

## Theologians admonish ELCA about ordination practices

November 22, 2002

For immediate release

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The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has been admonished to change controversial requirements for ordaining new pastors and installing new bishops.

A newly formed group of international Lutheran Theologians issued a written statement November 18, 2002 suggesting that the ELCA may have contradicted its own Lutheran Confessions in adopting new ordination requirements in recent years. The admonition addressed primarily the issue of requiring that new ministers and bishops be ordained into an “episcopal succession” as defined by The Episcopal Church USA (ECUSA). (See the full text at [www.wordalone.org](http://www.wordalone.org) )

However, the theological paper suggested the ELCA could remain true to the Confessions by giving equal standing to ordinations done outside the new requirements. New rites were mandated by a full communion agreement with the ECUSA, approved by the ELCA ruling body in 1999.

The theologians categorized the Episcopal requirements for ordination into “episcopal succession” as unnecessary or “indifferent (*adiaphoron*)” for justification of the sinner or for the church to be church. They wrote that by making “an *adiaphoron* into a theological necessity” the ELCA seemed to have contradicted its own confessional

documents, which state that the church only is made manifest when it properly preaches the gospel and distributes the sacraments.

“Episcopal succession” is accomplished by having only bishops ordain new ministers and having new bishops installed by three bishops in historic succession, one who must be an Episcopal bishop. Formerly, other pastors often ordained Lutheran pastors; Episcopal bishops did not install Lutheran bishops nor were three bishops in historic succession required.

The group of theologians, formed by a Lutheran renewal movement known as the WordAlone Network, met for the first time November 16-18, 2002 in Minnesota and in two and a half days wrote and signed the document.

The proclamation was presented November 18 at a conference at St. Andrew’s Lutheran Church, Mahtomedi, Minn., for lay persons and clergy, offered by WordAlone as a follow-up to the theologians’ meeting. The meeting, which was announced at the end of September, drew several hundred people from 21 states and five countries.

Conference participants began signing the admonition during the conference. Since then, WordAlone has received 3,052 (*updated number*) signatures at the conference and from Internet responses.

Participating theologians were:  
Dr. James Bangsund, Senior Lecturer, Old Testament and Hebrew, Makumira University College, Tanzania

Dr. James Burtness, Emeritus Professor of Systematic Theology, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota

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Dr. Gerhard Forde, Emeritus Professor of Systematic Theology, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota

Dr. George W. Forell, Carver Distinguished Professor Emeritus, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa

Dr. Roy A. Harrisville, Emeritus Professor of New Testament, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota

Dr. Jack Dean Kingsbury, Emeritus Professor of New Testament, Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia

Dr. James Nestingen, Professor of Church History, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota

Dr. Steven D. Paulson, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota

Dr. Hans Schwarz, Professor of Systematic Theology and Contemporary Theological Issues, University of Regensburg, Germany

Dr. Walter Sundberg, Professor of Church History, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota

Dr. Martin Synnes, Associate Professor of New Testament, The Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology (Det Teologiske Menighetsfakultet), Oslo, Norway

Dr. Dorothea Wendebourg, Professor of Church History, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany

Dr. Vitor Westhelle, Professor of Systematic Theology, Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, Chicago, Illinois

Minnesota, Dr. Gerhard Krodel, Emeritus Professor of New Testament, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania and Dr. Gottfried Krodel, Emeritus Professor of Church History, Valparaiso University, Indiana who were unable to attend the meeting.

The document also was signed by Dr. Mary Jane Haemig, Associate Professor of Church History, Luther Seminary, St. Paul,