

CORE Connection

News from Lutheran CORE

December 2011

Farewell words from Pr. Mark Chavez

As he leaves the directorship of Lutheran CORE to serve as the General Secretary of the North American Lutheran Church, Pr. Mark Chavez shares some final thoughts regarding Lutheran CORE and his ministry with the coalition.

I did not expect my last opportunity to write to you as Director of Lutheran CORE to happen so soon. I have thoroughly enjoyed serving the Coalition for Renewal and strongly affirm our mission of mobilizing confessing Lutherans for evangelical renewal.

I have been immensely blessed by meeting so many devoted disciples of Jesus in so many different places and settings. You live and serve in rural, suburban and urban settings. You are discipled in weekly gatherings that range from house churches to mega churches. Your worship ranges from charismatic to liturgical. You come from all nationalities and backgrounds.

In all of your diversity you are united by your confession that Jesus alone is Lord and Savior for all sinful humanity, and the whole Bible is the Word of God and it is the norm for all matters of faith and life.

You often make your confession in the face of intense opposition:

❖ Opposition from the dominant cultural worldview that denies there are absolute truths and that there is only one Savior, Jesus of Nazareth.

Your bold confession of the faith in the face of such intense opposition has impressed, humbled and inspired me.

❖ Opposition from denominational loyalists and leaders who substitute a socio-political gospel for the true Gospel of redemption. They claim to be inclusive and tolerant, but often marginalize and exclude those who will not proclaim the false gospel and pay for its proclamation.

❖ Opposition from congregational members and leaders more concerned about maintaining the unity of a congregation than boldly confessing the orthodox Christian faith.

❖ Opposition from relatives and close friends who question why you are so passionate and committed to your confession of the faith.

Your bold confession of the faith in the face of such intense opposition has impressed, humbled and inspired me.

Thank you for your prayers for the coalition, for our leaders and for me and my family. I cannot adequately express my deep gratitude for your care for us.

I am very thankful that my friend and colleague, Pr. Steve Shipman, has agreed to make such a significant shift in his ministry within the body of Christ and take over as director. He has been a key leader in our coalition for many years and has been very helpful in the transition this fall. Pray for him just as you have prayed for me and he, too, will be richly blessed.

Finally, I ask that you pray for all the confessional Lutherans in North America who are not aware of the denial of the Christian faith and the authority of Scripture. For every one who is aware there are at least ten who are not. Some will become aware in the coming months, but for others it may not happen for several years.

As you well know, when people do become aware they will experience shock, denial and anger. But far

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more devastating than those experiences will be despair and isolation. They will think they are all alone because no one else is talking about the crisis and they will despair of all hope for Lutheran churches in North America.

Pray for people as they become aware and reach out to them. Let them know they are not alone. Help them connect with confessional Lutherans across denominational lines.

These are my farewell words as your Director, but thankfully not a complete farewell. The NALC belongs to and works with Lutheran CORE. I look forward to seeing you at our joint events and working with you to make disciples of Christ here and abroad.

In Christ,

Mark



Rev. Mark Chavez

Advent Reflections from the Moderator

The season of Advent is upon us once again. The themes return to refresh us: waiting, watching, preparing, hoping, longing, judgment. There are others, too. Into a culture that waits for little, we reset both the church year and our spiritual clocks. I need this; we all do. I can wait for Christmas. It comes plenty soon.

Advent embraces so many real things of our lives...We face reality knowing there is One coming, who has already been here...We place our hope and fix our hearts on a promised future that is real.

We don't waste energy fighting the stores and moods of these days. We just quietly and steadily....wait. It's Advent and it's been this precious season long before Christmas was on the calendar.

Advent embraces so many real things of our lives. There is sin and brokenness everywhere. Advent is not surprised or overwhelmed. We face reality knowing there is One coming, who has already been here. He was born to die; He returns "to judge the living and the dead." We confess with others before us. We place our hope and fix our hearts on a promised future that is real.

We await His coming, as we work through the messiness and challenges of our lives. Our hope is

anchored, not in having everything right now, but in the "hope that does not disappoint, because God's love is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit."

As we look back to a previous Advent or two, we see the hand and work of God among us. These are not easy times for many Lutherans. Some have been through great times of stress and pain. Relationships keep realigning; we may have only seen the beginning. Advent is for us.

But the signs of life and hope and future are many. We have had the opportunity to support many in their struggles. We have not just been a negative voice about things happening. There is evangelism and witness, and we see new life springing up all over. Advent sustains us in the journey.

Our focus is on making disciples; we rejoice in the stories of people coming to faith in our churches and ministries. We hear stories of faithful people in many places working through transitions and change with great courage and grace. We live in forgiveness but not avoidance. Advent tells the truth.

We don't pretend that the ground of Lutheranism hasn't shifted and is still moving. When we are tempted to be overwhelmed or pull back, we know that the truth still matters and

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Advent Reflections

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Rev. Paul Ulring, Moderator

God is faithful and leading us forward. There is still so much to do. Lutheran orthodoxy

and Confessional faithfulness are worth the effort and challenge. Advent reminds us of the long haul of faith.

At this holy time, I greet you on behalf of the CORE Steering Committee and other leaders who make our ministry and organization move forward. We are grateful for those who support and encourage and join us in linking Lutherans all over in the challenge to “keep the faith” and “Lift High the Cross”. We look forward to the many opportunities and challenges of the year ahead. We wait together, not alone. Jesus Christ came, Jesus comes, and He will come again. Advent tells us this truth.

—Pr. Paul Ulring is moderator for Lutheran CORE and serves as senior pastor of Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Columbus, Ohio.

2012 DISCIPLESHIP AND EVANGELIZATION EVENTS

Mark your calendars for these exciting discipleship and evangelization events to be held in the new year!

JANUARY 27-28. Florida and Caribbean Area, Pastor Eddy Perez (305-445-0626, pastoredyperez@yahoo.com) is representing the Hispanic Lutheran Churches, Pastor Rebecca Heber (407-333-2087, w.c.heber@att.net) the Florida NALC/CORE Churches, and Pastor Chris Magnell, (magnell@gmail.com) the LCMC Churches.

FEBRUARY 17-18. Houston, Texas, Pastor Claude Villemaire, St. Paul's Lutheran (281-341-7500, stpaulrosenberg@sbcglobal.net), and Pastor Norm Albertson, Peace Lutheran, (281-342-8800, Peace_lutheran@sbcglobal.net). (Note: Bishop John Bradosky will be the main presenter here.)

FEBRUARY 24-25. Phoenix, Arizona, Pastor Glenn Zorb, Mountain View Lutheran, (480-893-2579, gzorb@mvlutheran.org).

TO BE ANNOUNCED. Pontiac, Illinois, Pastors Dieter and Heidi Punt, First Lutheran, (815-844-3695, punt@firstlutheranpontiac.org).

MAY 18-19. Western Pennsylvania, Pastor Mark Werner, St. Paul's Lutheran in Latrobe (724-423-2590, revmaw@wpa.net).

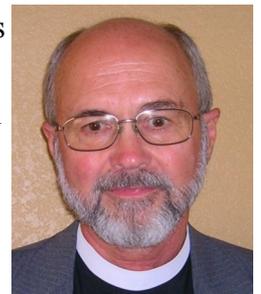
JUNE 1-2 Des Moines, Iowa at Pastor Mike Foss' congregation, St. Mark's Lutheran. Contact person is Pastor Ken Kimball working with pastors in Iowa (712-249-2355, pastordam@iowatelecom.net).

OCTOBER 26-27. Mansfield, Ohio, Pastor Paul Larson, First English Evangelical Lutheran, (419-522-0662, plarson001@neo.rr.com).

NOVEMBER 16-17. Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania (Eastern Pennsylvania), Pastor Brett Jenkins, Christ Hamilton United Lutheran (570-992-4085, pastorjenkinssts@gmail.com).



Please note: Pr. Steve Shipman will begin as the new director of Lutheran CORE on January 1, 2012. To contact Pr. Shipman, email him at the following email address: sshipman@lutherancore.org



Pr. W. Stevens Shipman

Lutherans Reform! — South Central Pennsylvania

By Pr. Dennis Nelson

On Monday evening, August 8, the night before the 2011 Lutheran CORE Convocation, representatives from 15 of the renewal movements that are a part of Lutheran CORE met on the campus of Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Hilliard, Ohio. All who attended felt that it was a great time of getting acquainted and encouraging one another. Articles in upcoming issues of the *CORE Connection* newsletter will introduce these various partner renewal movements.

Back in 2003 about a dozen people—most of them ELCA pastors within the Lower Susquehanna Synod—began to meet on a regular basis because of their concerns about the direction of the ELCA was taking. Eventually they named their group Lutherans Reform! At first they worked within ELCA structure, introducing resolutions and seeking to influence elections. Even after the August 2009 Churchwide Assembly, which changed ELCA policy changes policy regarding rostering people in same-gender relationships, they sponsored a resolution asking that the policy change be revisited. Their efforts were in vain.

They continued to help confessional people, pastors, and congregations find each other and prepare for possible changes in ELCA procedure and policy regarding dual rostering and disaffiliation.

For a while they felt they were floundering. Several pastors and congregations had left the ELCA and joined either LCMC or NALC. They were no longer just ELCA people, but a mixed group. They wondered what they should do now. In the spring of 2011 they began talking about whether to disband.

They identified their primary purposes as encouraging and teaching how to share the good news, providing mutual support, and equipping lay people in being able to give the reason for their faith, as well as fellowship, prayer, and worship.

The vote on whether to disband was postponed until September. During the summer members engaged in conversation. Several attended the CORE and NALC Convocations and the Theological Conference in August.

At their September 17, 2011, meeting they decided work still needed to be done. They redefined themselves not as a group within the ELCA, but as “a Pan-Lutheran Coalition for Confessional Renewal in South Central Pennsylvania.” They identified their primary purposes as encouraging and teaching how to share the good news, providing mutual support, and equipping lay people to give the reason for their faith,

as well as fellowship, prayer, and worship rather than introducing memorials or resolutions to synod and churchwide assemblies.

David Hefner, president of Lutherans Reform! and pastor of Reformation Lutheran Church near Lancaster, Pennsylvania, said, “We decided to continue. We need the support, and we need to find ways to help lay people know what is going on. Those who are still in the fight in the ELCA need our support. There is still a reason to network and stay in touch.” As an NALC pastor serving an NALC congregation, he added, “The ELCA is not my fight any more, but I can still help and support pastors in the ELCA.”

Pastor Hefner views Lutheran CORE as a “North American umbrella for renewing movements.” He added, “We are no longer just ELCA. It is much bigger than that now. We have needed to stop being anti-ELCA and start being for what we are for.”

He concluded by saying, “We are in this transition period.” While not sure how long the transition phase will last, Hefner added, “It has been a good time to be the church. The struggle has enlivened us.”

Rev. Dennis Nelson serves as pastor of Christ Lutheran Church in West Covina, California, and as a Lutheran CORE Steering Committee member. .

Why I am a Member of Lutheran CORE

By Pastor Cori Johnson

I first found Lutheran CORE when Lutheran CORE found me. I had been serving on the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality and dissented from “signing off” on the social statement and ministry standards document, along with Bishop Carol Hendrix and Pastor Scott Suskovic.

After issuing our dissenting position, I was contacted by Bishop Paull Spring about serving on the Advisory Council of Lutheran CORE. I prayed about it and agreed wholeheartedly. Lutheran CORE resonated with me at a core level! The common confessions of Lutheran CORE are my convictions, cultivated through the Word of God.

Lutheran CORE is an answer to prayer for me and such a true God-send. These are not easy times for theologically orthodox Lutherans in the ELCA. It can be a lonely place to hold the positions we hold precious in the common confessions. Each one of those confessions is under assault by the leadership of the ELCA. It can be hard to read the ELCA news releases or articles in *The Lutheran* magazine and realize that you can't assent to any of them. I find myself in that position more often than not. I rarely share any of the positions on issues taken by the leadership of the ELCA.

In contrast to this, I appreciate everything that Lutheran CORE has to offer me as an orthodox Lutheran pastor who remains in the ELCA for the foreseeable future. The theological conferences, convocations, and local partner reform movement events are places where I can go to learn from our best and brightest.

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They are easily the very best continuing education events I have done in my eight years as a pastor. I find myself leaving them feeling encouraged in my faith and ministry! Through these events, I am reminded that I am not the only one left in the ELCA who shares the common confessions. I have made lifelong connections with members of Lutheran CORE, particularly those who were at CWA 2009, who I affectionately refer to as my “battle brothers.” And, since I have been a pretty outspoken opponent to the theological drift of the ELCA, I find safety in numbers in Lutheran CORE!



Pr. Cori Johnson

I love the congregations I serve very much. They are full of faithful Christians who trust the Word of God. I am privileged to serve in my home synod – the Northern Great Lakes Synod – under an excellent bishop. In my synod, I serve as the chair of the Evangelism Committee and in a few other leadership roles. I believe we are still doing strong, faithful work in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and northern Wisconsin. Lutheran CORE and my commitment to my local synod are the two things that make it possible for me to remain in the ELCA. But the members of Lutheran CORE are my theological family. Lutheran CORE is my theological home.

Pr. Cori Johnson serves St. Stephens and Gethsemene Lutheran Churches in Michigan. She is also a member of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee.

One Congregation's Journey: Leaving the ELCA

By Pastor Don Brandt

It was by far my most difficult and painful experience as a parish pastor. And I say that as someone who has been engaged in full-time ministry for thirty-five years!

This was such a new experience for me. Part of the frustration I felt was my sense of helplessness. My denomination's new policy changes set the agenda for this entire process. Here I was, pastor at Our Savior's Lutheran for 15 conflict-free years, suddenly having to lead the congregation through this controversy.

In addition, the "tone" of this controversy was set more by the politics and partisanship of our secular culture than by our faith, the traditions of the Church, or Scripture. Our constant challenge was this: To try and frame this debate in ways that minimized the "heat" and maximized the "light."

Pastors and lay leaders, I learned, should never underestimate this challenge: To repeatedly stress that this controversy is ultimately about the centrality of Scripture in the life of Christ's church. However, our secular culture—including the news media and the entertainment industry—speaks in support of views similar to the new ELCA policies. In addition, more liberal politicians, almost without exception, support these types of changes. (And I'm not using the word

"liberal" in a pejorative sense; I happen to be a life-long Democrat.) Your best response to these realities, again, is to insist that the issue here is not about political or civil rights. The issue, to put it concisely, is whether our denomination's expectations for clergy should be consistent with Scriptural standards and values. A related issue is whether a denomination can still claim to base its teachings on Scripture when not even its expectations for clergy reflect biblical principles.

Another challenge: I experienced an overwhelming sense of isolation in my synod here in Oregon. Out of more than 100 congregations, only five other churches have even had a vote to leave, and three of those votes failed. So here I was in the North Pacific "wilderness," desperate for information and advice. I knew this would be the hardest thing I had ever faced as a pastor. I spent countless hours "surfing the web," checking out congregational and synodical websites across the country. I needed to learn from those who had gone ahead of me, but there was no one source available for the advice I sought.

I was able to take some comfort by realizing how much worse it could have been. I could be in a relatively new call, not having had time to earn the trust of my parishioners. I could have had a divided

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staff, but fortunately my co-pastor and I were of one mind on this. I could be serving a congregation that was already conflicted. I could have been new to the ordained ministry, not yet confident enough to lead the congregation through a "minefield" like this.

However, realizing how much worse this could have been also breaks my heart. Why? Because it's a reminder of just how unprecedented and tragic this has been for pastors and lay people in literally hundreds of ELCA congregations. And when I think of that I get angry. My anger is directed toward many of those in the ELCA who, over the last 15 years, decided it was appropriate to allow our denomination to be defined by a single, incredibly controversial social issue. Furthermore, I'm incensed that they pushed

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through these policy changes without any Scriptural justification, knowing that a majority of ELCA members nationwide opposed them.

This article is my attempt to provide a resource for pastors and lay leaders who have not yet gone

A related issue is whether a denomination can still claim to base its teachings on Scripture when not even its expectations for clergy reflect biblical principles.

through this process, or who have at least not completed it. It is important to acknowledge, up front, that there is no single blueprint for how this should be done. Every congregation and ministry setting is unique. However, as we struggled through this painful process, I found it extremely helpful to learn from those who had “gone before” us.

Before getting into the details of my congregation's story, there is the first, essential question you need to ask as a pastor or congregational leader: Is your congregation—practically speaking—even in a position to *achieve* two, two-thirds votes to leave the ELCA? And before you answer this question, you need to understand 1) how difficult the current ELCA constitution has made it for congregations to leave; and 2)

that the ELCA—in August, 2011—voted to make exiting the denomination *even more difficult*. (Consult the Lutheran CORE September/October 2011 newsletter regarding the new requirements.)

Let's suppose you doubt that your congregation can overcome the hurdles our relatively hierarchical denomination has put before you. If that is the case you might need to decide—at least for the short term—to remain in the ELCA. And this decision might be based on your conviction that this is the only way for your congregation to remain intact.

What if you're not sure regarding the views of your members? Then conduct a surprise **Sunday-morning survey** of your adults eighteen years of age and older. Make it short and anonymous. Take it during announcements; just two questions on a half-sheet bulletin insert. The questions are whether they agree, disagree, or are undecided about the two ELCA policy changes. Briefly describe each policy change on your “ballot.” No editorial comment, either from the pulpit or written on the survey. Your survey result should give you enough information—at least regarding the views of your active members—for either moving forward, or deciding that your congregation is simply too divided to address this.

In my congregation this worship survey was our first step in September, 2009. The survey indicated that two-thirds of the adult worshipers that day believed the ELCA was in error, and one-third agreed with the new policies. Based on those results, and the views my co-pastor and I shared regarding this controversy, I came to an important conclusion: Our best hope of remaining intact as a congregation was to leave the ELCA. That conclusion led to a very specific goal: To start with the two-thirds who felt the ELCA was in error and, over time, build that into an even more overwhelming majority in support of actually leaving the ELCA. Why an overwhelming majority? Because before we scheduled a formal congregational vote to leave I wanted to be confident that at least 80% would be in support. Why 80%? Partly to leave room for error, and because I didn't want the outcome of a second vote 90 days later to be in doubt.

So that was the task before me, my co-pastor, and the Church Council: To build an overwhelming majority in support of a resolution to end our affiliation with the ELCA. We pursued this goal, first of all, as a matter of personal conscience. But we also pursued this goal because we understood that, based on the views already held by a majority of our members (many of whom were

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quite angry with the ELCA leadership), leaving the ELCA was the best hope for our congregation to remain vital and intact.

With the initial survey results in we moved on to **congregational forums** where everyone could “speak their mind” on these issues. Not an enjoyable process, but necessary. We built into these forums (offered multiple times) both large-group and small-group discussion

...leaving the ELCA was the best hope for our congregation to remain vital and intact.

time. We were careful, with the discussion questions, not to prejudice the dialogue. The pastors attended these forums but made no presentations. We didn't even participate in the discussions, knowing this would have discouraged some from speaking up. We included, as part of these forums, another survey regarding the views of participants. (Members were asked to only attend one of the forums.) These survey results confirmed the results of our previous worship survey. The worst part of these forums, in retrospect, was that a few of our traditionalists, in small-group discussions, apparently made remarks that were perceived as “anti-gay.” To avoid this I would suggest that the forum leader (or perhaps the

pastor) make clear, before discussion begins, that these kinds of comments are inappropriate. This debate needs to be framed by the issue of the centrality of Scripture. I have found that the most *non*-traditionalists tend to focus on the issue of sexuality. However, those with the more traditional view need to stay focused on the role Scripture should play in the life and faith of the Body of Christ.

Our next step was **Bible studies** taught by the pastors. These, again, were offered on multiple occasions. These classes focused on Scripture's views regarding a) sexuality, b) marriage, and c) expectations for church leaders. Needless to say, we left time for questions and discussion at these classes.

The first time we asked our congregation to vote was when we addressed the issue of **ending our financial support of the ELCA**. This resolution, at our annual meeting, included giving members who disagreed with this decision the option of earmarking their individual accounts so the usual percentage of their offerings would still be passed on to the Synod. (They only had to notify our bookkeeper and she would do the rest.) The resolution was that the rest of our congregation's previous support for the ELCA would now be divided between Lutheran World Relief and the ELCA's Disaster Relief Fund. This resolu-

tion, after a long, somewhat acrimonious discussion, passed with 83% in support.

The preceding actions were accomplished within five months of the ELCA policy changes. Up to this point we had kept all our traditionalists except one couple who was not willing to wait. On the non-traditional side we lost five couples.

We now, at this point, took our time before taking any further action. However, we made it clear to our traditionalists that we would eventually be considering the question of our affiliation with the ELCA.

The next formal, organized step was to schedule a thorough, confidential, **survey by mail** of our entire membership. They would be asked a single question: Would they support or oppose a formal resolution to end our congregation's relationship with the ELCA? Once we set the date for mailing out this survey (informing the congregation, of course), we began a campaign to prepare for that survey. Our “campaign” was primarily a series of articles addressing every conceivable aspect of the issues involved. (*Any of these articles are available by emailing Pr. Brandt.*)

The actual survey we eventually mailed was, almost word-for-word, the formal resolution on which we

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would eventually be voting. Why? Because the purpose for the survey was to obtain an accurate “read” regarding how our members would vote at a future congregational meeting. There was an individual survey mailed for every adult member in a given household. Each of those surveys came with a separate “secrecy” envelope as well. They did not sign their survey, but did sign the envelope that the survey was inserted into. Each of these envelopes had a sticker with the typed name of that member. We assured our people that we would check the signed return envelope with the name on the stick-

Important steps to any vote of disaffiliation:

- ❖ Sunday morning survey
- ❖ Congregational forums
- ❖ Bible studies
- ❖ Redirecting benevolence
- ❖ Survey by mail
- ❖ Plan for the vote

er, then remove the (unsigned) surveys from the envelope, and only later would we count the survey responses. This way our members were confident we were not keeping any lists regarding how a given member was voting.

As part of this survey we announced our intent to include, in any future, formal resolution, this statement: That “our congregation will strive to include all people, including gay and lesbian persons, in the life and ministry of our church.” We did this so our people would know that our intent was never to exclude anyone from our congregation’s life and ministry.

We had a very high level of participation in this survey. And we were confident that both “sides” on this issue were equally motivated to participate. They knew the results would determine whether we would go ahead with a formal vote. (We never indicated—in advance—what kind of response would be needed before proceeding with this vote.) The results were that 82% of our respondents indicated they would support a future resolution to leave the ELCA; 17% that they would oppose such a resolution.

We immediately announced the results to the congregation. The Council then took about three weeks to decide whether to recommend scheduling a congregational meeting. That Council decision was, ultimately, to go ahead and call such a meeting. The vote was thirteen to one.

Now began our **planning for the congregational vote.**



Our Savior Lutheran Church in Salem, Oregon.

Note: Since August, 2009, the most helpful advice and support I received was from pastors and lay leaders who had already been through this. If your congregation is going through this process, and you have any questions, don't hesitate to E-mail me at the following address: DonB@oursaviorssalem.org

In the next issue of CORE Connection, Pr. Brandt will recount the preparations for his congregation's votes and the final results.

New demographic change impacts congregational outreach

Sometimes demographic trends can have a significant impact on congregational outreach. One such trend is the sharp decrease in the number of American households currently moving in a given year. So consider this: Per capita, fewer Americans are changing their addresses than at any time in the last sixty-five years! That's right. Due to the current economy we have a lower percentage of Americans moving than at any time since World War II! And while this means fewer of your members are moving away, it also means there are fewer new residents moving to your town or city. Unlike just five years ago, there are now very few American communities experiencing significant population growth.

What are the implications of this when it comes to your congregation's evangelistic outreach? This means an overwhelming percentage of your community residents have lived at their current address for an extended period of time. And that means they are that much less likely to be looking ("shopping?") for a new church.

Considering this new demographic reality, congregations must now, more than ever, focus on *friendship evangelism*. In other words ministry programs—in and of themselves—are less likely to attract long-time community residents. It's time to

get "back to the basics" when it comes to evangelism. Now, more than ever, we need to motivate our members to *invite their friends and acquaintances*. And with *Lutherans* this is no small challenge!

So what kind of ministry priorities will increase the odds your members

Pursuing Great Commission Evangelism in Your Congregation

will invite someone they know to "check out" your church?

1. Sunday-morning **worship hospitality** is key. Your members must be reasonably confident that if they invite (and bring) a friend to worship he/she will be warmly received by your members. So everything you can do to create a hospitable environment on Sunday morning increases the odds your people will be intentional about inviting their friends to attend.

2. Sunday-morning **worship content** also needs to be visitor-friendly. You must do everything possible to insure a quality worship experience. This includes relevant

sermon messages, participatory (and quality) music, and a worship liturgy that is not overly complex.

3. **Congregational events** that are **planned with visitors in mind**. Let's face it: Many unchurched people will never worship with us unless they have first had a positive experience at one of our congregational events. This being the case, more of our events should be planned with this question in mind: "Is this the kind of event our members would be comfortable bringing a friend to?" Once you've planned that kind of event announce on Sunday mornings that visitors will be expected, that they *will* have a positive experience, and that members should definitely *bring friends!* And don't forget *that your community service activities* are also ideal opportunities for members to invite friends. (One idea: What about marriage classes and/or retreats? Many unchurched couples recognize their need for marriage enrichment and renewal. They might respond favorably to an invitation from one of your couples.)

4. Closely related to number "3", consider congregational **events for families with children**. These are especially effective in motivating members to invite unchurched friends. Nesting-stage parents

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A New Demographic

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(married *and* single) have a special bond with friends in the same life stage. As a result, your nesting-stage members are ideal ambassadors for your congregation. Often they are willing to extend an invitation to their friends raising children. (Another idea: For mid-sized and larger congregations why not offer an extra Christmas Eve service specifically for children and their parents? Make sure every element of this service is child-friendly. Advertise this to the community and you will probably have Christmas Eve worshipers who otherwise would not be worshipping at your church.)

5. And finally, regularly **remind your members** to look for opportunities **to invite** their friends to either worship or a specific congregational activity. This emphasis needs to become a part of your congregation's DNA. Lutherans, in particular, need to be reminded of the importance of *friendship evangelism*.

While some of your members probably have the gift for personal evangelism, the majority need the collective witness of your congregation to inspire and motivate them as ambassadors for Christ. They might feel ill-equipped to verbally witness to their friends, but they *can* be motivated to extend an invitation to visit your church or participate in a well-planned congregational activity.

MINISTRY PRIORITIES FOR THE NEW DEMOGRAPHIC

1. Worship hospitality
2. Worship content
3. Congregational events planned with visitors in mind
4. Events for families with children
5. Friendship evangelism and invitations to worship



Don Brandt is pastor of Our Savior Lutheran Church (NALC) in Salem, Oregon, and welcomes comments at donb@oursaviorsalem.org



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News from Lutheran CORE

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