

Presentation of the Affiliation Committee Congregational Meeting and Fellowship Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why would we want to leave the ELCA?

During our research we have discovered that we share different views with the ELCA on many areas of faith and God's Word. Scripture, or the Authority of Scripture, the ELCA's view of salvation and its stance on "universal salvation" (everybody is going to heaven no matter how religious or irreligious you are), and the ELCA's structure and political involvement are just a few of the areas that we are in disagreement with and have focused on.

2. Why has St. Peter not made a decision on this until now?

The church council agreed that time was needed to prayerfully reflect on the recent changes in the ELCA and to further research other important issues that were causing conflict among ELCA membership. The sexuality statement caused an emotional reaction from members of the congregation and council, but council felt it was in the best interest of St. Peter's if we waited and avoid a knee-jerk reaction.

3. How did this all begin and how did the ELCA get to this point?

At the 2009 Churchwide Assembly in Minneapolis, Minnesota, when the ELCA, voted to approve the ordination of noncelibate homosexual men and women and the marriage of same, churches such as St. Peter began to question the actions of the ELCA and hence discovered other issues that we feel that are equally, if not more important, to our future in ministry here at St. Peter. It is also noted that a majority of our SC delegates were asked to vote against these homosexual positions, unfortunately, they were persuaded to change their votes in favor of these social statements.

4. Is this all about gay preachers?

No. We as the Affiliation Committee feel that the ELCA has disregarded the Authority of Scripture that we as Lutheran Christians, and members of St. Peter are grounded upon. We believe that the Bible is the Authority, the Law, the Final Word. The ELCA believes that the world influences Scripture and that it is a "living" document that is subject to change in interpretation based on evolving societal norms. We also feel that a major issue is that the ELCA has come to

believe more firmly in current political and social science theories than in biblical teaching.

We were also troubled at research that pointed to the diminished role of Scripture in the life of the Church that has led even the teachers of seminarians and pastors to deny the resurrection of Christ, the reality of sin, the atoning death of Christ, and Christ's unique role in our salvation.

5. Was any thought given to staying in the ELCA and trying to change things from within?

Yes, that is one option. We feel that our voice was heard and then not acknowledged at the Churchwide Assembly in 2009 when SC Synod delegates were asked to vote a certain way by congregations, a majority still voted in favor of the social statements.

We believe that the ELCA is not likely to respect the beliefs of traditional Christians, but will insist that synods and bishops enforce current ELCA teaching. This includes Augsburg Fortress, the publishing arm of the ELCA. We fear that it will become increasingly harder to work within the ELCA, or even purchase appropriate Sunday School materials and Hymnals, as these changes and others are written into policy.

6. What is "bound conscious"?

Bound conscience is a term coined by the ELCA's task force on human sexuality. We believe it is the responsibility of the ELCA to guide us to the truth in our understanding of Scripture, not encourage us to put our own wants and desires above God's law for us.

At the 2009 Churchwide Assembly, the ELCA adopted changes to its ministry policies concerning homosexual and lesbian behavior and passed a resolution to implement those changes. In both the ministry policy changes and subsequent implementing resolution, the ELCA calls **"upon its members to respect the bound consciences of those with whom they disagree"** and ***"respect the bound consciences of all."***

"Consciences are bound only by a Commandment of God" (Luther's Works 33:49). Some in the ELCA dispute Luther and argue that to "respect the bound consciences of all" means a person must internalize the oppositions argument to such an extent that it becomes their own. This is in direct conflict with Luther's understanding because it makes consciences bound to each other instead of God's Word. If Luther believed his conscience was bound to another's conscience instead of to God's Word, he would have recanted at the Diet of Worms.

7. Why have we recommended that we affiliate with the NALC instead of the ELCA or any other affiliation?

In the end, it comes down to mission and integrity. We are St. Peter Lutheran Church, and our mission is to share Jesus' love. We can only do that with integrity to the degree that our teaching about Jesus is biblically sound. Also, it is very difficult to work with people, well meaning people for the most part, who teach a different understanding of the Gospel. Every word, every publication has to be parsed and when not in line with orthodox Christian belief challenged.

The NALC is structured somewhat like the old LCA, with a regional structure and a presiding Bishop. The Bishop's primary responsibility has to do with oversight of the ministry of Word and Sacrament, and less to do with day to day administration. The NALC is committed to being Christ-centered, mission-driven, traditionally-grounded and congregationally-focused.

We feel that the NALC represents a structure for Lutheran churches to live and grow to do God's work with our hands.

8. Where will we get pastors if we leave the ELCA?

The denomination to which we will go will maintain a list of rostered and certified pastors and have procedures in place for access to that list. One likely outcome of leaving the ELCA is that the congregation will have more control over the call process, and more responsibility for its outcome.

9. What happens to Pastor Dave if we leave the ELCA?

Pastor Dave has committed to St. Peter Lutheran Church, regardless of the outcome of the decision. If the congregation chooses to leave the ELCA, Pastor Dave will seek and obtain certification with the body the congregation chooses.

10. Will Pastor Dave's retirement/pension be affected if we leave the ELCA?

No, Pastor Dave's benefits remain the same. The Board of Pensions voted some time ago to allow pastors and other rostered leaders who receive benefits through the BOP to continue to receive them.

11. What about our property?

We will not lose our property, even if it means not leaving the ELCA and pursuing legal action. There is a procedure for leaving that we will strictly adhere to, and we feel that we will not have any issues with property. ***Every member at St. Peter***

should feel confident knowing that we will not do anything that will cause us to lose our property.

12. What is the procedure to leave the ELCA?

We must have two votes, each of which is in favor of leaving the ELCA by two-thirds (67%) or more. These votes must be at least 90 days apart, and between the votes the congregation must notify the Synod office and request a visitation from Bishop Yoos. Bishop Yoos and/or another member of the Synod staff will talk to us about staying in the ELCA. Between the two votes, the congregation should vote to join another Lutheran denomination so that we fulfill the requirement that we join another Lutheran denomination.

13. Doesn't this just create more conflict when we don't need it?

The vote of Churchwide created the conflict. People were very upset, with a number insisting on leaving the congregation. They were willing to stay though, and await the outcome of the study process and prayerfully evaluate the situation. Essentially, the study process allowed us to be deliberative in our approach to the changes in the ELCA and think about what it means to be church and faithful, to look at other Lutheran denominations as well as the ELCA, and to make a decision that was not based on immediate response but on what is best for the congregation and its mission. That is not to say that there are no people who are unhappy with the idea that we might leave the ELCA or who agree with the direction of the ELCA. What we need to do is prayerfully reflect on these issues as a congregation, respecting one another. We need to think about where we are as a congregation and a community. We should also look down the road at what kind of church we want to leave our children and their children.

14. What changes for us as a congregation if we leave the ELCA?

For most congregations that have left there has been a renewed commitment to mission. In part, that comes of making the commitment to being church as Christ means us to be church. Also, the denomination we would join is very enthusiastically wedded to mission, and that enthusiasm is catching. We would also provide, for those who need it, a spiritual home for those who find it hard to stay in the ELCA given the changes.

15. How many other churches have left the ELCA?

Unfortunately, too many. The ELCA has been losing congregations since its inception in 1988, but the losses are accelerating. As of January 2011, about 500 congregations have left, and many that have not left yet have redirected their giving. Worse yet, many congregations have lost a significant percentage of their members because of the changes, and are finding it hard to survive.

16. A lot of this conversation sounds like alphabet soup to me. What are the ELCA, Lutheran CORE, the LCMS, the LCMC and the NALC?

We are currently a part of the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**, and have been since 1988 when it was formed by a merger of the Lutheran Church in America and the American Lutheran Church and a couple of much smaller Lutheran denominations. We were previously a part of the Lutheran Church in America, formed of a merger of several Lutheran denominations in 1962.

There have been Lutherans in America since the early 1600's, but the Lutheran associations to which individual Lutheran congregations have belonged have changed with the times and issues. www.elca.org; www.sclutheran.org

Lutheran CORE is a confessional group that has tried to keep the ELCA true to its biblical and confessional roots. CORE professes that the Scriptures are the only and final authority in faith and life. It is not a denomination but an association of congregations and individuals committed to orthodox Christianity who represent the "theological middle" of American Lutheranism. Our congregation is not a member of CORE, but members of the congregation are. www.lutherancore.org

The **LC-MS** is the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. It is congregational in polity, meaning there is little oversight exercised from the wider church and few resources developed to help congregations and pastors with their concerns. It is highly committed to evangelism, and worship style tends to be more contemporary than traditional. www.lcms.org

The **NALC** is the newest Lutheran denomination, having been created by Lutheran CORE in August of 2010. NALC stands for North American Lutheran Church. The NALC is structured somewhat like the old LCA, with a regional structure and a presiding Bishop. The Bishop's primary responsibility has to do with oversight of the ministry of Word and Sacrament, and less to do with day to day administration. The NALC is committed to being Christ-centered, mission-driven, traditionally-grounded and congregationally-focused. www.thenalc.org

The **LCMC** is Lutheran Church in Mission for Christ. This ten year old denomination is a spin off of the ELCA with American Lutheran Church roots, though many of the congregations that recently joined were once a part of the Lutheran Church in America. www.lcmc.net

Following is a list of position papers of other Lutheran Church's who are leaving the ELCA. Copies of these papers are available from committee members.

"A Comparison of the ELCA and NALC Denominations", Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, St. Charles, IL, 18 Oct 2010.

"How we left the ELCA", Peace Lutheran Church, Palm Bay, FL, May 2010.

"Affiliation Committee Letter", "Affiliation White Paper", "FAQ", and "The Best of a Bad Situation", St. Jacobs Lutheran Church, Glenville, PA.
<www2.stjacobs-lutheran.org>