

CONGREGATIONAL ACTIONS IN THE EAST CENTRAL SYNOD

Since the Churchwide Assembly of this past August a few congregations and leaders have acted to express their displeasure with the vote to allow the ordination of a same-sex individual in a long term, monogamous relationship. In essence, the congregations listed below began actions to sever their relationship with the ELCA.

The Constitution of our ELCA grants authority to congregations to decide their denominational affiliation. Congregations must observe the following order:

- #1) Take a first vote to leave the ELCA and gain a 2/3 majority to do so.
- #2) Consult with the Bishop over a period of at least 90 days.
- #3) Take a second vote to leave the ELCA and gain a 2/3 majority to do so.

Thus far, the following congregations have considered action or have taken actions to this end.

Zion, Manawa: (Yoked with First in Ogdensburg) Pastor supportive of ELCA.

By a vote of 71-8, the people of Zion voted to leave the ELCA on February 14, 2010. This was their second vote and removes Zion from the roster of the congregations of the ELCA. Zion has joined the roster of LCMC. (Lutheran Churches in Mission for Christ)The pastor will serve them for a short time and seek another Call in the ELCA.

First, Ogdensburg: (Yoked with Zion in Manawa). By a vote of 32-2, the people of First voted to leave the ELCA on February 14, 2010. This was their second vote and removes First from the roster of congregations of the ELCA. First has joined the roster of LCMC.

Ascension, Navarino: First vote failed by 2 votes. The pastor was not supportive of the ELCA. The pastor has resigned the Call and has resigned from the Roster of the ELCA. The people of Ascension have politely refused my offer to assist them at this time.

Northland, Iola: By a vote of 86-5, the people of Northland voted to leave the ELCA on January 10, 2010. This was their second vote and removes Northland from the rosters of congregations of the ELCA. The pastor has resigned from the roster of the ELCA. Pastor and congregation are on the roster of LCMC.

Immanuel, Zittau: Pastor supportive of ELCA. First vote called then rescinded. Held consultation with the bishop. The people of Immanuel are still in the discernment process.

Christus, Clintonville: By a vote of 162-28, the people of Christus voted to leave the ELCA on February 8, 2010. This was their second vote and removes Christus from the congregations of the ELCA. The pastor has resigned from the roster of the ELCA. Pastor and congregation are on the roster of LCMC.

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Grace, Oconto Falls: By a vote of 138-25, the people of Grace voted to leave the ELCA on February 14, 2010. This was their second vote and removes Grace from the roster of the congregations of the ELCA. Pastor resigned rather than seeking to influence this decision. Grace has joined the roster of LCMC.

Trinity, New London: First voted failed 77-76. Pastor supportive of ELCA. Those unhappy with ELCA and the failure of the vote will start a new church for LCMC. The people of Trinity are seeking to discern their future through small group discussions about mission and ministry.

St. Paul's, DuPont: (Yoked with St. Peter's Big Falls) By a vote of 28-5 the people of St. Paul's voted to leave the ELCA on March 23, 2010. This was their second vote and removes St. Paul's from the roster of congregations of the ELCA. The pastor has resigned the roster of the ELCA. Pastor and congregation are on the roster of LCMC.

St. Peter's, Big Falls: (Yoked with St. Paul's, DuPont) By a vote of 72-7 the people of St. Peter's voted to leave the ELCA on March 23, 2010. This was their second vote and removes St. Peter's from the roster of congregations of the ELCA. The pastor has resigned the roster of the ELCA. Pastor and congregation are on the roster of LCMC.

St. John's, Gillett: Pastor supportive of ELCA. By a vote of 90-36 the people of St. John's voted to leave the ELCA on March 21, 2010. This was their second vote and removes St. John's from the roster of congregations of the ELCA. The congregation has joined LCMC. The pastor will serve them for a short time until a new Call can be attained.

First English, Wausau: Pastor unsupportive of ELCA. A vote to affirm their relationship with the ELCA passed 163-53. Pastor has resigned the roster of the ELCA. Pastor and others considering developing an LCMC community.

As I have played a part in these discernments I offer these observations:

- ~For the most part, public conversations have been considerate, passionate and well attended.
- ~All have followed the appropriate constitutional process in the end.
- ~Several congregations (Zion, First, Ascension, Northland, Christus, St. Paul's, St. Peter's, St. John's) made no effort to contact me before they began their process. These congregations have allowed much advocacy for joining LCMC with little interest in lifting up what is good about the ELCA.
- ~Immanuel, Grace, Trinity and First English did reach out to me before they began official actions. These congregations sought and are seeking fairness in their discernment processes.
- ~Opinions are hard and fast. There seems to be very little room for dialogue and open discussion on the matters before us.

(3)

- ~Although I am saddened by their departure, allow me to thank God publicly for the fine leadership of the people and pastors who have served Grace Lutheran Church in Oconto Falls. They have made their decision over a 13 year time span. They have had 10 visits by their bishops. They have prayed, studied, agonized and have come to the conclusion that their faith testimony in Christ's name cannot be carried out in the ELCA. I have been honored in their presence, often invited into their community and always treated with love and respect.
- ~These votes have hurt many people. Even where the votes to leave were nearly unanimous friendships have been strained, feelings have been hurt and communities have been divided.
- ~These votes seem to have helped many people. By proclaiming a new allegiance and distancing themselves from the ELCA many people hope their missions will be revitalized.
- ~I have been coached, prayed for, supported, advised and accompanied by many. The wisdom of the many has guided me to approach this situation in the spirit of the father's love in the story of *The Prodigal Son*. (Luke 15:11-32) The right and the inheritance of affiliation is guaranteed by our ELCA Constitution. Though I am saddened to see these congregations leave it is my hope that we remain family in Christ with the possibility of warm and loving home-comings at some time in the future.
- ~The majority of our congregations are finding a faith-filled way to stay focused on mission in Jesus' name and are not letting this conversation get in the way of their work.

There have been many other visits and conversations taking place. There are yet more to come. I cannot tell you if this will lead to more votes to leave the ELCA or not at this time.

I commend pastors and congregations who are struggling to discern their future with care and patience. Most congregations would not change their carpet, pave their parking lot, change worship times or change the date of Confirmation as quickly as has been done by most above.

It is my hope and prayer that we can lean on one another for discernment in these interesting times. Again, whether we vote to stay or go, show concern or move along, express grief or joy, it is my fervent hope that our action will be guided by our zeal to carry others to Jesus.

~If we are busy carrying others to Jesus, we will be doing the right thing~

“Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only that which is useful for building up, As there is need, so that your words may give grace to all who hear...Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you.”

(Ephesians 4:29, 31-32)