



A Vision and Plan

for

The North American Lutheran Church

and

***Lutheran CORE,
a community of confessing Lutherans***

Christ-Centered

Mission-Driven

Traditionally-Grounded

Congregationally-Focused

Summary

February 18, 2010

Commemoration of Dr. Martin Luther, Renewer of the Church, 1546

Dear Friends in Christ,

We are living in an exciting time for confessing Lutherans in North America! Pastors and laypeople increasingly are engaged in the life of the Church beyond their congregations. Many are returning with new zeal to the true mission of the Church, the sharing of the Good News of Christ Jesus. Many are eager for new fellowships, new structures, and new ways of doing common ministry. And all this is happening in a society that has become once more a mission field, a culture desperately in need of the Gospel of our Lord and Savior.

In September 2009, Lutheran CORE's national convocation, meeting in Fishers, IN, committed us to pursue the "reconfiguration of North American Lutheranism," by providing for the needs both of those who plan to leave and those who plan to remain within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) in this season of challenge and opportunity. This document summarizes our vision and plan for pursuing these goals.

Lutheran CORE affirms the faithful call of confessing Lutherans, some of whom will remain in the ELCA and ELCIC and some of whom are now called to different affiliations. We envision a reconfiguration that maintains the highest degree of ongoing unity and cooperation possible among those who leave and those who stay. A primary vehicle for this unity will be the continuing ministry of Lutheran CORE, reconfigured as an association of confessing Lutherans spanning denominational bodies. However, after hearing the hopes and requests of many of those who plan to leave their current church bodies, we are now also proposing the formation of a new denominational body for confessing Lutherans: the **North American Lutheran Church (NALC)**.

The NALC will be a faithful and innovative Lutheran church body that spans national borders. It will hold at its heart the Great Commission of Jesus to "make disciples of all nations." It will utilize networked ministries of local congregations and parachurch organizations, rather than the large bureaucracy of a denominational body. It will be governed by a convocation of representative delegates from its congregations, and it will submit major decisions to congregational ratification. It will stand in continuity with the 2,000 year history of "the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church," marrying the classical form of the church catholic with flexible structures appropriate for its ministry emphases. It will be ecumenically engaged and confessionally grounded.

It will also be a church body bigger than itself, for it will work in close partnership and cooperation with the community of **Lutheran CORE**. For confessing Lutherans who will remain within the ELCA and ELCIC, Lutheran CORE will offer an alternate ecclesial family, where they can connect with each other and with confessing Lutherans

in the NALC and other church bodies. Some will choose to coordinate witness initiatives within the ELCA or ELCIC through this community. Many will choose to organize collaborative ministry initiatives with their partners in Lutheran CORE. Mindful of the objective of ongoing unity, the NALC will conduct many of its ministry initiatives with and through its partners in the Lutheran CORE community. And Lutheran CORE will organize its capabilities to provide resources, advice and assistance to its members in carrying out their local ministries.

Both the NALC and Lutheran CORE will be centered on four key attributes: Christ-Centered, Mission-Driven, Traditionally-Grounded and Congregationally-Focused:

- *Christ-Centered:* We confess the apostolic faith in Jesus Christ according to the Scriptures. We affirm the authority of the canonical Holy Scriptures as the only source and norm of our faith and life. We accept the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran Confessions as true witnesses to the Word of God.
- *Mission-Driven:* We believe that making disciples for Christ is the core priority of the Church, that congregation planting is often best done through local congregations, and that both external and internal evangelization must be a priority of the Church in the present age.
- *Traditionally-Grounded:* We affirm the ecumenical creeds and the faithful witness of the Church across time and space. We endorse the form and practices of the universal Church that are consistent with Scripture, particularly the office of the ministry and the tradition of worship under Word and Sacrament. We seek dialogue and fellowship with other Lutheran churches and with faithful Christians of other confessions.
- *Congregationally-Focused:* We envision a new church body and confessing community that are organized to facilitate the ministries of local congregations in a posture of servanthood and a spirit of partnership, through the provision of resources, connections and information.

Finally, both Lutheran CORE and the NALC will seek to foster further reconfiguration and unity among confessing Lutherans by seeking out partnership opportunities with Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) and with WordAlone and other orthodox Lutheran churchly groups and ministries. While respecting our different roles and church structures, we all share a common confession of faith and a common commitment to the authority of the Word of God and the centrality of the Great Commission in the life of the Church. May God grant us ever-increasing opportunities to serve Him collaboratively.

In the hope that God will use these efforts to His purposes, we offer this plan for review and comment by all confessing Lutherans in North America.

The Lutheran CORE Vision and Planning Working Group
The Lutheran CORE Steering Committee
The Lutheran CORE Advisory Council

I. Rationale for New Church Body and Overview of Relationship with Lutheran CORE

Confessing Lutherans have raised their voices over the past several months, asking for a church body that is faithful in its preaching and practice to the Holy Bible and to the teachings of the Lutheran Confessions. Lutheran CORE has heard these requests and, in response, now proposes to form the North American Lutheran Church (NALC). This will be a church body bigger than itself. It will work in cooperation with Lutheran CORE, a community of confessing Lutherans in North America, to reach out in mission and service to congregations and their local communities and to places around the world. Through using and sharing resources and mission opportunities, educational and youth materials and projects, establishing various forms of relationships with confessing Lutherans and other church bodies, and participating in clergy exchanges, the NALC will live out its vision of working beyond itself, while at the same time remaining in apostolic continuity with the Church universal, tracing its origin back to Jesus Christ's command to Peter the Apostle to "feed my sheep."

The new church body intends to encompass congregations in Canada, the United States, Mexico and the Caribbean. It will stand as a partner with confessing church bodies throughout the world.

The North American Lutheran Church

At its August 2010 convocation, Lutheran CORE will present a provisional constitution for the NALC, and will nominate a slate of officers for election to one-year terms. At the 2011 initial convocation of the NALC, delegates from congregations that have joined the new church will review the constitution and elect officers to full terms.

The NALC is being established in response to those members and friends of Lutheran CORE who have expressed a preference for completely withdrawing from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America or the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. They are looking for a Lutheran church body that stands in the tradition of the Church, is denominationally structured for leadership, oversight and accountability, enhances representative governance by congregations and affirms and supports ministry and mission at the congregational level. The NALC will be structurally lean and will look to Lutheran CORE, a community of confessing Lutherans in North America, for many resources.

Membership in the NALC will include congregations that vote to associate with it and adhere to the provisions of its constitution, as well as ordained ministers who are accepted onto the NALC clergy roster. Congregations of the NALC may also be members of other Lutheran church bodies. Individuals who remain members of an ELCA or ELCIC congregation may also join a NALC congregation.

The provisional constitution for the NALC will include the following components:

- a. **Guiding Principles:** Jesus Christ, the Living Word of God is clearly revealed in the Holy Scriptures, the written Word of God, and in the Lutheran Confessions, a faithful and trustworthy witness to the Word of God.
- b. **Leadership:** The NALC will have the capacity and authority to train, certify, ordain, call, encourage, care for and discipline pastors, ensure faithful preaching and teaching by its clergy, and support and, as necessary, discipline congregations.
- c. **Governance:** The primary authority of the NALC will be an annual or biennial convocation, which will make decisions on behalf of the church, including election of leaders by a process of direct representation, who are accountable to the church. There will also be a process of ratification by congregations of certain specified actions of the convocation. Between convocations, an elected board will have authority to act on behalf of the NALC.
- d. **Relations with the Wider Church:** The NALC will have the power to arrange for and engage in church to church relationships and to participate in pan-Lutheran organizations such as the Lutheran World Federation.
- e. **Education:** The NALC will develop relationships with theological institutions and will work to establish programs of confessional seminary training for clergy, as well as leadership training for all members of the NALC.
- f. **Ministry:** The NALC will inspire, encourage and participate in domestic and global ministry for evangelism, mission, outreach and growth, and will partner with other Lutherans for internal evangelism of the NALC congregations and members.

The NALC and Lutheran CORE will recognize both women and men in the office of ordained clergy, while acknowledging the diversity of opinion that exists within the Christian community on this subject. The NALC intends to adopt the standards of the ELCA Statement of Vision and Expectations for Ordained Ministers in its pre-August 2009 form.

Lutheran CORE – a community of confessing Lutherans

Many supporters within Lutheran CORE have indicated that they will remain members of ELCA (or ELCIC) congregations or on their clergy rosters, at least for a season. Some of these mention that they intend to remain within the ELCA on a limited basis - mostly at the congregational level, often re-designating their benevolence outside the mission support system of the ELCA. While these individuals and congregations may remain within the ELCA only in a formal sense, they may look to the Lutheran CORE community as their church beyond the congregation.

Others intend to remain more broadly engaged within the ELCA as faithful witnesses.

Lutheran CORE recognizes and affirms those congregations and individuals who feel called to remain within the ELCA and who wish to continue to work for the reform of the ELCA and to witness to Biblical and confessional teachings and practices, as well as to support others remaining in the ELCA. Some of these congregations and individuals may choose dual membership in the ELCA and the NALC. Others may be members of Lutheran CORE on an individual, congregational or partnership basis.

Lutheran CORE intends to be a community of Lutherans who acknowledge that Scripture is the only and final authority in matters of faith and life, and who accept the Lutheran Confessions as a faithful and trustworthy witness to the Word of God. It will be composed of individuals, congregations, partner renewal movements and church bodies, including the NALC, who agree with and adhere to its constitution. It will also seek close partnerships with other like minded bodies and associations such as Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC). Congregations affiliated with other Lutheran bodies may also be affiliated with this association.

At its August 2010 convocation, Lutheran CORE, which previously has been called a “free-standing synod,” will amend its constitution as necessary to engage in mission as:

- a. a confessional and confessing movement unifying all Lutherans who identify with the purposes of Lutheran CORE.
- b. a churchly community, grounded in Word and Sacrament, and rooted in the Scriptures, the ecumenical creeds, and the Lutheran Confessions.
- c. an association, providing a sense of Christian community and Lutheran identity and making available resources for mission, theological and lay education and the call process.
- d. a coalition of congregations, individual laypersons and pastors, reform movements, and church bodies.

Both the NALC and the community of Lutheran CORE will function cooperatively in shared ministry and mission. To express and build unity throughout the community, most ministries of the two bodies will be carried out jointly: pastoral care, theological education, sharing of resources, domestic evangelism and global outreach.

II. Being Christ-Centered: Our Lutheran Confession of Faith

We believe and proclaim that:

1. The God revealed in the Bible makes Himself known to us as one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
2. God the Father created the universe, sustains it, and desires to relate lovingly to His creation and to all people.

3. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, is “a mirror of the Father’s heart” (Luther’s Large Catechism), who was sent to rescue us from sin, death and the devil by means of His incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension. The cross of Christ is the Triune God’s unique eternal promise and demonstration of His love for all. The living Christ is the Savior and Lord of all creation, who calls all persons to be one with Him for the sake of His love for the world.
4. The Holy Spirit of God, sent from the Father and the Son, calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies and keeps believers who are by baptism the body of Christ, the Church. The Church, in Christ, is commissioned by Him to proclaim and share His Gospel with all people. By the power and authority of the Holy Spirit, working through the proclamation of the Word of God and the administration of the Sacraments by the Church, believers’ sins are forgiven, they are made one with Christ, and are given the certain hope that they will be raised from death to eternal life with God and all believers.

We believe and proclaim that the Good News, centered in Christ, clearly is revealed in the written Word of God, the canonical Holy Scriptures. “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). Through the Law, God preserves good order and safety in creation. As sinners violate His gracious will, the Law also exposes and condemns their sin. Through the Gospel, God forgives sin and grants salvation through Christ Jesus. In this way, sinners are put to death and raised to “walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:5)

We believe and proclaim that the ecumenical creeds and Lutheran Confessions provide faithful and trustworthy witnesses to the Word of God. Simultaneously, the Confessions call the Lutheran community to a reforming ministry based on the Word of God within the one body of Christ.

Lutheran CORE will propose an identical text for a confession of faith for the constitutions of the NALC and for Lutheran CORE. The language of the confession of faith will be virtually the same as found in the constitution of the present Lutheran CORE, except that the language regarding the Bible will include a reference from the Epitome of the Formula of Concord: “The only rule and guiding principle according to which all teachings are to be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments alone...Holy Scripture alone remains the only judge, rule, and guiding principle according to which, as the only touchstone, all teachings should and must be recognized and judged.”

In addition, the confession of faith will include the text of the Common Confession, understood as a summary of teachings otherwise affirmed by the Lutheran Confessions.

Candidates for ordination by the NALC or for reception into its clergy roster will be expected to preach and teach the Word of God according to the Lutheran Confessions. In their ministry goals, both the NALC and Lutheran CORE will implement theological education and spiritual formation for both clergy and lay people as high priorities.

III. Being Mission-Driven: A Vision for Mission, Evangelism and Discipleship

The primary mission of both the NALC and the community of Lutheran CORE will be the one given to the Church by our Lord Himself in Matthew 28: to “*make disciples of all nations.*” In Acts 1:8, Jesus explained how the Church would carry out this mission: “*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*” These are Jesus’ marching orders to the Church; this mission is the Church’s calling.

A church that is mission-driven lifts up the person and work of Jesus Christ in word and deed, that all people may be drawn to Him. Jesus is the evangel, the good news that forgiveness can be found in Him and in Him alone. The Church is called to be a faithful witness to Christ, not in its own strength, but in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Both Lutheran CORE and the NALC will seek to be faithful to this calling by placing missions and evangelism at the center of their common lives. For the sake of maximum effectiveness in missions and in the hope of ever-increasing unity amongst faithful Lutherans, the NALC will conduct its missions initiatives primarily with and through the community of Lutheran CORE, in local and national partnerships with other members of Lutheran CORE. Each congregation of the NALC and Lutheran CORE will determine how to live out the Great Commission in its own ministry.

Primary Evangelism

“You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem...”

The shared ministry of the NALC and the community of Lutheran CORE will call all believers to be faithful witnesses to Christ. It will provide training that equips God’s people to communicate the Christian faith to others and to incorporate them within the Church. It especially will encourage those who have the spiritual gift of evangelism to exercise and use that gift to speak to others about Christ. Both the NALC and Lutheran CORE clearly will prioritize training and assistance for evangelism in their collective lives, including at national and regional convocations and in the activities of the professional staff of the two bodies.

Our shared ministry will make use of Christ-centered approaches that the wider body of Christ finds useful and effective, tailored to the Lutheran context. For example, Lutheran ministries such as Word and Witness and Crossways International might be complemented by Alpha, Intervarsity, Mothers of Preschoolers and many other proven vehicles that God is using across denominational lines to transform the lives of countless people.

Our ministries also will emphasize the importance of assisting the faithful to grow in discipleship through self-evangelization, catechization and serving. Focus areas for deepening of personal faith such as participation in Word and Sacrament, spiritual retreats, prayer for revival, Bible study and personal spiritual practices will be lifted up as

a primary function of the Christian community, with the NALC and Lutheran CORE providing resources and training to congregations and individuals.

Congregation Planting

“You shall be my witnesses...in Judea and Samaria...”

Planting new churches is not just a fad, nor simply a response to demographic growth. It is an intentional strategy for making new disciples of Christ. In 2000 there were about 300 churches in America that were multi-site. In 2009, that number has grown to 3,000. On a typical Sunday in 2009, almost 10% of Protestant worshippers attend a multi-site congregation in the United States and Canada. As this experience demonstrates, church planting is done most effectively by local congregations, and new worshipping communities are often best supported by groups of nearby congregations.

The small but vital professional staff of Lutheran CORE and the NALC will focus on coordination of resources for mission to support the initiatives of member congregations. Leaders of the NALC will be conceived of as “missionary bishops” and “missionary pastors.” Leaders and staff will match resources and opportunities, connect groups of congregations to collaborate on church plants and publicize “best practices” from individual congregations. Our shared ministry will also seek to identify and train and equip gifted pastors to lead new churches. Mission resources for congregations will be the first tangible output of the NALC for its members, and new congregation starts will be the first shared initiatives of those joining the NALC.

In the present context within North American Lutheranism, house churches will likely be an important vehicle for the gathering of believers. The NALC and Lutheran CORE will encourage and support house churches, promote their connection to the wider body of Christ, provide worship and other resources, guide their development into mission congregations and identify local partner congregations for house churches.

Both the NALC and Lutheran CORE will also encourage and support specialized ministries in their calling of reaching out to people of all races and cultures. Taking to heart the words of Jude 1:3, that we “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints,” Lutheran CORE has established as its first missional priority the support of existing immigrant mission congregations in the ELCA.

Global Missions

“You shall be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth.”

Our shared ministry will engage in and support global missions. Particular emphasis will be placed on working with and through existing parachurch organizations such as World Mission Prayer League and the East European Missions Network. The NALC will also enter into church-to-church partnerships with Lutheran church bodies, particularly in the developing world, to support and enhance their efforts in pioneer evangelism.

In this age, however, it is also the case that Christian churches in the global south have much to give to the people of North America. The nations that once sent missionaries have now become themselves mission fields, acutely in need of the Good News of Christ Jesus. Both the NALC and Lutheran CORE look forward to deepening partnerships with the Lutheran churches of the global south, in the hope that through our common efforts, with confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Gospel of Jesus Christ might spread and spread again across our respective nations and that we might experience the fervor for Christ's Gospel shown by new converts in mission churches elsewhere.

IV. Being Traditionally-Grounded: Organization and Governance of the North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE

This section provides principles and guidelines for the organization and governance of the NALC and of the community of Lutheran CORE. The principles serve as a foundation upon which the NALC and Lutheran CORE can build, while the guidelines provide an initial organizational structure from which decisions will be made.

The principles set forth are intended to reflect the identity of the NALC and Lutheran CORE as members of the Church catholic. These principles will include the practice of worship in Word and Sacrament, the office of the ministry, a ministry of oversight and the teachings of the Lutheran Confessions and the ecumenical creeds.

The guidelines for the organization of both the NALC and Lutheran CORE will include representative, delegated and collegial decision-making, and a lean and simple structure of leadership.

The initial organization and governance of each respective group will be determined at the Convocation of Lutheran CORE in August 2010. Congregations joining the NALC will endorse the constitution for the new church body. Our intent is that these documents remain in place until such time as they no longer effectively serve the purposes for which they are offered.

Both the church and Lutheran CORE will see themselves as participants in the one Church of Christ, a community of believers across time and space. In their teaching and practice they will evidence a respectful appreciation for the life and witness of the whole Church, as well as a mandate to be part of the ongoing reformation of the Christian community under the Word of God.

The North American Lutheran Church

A Lutheran Church Body within the Church Catholic

In the Third Article of the Nicene Creed, we confess, “We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.” The Lutheran churches in North America are members of the universal Church and hold to essential teachings shared with other orthodox Christians. The NALC will be committed to the unity of the universal Church, doctrinal continuity with apostolic teaching, and its distinctive confessional heritage.

The North American Lutheran Church will be a church body dedicated to the preaching of the Gospel in its purity and to the Sacraments administered in accordance with the divine Word (*The Augsburg Confession*, Article VII). In the koinonia (fellowship) members are to serve one another in love which builds up (*I Corinthians 8:1 and I Corinthians 13*). Within this new church body we intend unity in Jesus Christ, our Lord, and dedication to the orthodox faith. The church will encourage faithful discipleship and spiritual discipline. The NALC and its individual members will engage in mission whose purpose is the proclamation of the Gospel so others also may believe that their salvation comes from Jesus Christ alone.

“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, . . .” (*Formula of Concord, Epitome, Part I*, Tappert Edition). The Creeds and Lutheran Confessions serve as faithful witnesses to the Holy Scriptures. The Early Church Fathers and other theologians, especially Luther and evangelical Lutheran theologians, provide testimony to biblical teachings. The North American Lutheran Church respects the deposit of Scriptural interpretation, doctrinal explication, and worship practice accumulated over the ages in so far as it conforms to the canonical Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

The Decision-making Process

The NALC will meet in convocation annually or biennially. All the clergy on the roster and approximately an equal number of lay delegates, including at least one from every congregation, shall convene in a single representative decision-making body. Parishes of more than one congregation will be represented by their clergy and one lay delegate per congregation. Larger congregations will be represented by more than one lay delegate. The constitution will indicate the formula of representation. Similar principles would apply to regional convocations, should such structures develop.

Whenever possible, actions of the convocation will speak for the church in an advisory fashion, expressing the mind of the convocation without binding individual congregations. Proposals that bind congregations in non-essentials must be accompanied by a statement of why such binding is necessary. In addition, such binding actions, as well as changes to specified sections of the NALC constitution and the adoption of teaching statements, must be approved both by the convocation and two-thirds of all

congregations. The bishop with the regional pastors/deans and in consultation with the church's theologians will be responsible for submitting teaching statements and policies on church practice to the convocation.

The convocation will elect the bishop, secretary, and treasurer to serve for prescribed terms. All officers are eligible for re-election. The constitution will outline a nominating process. The offices of secretary and treasurer will be open to both clergy and laity.

An executive council will be empowered to make decisions for the NALC between convocations. The convocation will elect the members of the council. Committees will be formed as needed to do the work of the church. A Committee on Appeals, elected by the convocation, will be established to decide cases regarding the constitution and discipline of pastors and congregations. The church will be governed in a collegial spirit with the participation of clergy and laity.

The Ministry of Oversight

The Church is expressed primarily in the congregation but is also manifested in wider structures that serve the ministry of the local congregation. Oversight in the Church has been fundamental since New Testament times. The NALC will be served by a bishop, and by regional pastors who will be called deans. Both men and women may serve in all offices of the church.

The bishop, a title which means overseer, will provide oversight of the North American Lutheran Church. The Augsburg Confession, Article 28, teaches that the office of the bishop is to preach the Gospel, forgive sins, judge doctrine and condemn doctrine that is contrary to the Gospel. Consistent with that Confessional understanding, the bishop of the NALC will be charged to proclaim the Gospel, administer the Sacraments, defend the faith, foster the mission of the Church, ordain or make provision for ordination, participate in the application of discipline, visit congregations, engage in ecumenical relationships, and provide counsel and assistance in the call process.

The deans will embody this oversight in a particular geographical region which may be established. Regional geographical units, intended to be small and local, may be formed to assist congregations in working together for mission. They will elect a dean who will serve as pastor to pastors, their families, and congregations and will emphasize teaching the faith and visitation with pastors and congregations. Deans may continue to serve under the call of a congregation. The deans will be accountable to the bishop, and support the work of the bishop by conducting similar functions in their respective geographical areas except that they will not be responsible for any disciplinary proceedings.

The bishop of the church will install the bishop-elect. Deans will be installed by the bishop or, at his/her behest, another dean. Pastors will normally be ordained by the bishop or a representative appointed by the bishop. A candidate for the ministry may submit a request to the bishop to appoint a particular pastor to preside at the ordination, which shall be approved absent extraordinary circumstances.

If the office of the bishop is vacant, the executive council will appoint a pastor-administrator who will serve until the election of a new bishop. This officer will perform the duties of the bishop including presiding at meetings of the executive council and the convocation.

The national organization serves the ministry of the entire church with the understanding that the congregation is the primary locus of ministry and mission. The structure of the national church should follow the rule that form follows function.

Funding

A budget for the operation of the NALC will be submitted to the convocation with an estimate of the percentage of congregational income needed to meet the budget. Bearing in mind that information, congregations will decide the level of financial support that they provide to the NALC and to other ministries. The budget for the NALC will include support for its partner ministries. Congregations also will be encouraged to support these and other mission and ministry efforts directly.

Property and Other Congregational Matters

Congregations of the NALC will own their buildings and property and, if they depart from the NALC, retain ownership. Congregations will become members of the NALC according to the requirements of their congregational constitutions, by accepting the confession of faith and constitution of the NALC. Congregations may terminate their relationship with the NALC by the process specified in their own congregational constitutions without any requirement for consent by the NALC. Dual membership of clergy and congregations in other Lutheran church bodies will be permitted.

Congregations will call their pastors, decide their mission priorities, determine their benevolence, and select their worship and educational resources. Applying the principle of the priesthood of all baptized believers, all members will be encouraged to engage in ministry according to individual spiritual gifts.

Clergy and the Call Process

The NALC will certify and maintain a clergy roster and will establish procedures for the reception of clergy from other Lutheran church bodies. Congregations may call any pastor who is on the roster of the NALC. The bishop and local deans will be available to provide assistance and counsel on these matters, using resources such as WordAlone's Clergy Connect service.

The NALC will certify and maintain lists of chaplains and interim pastors, and will seek qualification as an endorsing agent for military chaplains. The church will welcome the ministries of those currently serving as Associates in Ministry, Deaconesses and Diaconal Ministers, and will explore the possible creation of a single structure of commissioned lay ministry.

Ecumenical and Other Relationships

The NALC will engage in ecumenical dialogue with other churches. Congregations and regions are encouraged to engage in such relationships and conversation. The new church body will encourage new forms of ecumenical dialogue.

The NALC will seek to establish close relationships for shared ministry with other Lutheran churches, including interchangeability of clergy. Additionally, it will maintain forms of support and community with those ELCA congregations and individuals who are members of Lutheran CORE.

The NALC will apply for membership in the Lutheran World Federation, but will not apply for membership in the National Council of Churches or the World Council of Churches. It will be open to cooperating in the establishment of new national and worldwide ecumenical organizations.

The NALC will encourage the formation of associations and affinity groups such that its members can pursue particular shared ministry objectives. The NALC will be a member of Lutheran CORE and will covenant with it in missions, theological education, and other areas to be determined by Lutheran CORE and the NALC.

Theological Education

Theological education for laity and clergy will be a priority for the NALC. Providing teaching for all the baptized is essential if they are to live as disciples, following the commands of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20). A basic knowledge of the Lord's Prayer, the ecumenical creeds, and the Ten Commandments grounds all Christians in the essential narrative of Holy Scripture and in the tradition of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. The NALC will provide guidance for initiation in the Christian faith as well as for ongoing learning that supports that faith and life.

In addition, the formation of clergy, through both initial confessional training such as is received in seminary and ongoing systematic study, will be established and criteria for such will be set forth. Such education has as its goal the establishment and support of a parish practice that is centered in the Word and the Sacraments.

The NALC will partner with Lutheran CORE and other confessing Lutheran groups in the implementation of this priority, and will work with existing Lutheran and non-Lutheran seminaries and with newer theological education initiatives such as the Institute of Lutheran Theology.

Our Mission

The North American Lutheran Church desires to be faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ in its worship of the Holy Trinity, one God in three persons, and to serve Christ in the world with a dynamic mission of Gospel outreach. It will also serve the poor as our Lord

commands and will be intentional in reaching out to meet human need. Already existing relief and service organizations, such as Lutheran World Relief and Lutheran Disaster Response, will be partners in the ministry of the NALC. The structure of the church must expedite, not hinder, the commission Christ has given to His Church.

Lutheran CORE: a community of confessing Lutherans

Membership and Purpose

Lutheran CORE will include in its membership Lutheran church bodies, synods, congregations, reform movements and individual members. All of its members, as a basic requirement for membership, will endorse the Common Confession.

Lutheran CORE will partner with its members in a variety of ministry and mission efforts. It will serve as a connection for cooperation among its members and provide resources and counsel for work done on the congregational level, as well as in conjunction with other congregations and church bodies. In so doing, it will take advantage of already existing resources from WordAlone and other Lutheran and parachurch organizations, including resources for local and global missions, youth ministry, Christian education, and the call process.

Necessary Structure

Lutheran CORE requires some basic structure and staffing to fulfill its purposes. The specifics of the staffing and structure will be determined as the ministry develops, and in conjunction with the NALC and WordAlone. However, the guiding principles for staffing and structure will be to remain as lean as possible, allowing form to follow function, and to share resources as much as possible, seeking to avoid duplication of efforts.

Initially, Lutheran CORE will meet in convocation at the same time as the NALC. Once the NALC is constituted as a church body, the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee will determine the time and place of the Lutheran CORE convocation, independent of the NALC, as well as the number of delegates and the method of their selection, based upon representative principles.

V. Being Congregationally-Focused: Strategy for Organization and Common Ministries of the North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE

This section outlines what it means for the NALC and Lutheran CORE to be congregationally focused in their ministry and mission efforts. The strategy and structure are designed to serve as the basis for a model for ministry and mission that takes place primarily through the local congregation.

The work of Christ's Church throughout the world needs ministries and mission efforts that range in size, role and scope in order for it to carry out the Great Commission:

“...Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’” *Matthew 28:18-20*

Both the NALC and Lutheran CORE recognize the need for ministries that necessarily require a wide range of involvement and effort. However, the organizational structures of the NALC and the Lutheran CORE will be built on the understanding that the basic and most fundamental unit through and in which ministry and mission happen is the local congregation. There, through the pure teaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments (*Augsburg Confession, Article 7*), disciples are made, equipped, and sent. As congregations faithfully respond to the Great Commission (*Matthew 28:18-20*; cf. *Mark 16:15, Luke 24:48-49, John 20:21 and Acts 1:8*) and the Great Commandments (*Matthew 22:37-40*), individually and together, God's mission and the ministry of Christ's Church throughout the world are carried out faithfully. In the same way, as individuals within congregations take personal responsibility for faithful living, the work of the congregation and the larger church, in serving Christ, is enabled and accomplished. This understanding and this goal guide our proposals.

Shared Ministries and Missions

Organizational Strategy

The organizational strategy for ministry and mission for the NALC and Lutheran CORE is to equip congregations in their own local context; to encourage, inspire and challenge them in their work; and to provide support as they work together with other congregations and individuals throughout the world. To this end, the NALC and Lutheran CORE will connect congregations with the best available ministry knowledge and practices, and encourage development and dissemination of new resources that support faithful ministry in congregations.

Working closely with WordAlone, LCMC, and other Lutheran and parachurch organizations, the NALC and Lutheran CORE will support the efforts of congregations and the larger church. In particular, through Sola Publishing and the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, and in partnership with others that share in the Common Confession, they will provide resources for ministry and mission to congregations and individuals that can be used in their own setting:

- evangelization and new ministry development
- educational resources for persons at all ages and stages of faith formation and life

- programmatic aids for children's ministry, youth ministry, men's and women's ministries and other specialized ministries
- connection to existing congregational ministry resources that are biblically and confessionally sound.

This structure will also facilitate links between congregations and ministry and mission agencies throughout North America and beyond, to enable congregations and movements of the NALC and Lutheran CORE to work together in efforts beyond their local context. Through the shared resources of WordAlone, World Mission Prayer League, Youth Encounter, East European Missions Network, Lutheran World Relief, Lutheran Disaster Response, other parachurch organizations, and faithful resources from other Lutheran church bodies, the NALC and Lutheran CORE will support the identification of new ministry opportunities for proclaiming the Gospel through outreach with God's Word and in the serving of human need.

As congregations work individually and together, irrespective of organizational boundaries, the work of Christ's Church throughout the world is carried out faithfully and a united witness is given. And as individual members are encouraged, inspired, and challenged to take personal responsibility for faithful living, the work of the congregation and the larger church, in serving Jesus, is accomplished.

Structures for Ministry and Mission

The structures for ministry and mission for the NALC and Lutheran CORE will be built upon a shared relationship with and common goals of a number of evangelical ministries and mission agencies and bodies. Recognizing that unnecessary duplication of resources is poor stewardship, the NALC and Lutheran CORE will rely primarily on resources and ministry and mission agencies already in place. The NALC and Lutheran CORE will have the competence to initiate new ministries, but will only do so in areas where there is no existing and effective support organization already in place that operates compatibly with their confession of faith.

The NALC and Lutheran CORE structures will be built in such a way as to provide resources and ministry and mission links to congregations. In particular, resources to support Christian education, ministry to children and youth, theological education, men's and women's ministries, and the serving of human need will be made available, along with support for global mission. The congregations will then take those resources and links, adapt them to their local context, and support and carry out the work as they are able.

Also, the NALC and Lutheran CORE will coordinate efforts with LCMC in order to work together more effectively and efficiently in shared ministry and mission efforts. High priority will be given to shared efforts with LCMC ranging from helping ministries designed to serve the poor, to outreach efforts such as mission starts and global mission support. Lutheran CORE will serve its members as they seek to serve the cause and purposes of Christ. Thus, the structure for ministry and mission, through Lutheran CORE,

will seek to remove any organizational barriers that might otherwise stand in the way of the work to which all Christians have been called in the name of Jesus.

Ministries Unique to the NALC

The new church body will support its member congregations in the call and disciplinary processes through a ministry of oversight and mutual accountability. Working with the bishop, regional pastors/deans, and WordAlone's Clergy Connect service, the NALC will provide a roster of eligible clergy, assist in the calling process, and provide for ordination and installation of pastors. The NALC will also provide a process for discipline of its pastors and congregations, working through the bishop, regional pastors/deans, and in conjunction with a Committee on Appeals.

VI. Concluding Thoughts

The principles and guidelines set forth in this document for the NALC and Lutheran CORE are intended to provide for their initial organization and structure. The guidelines are provisional. They serve to provide immediate structure and organization and give direction to future changes. The governing principles are intended to remain constant, insofar as they support the basic identity of each respective group.

It is the hope and prayer of the Vision and Planning group that working together across church bodies and sharing resources from WordAlone and other orthodox organizations, we will begin to see a reconfiguration of Lutheranism in North America, to the glory of Christ Jesus.

Appendix A: The Common Confession

The Common Confession

(The faith statement of Lutheran CORE. Adopted: November 2005)

CC1) The Lord Jesus Christ

We are people who believe and confess our faith in the Triune God -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We trust and believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

CC2) The Gospel of Salvation

We believe and confess that all human beings are sinners, and that sinners are redeemed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God alone justifies human beings by faith in Christ — a faith that God creates through the message of the Gospel. As ambassadors for Christ, God uses us to speak his Word and build his kingdom.

CC3) The Authority of Scripture

We believe and confess that the Bible is God's revealed Word to us, spoken in Law and Gospel. The Bible is the final authority for us in all matters of our faith and life.

CC4) A Common Confession of Faith

We accept and uphold that the Lutheran Confessions reliably guide us as faithful interpretations of Scripture, and that we share a unity and fellowship in faith with others among whom the Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached and the sacraments are administered in accordance with the Gospel.

CC5) The Priesthood of All Believers

We believe and confess that the Holy Spirit makes all who believe in Jesus Christ to be priests for service to others in Jesus' name, and that God desires to make use of the spiritual gifts he has given through the priesthood of all believers.

CC6) Marriage and Family

We believe and confess that the marriage of male and female is an institution created and blessed by God. From marriage, God forms families to serve as the building blocks of all human civilization and community. We teach and practice that sexual activity belongs exclusively within the biblical boundaries of a faithful marriage between one man and one woman.

CC7) The Mission and Ministry of the Congregation

We believe and confess that the church is the assembly of believers called and gathered by God around Word and Sacrament, and that the mission and ministry of the church is carried out within the context of individual congregations, which are able to work together locally and globally.

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