

Richland Lutheran Church

Questions & Answers Regarding Council's Recommendation to Affiliate with Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC)

Q: Why do we not stay in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and work to effect change from within?

A: For over 10 years, reform groups within the ELCA (WordAlone, Call to Faithfulness, Article 7, etc.) were formed due to concerns about adherence to Lutheran Confessions and scriptural authority. CORE (Lutheran Coalition for Renewal) is a coalition of over 14 of these groups. These groups have concluded that working from within is no longer a viable option and are pursuing other paths, which means the likelihood that we could impact the decisions of the ELCA is slim. The best stewardship of the time and resources God has entrusted to us is to work for Christ and His glory rather than become bogged down debating differences of thought with other Christians.

Q: Could RLC affiliate with Lutheran CORE?

A: At this time Lutheran CORE is not an official denomination. Previously established as a network of ELCA like-minded congregations, it recently decided to become a new denomination. However, they will not be officially organized until August of 2010 at the earliest, and then, as is the case with all organizations, it will take time to mature. We have no idea what form the denomination will take, and Lutheran CORE has actually recommended that churches already in the process of leaving the ELCA affiliate with LCMC. The RLC Council determined RLC's needs were more immediate than the timeframe of Lutheran CORE's development. We did not feel it was wise to keep the congregation in limbo for an extended period of time, and we need to establish an affiliation in order to begin the call process for an associate pastor.

Q. What process did the RLC Church Council use to arrive at the recommendation that we affiliate with the LCMC?

A. The general process included:

- 1. Identifying and researching 29 different Lutheran denominations in the United States*
- 2. Identifying the characteristics and values important to the RLC church family—from our constitution, from the congregational feedback sessions, and from our long-range plan*
- 3. Developing a comparative analysis of the 29 different denominations with respect to the characteristics and values important to RLC*
- 4. Summarizing the comparative analysis in a special edition of the Preview and mailing this information to each member of the congregation*
- 5. Provided information sessions conducted by Pastor Martens about the different Lutheran denominations.*
- 6. Conducting a special meeting of the Congregation Council on January 19, 2010 to discuss, consider, and recommend a Lutheran affiliation.*
- 7. Announcing the results in the weekend services of January 23 and 24*
- 8. Following up with the mailing you are now reading*

But the process is not over. We are planning additional question and answer sessions. We will have a guest speaker from the LCMC at worship services February 13-14. And, prior to the vote on February 28, we will be having our Lenten prayer vigil where we will include prayers asking for God's guidance.

Q: Is the LCMC “non-denominational”?

A: No, not in the usual sense. The LCMC is unequivocally Lutheran and its statement of faith requires adherence to the Lutheran Confessions.

When the LCMC says it is not a denomination or calls itself “post-denominational,” it means that it does not have the kinds of institutional accoutrements one usually associates with denominations: hierarchy, social statements, control over congregational property and decisions, etc. Instead, LCMC sees itself as an association of congregations who are “free in Christ, accountable to one another, rooted in the scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, working together to fulfill Christ’s Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations.”

As an association, LCMC’s organizational structure is intentionally simple and “flat.” Operating with a Board of Trustees for oversight and a Board of Ministry for pastoral and theological integrity, they have only two full time and two part time employees. “Districts” are set up to help congregations to work together more effectively, and they may be geographical (there is a Northwest District) or ministry-related (like the Evangelical Renewal District). Congregations may join several districts or none at their own discretion.

Q: If the LCMC is primarily composed of churches which have left the ELCA, what are the main differences between the LCMC and ELCA?

A: The following are major differences:

- 1. LCMC has a more traditional, centrist stance on Biblical authority, doctrine, and morality.*
- 2. LCMC has a flat organizational structure, with minimal staff (two full time, two part time staff). The ELCA has a hierarchical structure with many staff.*
- 3. LCMC has a strong focus on missions. ELCA has a strong focus on social issues (social statements, political lobbying, etc.)*
- 4. In the LCMC, congregations have authority over their own life and ministry, including the right to ordain, call, and fire pastors. In the ELCA, many such issues are determined by synods, bishops, and/or the national church.*
- 5. In the LCMC, the process of calling a pastor is simpler and more open than in the ELCA.*
- 6. The LCMC governance policy has checks and balances. Any policy decision at the annual meeting must be ratified by two-thirds of the member congregations. The ELCA national assembly has final authority. (1,200 delegates make a decision for 4.6 million members)*
- 7. The ELCA has significant resources of its own to support the organization: seminaries, publishing house, etc. LCMC uses existing available resources to supplement the organization.*

Q: What would be the financial obligations of affiliation with the LCMC?

A: Each congregation decides what to contribute toward operational costs of LCMC. Congregations similar in size to RLC typically allocate \$5,000-\$10,000 of their budgets for this purpose. Congregations have complete discretion over benevolence designations and may give to whomever they choose.

Q: What will be the effect on RLC?

A: For most people there will not be a discernable effect. This will not result in any changes to worship, Sunday school or most other activities. We will have to revise our constitution and some of our policies. The call process has the potential for being faster. The congregation will have more discretion over benevolence. This is a time of looking forward to the opportunities for mission.

Q: Are there any nearby LCMC churches?

A: There are presently 8 LCMC churches in Washington, with the closest in Walla Walla. Several churches (including Connell) have taken their first vote, and more are scheduled to vote soon.

Q: Does the LCMC qualify as an official Lutheran body so we can retain ownership of our property?

A: Yes

Q: Will the LCMC have a claim on RLC property?

A: No, the LCMC constitution specifically prohibits this.

Q: How do we know we will not end up with a similar situation in a few years with LCMC?

A: LCMC has a process of checks and balances lacking in the ELCA. Any proposed change to the LCMC Constitution, By-Laws, or other governing documents must be approved at the annual meeting and then ratified by two-thirds of the member congregations. Then, if we still were not satisfied with the outcome, leaving the LCMC is as simple as notifying them that we wish to terminate our membership. We would not be required to go through a lengthy process to leave.

Q: LCMC seems to be growing rapidly. Will that growth cause problems?

*A: LCMC has added 70 churches since August 17, 2009, with more coming in each week. There is always a potential for growing pains, but there have been no major issues so far. Actually, from the Annual Conference in Fargo to our phone calls with *them*, we have found that the growth is exciting, exhilarating, and very positive. There are now over 12 congregations in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho – with more to be added.*

Q: If after time we decide LCMC is not a good fit for RLC, is it difficult to leave?

A: No. The LCMC By-Laws only require that a congregation terminate its relationship in accordance with the congregation's procedural guidance.

Q: RLC has an opening for an Associate Pastor. What is the LCMC call process?

A: The LCMC website has a list of rostered pastors seeking to be called. We can also post our vacancy on the LCMC website and take applications from anyone who wants to apply. This process has the potential of being much quicker than the ELCA process.

Q: What is the supply of pastors at this time?

A: At this time, the LCMC has a surplus of rostered ordained pastors. Churches within the LCMC that have recently gone through the call process have received a significant number of qualified applicants. There

seems to be a number of pastors in the ELCA that are not happy with the recent decisions, but do not want to leave their current position until they have another call.

Q: How do we know if we are getting a good candidate?

A: The Call Committee, with RLC support, will have to perform “due diligence” as we would in hiring any other staff member.

Q: Does the LCMC have a process for handling problems between a pastor and the congregation?

A: The LCMC Board of Ministry has been appointed to handle these situations, but it only intervenes if requested by the congregation. The congregation has the authority to hire and fire staff, including the pastor. The RLC Council has identified a need to revise existing policies to address such issues ensuring a prayerful, discerning process that is also in compliance with state and federal guidelines

Q: Does the LCMC have any seminaries?

A: No, but they have a working relationship with a number of established seminaries to establish a “Lutheran track.” Seminary relationships have been established with Bethel Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota; Faith Evangelical Seminary, Tacoma, WA; Institute of Lutheran Theology, Brookings, SD; Sioux Falls Seminary (formerly North American Baptist Seminary), Sioux Falls, SD; and The Master’s Institute Seminary, St. Paul, MN. There is a certification process comparable to colloquy in the ELCA. As a further guarantee of faithfulness to Lutheran teaching, theology students must study the Lutheran Confessions with a pastor mentor.

Q: Does LCMC have a publishing house?

A: No, but LCMC has a close association with Word Alone, which operates SOLA Publishing. It should also be noted that RLC has used materials from a variety of publishing houses for many years now.

Q: How does joining LCMC affect the called staff (Pastor Martens and Maria Frame)?

A: Pastor Martens would have to complete paper work and go through an interview with the Board of Ministry to become a Certified Ordained Pastor on the LCMC roster. LCMC does not have an Associate in Ministry (AIM) equivalency at this time, which is the commissioning Maria Frame holds. However, this would not affect her call as an AIM at RLC, and she would still remain Minister of Worship Arts.

Q: How will the pensions and benefits of our called staff be affected since they are provided through the ELCA Board of Pensions?

A: We have confirmed that we may continue to sponsor both Pastor Martens and Maria Frame through the Board of Pensions, even if we leave the ELCA. There will be no change to the pension and benefit programs in which they are currently enrolled.