

# Augsburg Lutheran Churches

*--A Lifeboat for Confessing Lutherans*

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Lutheran CORE Visionary Team

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Thank you for the work you are doing in gathering a vision for the reconfiguration of Lutheranism in North America. Thank you for inviting Augsburg Lutheran Churches (ALC) to be one of those "gathered" visions.

Augsburg Lutheran Churches came into being about ten years ago in the early days of Word Alone and has been recognized as a Lutheran "church body." It has been a "lifeboat" for theologians of the cross, fans of the Heidelberg Disputations, proponents of the Bondage of the Will, and preachers of Christ categorically. "Confessors" in such a mix did not "mix well" with some others in Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) so we ended our status as a district of the LCMC association.

I, Timothy J. Swenson, have been actively opposing the ELCA's "erroneous" decisions since 1997. I've been a member of Word Alone since its inception. I was drawn to Augsburg since the beginning. My participation has had varying degrees of intensity as time and resources warranted. I've been acting as Doctrine and Church Relations chair for Augsburg since 2007. My call is to Wilmington and Trinity Lutheran Churches (ELCA) of Arnegard and Alexander, North Dakota, respectively--two rural community congregations.

Augsburg Lutheran Churches' contribution to the gathering of visions for the reconfiguration of Lutheranism in North America has three parts: 1) Three theological statements which ALC believes present the core of its Lutheran witness; 2) Three Augsburg achievements which are "offered" to Lutheran CORE for however they may be of use; and, 3) Three "structural" hopes for the shape of the coming configuration.

1) Three theological statements presenting the core of its Lutheran witness

- The Augsburg Statement of Faith (ALC Constitution -- Article 2) is unique in that it a) includes the doctrine of justification as the Lutheran proposal of dogma to the church catholic; b) incorporates the five exclusive particles--the "*solas*"--as key affirmations of the Lutheran witness; and, c) clearly distinguishes between the material and formal content of the statement.
  - The Ministry of Word and Sacraments (a teaching document of Augsburg Lutheran Churches) which sets forth this ministry's a) content; b) ministers; c) public office; and d) "partnership" with the baptized.
  - Standards for Those Called to the Public Ministry of Word and Sacrament. These standards are derived from the promises a candidate makes at ordination--the public promises and obligations which distinguish the public office holders from the other baptized of the congregation.
- 2) Three Augsburg "achievements offered to Lutheran CORE for however they may be of use:
- An already existing corporation a) recognized as a church body; and b) possessing a pension and medical plan
  - An already existing 501c(3) group tax exemption
  - An "in place" status as an Endorsing Agent for Chaplains in the United States military.
- 3) Three "structural" hopes for the shape of the coming configuration:
- As confessors in a "lifeboat" community we've traveled with little ecclesiastical baggage and so would relish a configuration which clearly separated legislative and executive authority from that of proclamation; that is, distinguishing and distancing the power of the sword from that of the spirit. A structure which provided administrative support--e.g. insurance and pension, logistics and planning, referral and organization, and adjudication--while providing for the voluntary organization of congregations and clergy into various ecclesiastical styles would be preferred.
  - If the coming configuration is structured as a "church" that it would allow for and provide support for various conventicle groups--voluntary associations in which members "covenant" with one another for mutual accountability and support--groups like the Society of the Holy Trinity; or like ALC's "fellowship of preachers."
  - Whatever structure is to come, Augsburg hopes the decision-making can be brought as close to the "people in the pews" as possible and that all decisions would be subject to constitutional oversight. We in the ELCA, and in the various "lifeboats" fleeing it, have witnessed what results from a legislative process removed and distant from the people. With today's technology we could come very close to direct democracy. Momentous legislative decisions could be referred to the synods, or to the congregations, or to the members--or even all three. Such "anchors" of oversight in the people and in the constitution would hold the overly ambitious in check.

As previously stated, Augsburg Lutheran Churches is grateful to be participating in this gathering of visions for the reconfiguration of Lutheranism in North America. Considering

ourselves a "lifeboat for confessing Lutherans" reflects our living with the hope that the "ship" of the Lutheran Church in North America would "repent and confess." ALC's sojourn as a lifeboat would then be over and we could join those brothers and sisters in Christ as Lutheran confessors. That is a day I eagerly anticipate!

Respectfully Submitted,

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