



September 18, 2012

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

As we promised at our Convocation, you are receiving the contents of this information packet for your consideration during congregational discussion and decisions in the ratification process regarding the resolution to pursue application for full membership in the Lutheran World Federation.

During the planning process to form the North American Lutheran Church it was the hope of those charged with this important task that our polity would express the central importance of both the congregation as well as our connection to the universal church. The planners envisioned a church body with the primary focus for decision making, mission and ministry residing in the local congregation, while also pursuing participation in structures that express our identity as part of the universal Christian community.

Even though we have had to separate ourselves from predecessor bodies on the basis of the authority and historic interpretation of the scriptures and our confessional understandings, the North American Lutheran Church remains committed to expressing the unity of the Church as Jesus expresses it in the Gospel of John. (See John 17: 11-23)

In addition, our Confessional documents begin with a firm commitment and conviction that the purpose of our witness is to produce true Christian concord. That “these matters may be settled and brought back to one simple truth and Christian concord, that for the future one pure and true religion may be embraced and maintained by us, that as we all are under one Christ and do battle under Him, so we may be able also to live in unity and concord in the one Christian Church.” (The Augsburg Confession, Preface to the Emperor Charles V)

As a result of these understandings, our constitution mandates our ecumenical involvement:

Section 3.04: To carry out its witness to the world, the Church structures itself both as congregations and in wider and more universal bodies. The NALC derives its character and polity both from the sanction of its congregations and from its nature as a manifestation of the universal assembly of all believers. The NALC understands itself to be within the one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

Section 13.01: Led by the Bishop as chief ecumenical officer, the NALC shall participate in inter-Lutheran, ecumenical, and inter-religious relationships as a part of its ministry and mission. These relationships may vary from one another in character on a case-by-case basis.

These relationships expand our perspective to be inclusive of “all nations” as the context for the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our involvement gives us the opportunity for encouraging others even as we receive encouragement from them, that the Body of Christ might be built up and strengthened in our witness to the world.

We have reached this point not because our membership in Lutheran World Federation is an agenda that stems from my role as your Bishop. Instead, I have pursued this path because the recommendation to do so was first raised in our Constituting Convocation in 2010. In the next Convocation the motion to pursue application for membership in LWF passed without dissent. In our most recent Convocation it was approved by slightly more than the required two-thirds majority.

In conversations with the LWF membership representative assigned to us, we were clear in describing the fact that we are a Lutheran body composed mainly of congregations that had separated from the ELCA. We also told the representative that we anticipated other congregations from Canada would also be joining us, separating from the ELCIC. In those discussions we spoke openly about the differences that created this divide. We raised the issue of the LWF constitution that asserts altar and pulpit fellowship among the members of LWF. We were told by the LWF representative that was a goal but not a present reality. The only provision was that we must be willing to discuss such differences with representatives of the other members. After providing a clear description of our context we asked if we should continue the application process. The LWF representative responded positively. In raising these questions we were permitting LWF to interpret their own constitution and its application in our situation, and we seek membership on the basis of this interpretation by the LWF representative.

I believe the LWF has acknowledged the many differences between member churches in a variety of their reports. In this packet you will see additional notes from members of the Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine that has examined these documents in order to provide you with their perspective. (A Note on Altar and Pulpit Fellowship and Memorandum from the Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine)

It is important to remember that the Lutheran World Federation is a federation and not a church. It brings together various Lutheran churches from around the world but it does not set doctrine or mandate doctrinal conformity among member churches. Each church body maintains its own rights and responsibilities in that regard. By joining LWF we are not submitting to the authority of an organization that would preempt our own identity or constitutional authority. In fact, they have already reviewed our constitution without objection. In the NALC constitution we clearly state that official ecumenical relationships with another church (including altar and pulpit fellowship) must be adopted by the convocation and ratified by our congregations. We are not in official altar and pulpit fellowship with any LWF church, except for the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. We also disclosed that specific fact in our conversation when asked if other current members of LWF would support our application.

In order for the NALC to be in official altar and pulpit fellowship with any other church body, a specific resolution delineating the details of such an agreement would have to receive a two-thirds approval by the delegates at the Convocation and then receive the same level of support in the ratification by our congregations. The basic rights and responsibilities of the congregation along with deliberation and final authority regarding decisions that affect the entire NALC are an

integral part of our identity. No constitutional provision by LWF or any other organization to which we may belong can ever hold more authority than our own constitution. LWF is well aware of the many differences among member churches. The doctrinal article of the LWF constitution is intentionally minimal so as to avoid controversy and infringement on specific differences for individual churches.

One of the most important reasons for pursuing this path has been the encouragement by several other member churches in Africa. There seems to be a growing group of member churches who are concerned about the biblical understandings and theological direction of LWF, and they believe they have the chance for positive influence and direction. While some among us have questioned the probability of such influence and the opportunity for significant changes, we must remember that the epicenter for Christian faith has shifted from the north and the west to the south and the east. Even a casual statistical analysis of the growth of the church confirms this truth. Many of us believe that the influence of those member churches will continue to grow and expand as our Lord continues to bless and strengthen them. A letter from the president of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) is included in this information packet. We expect to receive a letter from Bishop Malasusa of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) shortly; we will send it to you as soon as it is received. It is my prayer that as we consider this decision we think about the many faithful leaders that these letters mention instead of the few that tend to occupy so much of our thinking.

We have also revised our responses to frequently asked questions in order to address the specific issues raised at the convocation that we did not have time to address. Should you have additional questions or require more information please contact, Pastor David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism (dwendel@thenalc.org; 614-777-5709).

Additional documents that are included are a copy of the resolution, instructions regarding ratification, a model ballot for congregations, and the required form to report your vote to our Minnesota office for recording.

Finally, I understand the passion and emotions linked to our past that are also a part of our discussion regarding this issue. However, I have no doubt that you will make your decisions on the basis of prayerful deliberation and not your feelings. I trust the process that we have created, providing our congregations with the final decision. Above all, I trust in the power of the Holy Spirit at work in you, guiding and leading us through this deliberation to an appropriate decision.

Thank you for your partnership in this ministry we share.



Bishop John F. Bradosky

Enclosures