

A Quick Update on Spirit of Joy + Changes within the ELCA and Options like Lutheran CORE and LCMC

October 16, 2009 + Pastor Ed Thomas

In August voting actions within our barely 20-year-old Evangelical Lutheran Church in America rejected clear teachings of the scriptures, moved away from traditional teachings about marriage and family, and pulled us away from the teachings and practices of most Christians in the world – including the Orthodox, Catholics, Evangelicals, most Protestants, and the vast majority of Lutherans worldwide.¹

In response, Spirit of Joy has ...

1. Stayed consistent with Spirit of Joy's teachings on these issues for the last five years. We've held congregational forums and discussed this with each of our new member classes.
2. Held a congregational forum / open council meeting.
3. Within the congregational forum, the council responded to the strong consensus within that meeting by voting unanimously to ...
 - A. Work with other concerned Lutherans to determine options in how to respond to our concerns over these issues.
 - B. Withhold benevolence dollars to the ELCA until our response is determined.

What has council done so far?

1. Near the end of September, 1200 people from 39 states and a few foreign countries gathered for a Lutheran CORE convention in Indianapolis. CORE stands for Coalition for Renewal. Spirit of Joy sent three representatives – Pastor Ed Thomas, John Hejka, and Lissa Roseman. CORE's goal is to form a gathering point – for ideas, resources, support, and actions – for Biblical-based (Orthodox) Lutherans. The atmosphere of this event was joyful, committed, and unified. It wasn't *against* issues, people, or denominations; it was positively *for* Christ and his Word.

CORE provides strength (and support) in numbers. Many within CORE are advocating staying and working within the ELCA. Acknowledging that we've worked on this for 15 years, others advocate leaving and joining a new Lutheran body where ministry – rather than social politics – is the primary focus of the denomination.

The council is still researching options, but affiliating with CORE is an immediate step we could take even before making decisions regarding long-term ELCA allegiance.

2. Just this past Monday – October 12 – ten Spirit of Joy staff members, council members, and ministry leaders went to Salisbury for a LASTing WORD conference (it stands for Lutherans Affirming Scriptural Truth).

Four hundred and fifty North Carolina Lutherans – representing dozens of North Carolina Lutheran congregations – attended the LASTing WORD meeting. Gatherings like this are happening all across the nation.

The keynote speaker for the evening was the representative of a 10-year-old Lutheran denomination that has been growing for years as the ELCA has strayed farther and farther from scripture. LCMC (Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ) is expecting to grow exponentially in the next few years. One option – not at all determined yet – is for Spirit of Joy, many Lutheran Congregations in the Charlotte area, and dozens of congregations throughout North Carolina, and hundreds throughout North America is to join LCMC.

3. We are asking you to remain patient – and come talk to us – as we are still in an information gathering mode. We don't want to knee-jerk and move too fast. Whatever we do, we want to do it once and right.
4. We are still planning to give our benevolence to ministries outside of Spirit of Joy, but until we know where God is calling us, we are holding them in escrow.
5. We are praying for our North Carolina Synod Bishop, Leonard Bolick. He's a devote man who didn't vote for this. My understanding in personal conversations with him is that he feels God's calling him is help congregations stay ... or move ... and stay healthy ... and do whatever they feel God is calling them to do.
6. We are praying for Lutheran congregations across America. Spirit of Joy – perhaps because we've been proactive in forums and conversations over the years – is mostly united on this topic. Other congregations are being torn apart because the divide is wide and painful. Please pray for them.
7. Indeed, keep praying. Prayer must be our first, last, and continual step through this process. Please join our whole church in prayer – for unity, purpose, and growth in mission.

In Christ's Love,

Pastor Ed

¹In approving the blessing of same sex marriages and the ordination of practicing homosexuals, the ELCA voted against the clear teachings of scripture on both homosexuality and marriage.