

Fall conference, Nov. 12-14

"Fundamentals, not Fundamentalism" is the theme of WordAlone's 2006 fall theological conference beginning at 6:30 p.m. Nov. 12 at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Fridley, Minn. It runs until noon, Nov. 14.

During the conference, articles by Prof. Dennis Biefeldt, South Dakota State University in Brookings, S. D., setting out basics for WordAlone's theological stance on several issues will be featured and discussed. Biefeldt has written papers setting forth theological arguments in technical, academic language.

An edited and abridged version in non-technical language appears in this issue of the WordAlone Network News. WordAlone leaders call upon members, lay and rostered to prayerfully read and study the article either in this newsletter or on the web at www.wordalone.org/docs/wa-fundamentals.shtml.

Keynote presenters focusing on the movement's basic theological tenets and Biefeldt's articles will be Dr. Mark C. Mattes, professor of religion and philosophy, Grand View College, Des Moines, Iowa, and Dr. Walter C. Sundberg, Jr., professor of church history, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.

Registration information will be mailed in September.



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NETWORK NEWS



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Heat still on 2005 sexuality votes

by Betsy Carlson, editor

Actions at a number of Evangelical Lutheran Synod Assemblies this spring show that the issues of blessing persons in same-sex relationships and allowing them to be lay or ordained ministers are still bubbling on the front burner in a number of synods.

The results would seem to indicate that, much like at the 2005 churchwide assembly, opinions on how the denomination will deal with gays and lesbians in homosexual relationships still are divergent. Synods focused on one or two similar resolutions.

One resolution this year would uphold and carry out resolutions approved by the 2005 churchwide assembly. Those 2005 resolutions proved to be ambiguous--a call for "living together faithfully" in the face of disagreement and another to provide pastoral care to gays and lesbians in relationships, which left open the question of blessing such relationships.

The other resolution called for restraint in disciplining ministers in same-sex relationships where that relationship was the reason for discipline. In most cases the synods referred to a resolution passed at a special meeting of the Metropolitan New York Synod last October to protest the 2005 churchwide

assembly votes. The 2005 churchwide assembly defeated a proposal to allow homosexuals in relationships to become ministers through a special exemption process.

Interestingly, the Metro New York Synod Assembly voted this year to rescind its original resolution on disciplinary restraint. (Earlier this spring, the ELCA Church Council ruled that the Metro New York resolution "may" be unconstitutional.) The New York assembly also voted to undertake "faithful" studies of "Confessional theology" so members of the synod can make recommendations on a statement on sexuality that is supposed to be ready for the 2009 churchwide assembly.

Synods voting for the Metro New York or similar resolutions calling for disciplinary restraint were Minneapolis, Saint Paul Area, New Jersey and Metropolitan Washington D.C. Metro D.C. also called upon the 2007 churchwide assembly to change ELCA governing documents to allow persons in same-sex relationships to become ministers.

The Rocky Mountain Synod postponed the matter indefinitely. The Northwestern Minnesota and Southwest California synods chose not to discuss

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disciplinary restraint proposals. Sierra Pacific’s bishop, David Mullen, ruled out of order a proposal to take up the Metro New York resolution. Later, that assembly passed a softer version commending Bishop Mullen for his handling of such matters and encouraging him to use restraint.

The Grand Canyon Synod said it was taking a neutral stance and adopted a “non-binding” resolution as a “sense of the assembly,” (more like stating an opinion) saying it would not discipline congregations that chose to call or that chose not to call persons in same-sex relationships. The assembly said it took an “open stance,” neither for nor against ordaining gays and lesbians in same-sex relationships.

Votes on affirming the 2005 churchwide actions confirmed their ambiguity. The North Texas/North Louisiana and the Southwestern Texas synods endorsed the 2005 actions and were looking for ways to carry them out while the Central and Southern Illinois and the Allegheny synods affirmed them too but said the denomination should keep enforcing present policies prohibiting non-celibate gays and lesbians from becoming ministers.

Northwest Washington Synod voted to have several forums in the next year to interpret what the 2005 churchwide

assembly did. The Northwest Wisconsin and the North/West Lower Michigan synods defeated resolutions to affirm those 2005 votes while the Florida-Bahamas Synod declined to even talk about them.

Related to admitting gays and lesbians to “full participation” in the denomination, two synods dealt with being known as a “Reconciling in Christ” synod and encouraging local churches to become Reconciling in Christ congregations. Southwestern Texas defeated a proposal to drop its designation as an “RIC” synod, while Southeastern Iowa asked its congregations and institutions to study statements of welcome for persons of all gender identities and sexual orientations in order to be named “RIC.”

Concerning naming, how to talk about and address the Holy Trinity came up in a few synods. Northwestern Ohio, Southwestern Pennsylvania and the Allegheny synods voted in favor of keeping and promoting use of the traditional “Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” The Southeastern and the Indiana/Kentucky synods voted down similar proposals.

In a surprising move, the Southwestern Texas Synod passed a memorial for the 2007 churchwide assembly to start the process of entering into full communion with Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ. ♦

‘Fundamentals’ of WordAlone Network theology presented

by Dr. Dennis Bielfeldt, Professor of Philosophy and Religion,
South Dakota State University and WordAlone board member

In the Undergraduate Handbook of the state university at which I teach, I often see the word “fundamentals.” One can take classes to learn the fundamentals of number theory, the fundamentals of optics, the fundamentals of surveying and the fundamentals of engineering. Thinking about fundamentals has got me thinking lately about theology.

What are the fundamentals of Christian theology, or better yet, the fundamentals of Lutheran theology, that without which Lutheran theology would cease to be Lutheran? Furthermore, it got me thinking about WordAlone and its particular theological orientation. What are the fundamentals of WordAlone theology, those principles without which WordAlone would itself cease to have theological grounding?

To ask about the fundamentals of the WordAlone movement is to pin down those basic assumptions taken for granted in discussing the truth of WordAlone’s theological assertions.

The effort to locate fundamentals must itself be regarded as a theological task. The lifting up of such fundamentals has everything to do with the central task of Christian theology: the proclamation of God’s gracious act of redemption in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. Because this proclamation is controversial, every act of reflection upon the basic assumptions presupposed in theology must itself be controversial.

A number of months ago I began thinking about trying to describe the WordAlone fundamentals, and I actually wrote an article about them for the WordAlone website. However, because

of the potentially controversial nature of this list of fundamentals, WordAlone leadership thought it best to take these principles to the Board of Directors of the WordAlone Network first to see if they agreed that these supposed fundamentals were, in fact, generally assumed by rank and file WordAlone members.

The board wanted to take a second look a few months later, and consequently decided to distribute these fundamentals to the WordAlone Convention last spring, and to solicit feedback and discussion at this year’s fall theological conference. The question is simply this: Does the following list of fundamentals provide the prerequisites for a distinctively “WordAlone theology”?

1. God is real and statements about God are either true or false

WordAlone asserts that God is real, that is, God exists in ways that humans cannot experience or wholly conceive. WordAlone assumes that God exists out and beyond the human mind. Today’s popular culture, however, routinely understands religious and theological statements as either expressions of the self, its attitudes and orientations or as the regulative statements of a religious community. Some in theological circles regularly assume that good theology begins with the idea that God cannot be any kind of real substance. Instead, God is seen by them as an ideal of human reason. WordAlone asserts, on the other hand, that the truth of theological statements is not dependent on the experience of individuals. WordAlone dares to suppose that theological statements are

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true or false based upon divine reality existing outside one’s self, one’s awareness, conceptions, language and values. This realist affirmation is entirely consistent with the thinking of Luther and the Lutheran Reformation—and with the Biblical witness.

2. God causes things to happen in the universe

While those who believe that God is only an ideal cannot logically claim that God causes things to happen, WordAlone firmly states that God’s creative acts do truly change the universe. God is an agent who causes natural events throughout the universe. WordAlone assumes that God really influences events in space and time and that His “mighty acts in history” are not mere metaphors of human existence. As Luther says in his explanation of the First Article in the Small Catechism: “I believe that God has created me and all creatures. . . .” WordAlone claims that “creates” must here be understood as “causes.” The necessary application of the term “creates” in “God creates me” is that God causes me to be.

3. All structures, institutions and sets of ideas or beliefs have been shaped by history

WordAlone realizes that all created objects and events are affected by other objects and events, and that this applies to thinking as well. There can be no thought or affirmation, no creed or confession that wholly escapes the historical context in which it originates. While WordAlone acknowledges that we cannot escape our historical context in conceiving God, it nonetheless follows the theological tradition that was dominant up until the time of the Enlightenment, a tradition that assumed that divine reality did not depend upon our conception of it. While our claim to know certain information is limited by the social,

political, economic and cultural systems of our day, truth is not dependent on any of those.

4. Nothing finite is infinite

Because everything temporal or worldly is affected by and subject to the historical period in which it existed, nothing temporal can be infinite, or, without limits. Furthermore, no finite structure can be replaced by an infinite reality. WordAlone strongly rejects any effort to transubstantiate wine into blood, or to transform the human association gathering around Christ (the church) into the very Body of Christ Himself. Neither its structures, offices, nor people are “holy” in the sense of unambiguously presenting the divine in itself. The fact that the church is a sociological reality concerned with spiritual and eternal matters does not change the earthly or finite nature of the institution. Pastors and bishops are not “closer to God” or somehow “holier” than the lay people to whom they minister.

5. The true church is hidden, but is manifest primarily in local assemblies

WordAlone holds—with Luther, Melancthon and the early reformers—that the true church consists of those with “faith and the Holy Spirit in the heart,” and that this church appears when and where the Holy Spirit gathers believers around Word and Sacrament. This happens primarily and regularly within the local assemblies. However, since God alone knows who the believers are, the true church remains hidden. Lutheran theology has always affirmed that while the visible church has members of the true church within it, it itself is not the church, properly considered. This notion of the hidden nature of the church is wholly consistent with the notion that nothing finite is infinite. Just as the infinite deity of Christ is hidden under the finite humanity of Jesus, and the

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infinite Body of Christ hidden under finite daily bread, so is the true church of the justified hidden under an earthly, visible church of human association and administration. WordAlone thus rejects the assertion of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America that the church can have three visible “expressions”: local church, synod and church-wide organization—as if these finite institutions could express the visible infinite itself.

6. Original sin is the condition of humanity’s freely, but inevitably, turning from God toward something finite

Over and against a culture that assumes a basic goodness or innocence of human beings, WordAlone asserts that human beings are from birth enemies of God. The basic human orientation is to turn away from God in pride, sin and unbelief. All redemption is by God’s grace alone. The sinfulness in which we are fallen affects all of our faculties, even the operation of our reason. Because of this, all of our knowledge also is limited, finite and fallible. While reason is the highest gift of God to human beings, it is wholly susceptible to sinning, particularly when it thinks its power grand enough to know the ways of God.

7. The Holy Spirit works by grace alone to grant sinners the saving faith, not by grace with the necessity of human assent

WordAlone claims that the Holy Spirit’s work primarily is to illuminate and call human beings to the grace available in Christ. It assumes that human beings have no free will to cooperate with grace, even if they experience their divinely-wrought cooperation as flowing from their own freedom. Over and against many within the ELCA, WordAlone asserts that God and God alone saves; humans can do nothing—not even agree with God’s saving action.

WordAlone endorses the general Augustinianism of the West, and the Reformation’s rediscovery of Augustine, in its claim that human beings cannot bring about their own justification.

While I claim that these seven statements are necessary for WordAlone theology, I am not claiming that they comprise all or sufficient statements of Christian theology. To get that, one must add a whole host of other notions, for example, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, God’s confrontation with us in Law and Gospel, the theology of the cross and our simultaneous justification and sinfulness. These others, however, are shared by many Christian groups, and are not distinctive of WordAlone as a movement.

My claim is that the theology of WordAlone avoids any attempt to base the truth of theological language upon personal experiences, attitudes or outlook, and prefers instead to hold to a realist interpretation that asserts that the truth of theological language is based upon the existence of realities outside of the limits of language and beyond what we can know through our five senses. Simply put, one can meaningfully assert that God is and He causes events within the universe to happen, even while admitting that no current scientific avenue exists for confirmation of God’s existence and this causal relationship. In other words, WordAlone allows for the possibility that the truth of theological language can transcend any available evidence, even when we, conditioned by the constraints of time and the times in which we live, cannot wholly apprehend that truth.

Moreover, our access to knowledge of the divine is limited by the history out of which our conceptual and interpretive frameworks came. Our standpoint is consonant with our assumption that the

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("Fundamentals..." continued from page five) finite is not infinite, and that all finite structures—including the church—are finite, and that a basic waywardness characterizes all things finite. To speak of the true church in this life is, properly speaking, to speak of its hidden character as the gathering of all those granted the righteousness of Christ through

faith, a righteousness that we now possess even though there is no "merit or worthiness within us."

Editor's note: This article is an edited and abridged version of Bielfeldt's paper that was distributed at the 2006 WA annual convention. That paper is on the WordAlone website: www.wordalone.org/docs/wa-fundamentals.shtml ♦

Lutheran Clergy Connect

Clergy Connect is one way for churches seeking a pastor or other leader 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 more detail and listings, is posted at: www.wordalone.org/clergy.shtml

To list your search on Clergy Connect, 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: 651-633-4260. Include this information: title of position, church's name (city and state), contact person with phone number and e-mail address. If you list your search, please inform us when you fill the position.

Calls are listed starting with the most recently received.

Hosanna! Lutheran Church, St. Charles, Ill.

Position: associate pastor of evangelism, full-time with a passion for the lost and a desire to help make disciples.

Contact: Pastor John Nelson, pastorjohn@HosannaChurch.com or 630-584-6434

Morningside Lutheran Church, Sioux City, Iowa

Position: senior high youth director, full-time position at an LCMC church. Responsible for the senior high youth program, including Sunday School, develop a relational ministry reaching beyond the faithful few, work with youth band, though not necessarily be musical. Team ministry. Experience or educational background are important.

Contact: Pastor Paul Spaulding, pauls@cableone.net or 712-276-2511

Glendale Evangelical Lutheran Church, Burien, Wash.

Position: senior pastor who believes and will reinforce our congregation's belief that the Bible is the "divinely inspired Word of God and we submit to this as the only infallible authority in all matters of Faith and Life."

Contact: Pastor Jan Nesse, Asst. to the Bishop, NW Washington Synod, 5519 Phinney Ave N., Seattle, WA 98103-5829, phone: 206-783-9292; fax: 206-783-9833

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Brigham City, Utah

Position: solo pastor, full-time, in small, well-established LCMC congregation. Current pastor retiring in December 2006. Teaching and worship based on traditional Lutheran theology.

Contact: Albert R. Harvey, call committee chair @ 435 734-9985 or akharvey@besstek.net or write to him at 112 Ashe Circle, Brigham City, UT 84302

Lutheran Clergy Connect (Continues from page six)

St. Timothy's Lutheran Church, San Jose, Calif.

Position: associate pastor, full-time to share preaching, teaching, ministry and outreach opportunities for a congregation of 1,200 members. Needs evangelical heart, conservative theological emphasis and strong commitment to Scriptures and Confessions of the Lutheran church. Seeking a pastor desiring to support growth and outreach to families. Interested candidates should respond no later than Sept. 15.

Contact: Dennis Berg, Call Committee Chair @ 408-445-1441 or decoberg@aol.com

Calvary Lutheran Church, Golden Valley, Minn.

Position: youth director to join team in ministering to junior and senior high youth, offering confirmation presentations and providing community leadership for the Vine, Calvary's post-modern service.

Contact: Pastor Mary Brown @ 763-231-2961 or mbrown@calvary.org

St. Paul Lutheran Hickory Grove, an ELCA/LCMC church, Auburn, Neb.

Position: full-time ELCA-rostered pastor committed to preaching and teaching the Word of God and guided by the Augsburg Confession and the Book of Concord needed. Rural congregation about 300 baptized members with average attendance of 80-100. Modern, one-level, handicapped accessible church. Located 5 miles from town and 1 mile from main paved highway. Parsonage provided.

Contact: Don Gerdes, call committee chairman @ 402-868-6695

Zion Lutheran Church, Kerrville, Texas

Position: youth ministry director, may be ordained (Lutheran) or non-ordained

(college degree). Developing, coordinating and administering effective and comprehensive ministry to the junior and senior high youth. An 800-member LCMC congregation, scripturally oriented congregation, adhering to the words of 2 Timothy 3:16-17. See website for job description, <http://www.zionkerrville.org>.

Contact: Send resume via email to texhilco@kctc.com or by U.S. mail to Mark Bigott, chair, search committee, Zion Lutheran Church, 624 Barnett, Kerrville, TX 78028

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Harlan, Iowa

Position: senior pastor, full-time, part of ministry team for a diverse, mid-sized LCMC congregation in a friendly, progressive community of 5,400 people. Able to lead Spirit-filled worship, teach and preach Word of God and theology of the Cross in a way that is practical, inspirational and motivational. Minimum of 5-10 years pastoral experience is required.

Contact: Richard Daberkow, ilc@fmctc.com, Immanuel Lutheran Church, 1700 19th St. Harlan, Iowa 51537 or phone 712-755-5207, fax 712-755-7735

King of Glory Lutheran Church, Tempe, Ariz.

Position: associate pastor for 3,800 member church near Arizona State University. Need good teaching skills and ability to organize; supervise paid staff and volunteers. Specific work responsibilities depend upon experiences and training, but areas of family life/children/youth will be included.

Contact: Pastor Roger Gordon, 2085 E. Southern Ave., Tempe, AZ 85282 or 480-838-0477, fax: 480-820-4127 or email info@kogaz.org ♦