

**St. Timothy's Lutheran Church
Church Body Affiliation Presentation
September 26 & October 3, 2010**

Opening Prayer

Adult Forum Overview (Jonathan Strand – Church Council President)

Church Council Recommendation

- A Two-Step Process
- An Open & Prayerful Discussion & Consideration
- A Paper Ballot Vote by the Church Council

Moved, seconded and passed to recommend to the congregation that St. Timothy's Lutheran Church, San Jose, California terminate its affiliation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and join the North American Lutheran Church (NALC).

Affiliation Actions since December 2009

- Joined Lutheran CORE (a renewal movement within the ELCA)
- Church Council formed an Affiliation Team to gather information
- Possible Church Body Affiliations were narrowed to three, the ELCA, the NALC, and Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC)
- Congregational Representatives attended National/Synodical Gatherings of ELCA, LCMC, NALC
- Affiliation Team Report was presented to the Church Council (and is available to members)
- Church Council Recommendations were made

Rationale for the Recommendations (Pastor Dan Selbo)

- Thanks for the chance to share...an important decision for us...Not one taken lightly by any of the leaders involved
- A very deliberate process we have followed...Not only over the past year, but over the past years (dating back to congregational decisions in the mid-late 90's)...deeper concerns dating back to the early years following the merger that brought into existence the ELCA
- As a congregation, we have been addressing the concerns we have had for many years...Individually, with letters, conversations, serving on synod committees...As a congregation, beginning with decisions to join WordAlone in 2002, redirect our benevolence since 2003, and adopt statements reflecting our shared Common Confession...Thus, what we're dealing with today (in this recommendation) is nothing new
- Important for you to know that the recommendation to leave the ELCA was made unanimously by your Church Council and is supported by all three of your pastors...The second part of the recommendation to join the NALC received supporting votes from all but one member of the Council (preferred LCMC)...In that sense, what I will be sharing is a summary of the conversation and thinking behind the strong recommendation of both your pastoral and elected leaders
- As already shared, we followed a two-step process: 1) Whether or not to leave the ELCA, and 2) If yes, then which church body to join...the Church Council took those questions separately...I'll be following that same two-step approach in this presentation

Why the Church Council is recommending that we leave the ELCA

- To help us think through what's behind the recommendation, I've organized my comments into three general areas: 1) Structural; 2) Theological; 3) Practical...How has the structure of the ELCA contributed to the troubles we have had/now face?...What are the theological concerns that have caused us to recommend that we leave the ELCA?...What are the practical implications of such a decision for us at St. Timothy's?

1) Structural...How has the structure contributed to the troubles we now face?

- To understand the underlying problems we have faced, you need to start with what happened at the time of the merger (in 1988) that formed the ELCA
- Three groups joined together in the merger...the two largest with very different understandings of church and theology...In general, the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) was more top down structurally (and theological liberal) than the American Lutheran Church (ALC)...When these two came together, it was inevitable that one of the two approaches would have to win out...In this case, the old LCA model of structure (and theology) won the day, leading to many issues ever since
- What has happened since the late 1980's, (in terms of structure) is that many of the major decisions of the ELCA have not only been directed by the leadership of the church, but almost entirely made on the national level, without congregational representation
- The ELCA uses language (when it comes to structure) of having "three expressions of the church" and of how each expression is "fully the church" when it gathers...1) the congregation; 2) the Synod; 3) the National Body (churchwide expression)...And it's true...whenever two or three are gathered, there exists the church...The trouble is that when decisions are allowed to be made on a national level that set policy and direction and theological understanding for the entire church (without the involvement of the entire church), the result is disastrous
- Two examples are worth sharing: 1) The Called to Common Mission" agreement in 1998 that set a requirement for bishops to be present for an ordination to be valid...Although exceptions were allowed, this decision was in direct conflict with the Lutheran understanding of the authority pastors are given (to preach and to teach) that comes solely from the Word of God...The result was that not only had we adopted a theological position that we actually don't profess to believe, but we gave increased power and authority to bishops (which has been used over the years to close the door to almost any "exception" being made)
- Pastor Judy can tell you the story of her experience...After having received full endorsement by all groups involved in her ordination process over a 4-year period, the gate to ordination was nearly closed by one person: the regional bishop. He had the power to give a thumbs-down simply because she upheld the Lutheran understanding that it is by God's Word alone (without the authority of a bishop) that we preach and teach in the church...All of this came about as a result of the heavy top-down structure and authority given to the churchwide expression, without congregational involvement
- The second example (of how the structure has been an ongoing issue) is what happened in August of last year at the national gathering when the ELCA adopted a social statement on Human Sexuality, four accompanying resolutions that allow for gay and lesbian clergy who are living in partnered same-sex relationships to serve as pastors in the church, and to allow for the blessing of same-sex marriages by the church
- I'll say more about the theological implications of that decision in a few moments...As far as structure, the result has already proven to be devastating to the life and faith and witness of the ELCA
- Just over 1000 members of the ELCA gathered last August, adopted Social Statements on Human Sexuality that had little if any basis in Scripture, opened the door to same-sex relationships and blessings, and caused a rift in almost every Lutheran congregation nationwide
- The disastrous result of that top-down, flawed structural decision is already showing up in significant ways: 1) Our ecumenical relationships with many other church bodies have been damaged (if not destroyed); 2) The ethnic minority groups we have worked for more than 20 years to support and bring on board have all but left; 3) We have set ourselves apart from more than 95% of the Christian community worldwide; 4) Rather than bringing about inclusion and growth (as many had hoped would happen), the result has been division and decline...Not to mention the fact that congregations have split, financial support has dropped dramatically, and our witness (to the world) is no longer a light, but an accommodation to the culture in which we live
- Bottom line, the structure of the ELCA and its top-down approach to "church" has not furthered the work and witness and unity of the ELCA, but become one of its greatest hindrances

2) Theological...What are the theological concerns that have caused us to recommend that we leave the ELCA?

- Let me focus my comments on two areas: 1) The place and authority of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions for matters of faith and life; and 2) The centrality of Christ and the cross
- The place and authority of Scripture...Historically, the church has said that what we teach and believe and how we live are determined by what is found in scripture...It is the “source and norm” for all matters of faith and life
- The Lutheran Confessions state the following about the Bible and its authority for the church: *We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged...Other writings of ancient and modern teachers, whatever their names, should not be put on a par with Holy Scripture.*
- The ELCA Constitution states the same: *This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life*
- The Bible is the “source”...It’s the basis upon which we build our teachings and set moral standards...it’s the foundation for what we proclaim and have to say to the world...Other *sources* (sciences, personal experience, history) may be considered in determining a response to and an understanding of whatever it is we are facing (the issues involved), but not as the *source* of what we teach and believe...What we teach and believe is based upon God’s Word
- The Bible is the “norm” for our life and witness...A “norm” is a standard or a guideline or a boundary given to us in Scripture...What we teach and believe is based upon the “norms” given to us in God’s Word...Therefore, if the *norms* we use for setting boundaries and guidelines and standards change from the *norms* given to us in Scripture, then the teaching will become a departure, at whatever point it changes, from the biblical witness...(And so what has happened?)
- In the ELCA today, Scripture is all too often understood as “an” authority and placed on the same footing as personal experience and the social sciences...(And there’s the problem)
- When the “source” of what we believe is no longer solely based upon scripture, and when the “norm” gets set aside, then we end up on a “slippery theological slope” from which it is nearly impossible to get off...Not only that, but when the Bible is no longer the source and norm for what we teach and believe, then it is wide open to anyone and everyone to set policy and standards as they desire
- Having lived through the past 20 years of discussion and debate and dialogue around matters of human sexuality, it is instructive that those conversations have rarely (if ever) taken place on the basis of Scripture...rather, they have been fought on the grounds of justice, equal rights, tolerance and acceptance of our sisters and brothers in Christ...When the Bible was used, it was used only insofar as to discount the passages and offer new understandings and interpretations...In the Social Statement adopted last summer, (in a 40-plus page document), rather than building a statement using the Bible as the source and norm for our faith and life together, there were only passing references to the Scriptures and a few footnotes referencing verses to be considered...A slippery theological slope
- It’s the “frog in the kettle” analogy being played out in the life of the church...Increase the water temperature one degree at a time, and a frog never notices...It remains in the water until it boils and dies...So it is happening in the ELCA...St. Timothy’s has not moved...The ELCA has...And it has happened as the culture has shifted (one degree at a time) and the church has followed, with the Bible no longer as “the source and norm, the sole authority for our faith and life”
- The second area of concern has to do with the shift that has taken place away from keeping the proclamation of Christ and the cross as the central message and purpose of the church
- Jesus’ Great Commission has always been the central and primary task of the church...”Go into all the world and make disciples of Jesus, baptizing and teaching all that he has commanded”...that commission defines our reason for existence...It creates a purpose that will never change...And it’s primary...Nothing else is to ever take its place

- What has happened in the ELCA has been that the task of preaching and teaching Christ, crucified and risen for the sins of the world is no longer the “primary” mission we have... In its place are a wide range of social concerns, things we do for the world and each other, in the name of Jesus, (many of which are good), but they cannot become our primary purpose and task
- Pastor Jim talks about the vertical and horizontal elements of our faith... Just like the cross, with its vertical and horizontal beams, so it is with our faith... We are to love God above all else (vertical) and we are to love our neighbors as ourselves (horizontal)... Now, obviously, the horizontal beam of love for one another is important, (and we must never lose sight of its importance), but it is carried on the weight of the vertical beam... God's love for us, and our love for him is what is primary, distinguishing us (as the church) from all other organizations
- How is it playing itself out in the church?... Example, at our most recent synod assembly, issues of sexuality were no longer front and center... We made “decisions” last summer (we’ve moved beyond those concerns)... What had now become central was not Christ and the cross, a message of repentance, our sin, the need for God’s grace, but new social concerns
- The focus was on global warming, how we can become a “green church”, what we can do to bring about immigration reform, fighting “hate crimes” and the like
- The trouble with all of that (not that those are not legitimate concerns) is the fact that we will never agree... It becomes a Democrat and Republican convention, instead of a Christ-centered, mission-driven gathering of the body of Christ
- Let’s try it (let’s vote)... See if we agree on “global warming” or “immigration reform” or “becoming green” or how best to “fight hate crimes”, or whatever other social issues might arise... It’ll never happen... If that’s why we exist in the church (if that’s our primary mission), we will forever be divided (in disunity)... But that’s what’s happening in the ELCA
- We’ve said (repeatedly) that the issue is not “sexuality”, and it’s not... It’s a far greater concern... It’s the Scriptures and our witness to them, and the primary task and mission of the church... the sexuality debates are over (at least as far the official policy of the ELCA is concerned)... But now that that’s over, these other social issues have taken front and center place... And therein lies the problem
- Other examples of a shift in theological position:
 - 1) Pastor Jim attended a service in the south bay area where a picture of the goddess Sophia was above the altar... The sermon focus was on the wisdom goddesses and “Woman Wisdom”
 - 2) Another service, a pastor had rewritten the Apostles’ Creed and the Words of Institution to make them all about us-helping-others, rather than what God has done for us in Christ
 - 3) Another example was an assembly election for Synod Council... One of the candidates was the pastor at Ebenezer Lutheran in San Francisco, more commonly known as “Her Church” (where feminist theology and worship of the goddesses is central in what they’re doing)... Now, she lost the election (barely)... What was troubling was the fact that everyone knows what she is doing and doesn’t care
 - 4) Another recent synod event had re-written the Lord’s Prayer: “Our Mother who is within us, we celebrate your many names. Your wisdom come, your will be done, unfolding from the depths within us”... In this case, it wasn’t the feminine imagery for God that was the issue (the Bible gives examples of that), but the pantheism: “Our mother within us, unfolding from the depths within us”... There is also a hint of “universalism”, how we are all climbing different paths up the same mountain, rather than lifting up the necessity of Christ
- All of that to say, that when Christ and the cross are not central in what we are doing and what we proclaim to the world, we’ve lost our purpose, we will forever remain in disunity, and we will have little (if no) impact on the world
- The ELCA is a church body no longer growing but in decline... Over the past ten years, it has lost more than 650,000 members... To put that in perspective, think about who we are (a congregation of 1250 members)... What has happened in the ELCA is the fact that it has lost 1250 members (a congregation our size) every week for ten years running... And the rate of decline has increased more rapidly over the past twelve months

3) Practical...What are the practical implications of such a decision for us at St. Timothy's?

- In terms of our everyday life, nothing will change
 - 1) Our worship, our witness, our classes will all continue as they are
 - 2) Our youth programs, children's ministry, and confirmation instruction will remain the same
 - 3) The connections we have with other ministries (Mount Cross, City Team, Family Shelter, The Lord's Pantry) will continue
 - 4) The national and international relationships we have with WMPL, American Bible Society, LWR will remain as they are
 - 5) Our property will remain with the congregation
 - 6) Our school will be unaffected
 - 7) The support offered for pastors (in areas of major medical and pension) will continue
 - 8) Opportunity to call future pastors from Lutheran seminaries will remain in place
 - 9) As far as the sexuality concerns (and these are not central – I hope you're hearing that), our doors will always be open to anyone and everyone who comes to this place in search of growing in their faith and relationship with God...Society assigns labels like "homophobic" to churches (people like me) who work hard to maintain Biblical standards...Nothing is further from the truth...Everyone is welcome in this congregation...Gay and lesbian people have been involved in this congregation for years (not in great numbers), but involved and always welcome... We need to resist those labels and love as Jesus loved...In terms of our everyday life, nothing will change

- In terms of the church body of which we are a part, much will change:
 - 1) We will be part of a church body that is in the center of the Lutheran landscape
 - 2) We will belong to a body much more in line with who we are as a congregation
 - 3) We will be able to send funding without worrying about how it is being used
 - 4) We will share a common confession of faith with other congregations who join
 - 5) We will look forward to regional and national gatherings in a way we have not for many years
 - 6) We will be known not for what we are against, but will have the opportunity to become known for what we are for

- For reasons structural, theological, and practical, it is the unanimous recommendation of the Church Council and fully supported by your pastors that we leave the ELCA and join the North American Lutheran Church

Why the Church Council is recommending that we join the NALC

- Once the recommendation was made to leave the ELCA, there were two church bodies we considered: Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) and the North American Lutheran Church (NALC)
- Both church bodies are solid Lutheran denominations, falling into the center of the Lutheran theological spectrum (Missouri & Wisconsin Synods on the conservative end and the ELCA on the liberal end)
- Both are what we would refer to as "centrist" in their theology...They represent the center of Lutheran Confessional positions...They are consistent with what the Lutheran Church has taught and believed since the time of the Reformation...They are also consistent with the theological positions of St. Timothy's since the time we were formed nearly 50 years ago
- There were/are pros and cons to each of the two church bodies...There is no such thing as a "perfect Lutheran Church"...The Church Council looked carefully at both
- In general, in comparing the differences, the one, Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) is congregationally based, with little if any structure beyond the congregation itself...It shares a common confession...It works with other congregations to provide support...But its weakness is in the fact that it is so congregational in nature that it has difficulty making decisions, setting "policy", relating to other church bodies, dealing with matters of discipline, etc.

- The other, the North American Lutheran Church (NALC) is so young (began in August) that it has no history upon which to base a decision
- Having said that, the Church Council voted (almost unanimously) to recommend we join the NALC

Why the NALC:

- Theologically consistent with traditional Lutheran witness and confessions (a centrist position)
- Strong Leadership giving direction to its early years
- Four Areas of Definition built into its founding documents: Christ-Centered, Mission-Driven, Traditionally-Grounded, Congregationally-Focused
- Basic supporting structure is provided on a national level (discipline, pastoral roster, ministry connections, etc.)
- Able to make church body decisions on a national level... However, in contrast to the ELCA, constitutional and theological changes are subject to congregational ratification
- Ability to formalize connections with other church bodies around the world (has already received support from other church bodies); reps from the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Missouri Synod, the Lutheran Churches in Tanzania and Ethiopia, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) and LCMC were all present at the constituting convention
- Opportunity to be on the ground floor of a newly-formed church body (as of mid-September, about 30 churches have already signed on, many others voting, on-going inquiries, interest from seminarians)
- Easy to join and would “require” no involvement on any level, although opportunity would most likely arise to do so if desired
- Rather than creating its own seminaries, Publishing House, Global Mission agencies, it will take advantage of a number of ministries already in place: Strong support through WordAlone Ministries (WAM), World Mission Prayer League (WMPL), Youth Encounter, Sola Publishing, Lutheran Clergy Connect, Chaplaincy Core, other pan-Lutheran efforts... working with a number of seminaries to develop a process for pastors to learn in already existing institutions of higher education
- Good relationship with Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC)
- Going back to the three areas of concern raised with the ELCA (structural, theological, practical), the Church Council believes this is the group (of the two it considered) that has the best supporting structure in place, theological understanding and positions being held, and practical approach to ministry that will give it the best chance for long term future and growth

Affiliation Timeline

- Adult Forums to hear Church Council Recommendations
- Congregational Vote on October 10, 2010 (two-thirds majority required for passage)
- If the motion to leave the ELCA is approved (by two-thirds majority), then a second vote will take place no sooner than 90 days later
- If the second vote is approved (by two-thirds majority), then the affiliation change is in effect

Questions & Answers

Additional Information Available

St. Timothy's Affiliation Team Report: www.stlcsj.org (click on Affiliation link)

Lutheran Core Website: www.lutherancore.org

NALC Website: www.thenalc.org

Copies of the Presentation are available

Brochure on the NALC

Closing Prayer