

CCM supporter calls for its suspension

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) should suspend its full-communion agreement with The Episcopal Church USA (ECUSA) in light of the recent ordination of a practicing homosexual as bishop, says Pastor Paull Spring, former bishop of the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA.

Spring was a supporter of the Called to Common Mission agreement (CCM) with the ECUSA, which was adopted by the 1999 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

While the recent ordination of Gene Robinson, an openly homosexual bishop, does not technically affect the "text or practice" of the full-communion agreement, he said, from "the broader perspective" the ordination was "very worrisome."

And, acknowledging that another full communion partner, the United Church of Christ, has ordained practicing homosexuals for more than 30 years, Spring stated that the ELCA should suspend its ecumenical agreement with the UCC as well.

The ordination practices of both partner denominations raise questions about the

ELCA's Visions and Expectations ministry standards, which require celibacy of homosexual clergy, said Spring.

"It's certainly not business as usual between us and our partners on this matter," he said. However, he asserted that the full-communion agreements should not be suspended indefinitely but only until the churches "get this issue resolved," with ongoing conversation on the matter.

Spring noted that under CCM, the ELCA and the ECUSA both have absolute control over who shall be clergy in each church. So, to serve in the ELCA, clergy from the ECUSA would be subject to the "discipline of the ELCA" and come under the requirements of the Visions and Expectations.

Clergy from the UCC also are subject to Visions and Expectations, he said, just as ELCA clergy are subject to approval by full-communion partners before they can serve in those member churches.

Spring is an associate pastor at Grace Lutheran Church, State College, Penn.

(See related story on page 2.)

Fallout from ECUSA ordination of active gay bishop builds in just two weeks

Negative responses to the Nov. 2 ordination of Gene Robinson, a practicing homosexual, as an Episcopal bishop in New Hampshire have erupted in the U.S. and internationally. By Nov. 17, the Network News' press time, such reactions even clouded Episcopal and Anglican ecumenical relations with eastern Orthodox churches.

Reaction to Robinson's ordination within the worldwide Anglican Communion came swiftly when the national leaders of Anglican provinces in the Southern Hemisphere declared a "state of impaired communion" with The Episcopal Church USA (ECUSA) on the ordination day.

Over the next several days, there followed blunt statements from some Southern Hemisphere primates. Several dioceses of the ECUSA repudiated Robinson's ordination.

Then, on Nov. 17 a statement from the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Or-

thodox Church announced it was suspending further cooperation with the ECUSA even though relations between the two churches have been "warm and friendly" for almost 200 years.

The Russian statement said: "We shall not be able to cooperate with these people not only in the theological dialogue, but also in the humanitarian and religious and public spheres. We have no right to allow even a particle of agreement with their position, which we consider to be profoundly anti-Christian and blasphemous."

In another sign of ecumenical concerns, the heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches had postponed an October meeting of the Anglican Orthodox International Commission in response to Robinson's then anticipated ordination, the Anglican Communion News Service announced recently.

Here at home, the American Anglican Council (AAC), a group that describes itself as orthodox in outlook, has said that a realignment of the ECUSA is coming. In a church in which strict geographic boundaries are the norm, individuals and parishes opposed to Robinson's ordination and the blessing of same sex relationships but who live in dioceses that accept the gay agenda, might be placed under orthodox bishops' oversight regardless of geography.

Some observers have wondered aloud if a parallel American Episcopal church will emerge and what legal and property questions may arise.

Already the Episcopal dioceses of South Carolina, Fort Worth, Pittsburgh, Albany and Florida have reject- *(Continued on page 3)*

Convention moved up to April 25-27 to discuss sexuality issues

The next annual convention of the WordAlone Network, has been moved up to April 25-27, 2004 at Roseville Lutheran Church in Roseville, Minn., rather than being in the fall of 2004 as previously announced. Members will be asked to discuss sexuality questions facing the church today.

The WordAlone Board decided in October to focus on sexuality questions to be voted on at the 2005 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Churchwide Assembly, basically, whether to ordain non-celibate gays and lesbians and whether to bless gay and lesbian relationships.

The date was moved up, according to WordAlone President Jaynan Clark Eglund, to better help WordAlone members respond to the ELCA sexuality task force's second study guide by its deadline of Nov. 1, 2004. The ELCA document, "Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two: The Church and Homosexuality," was sent to every congregation in early September.

"We believe strongly that because the WordAlone movement is a grassroots

movement, it would simply be inappropriate for the board to make a decision or recommendation on an issue as significant as the sexuality issue," said board member, Pastor Dennis Bielfeldt. He also is a professor of philosophy and religion at South Dakota State University, Brookings. "Therefore, we believe the most responsible way of arriving at a WordAlone position is for members of WordAlone to vote after studying both sides of the issue."

Eglund said, "The WordAlone convention will be set up as a model of how the church can discuss controversial issues based on biblical and confessional Lutheran foundations, accepting that God's word is authoritative over us. We will invite top scholars from biblical theology, systematic theology and scientific and sociological disciplines." Confirmed speakers as of press time are: Dr. Roy Harrisville III, Dr. Paul Jersild and Dr. Marc Kolden.

Besides the 2005 vote, the ELCA is expected to decide on a new social statement on sexuality in 2007.

Fallout from ECUSA ordination *(Continued from page 2)*

ed Robinson's ordination or declared "impaired fellowship" with those who approved of his consecration or took part in it. Some have indicated they may withhold financial support from the ECUSA. Others are asking for realignment such as the AAC predicts.

While the Southern Hemisphere provinces in the Anglican church have declared a state of impaired communion with the ECUSA, they have not specified what it means. However, Archbishop Peter Akinola of the Anglican Province of Nigeria made very

clear what he meant. The Episcopal News Service has quoted from a radio interview in which he said: "We can no longer claim to be in the same Communion. We cannot go to them and they cannot come to us. We will not share communion. We have come to the end of the road."

Likewise, the Episcopal News Service reported, Archbishop Benjamin Nzimbi of the Anglican Church of Kenya announced his church will have nothing to do with Robinson or any of the 53 bishops who participated in his consecration.

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WA president reviews board actions and reports

Financial news from the WordAlone treasurer's report at the board of directors' October meeting in Buffalo, N.Y., was both encouraging and distressing, WordAlone (WA) President Jaynan Clark Eglund wrote recently.

Besides hearing treasurer John Beem's report, the board decided to continue to push the Lutheran Episcopal Coordinating Committee and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Division for Ministry to review and use the "Admonition for the Sake of the True Peace and Unity of the Church." This document was written in 2002 by WA's Theological Advisory Board and it questions ordination and hierarchical requirements of Called to Common Mission, the full communion agreement with The Episcopal Church USA.

Regarding WordAlone financial news, Eglund commented in the recent website post at www.wordalone.org, "It is encouraging that as a non-profit organization in this difficult economic climate, WA is holding its own better than most. Yet, we are restrained from doing more as a movement because of financial limitations. But the reality of what needs to be done is daunting."

Needs she cited were: forming new WA chapters, preparing for the 2005 and 2007 ELCA Churchwide Assemblies, producing educational resources, communicating with members and the public and holding con-

ferences and conventions. She noted that WA supports annual meetings of its international Theological Advisory Board.

Eglund encouraged fund-raising appeals to congregations and individuals to support WordAlone's ministries. In addition, she wrote that the board decided to make more efforts to increase support of an established fund to help new WordAlone pastors reduce their debts from seminary education. She noted the needs will increase as the number increases of ordination "exceptions" under the ELCA by-law allowing new pastors to be ordained by other pastors rather than bishops, which was a requirement of the full communion agreement with The Episcopal Church USA.

In other action, she reported, the board endorsed a new brochure, "Responsibility, Freedom and Accountability of Call Committees" and directed that it be produced and made available to congregations in the call process. WordAlone's Call and Candidacy task force wrote the brochure.

The board also asked that a letter from Network director Mark Chavez and Eglund to the ELCA Conference of Bishops be included in the newsletter (see the inserted letter) and be posted on the WordAlone website. The letter was sent this fall to clarify misperceptions bishops may have had about the WordAlone Network.



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Ancient charges in new attire or, how to silence dissent



by
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"The decision has been made – now, let's move on."

Those of us, who believe that the Called to Common Mission full-communion agreement (CCM) seriously distorted the teaching of the Lutheran confessions, have heard this phrase many times. I have – even from pastors who had been pointed in their opposition to CCM when the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) church-wide assembly discussed and endorsed it four years ago.

"Now, let's move on." I favor moving on for the reason that CCM was – and is – a symptom of a larger malaise.

Nonetheless, what has puzzled me about "moving on," as CCM supporters would have it, is the implication that a wrong can become a right because of a majority decision.

What was wrong at one time – when CCM was discussed in our church – surely must continue to be wrong even after the church-wide decision. Wrong before, wrong after. Correspondingly, right before is also right after. CCM was wrong before its ELCA adoption, because a romantic ecumenism turned the freedom of

the Lutheran confessions into law. It surely was a curious understanding of Luther and the Lutheran confessions that might have been remedied by a re-reading of Luther's *Invocavit* Sermons of 1522. These sermons were Luther's first public statement upon his return from the Wartburg, and he addressed those who were impatiently advocating extensive ecclesiastical changes. Luther inveighed against those who wanted the "may's" of the gospel to be turned into "must's." The wrong of CCM will remain until the ELCA is willing to return, with a fair and non-prejudicial use of a broader ordination exception clause, to traditional Lutheran freedom.

Church history shows that there were quite a few instances when the church demanded obedience for erroneous teachings.

Take the entire fourth century, the time between the councils of Nicea and Constantinople. Arianism – the heresy that Jesus was not fully equal with God – dominated the Eastern church, and was supported by emperor, bishops and clergy alike. It was a time, when "the decision had been made." Or take the sixteenth century. Pope Leo X, in the papal decretal, *Cum Postquam*, quick-

ly defined the disputed matter of indulgences in November 1518 contrary to Luther's understanding and, two years later, in a papal bull, condemned him for no less than 41 errors found in Luther's writings. The decision was made.

What, if in the fourth century, Athanasius, defender of the Trinity and the (Continued on page 6)



Hans Hillerbrand

(Continued from page 5) Nicene Creed, upon seeing his nemesis, Eusebius of Nicomedia, restored to power, had said, "The decision has been made, let's move on"? The Nicene Creed would today be a forlorn relic, rather than the hallmark of apostolic orthodoxy. What if Luther, upon the promulgation of the decretal, or after the issue of the papal bull had said, "The decision has been made. Now, let's move on"?

The answer is clear. Had Luther done so, his story would be a small footnote to the story of the church in the 16th century—and we would still be Roman Catholics. Perhaps to the delight of some Lutheran theologians. Trouble is that authentic biblical insights, recovered by the Reformation, also would have got lost in the shuffle.

The Lutheran tradition always has sought to identify the individual's conscience, bound by Scripture, as the locus of authority. Lutherans must take a jaundiced view whenever human institutions and dignitaries, by whatever title and designation they

are known, demand that we "move on." Especially, when these structures and powers demand unconditional allegiance and loyalty. Luther, after all, defined the church not institutionally but theologically—the church was not an empirical institution that made claims to obedience but the mystic body of Christ.

To be sure, today there seem to be more pressing issues than that of the historic episcopate. Few will deny that. But that reality does not alter the fact that what was wrong before the churchwide assembly in Denver continues to be wrong today. Even when numerous bishops and clergy are in support. To be in a minority surely must never mean that you are wrong. After his appearance at Worms Luther had the book thrown at him—the argument being that church and state had spoken—and he had to fall in line. His response was that the Word bound his conscience.

That Word Alone gave him strength and comfort.

'The Forgetfulness of Being Fallen'



by
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Dennis Bielfeldt

Many people lament the myriad "problems within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)." Some are blatantly

hostile towards the ELCA because they perceive that it wantonly teaches positions contrary to Scripture and Confession. Others are more positive, believing that law and gospel are preached from many ELCA pulpits, and that an adjustment in decision-making processes can keep the 16-year-old Lutheran body afloat.

I believe, however, that both of these responses are naïve. The ELCA can neither be blamed for sincerely believed heresy nor "fixed" through structural modification.

The problem with the ELCA is not difficult to diagnose: Like many other Protestant denominations, the ELCA no longer takes seriously the fall of created being into sin. The results of this forgetfulness are legion within the ELCA. They include its current ecumenical opinions and its developing understanding of human sexuality.

The fall is not a very popular topic in contemporary American culture. Indeed, it is something of an embarrassment for many people – theologians included. Classically conceived, the fall is an irrational event of cosmic proportions. It is irrational because it can neither be derived logically from creation, nor explained wholly on the basis of it. While God created the universe good and without flaw – evil, sin and flaw have always developed within that created goodness. Moreover, God is in no way responsible for their development.

A major problem in talking about creation and fall today is that many in the church have forgotten what the doctrine of creation is all about. Many sincere Christians tend to pair creation with evolution. They claim that the universe either came into being through intelligent design, or that it was merely the result of blind efficient causes. Many pitch the battle with the secular at this point: Either God designed the universe and thus we must take God seriously, or the universe arose from fortuitous antecedent conditions and we can forget about God altogether.

But the doctrine of creation should not be paired with evolution; rather, creation belongs together with the fall. The two are complements, one cannot be thought of without the other. The doctrine of creation teaches that there is a deep "oughtness" present within all of Being; it claims that

there is an "original intentionality" pervading all that is. The doctrine of the fall, on the other hand, declares that this "oughtness" is never achievable; it holds that the created divine intentionality is inescapably perverted under the conditions of existence.

For most Americans this is a puzzling teaching.

"How," they say, "can there be an original divine intentionality that is not realized. After all, God is all-powerful, so God can implement everything he intends." This line of thinking – I call it the "God doesn't make junk position" – assumes that whatever traits humans happen to be born with are given by a benevolent deity who, in His great care, creates each and every person with unique drives and abilities.

Unfortunately, this assumption confuses the original created order with the order that arises continually within time. Instead of declaring the inexorable waywardness of all Being from what ought to be, it simply assumes that what is, is that which ought to be. All things coming into being are given the sanction of divine creation. It is this fundamental confusion between what the tradition called natural law – the human perception of the original divine intentionality called "eternal law" – and that which comes into being within nature, that pervades much of the reflection upon sexuality within the ELCA. The argument is simple, though seldom stated this starkly: 1) All things that are, are created by God; 2) Bob's homosexual orientation is a thing that is; 3) Therefore, Bob's homosexual orientation is a thing created by God.

The Christian tradition, however, clearly and continuously taught that nature (that which is) does not (Continued on page 8)

'The Forgetfulness of Being Fallen'

(Continued from page 7) conform to Nature (that which ought to be). This gap between Nature created in the image of God and nature as it arises within the field of time constitutes the fall. Unfortunately, this gap can only be named and never explained. Creation did not carry within itself the "seeds of its own destruction." To say that sin explains the fall simply begs the question. We can go no further than to claim that the world that ought to be is not the world that is.

The fundamental confusion of creation and fall pervades current ecumenical thinking as well.

It is precisely when the fall is not taken seriously that we begin to dream that we can build structures that manifest the properties of paradise. Wouldn't it be wonderful to think that an association of human beings could together comprise the Body of Christ in a strong sense? On this way of thinking, the visible church sheds the qualities of the fallen, temporal order and becomes the vehicle (or being) of God within time itself. The predicates "one", "holy", "catholic", and "apostolic" are now applied to a visible structure whose unity is effectively symbolized by the unity of the bishop. Downplaying the fall results in unwarranted optimism about the very nature of church. It results in a conception of church that mirrors human thinking about God: Just as God is victorious over the power of sin, so is the church victorious over the vicissitudes of history. The church becomes divine substance, and a gulf opens between it and other social orders. Holy orders in the church are metaphysically elevated; they become ontologically (in reality) pregnant with the divine.

The movement known as WordAlone grounds itself upon the confession that sin pervades all created objects, events and states of affairs, and that even justification by the free grace of Christ cannot change that fact. WordAlone claims that the way that things ought to be is not the way they are, and the way they are, is not the way they ought to be. Accordingly, it exposes as idolatrous any claim that what is, ought to be.

WordAlone declares that just as the fall cannot be deduced from the goodness of God's creation, so too cannot original creation be extrapolated from the fall. Grace does not perfect nature, nor does nature anticipate grace. Just as the fall is discontinuous from creation, so are our redeemed lives in Christ discontinuous from our fallen condition. The Word alone bridges the discontinuities of creation and fall, sin and righteousness.

To remember the fall is to recall that God is not responsible for all that comes to be within the fissures of time. To remember the fall is to declare that human history can never be wholly gathered within the folds of the eternal. To remember the fall is to recollect that chaos is constantly present within temporality, scuttling every effort to transubstantiate the finite into the substance of divinity.

Because we know so well the power of sin in all finite structures, we reject the notion that a historic episcopacy can effectively sign the unity of church and vouchsafe the power and presence of the Word. Because we know so well the power of this sin, we reject all efforts to identify pervasive and unavoidable fallen sexual structures with the goodness of God's creation.

WordAlone awaits theologians' statement on worship

The Theological Advisory Board of the WordAlone Network, a group of 20 international Lutheran theologians from the Evangelical Church in America (ELCA) and other Lutheran churches met for the third time in two years on Oct. 20-21 in St. Paul, Minn. Their topic was evaluating Lutheran worship practices in the past 50 years and potential changes in liturgy and worship in the ELCA, in light of the Lutheran confessions and Martin Luther's reforms of the medieval worship service.

As at their first two meetings, the theological board drafted a document. This new document is different in that it is intended to be a teaching document that can be used by congregations as they plan and evaluate their worship services, and respond to the ELCA's Renewing Worship materials and proposals. The first two were responses to Lutheran ecumenical documents.

The current document is being edited. When editing is finished the document will be posted on the WordAlone website and made available for all who wish to use it. The central theme of their document is that many of the trends and changes in Lutheran worship have eroded Martin Luther's fundamental reforms. Luther emphasized that

God is the primary actor, coming in grace in his Word, Jesus Christ, to give the gathered believers his kingdom. Recent trends and changes in Lutheran worship tend to put the emphasis on the action of the people and their offerings to God.

The theological board also decided that the topic for their next meeting will be "Sola Scriptura: The Authority of Scripture and Human Sexuality." They acknowledged that this topic will be more difficult than any they have addressed thus far, and they may need to meet twice (spring and fall) next year to complete their work.

The method of this international group of theologians is cutting edge. They all report that it is very uncommon for theologians from multiple disciplines (biblical theology, systematic theology and church history) to meet and engage in extended discussions. They also say that it is unheard of for theologians to meet for two days and hammer out documents as they have done. This new, fresh approach is necessary in the current climate of the Lutheran churches as the Lutheran confessional witness is at stake worldwide, not just within the ELCA.

Financial support for theological board sought

The WordAlone Theological Advisory Board of 20 national and international Lutheran confessional theologians gives vital Biblical guidance to our ministries. They serve as volunteers, but your special gifts will assist with travel to and lodging at their meetings.

Please make your check payable to "WordAlone Network" and note "Theological Advisory Board" in the memo line.

Thank you,
John Beem, Treasurer

Illinois chapter leader offers evangelism plan

Pastor Fred Baltz of St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Galena, Ill., is proposing congregations try an updated version of a renewal program that was used in Lutheran churches across the country in the 1950s and 60s. Baltz is a leader in the Tri-State chapter of WordAlone.

He said that about seven years ago his congregation successfully tried the old "PTR" or "preaching, teaching and reaching" evangelism tool. He said that he had heard about it from different pastors although he didn't remember the program. He added that he wanted to share his written draft of "PTR Renewal" with WordAlone for younger pastors and for congregations who probably have never heard of the concept.

"We're starting to plan one (a PTR program) again and that's what made me think of sharing it with WordAlone," said Baltz. "The renewal leg of WordAlone invites something like this. I think that WordAlone runs the risk of being misperceived as a group of negative people with nothing to offer except criticism.

"It's important for us to counter that perception and I think offering this model is a way we can offer significant means for congregations to move ahead."

You can find Baltz's document posted at http://www.wordalone.org/resources/ptr_renewal.htm or contact the WordAlone office. He said he would be happy to talk with individuals about the program and would make suggestions for speakers. His phone number is 815-777-1134. He would also like to hear from congregations that use PTR Renewal.

He would see the program as a major undertaking to be used only about every seven years, he explained. Why seven years? Because that was a "good Biblical number"

and allowed for natural turnover in a congregation, Baltz explained, and added that there was enough work involved that to do it any more often would "burn out" a congregation.

The program should include several months of planning and would need to be approved for funding early in the process because a congregation would bring in a "dynamic" speaker and serve both a catered light lunch and a dinner on "Renewal Sunday," the culmination of the planning and preparations. Workshops would be offered for various "affinity groups."

The workshops would be designed to help members learn about and talk about the particular role their group could play in the life of the congregation. People might attend more than one workshop, such as a women's group and a senior citizens', he added.

Leading up to the Renewal Sunday, various small groups and committees would handle such tasks as preparing the budget, promoting the event, giving temple talks, leading forums on the program, planning workshops for the day, designing and distributing doorknob hangers as well as praying.

Congregation members would be encouraged to invite former members and persons who don't have a church as well as anyone who was seeking to find out more about Jesus. Individuals taking part might be asked to read the Gospel of John or to attend worship services for seven weeks leading up to the event. That would help establish a habit of worship attendance, he said.

A very important facet of the planning, he added, is preparing for follow-up after Renewal Sunday.

"The congregation would need to become aware of ways to continue touching people's lives and of assimilating them," Baltz stated.

Lutheran Clergy Connect

Lutheran Clergy Connect is one way for congregations seeking a pastor to connect with potential candidates who believe that Christ alone is sufficient for the unity of the Church and that the Word of God is the authority for the Church. Below are the most recent listings. A full list, which includes 16 additional listings, is posted on the WordAlone website. (www.wordalone.org).

If you would like your congregation listed on Clergy Connect, please mail or fax your request on church letterhead, signed by an officer or call committee chair, to WordAlone Network, 2299 Palmer Dr. Suite 220, New Brighton, MN 55112 Fax: 651-633-5994. (Please notify us when the position's been filled.)

Give the following information:
 Pastoral position
 Congregation's name, city, & state (& website address if applicable)
 Contact person
 Phone number
 E-mail address

Calls are listed starting with the most recently received.



St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church
Minneapolis, MN
www.StPaulsEvLutheran.org
 Contact: Rev. Roland Wells, Jr.
 1901 Portland Ave. S.
 Minneapolis, MN 55404
 612-741-2904 cell
rwells@chrcom.net

Associate position, focusing on evangelism of young students and new urban dwellers in gentrifying neighborhood in downtown Minneapolis; other pastoral ministry and some children's programing. Develop things like Alpha, other outreaches; background in cross-cultural outreach helpful. Outgoing, aggressive, self-starter who wants to help rebuild a tremendous congregation.



Bethesda Lutheran Church
Inver Grove Heights, MN
 Contact: Church Office
 2855 47th Street East
 Inver Grove Hgts, MN 55076

651-451-1355
www.bethesdalutheranchurch.org
A part-time (20 hours per week) parish associate whose responsibilities would include planning and participation in a Sunday night contemporary worship service and overseeing established youth programs, including Confirmation.



Grace Lutheran Church & Learning Center
Miami Springs, FL
 Contact: Jim Llewellyn
 254 Curtiss Parkway
 Miami Springs, FL 33166
 305-887-7632
JDFLlewellyn@aol.com
A like-minded, full-time senior pastor is being sought by an enthusiastic, Christ-centered, ready-to-grow congregation. Bilingual (English/Spanish) an asset. For a complete description of this position please contact the Call Chair listed above. All inquiries treated with strictest confidentiality.



Immanuel Lutheran Church
Moses Lake, WA
 Contact Person: Judy Burns
 1020 South A Street
 Moses Lake, WA 98837
 509-765-8621 rtndtr@2fast.net
Full-time interim pastor for a congregation with 1000 baptized members.

Resurrection Lutheran Church
Blaine, MN
 Contact: Diane Vaughn
 14511 Brant St. N.E.
 Ham Lake, MN 55304
 763-786-9419
vaughndiane@hotmail.co
Full-time solo pastor for a suburban congregation which has 408 baptized members.



St. John Lutheran Church
Boydton, IA
 Contact: Paul Winter
 4213 300th Street
 Sheldon, IA 51201
pkhcw@rcconnect.com
 712-725-2574
Full-time pastor



St. Paul Lutheran Church
New Braunfels, TX
 Contact: Will Krieg
 1410 Flaming Oak
 New Braunfels, TX 78132
 830-625-9347
Pastor



First Evangelical Lutheran Church
White Bear Lake, MN
 Contact: Helen Kahl
 4044 Scheuneman Road
 White Bear Lake, MN 55110
 651-429-5137
whkahl@att.net
Teaching pastor



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September 26, 2003

Dear friends in Christ,

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

We had a very good meeting with Bishop Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl and Bishop Jon Anderson in Milwaukee. There were a few of your assistants at the meeting along with about 40 WordAlone members and supporters. We are sorry that some of you did not receive our invitation before leaving for Milwaukee, and understand that many of you had other commitments on the evening of August 12th.

We stated in our invitation last month:

We hope that we can take a few minutes during this busy assembly week to engage in conversation that will benefit the future of our church, clear up any confusion and misperceptions as to who the Network is or what it is doing, and achieve clarity in the areas where we can agree to work together and areas where we will realize we need to agree to disagree.

We believe that our conversation in Milwaukee was helpful, and Andrea encouraged us to share with all of you notes from our conversation. In particular there are three misconceptions about WordAlone that some of you may have, which need to be cleared up.

First, the *Lutheran Commentator (LC)* is not, nor has it ever been, WordAlone's official newsletter. The *Network News* is our only newsletter. *LC* began before the formation of the ELCA. WordAlone was not formally organized until March 2000. *LC* has always been a completely independent organization from WordAlone. No doubt some WordAlone members read *LC*, but our members also subscribe to *The Lutheran, Lutheran Quarterly, Lutheran Forum, Dialog, F.O.C.I. Point* and other Lutheran publications. *LC* does not always take positions in agreement with WordAlone's positions, and has occasionally been critical of WordAlone's efforts to work for change within the ELCA, especially in recent months.

Second, WordAlone and Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) are completely independent organizations. LCMC grew out of the WordAlone movement, but it has been an independent organization since October 2001. WordAlone is focused on working for renewal and reform within the ELCA, and LCMC is an association of Lutheran congregations (most of whom are ELCA congregations) that is focused on helping congregations do the central mission of the church.

LCMC grew out of WordAlone for two reasons. In spring 2000 there was no certainty that the 2001 churchwide assembly would approve a bylaw amendment. It was expected that there would be seminary graduates who would not conform to CCM's requirements and would not be able to serve on the ELCA clergy roster. They needed a place to serve. Also, a very small number of congregations said that they were not able to stay within the ELCA.

Third, WordAlone does not, nor has it ever, made redirection of benevolence a condition for membership in WordAlone. Nor has WordAlone officially encouraged congregations and individuals to redirect benevolence. Andrea and Jon heard from some WordAlone members in Milwaukee that they and their congregations oppose redirection of benevolence, and one congregation had intentionally increased their mission support. A WordAlone chapter in Southwestern Minnesota Synod gave half of its offering from one of their meetings to their synod.

You will hear a variety of opinions from WordAlone members on this subject and our movement has always respected the different points of view. People who favor redirection have come to that conclusion with great regret and as a last resort, and have usually concluded that the only real vote they have in the ELCA is how they make their offerings. We think it is tragic for our church that people reach this conclusion, which is just one reason why we will continue to work for amendments to our constitutions so that churchwide structures are truly representative of and accountable to ELCA members and constitutions. If people believe that they really are partners with the churchwide assembly and Church Council in making decisions in our church, they will be less inclined to redirect benevolence.

Andrea and Jon expressed concerns about their experiences with some WordAlone members in the past. They believe that some WordAlone members have not always worked in constructive ways in our church. WordAlone members at the meeting acknowledged that there have been some individuals, especially early in the movement's history, that were angry and shrill. Most of those angry voices have withdrawn from WordAlone and now direct much of their anger at WordAlone. The people who spoke to Andrea and Jon in Milwaukee repeatedly said that they have perceived a noticeable change in the WordAlone movement in the past couple years, a change that has the movement more clearly focused on being a constructive, not a destructive, movement within the ELCA.

We know that not every voice has been helpful on either side of the CCM debate. The shrill voices on both sides will not deter WordAlone from its course to strengthen the ELCA.

We especially want to emphasize again that the Admonition (now signed by over 3,000 ELCA theologians, pastors and members) from our Theological Advisory Board is a serious invitation to find a middle position between the two extremes in the debate over CCM. Surely we can reach an agreement with our partners in the Episcopal Church that it is not absolutely necessary for the sake of joint mission and cooperation that every one of our pastors and bishops conforms completely to the Anglican ordinals.

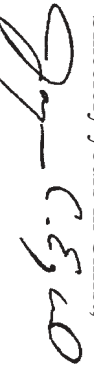
Conformity is only an issue in the rare situations when one of us might serve in the Episcopal Church. Most on our roster will conform, but not all. If someone does not meet the Episcopal requirements and should want to serve in their church, then it should be easy to bring that about.

Bishop Mark Hanson assures us that all of you are abiding by the 2001 bylaw amendment. We hope that it is possible for a request under the amendment to be approved in every ECLA synod. If that is so, then we ask you, as the Conference of Bishops, to state this clearly and publicly. We continue to hear from seminary graduates that they do not perceive any possibility of having their request approved or even considered in some synods. We hope that it is just an unfortunate misperception on their part. A public statement from you would quickly clear this up.

We hope that this summary of our conversation in Milwaukee makes it clear that WordAlone is committed to helping our church, not dividing it. WordAlone is not trying to lead people and congregations out of the ELCA. In fact, several people said at the meeting in Milwaukee that WordAlone is what keeps them in the ELCA and hopeful for our church's future. They told Andrea and Jon that were it not for WordAlone the ELCA would have suffered even greater losses in the past four years.

We pray for you as you meet in Chicago this weekend, that your time together will be fruitful for you and our church. Our church has some difficult times ahead and we pray that you will be effective leaders that help our church remain faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Pastor Jaynan Clark Eglund
President



Pastor Mark C. Chavez
Director