

Lutheran CORE Plans Next Steps, Intends to be 'Free-Standing' Synod

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CHICAGO (ELCA) -- Saying the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has "fallen into heresy," because of actions taken at last month's churchwide assembly, the chair of Lutheran CORE (Coalition for Reform) said the organization intends to be a "free-standing synod" which will carry out ministries apart from the ELCA.

In addition CORE is expected to consider initiating conversations with member Lutheran congregations and reform movements in the United States and Canada toward a possible reconfiguration "of North American Lutheranism," said the Rev. Paull E. Spring, State College, Pa., Lutheran CORE chair. Spring is a former bishop of the ELCA Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod.

Those and other ideas will be discussed when Lutheran CORE holds a convocation Sept. 25-26 at Christ the Savior Lutheran Church, Fishers, Ind. Nearly 700 people have registered as of Sept. 8, said the Rev. Mark Chavez, Landisville, Pa., CORE director and vice president, WordAlone Network, New Brighton, Minn. WordAlone is a member of Lutheran CORE.

Lutheran CORE is a coalition of pastors, lay people, congregations and reform groups in the ELCA. CORE expressed distress and sadness over the assembly's decisions on human sexuality. The assembly adopted by a two-thirds vote an ELCA social statement, "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust," which CORE said changed ELCA teaching and policy on same-gender relationships. Voting members also directed that changes be made to ELCA ministry policies to make it possible for people in committed, same-gender relationships to serve as ELCA associates in ministry, clergy, deaconesses and diaconal ministers. CORE opposed that change, citing biblical teaching on marriage and homosexuality.

Following the assembly's decisions on sexuality, CORE announced it was ending its relationship as an independent Lutheran organization "officially recognized" by the ELCA. The organization is also encouraging ELCA members and congregations to send finances directly to ministries they support versus giving to the ELCA.

More than 1,000 people have contacted Lutheran CORE since the assembly, most expressing sadness and asking questions, Spring said. However, CORE is "encouraging people to remain in the ELCA -- for now," Spring said in a telephone interview with the ELCA News Service. "I myself intend to remain on the ELCA clergy roster and remain a member of an ELCA congregation," he said, adding that he and others may not participate much in the ELCA beyond the congregation.

Despite his own "disappointment and shock" over the assembly's actions, Spring said he hopes Lutheran CORE can "be a visionary, future-oriented group."

"We have no desire to look back at what happened in Minneapolis. We need to look to the future with confidence, amid much uncertainty," Spring said.

CORE's 2009 convocation is expected to adopt a proposed constitution, authorize proposals for developing fiscal plans and authorize its steering committee to initiate conversations with "congregations and reform movements" within Lutheran CORE, Lutheran Congregations for Mission in Christ, and other compatible organizations, Spring wrote in a Sept. 4 e-mail to CORE supporters. There's also much planning to do over the course of the next year, he said.

Convocation speakers include the Rev. Kenneth H. Sauer, Columbus, Ohio, former bishop of the ELCA Southern Ohio Synod and former chair of the ELCA Conference of Bishops; Ryan Schwarz, Washington, D.C., a CORE steering committee member and runner-up in the election for ELCA vice president at the 2009 assembly; plus Spring and Chavez.

"We will try to be churchly," Spring said of the upcoming CORE convocation. "We are trying to be responsible. There's a lot at stake here, including the future of Lutheranism in the United States."

Editors: Pastor Spring's first name is correctly spelled as "Paull."

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