement, we completely share this interchangeable ministry. However, this is not true. The ELCA will not be considered legitimate until every pastor has been ordained in the Historic Episcopate.

During this transition period, ELCA bishops will not have the full privileges of Episcopal bishops. But at Full Communion Episcopal and Lutheran bishops must be fully interchangeable (p. 14). They cannot be partially interchangeable, which means, like Episcopal bishops, Lutheran bishops are for life. I suspect the ELCA will not give up term limits for bishops. However, instead of bishops going back to a parish as pastors, they will probably retain the title bishop like they do in the Episcopal tradition and take part in ordinations, etc.

A Catholic Ordination

Dr. Carl Braaten, a former professor at Lutheran Seminary in Chicago, writes in his book, *Mother Church*: "The recovery of authority in the church on matters of faith and morals cannot happen as long as the cord remains severed between ordination and magisterium.... The net result is a loss of sacred authority because the laity cannot be expected to teach with authority when they have not received, by ordination, the charism from the Holy Spirit to be teachers of the church and have not been empowered by theological education and pastoral experience to assume this solemn responsibility" (p.146-7).

What Dr. Braaten is advocating is a return to a time when ordination and the laying on of hands provided the candidate a special charism (Holy Spirit). It enabled the priest to make the sacraments valid. The laity needed a priest in order to have access to God's grace.

Was Luther wrong? Does Holy Scripture advocate a special class of professional priests? The necessity of an outward succession is an Old Testament idea; the New Testament requirement is that of an inward succession, i.e. a succession of faith and doctrine (Rom. 4:16; Gal. 1:8). Hence the distinct statement of the Augsburg Confession, (CA 7), that "the only marks of the church are the pure preaching of the gospel, and the right administration of the sacraments," and its ignoring of an outward succession of ministers as any test whatever of the true church.

Smoke and Mirrors

In 2001, the church wide assembly adopted a wiggle room bylaw, allowing a few pastors, but no bishops, to be free of the Historic Episcopate. In response, Frank Griswold of the Episcopal Church USA has written that the bylaw seems to create two classes of clergy... The Episcopalians will never regard these second-class pastors as valid priests who can offer a valid Eucharist. (Letter to ELCA Presiding Bishop H. Geo. Anderson, 3/20/01). Isn't it strange how the ELCA, so rabid about fairness and equality, could allow the Episcopal Church to claim those ordained outside the H.E. to be not valid? If they aren't valid, then what are they? If these pastors are considered invalid in the Episcopal tradition, then what does that say about the Lutheran understanding of ministry for the past 500 years? Even the church of Sweden, who has the Historic Episcopate, recognizes and accepts clergy from Lutheran traditions that do not have the Historic Episcopate. The Episcopalians are, however, right. There will be, if there aren't already, two classes of clergy in the ELCA.

Power to the Bishop

Constitutional changes have centralized power in the hands of bishops: 8.74 Local practice of altar and pulpit fellowship...is subject to the approval of the Synod Council.

My comment: This is to prevent local churches from inviting members of the local clergy (other than those approved by the ELCA) from preaching or presiding at communion without asking permission from the bishop.

When I resigned from the ELCA clergy roster, I received a letter from the bishop warning me that I am not to participate in any ELCA congregation in a pastoral role. The national church now believes it owns the call instead of God and the congregation. Those of us who have received such a letter are in good company, as Luther himself preached several times on his way home from his heroic stand at Worms, in spite of the Emperor's prohibition. Luther said, "I never consented to tie up God's word." This is a condition beyond my power. (Letter to Spalatin, May 14, 1521)

S14.13.d/c9.05.d Termination of a pastor's call would require a simple majority vote...where the bishop and the committee recommend termination of the call.

My comment: This recommended change, from a 2/3 to a simple majority vote; makes it easier for bishops to remove pastors. This has already been attempted. On the basis of a complaint about the church initiating a day care center within the facility, a friend of mine, who is an outspoken critic of Called to Common Mission, was asked to resign. When the pastor refused, the bishop forced a congregational vote. The bishop even campaigned by calling the pastor's members. The congregation overwhelmingly defeated the bishop's attempt to remove him.

From Send Me to Spend Me!

The ELCA bureaucracy has grown; it now has 323 executives in its national staff (2001 Preassembly Report, Section III, p. 77). This is a 10% increase from 1998: 293 - 323. The ELCA has 106 more executives than missionaries (217). The number of New Mission Starts in the United States has shrunk. In a 3-year period in 1962-64, the two predecessor churches, (LCA, ALC) started 324 new mission congregations. In 1995-97, the ELCA started 52 mission congregations.

Who Will The Pastor Obey?

The following is an example of how the church has shifted authority from the Word to the church structure in the certificate of ordination: The former ALC certificate states: *This certifies that (name) a candidate for the ministry of the gospel having received a call to serve in the ministry of the ALC; and having acknowledged that he accepts the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God and adheres to the Confessions of the Lutheran Church...*

Quoting the ELCA certificate: *This certifies that (name) who has been called to serve in the ordained ministry of the ELCA and who acknowledges adherence to this church's confession of faith and accepts it constitutional order, was ordained a Minister of the Church of Christ in the Office of Word and Sacrament...*

When a priest in the Roman Catholic Church is ordained, the candidate vows obedience to the Pope because the pope is Christ's representative on earth. ELCA candidates have on their wall obedience to the ELCA's confession of faith and Constitution. What happens if the ELCA's confession of faith changes and a pastor cannot, in good conscience, adhere to it? What happens when a pastor or church dissents? "...When bishops teach or ordain anything contrary to the Gospel,

churches have a command of God that forbids obedience." (Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). The Augsburg Confession)

Gustaf Wingren, in *The Living Word* warns, "The whole conception of the Church becomes somewhat warped when in Lutheran circles the term ministry is taken to refer exclusively to the ministry of the clergy" (p. 104).

A Final Word

For many years I have found myself dismayed by the direction and actions of the ELCA. Standing at synod assemblies only confirmed my fears that I, like many who hold to a traditional biblical and confessional Lutheran church, were being marginalized, even rejected. During the last synod assembly I attended, a resolution was being discussed pertaining to Called to Common Mission. One pastor rose to the microphone and told confessional members to leave the ELCA.

However, my ordination certificate reminds me the Word of God is my final authority. My conscience would not allow me to remain silent. I also realized that when I spoke out, many people considered my positions to be narrow and even stubborn. I understand, because I am keenly aware of my own weaknesses, and I continued to ask people to show me from scripture where I was wrong. Instead of being taken seriously, we were ridiculed and called troublemakers. There continue to be officials, pastors, and others who are working hard to stifle vocal or written disagreements with the so-called party line. There are some zealots who are so compelled to exercise their newfound power that they will exert institutional pressure to fire or threaten fine and honest pastors from receiving calls. I then realized that when members of the church can no longer stand and speak their convictions in freedom without retribution, then the church has ceased to be the church and has become an instrument of discrimination.

There are countless pastors who have been told, "As long as I am bishop, you will not receive another call in this synod." This threat lacks full appreciation of either the ethical element of the Christian faith or the Lutheran understanding of bishop. And yet pastors and lay alike sit back and take it, as if these bishops held Thor's hammer over our heads.

People of God, bishops do not have any power unless we allow them! The call belongs to the congregation, and the congregation has

the divine right to call anyone within the Lutheran church. Thus the Smalcald Articles (Appendix, Mueller 341, Henkel 404) declare:

“The churches undoubtedly retain the authority to call, to elect, and to ordain ministers. And this authority is a privilege which God has given especially to the Church, and it cannot be taken away from the Church by any human power, as Paul testifies, Eph 4:8, 11, 12.”

It became obvious to us that in this church of five million, the slow but steady transformation of ecclesiastical build-up and clergy pretensions cannot be stopped. As Luther said in his commentary on Genesis, “We were wrong for even thinking that we could keep the Word ‘by remaining in their church.’”

It appears that after two millennia, we need to recapture the vision and passion for the spread of the Gospel. If the early church and the reformation didn't believe Jesus' great commission to make disciples of all nations, then neither the early church nor the reformation would have transformed a world.

This transformation will not begin until we return to the cross of Jesus Christ, the center of our faith. It is here, on a hill with two beggars, God in Christ begins a great work. God puts to death our old selves so that a new one might arise. There is no compromise with sin. There is only death. And yet, the greatest of promises come at us like a mighty waterfall: while we were still ungodly and hostile sinners, God died for us. For many today, Paul's words sound medieval. But sin never dies easily. Therefore, we preach Christ crucified, which has the power to transform sinful, ungodly people like us into saints who will live out the great commandment to love God and our neighbor. And with that, we are free because our relationship with God in Christ Jesus surpasses everything—even life itself.



Pastor Mike and Amy Williams



The Augsburg Lutheran District (ALD) was formed on July 18, 2001, as a fellowship of churches united by a common confession of faith.

We believe, teach, and confess the Holy Scriptures as the *sole* authoritative source and norm for our proclamation, faith, and life, and the confessional writings of the evangelical Lutheran church as truthful witnesses to Scripture.

- Our common mission is to bear witness to the good news that sinners are put right with God by faith alone in Jesus Christ.
- We resist any corruption of this gospel.
- Looking only to the cross of Christ, we proclaim God's Word as law and gospel for the redemption of his people today.

We invite you to learn more about us by visiting our website:

www.augsburgdistrict.org

Feel free to contact any of our Joint Council members for more information about who we are and what we do.

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