

Why St. Paul's Lutheran Should Oppose the Proposal to Disaffiliate from the ELCA and Affiliate with the North American Lutheran Church (NALC)

Introduction

This document provides rationale for St. Paul's to remain part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) and to oppose a proposal offered by some members to disaffiliate and join the North American Lutheran Church (NALC). The report, developed by St. Paul's members, is divided into three sections, followed by three appendices that address negative points raised about the ELCA:

Section I	Reasons for Staying in the ELCA
Section II	Areas of Concern Presented by St. Paul's Members
Section III	Responses to the Areas of Concern
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Appendix A	Websites Focusing on Negative Information About the ELCA
Appendix B	Detailed List and Responses to Nine Concerns
Appendix C	List and Responses to Additional 46 Concerns

The areas of concern were offered by a St. Paul's member and distributed by him to selected members of the congregation. Two introductory subjects follow – (a) assertions that the SC Synod and ELCA can seize a congregation's assets and (b) the principal reason that the NALC was formed, regarding ordination of pastors in same sex relationships.

Assertion about the ELCA Seizing a Congregation's Property. An important point to address initially is the assertion by some SPLC members that the ELCA would seize St. Paul's property if it were to disaffiliate and that there were expected constitutional changes being considered in this year's churchwide assembly on this subject. This is NOT true, as long as SPLC continues to exist, as addressed in more detail in *Appendix III, Point 23*. The SC Synod states the following regarding property seizure:

"The guiding principle of ownership of property is that deeds and titles remain with congregations.

Congregations retain title to their property in all cases of discipline or transfer to another Lutheran body."

This is affirmed in the ELCA Constitution, Chapter 9, Ownership of Property, 9.70. An example offered of a congregation that faced forfeiture of property involved a unique situation, which would NOT impact SPLC.

Formation of the NALC. As background, it is important to recount why the North American Lutheran Church (NALC) was formed in 2010, a year after the ELCA approved ordination of pastors in same sex relationships/marriages. The effort was initiated by an organization that was originally part of the ELCA known as CORE, or "Coalition for Reform." By the NALC's own historical account, the principal issue was marriage of same sex partners and the ordination of pastors in same sex relationships and marriages:

"... in 2009, CORE and those who believed in orthodox teachings lost on all three counts: the ELCA approved the 'blessing of gay unions,' which soon morphed into the acceptance of gay marriage; the ordination of married gays; and a social statement that was ambivalent about marriage itself, gay marriage, and cohabitation. ... In response, CORE announced in November 2009 it would form a new church. At its next gathering in Columbus, Ohio, in August 2010, the North American Lutheran Church (NALC) was formed." (<https://www.thenalc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/NALC-Story-by-Robert-Benne.pdf>)

In Section II of this report, the "areas of concern," there are twelve separate points addressing sexual orientation and homosexuality, the most frequent topic addressed. Some of these points of criticism are "one offs," isolated examples that would have no impact on St. Paul's, and other points are based on personal opinions.

Section I – Reasons for Remaining in the ELCA

- A. The risks of shifting to the fledgling North American Lutheran Church (NALC) relate to whether (a) it is likely that the NALC will continue ten, twenty, thirty years from now and (b) whether their beliefs are consistent with our Lutheran doctrines. This relatively new Lutheran branch has over 500 congregations, with approximately 142,000 members, compared to 8,400 ELCA churches with 2.7 million members. Yes, the NALC has grown substantially, principally at the expense of the ELCA, but the continuation of this Lutheran offshoot with its minimal national and local administrative support must be questioned.

The NALC's and Lutheran CORE's websites both report substantial pastoral vacancies and challenges in locating ordained supply pastors during the congregations' periods of vacancies. See page 19 for more detail on NALC's recruitment problems and its reliance on "lay pastors." A further example is that when St. Paul's requested a representative from the NALC, they needed to send a full-time pastor designated as a "dean," who has assumed administrative duties for South Carolina. She represented the NALC at three informational meetings at SPLC.

In regard to the second point regarding consistency with our Lutheran beliefs, we should question the NALC's approaches to various topics, including marriage, sexuality, divorce, gender, and abortion. These and other areas are addressed in Section III. See <https://thenalc.org/en-us/our-work/commission-on-theology-and-doctrine/>, item #3, on NALC doctrine.

- B. Disaffiliation would sever our excellent support from the ELCA national office and the SC Synod. Comparable important services do not appear to be available from the NALC. Recent examples of this assistance to St. Paul's are: (a) initial guidance to the Council for the call process (now pending as of this date); (b) excellent, ordained supply pastors following our pastor's retirement; and (c) an outstanding interim pastor, who resigned due to negative reactions and comments from some church members who support the NALC shift.
1. Ongoing support from the ELCA and the SC Synod includes sponsorship of and assistance to:
 - Mission congregations and churches with internal problems
 - SC Men in Mission
 - Campus Ministry
 - Women of the ELCA
 - Review and approval of pastoral candidates and guidance in the call process but NOT selection of a church's pastor
 - Oversight of pastors, including review of sexual and other cases of misconduct.
 2. Disaffiliation would mean severing SPLC from important ministries provided by our Lutheran partners:
 - Christian Camps and Retreat Centers – As part of the ELCA, we also share in the following facilities and programs that we support with our resources and participation:
 - NovusWay Facilities – Lutheridge, Luther Rock, Luther Springs
 - Camp Kinard
 - Coastal Retreat Center – operated by the SCLRC (SC Lutheran Retreat Centers).
NOTE: A non-ELCA church could rent space from these facilities.
 - Lutheran Homes of South Carolina – facilities and home-based programs
 - Lutheran Services Carolinas – critical services to children and families including foster care, mental health and recovery services, and support living
NOTE: St. Paul's provided gifts totaling \$20,000 to LSC over the past year to help repair damage from Hurricane Helene and to support LSC's foster care efforts.

- Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary – now located at Lenoir Rhyne University
 - Newberry College.
3. Disaffiliation would eliminate our financial and physical participation in the ELCA’s international mission efforts, including:
- Disaster Response
 - Young Adults in Global Mission, which one of our members participated in recently
 - World Hunger Appeal
 - Refugee Resettlement [NOTE: This is a controversial area for some proponents of disaffiliation; see discussion of this effort in Section III of this report.]

Section II – Areas of Concern Presented by St. Paul’s Members

This document responds to two lists contained in the church member’s report that address “what is wrong with the ELCA today” and why the church should join the NALC. The writer prepared and distributed a report containing these lists to selected St. Paul’s members, not including all Church Council members. This member indicated that he had worked on his covert study for over two years, but few Church Council members, including the Council President and Vice-President, were aware of this effort. He claims that his report is well researched and factual, but our document challenges that assertion.

This document contains responses to these two separate lists of criticisms and concerns:

- **Appendix B** – 9-point list entitled “What’s Wrong with the ELCA”
- **Appendix C** – 46-point list entitled “What’s Going on with the ELCA Today,” which duplicates some of 9-points in Appendix B.

The “9-points” and the “46-points” are quoted verbatim, with no corrections, additions, or deletions. The ELCA criticisms fall into the following four major categories, with the frequency of the separate comments listed.

- 1) Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality (12 separate points) – The criticisms appear to focus on the perceived inconsistency of the ELCA’s statements and positions with the scriptures. As examples, points cite ELCA churches celebrating gay pride, the use of pronouns to indicate individuals’ sexual inclinations, and isolated biblical references related to sexual matters, which *claim* to indicate God’s disapproval of homosexuality.
- 2) Critique of ELCA Social Statements (8 separate points) – A number of these points oppose the ELCA’s taking Christ-like positions on social issues. Several of these criticisms reflect a political point of view, as opposed to a Christian approach to the social issues identified.
- 3) Opposition to ELCA Efforts Related to Migrants/Refugees (7 separate points) – The points address the untrue claim that the ELCA is encouraging churches to engage in alleged activities related to “undocumented immigrants.”
- 4) Isolated Examples of ELCA Churches’ Practices (5 separate points) – Examples are presented of individual ELCA church practices that are unacceptable in the eyes of the writer.

In Appendices B and C, this report identifies many statements criticizing the ELCA that are disproved by alternate, reliable sources. These misstatements include reference to control and confiscation of property by the ELCA, the unavailability of information on the ELCA’s and the SC Synod’s finances/budgets, the ELCA’s “abandoning the Holy Bible,” and claims that ELCA Social Statements “govern” church members.

Section III – Responses to Selected Areas of Concern about the ELCA

The responses in this section and in Appendices B and C were researched, written, and reviewed by St. Paul’s members who are concerned about the disaffiliation proposal. Sources for the *responses* to the concerns include the following:

- The Holy Bible, various translations (*see “common scriptural themes” below*)
- ELCA website – <https://www.elca.org/>
- North American Lutheran Church website – <https://thenalc.org/>
- Various websites cited in responses
- Lutheran Synod of South Carolina – <https://scsynod.com/>
 - South Carolina Synod document – “Response to Questions and Claims Concerning the ELCA,” Revised May 12, 2025, and made available to SPLC members*

NOTE: The overview of the detailed whitepaper from the SC Synod indicates the following goal: “The goal of this compilation with corresponding responses is to identify concerns being raised and offer calm, fact-based responses that can equip leaders and congregations with honest, clear answers in the face of misleading or outright erroneous information.”

Common Scriptural Themes for Responses to Areas of Concern

The common scriptural themes for the responses are the following: *[emphasis added]*

- + “So in everything, *do to others what you would have them do to you*, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 7:12)
- + “*So God created mankind in his own image*, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27)
- + “Of all the commandments, which is the most important? [Jesus responded] ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘*Love your neighbor as yourself.*’ There is no commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12: 30-31)
- + “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become *children of God*, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:12-13)
- + “*Accept one another*, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” (Romans 15:7)

Seven separate points of concern identified by the SPLC member – “What’s Wrong with the ELCA” – are chosen to illustrate the more detailed responses included in Appendices B and C. The points are quoted verbatim from the SPLC member’s report.

Point #1 of 9– “Abandoning the Holy Bible and its teachings regarding all areas of congregational worship and guidance.”

Response: This statement represents personal opinion and is blatantly false, both for the ELCA and our own church. The SC Synod’s response to this criticism follows:

“Scripture is central to ELCA life and teaching. As the ELCA Constitution states (2.02.c), ‘The According canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God’s Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God’s revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God’s Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.’”

Point #2 of 9 – “Claiming the Bible is a “living document” that changes and evolves with society.”

Response: The Holy Bible certainly IS a “living document” that we spend our entire lives attempting to interpret and apply to our daily lives, with the help of our pastors, spouses or partners, and Bible mentors. The Bible cannot be considered “clear-cut.” According to the American Bible Society, the number of translations and paraphrases of the Bible total around 900, and even reading from different translations can change the meaning of a passage. One Bible scholar in the Eugene Finnegan Bible Project describes this approach to the scriptures:

“The Bible, particularly the Christian New Testament, represents the source and foundation of any Christian life. Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*) sounds easy enough until you realize that there is always an individual human interpretation or an established communitarian way of interpreting the Bible because it is a ‘living document.’ ...” (See Appendix B for the full quote and source.)

Point #3 of 9 – “Uses social statements and political views to govern its members that are contrary to biblical and traditional Christian beliefs.”

Response: Social statements do not “govern” ELCA members, and the ELCA does not impose the statements on SPLC or other congregations. The statements include the following topics: abortion, caring for creation, the death penalty, education, human sexuality, peace, and race, ethnicity, and culture. How have these statements affected St. Paul’s, and have a majority of our church’s members even read any of these? The Social Statements let us as a national church body address societal and governmental activities and actions that are contrary to Christ’s command for us to *love our neighbors as ourselves and to treat others as we would have them treat us and to take care of God’s creation.* (See Appendix C for more details.)

Point #4 of 9 – “Reducing the autonomy of Congregations by managing Congregations from the National ELCA. Governance from the top down and not from the bottom up where congregations have authority over their own matters.”

Response: Examples of how the ELCA has reduced the autonomy of SPLC or other congregations are **not** provided, even though critics of the ELCA may raise isolated examples that involve special circumstances. Our own church exercises autonomy in all areas of local governance, including directing our Christian inreach and outreach ministries, Christian education of our children and youth, hiring of pastors and other key staff, budgeting and managing our funds, and use of our property.

Point #5 of 9 – “Expressing an abundance of concern for woke, racism, DEIA and LGBTQIA+ [SIC] issues with little or no attention paid to traditional Lutherans. In fact, the ELCA discourages Traditional Bible based Lutheranism.”

Response: This is entirely based on the author’s opinion, colored by a political approach that rejects attention to the critical social issues that reflect a Christ-like approach to our country and world. The ELCA has been criticized for bringing politics into the church, but this statement indicates that its opponents are applying solely political arguments, not “Traditional Bible-based” points, to criticize the ELCA. What the author means that there is “no attention paid to traditional Lutherans” begs the question of *who these Lutherans are*. The full response to this point in Appendix C includes arguments about why the ELCA and we as Christians should be concerned about these issues. Please note especially the discussion regarding diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, all concerns at the heart of the Gospel.

Point #8 of 9 – “The ELCA uses its funding and funding from other sources to fund illegal immigration into the United States. There *appears to be* no screening of aliens before they receive funding. The ELCA has at least two programs AMMPARO and RRMRP to assist migrants (aliens) in many areas.” *[italics added]*

Response: These statements are not true, including the “appears to be” phrase. The Lutheran church has for many years been a leader in refugee* resettlement, with funding from the ELCA and the Federal Government. The AMMPARO program (“Accompany Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities”) is an ELCA effort explained here: <https://www.elca.org/our-work/relief-and-development/ammparo>. See a lengthier response from the SC Synod to point 32 in Appendix C. In short, the SC Synod document states the following: “No individual, congregation, or synod is asked or encouraged to break the law. Participation is not mandated by the ELCA and is voluntary ... “. SPLC is not currently involved in refugee support and resettlement. See Appendix C, Point #8 for a description of efforts by Lutheran Services of the Carolinas to support refugees.

NOTES: (a) Definition: “Refugees are people who have left their countries to escape conflict, violence, or persecution and have sought safety in another country.” (U.N. Refugee Agency); (b) The second effort identified in this point, the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RRMRP), is **NOT** an ELCA initiative but involves over 200 organizations including the ELCA.

Point #16 of 46 – “Married homosexuals are allowed to be ordained in the ELCA, as well as openly transgender individuals. Examples: Bishop of ELCA, Southeastern Synod, same sex marriage. Also, Newberry College campus pastor, same sex marriage, as well as Bishop Megan Rohrerm, openly, Transgender Bishop, Sierra Pacific Synod, ELCA, May 2021”

Response: The first sentence is true, and this is a commendable and Christ-like position taken by the ELCA. Is our own church open to all “children of God,” and does this include homosexual and transgender people? If so, then why would a church prevent these individuals, with proper credentials, to serve as ordained clergy? The NALC does not permit this, and their “Ecumenical Affirmation of Marriage,” jointly approved with the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church and other denominations, also opposes same sex marriages. (<https://thenalc.org/en-us/our-work/commission-on-theology-and-doctrine/>)

People who fit into one of the categories of LGBTQ are *children of God, created in his own image, and God’s creation is perfect*. The ELCA’s position does NOT dictate to a congregation that it must hire a pastor who is openly gay and/or a pastor who is in a monogamous, same sex relationship. See Appendix C, Point 16, for a more robust discussion of this concern, including the following:

- The SC Synod’s discussion of the ELCA position
- Link to the ELCA statement on human sexuality
- American Psychological Association link describing how being gay, lesbian, or bisexual is neither a lifestyle choice nor a mental disorder (<https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq/orientation>)
- Reference to the link of the NALC’s formation to this issue (noted in Part I of this paper)

Appendix A

Probable Sources Used for Points of Concern about the ELCA

Below are three of the key websites that contain material focused on “What’s wrong with the ELCA.” The referenced document criticizing the ELCA and the slide presentation by another church member at both a Church Council meeting and an informational meeting have both used information from these websites.

- The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) EXPOSED
 - This website’s sole purpose is “to inform and expose the teachings, actions and beliefs of the ELCA.” There are hundreds of links to negative and non-verified information about the ELCA.
 - The website is maintained by Lutheran lowan Dan Skogen, who describes himself as a “former ELCA seminary student and former ELCA member who is fed up with the ELCA’s consistent mockery of God’s Word.”
 - When you open the website, you immediately see a solicitation: “This website, Exposing the ELCA, exists to inform and expose the teachings, actions and beliefs of the ELCA. Help us by giving a gift to Exposing the ELCA!” The website is filled with ads, and there is the following comment under the “About and Contact” link: “Send me your thoughts, comments or recommendations on any information I should include on the Exposing the ELCA website.”
 - The website focuses especially on sexuality and the opposition to inclusion. One of the principal sections is entitled “ELCA Exposed News,” which links to articles from other sources about homosexuality, gender neutral language, DEIA, abortion, and other topics that make the site owner’s case. (<https://www.exposingtheelca.com/>)
NOTE: Author and ELCA pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Fayetteville, Arkansas Clint Schneklath describes Mr. Skogen as a “failed seminarian.” In a lengthy blog he describes Skogen as follows: “He’s the voice and face behind a blog titled ‘Exposing the ELCA.’ Well, he does more than blog. He tweets, trolls Facebook groups, and in particular, visits the web sites and Facebook pages of congregations of our denomination and gives them a negative review, along with a long diatribe about the evils of “the ELCA.” (<https://lutheranconfessions.blogspot.com/2015/12/exposing-exposing-elca.html>)
- Lutheran Coalition for Renewal (“Lutheran CORE”)
 - This group was formed in 2005 as part of the ELCA network. However, this organization broke with the ELCA in 2009, following the ELCA’s Churchwide Assembly. In 2010 CORE formed its own denomination, and North American Lutheran Church (NALC).
 - Lutheran CORE’s objective is to challenge and question ELCA practices, especially in the area of marriage and sexuality. This quote is one part of the statement on “Our Work and what We Do:” *Challenging the ELCA to uphold its commitment to honor the bound conscience of those holding to a traditional view of human sexuality and marriage.*”
 - Retired pastor Dennis D. Nelson is listed as the Executive Director and President of the Board of CORE (not listed on their website, but on external sites). (<http://lutherancore.website/>)
- Lutheran Congregational Support Network
 - According to the website, “Our mission is simple — to inform congregations about what is happening in the ELCA. LCSN is a grassroots initiative begun by lay people from around the nation. It arose out of a concern for ELCA congregations and an impending threat to their proclamation of the Gospel.”
 - This website is presented anonymously, with no names or other organizations associated with the network.

- One of the principal focuses is on governance, with an emphasis on how the ELCA is allegedly taking over control from congregations. This site includes many videos, two of which were included in the PowerPoint presented at SPLC, each including isolated examples of governance issues. The same unidentified interviewer leads all videos. The apparent approach of this website is to use scare tactics of why it is imperative that congregations leave the ELCA.
(<https://lutherancongregationalupportnetwork.org/>)

Appendix B
WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE ELCA?
(9-Point List of Concerns)

1. Abandoning the Holy Bible and its teachings regarding all areas of congregational worship and guidance.

Response:

This statement represents personal opinion and is blatantly false, both for the ELCA and our own church. The SC Synod's response to this criticism follows:

"Scripture is central to ELCA life and teaching. As the ELCA Constitution states, 'The According canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.'" (ELCA Constitution, 2.02.c)

2. Claiming the Bible is a "living document" that changes and evolves with society.

Response:

The Holy Bible certainly IS a "living document" that we spend our entire lives attempting to interpret and apply to our daily lives, with the help of our pastors, spouses or partners, and Bible mentors. This is not a "claim." If the Bible is so clear-cut, then why are there so many translations through the centuries? According to the American Bible Society, "I am afraid no one can give you an exact number for the English translations and paraphrases of the Bible printed since Tyndale's New Testament of 1526. In part this is due to the difficulty of determining what should be defined as a new translation as opposed to a correction or a revision of an existing translation. ... With all these caveats in mind, the number of printed English translations and paraphrases of the Bible, whether complete or not, is about 900." (<https://www.americanbible.org/news/articles/number-of-english-translations-of-the-bible/>)

This description by a Bible scholar seems to describe this approach to the scriptures:

"The Bible, particularly the Christian New Testament, represents the source and foundation of any Christian life. Scripture alone (sola scriptura) sounds easy enough until you realize that there is always an individual human interpretation or an established communitarian way of interpreting the Bible because it is a 'living document.' Layers of understanding continue to develop with each new reading. Thus, various biblical passages have served as the source of theological reflection and conflict for many centuries." (Source: Eugene Finnegan Bible Project, "The Bible as a Living Document", February 16, 2023, <https://efinne1540.wordpress.com/2023/02/16/the-bible-as-a-living-document/>)

The SC Synod's response to the criticism that the ELCA allows societal norms to change the meaning of scripture follows:

"The ELCA holds Scripture as "the authoritative source and norm" (ELCA constitution, Chapter 2, section 03). Because the living Word is Christ, we read the written Word through the law-and-gospel lens, using the best tools of scholarship to hear its message for today; we do not rewrite the biblical text."

3. Uses social statements and political views to govern its members that are contrary to biblical and traditional Christian beliefs.

Response:

Social statements do not “govern” ELCA members, and the ELCA does not impose the statements on SPLC or other congregations. The statements include the following topics: abortion, caring for creation, the death penalty, education, human sexuality, peace, and race, ethnicity, and culture. How have these statements affected St. Paul’s, and have a majority of our church’s members even read these?

These statements are clearly based on “biblical and traditional Christian beliefs.” It is the Lutheran church’s mission to serve not only as the hands and feet of Christ, but also, his voice. The Social Statements let us as a church body address societal and governmental activities and actions that are contrary to Christ’s command for us to *love our neighbors as ourselves and to treat others as we would have them treat us and to take care of God’s creation.*

The SC Synod’s two explanations of the Social Statements follow:

“The ELCA develops social statements through extensive study of scripture, listening across the church, and a 2/3 majority vote at churchwide assembly. These statements give a framework of reference so that the church may engage current matters in thoughtful, faith-filled ways. *These statements are guides, not church doctrine.* [emphasis added] Additional information about social statements and their formation may be found here.” (<https://www.elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements>)

“ELCA social statements are theological guides meant to encourage reflection and discussion, not mandates to bind the consciences of individuals. They are created through a years-long process of scriptural study, theological reflection, moral discernment, and church-wide participation and attempt to provide the best and most careful theological thinking possible at a given time on a given topic. They are used to guide policy and advocacy work of the ELCA.”

4. Reducing the autonomy of Congregations by managing Congregations from the National ELCA. Governance from the top down and not from the bottom up where congregations have authority over their own matters.

Response:

Examples of how the ELCA has reduced the autonomy of SPLC or other congregations are **not** provided, although critics of the ELCA may raise isolated examples, involving special circumstances. Our own church exercises autonomy in all areas of local governance, including directing our Christian inreach and outreach ministries, Christian education of our children and youth, hiring of pastors and other key staff, budgeting and managing our funds, and use of our property.

5. Expressing an abundance of concern for woke, racism, DEIA and LGBTQIA+ [SIC] issues with little or no attention paid to traditional Lutherans. In fact, the ELCA discourages Traditional Bible based Lutheranism.

Response:

This is entirely based on the author’s opinion, colored by a political approach that rejects attention to the critical social issues that reflect a Christ-like approach to our country and world. The ELCA has

been criticized for bringing politics into the church, but this statement indicates that its opponents are applying solely political arguments, not Traditional Bible-based points, to criticize the ELCA. What the author means that there is “no attention paid to traditional Lutherans” begs the question of who these Lutherans are.

In our opinion, all Christian Churches should address the following issues.

- Combatting *racism* and being *woke*, which means having an “awareness of racial prejudice and discrimination” (Wikipedia) are Christ-like positions that the ELCA has taken, with no apologies. Use of the term “woke” dates back to at least the 1930’s. It is acknowledged that the meaning of “woke” has evolved in the current political environment to describe people considered to be “left wing.” Applying this term in the Lutheran/Christian concept introduces politics into the into the church.
 - The ELCA’s support for *DEIA* (diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility) must be considered outside the secular/political concept that DEI favors minorities and women over white males, especially in the area of hiring. From a Christian perspective, DEI is interpreted as loving your neighbor, seeking justice for everyone, and welcoming the stranger, all supported by numerous Bible passages, especially in the New Testament. “Bible-Based Lutheranism” encompasses DEIA in these critical areas that should be a concern for all Christians:
 - Diversity – seeking diversity in our congregations, diversity of race, national origin, socio-economic status, sex, marital status, and sexual preference – “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.” (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)
 - Equity – striving for equality for all, as God does with all of us – “For God does not show favoritism.” (Romans 2:11)
 - Inclusion – following Jesus’s example of including everyone at His table – “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” (Romans 15:7)
 - Accessibility – ensuring good accessibility to all of the church’s facilities, regardless of members’ physical disabilities – “Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 19:14)
- NOTE: See the response to Point 27 of the 46 points in Appendix C.
- Acceptance of people who fit into a LGBTQIA designation as our neighbors and brothers and sisters in Christ does not diminish the place of “traditional Lutherans” in the church. – “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27)

6. Although congregations support the Synod and National Church, they are never offered information on how their offerings and contributions are used.

Response:

This is not true. The SC Synod and ELCA budgets are publicly available, as shown below:

- SC Synod: <https://scsynod.com/wp-content/uploads/documents/2025assembly/26-27%20Funding-Spending%20Plan%20Approved%20by%20Synod%20Council.pdf>

- ELCA:
 - 2023-2025 Approved: <https://resources.elca.org/financial/approved-budget-2023-2025/>
 - 2026-2028 Proposal: <https://resources.elca.org/churchwide-assembly/2026-2028-budget-proposal/>

7. No agendas are available for ELCA Churchwide Assemblies or the National Youth Conferences in advance of these events.

Response: This is not true. It is not clear why this is an important point of criticism of the ELCA. See <https://www.elca.org/about/leadership/churchwide-assembly>.

8. The ELCA uses its funding and funding from other sources to fund illegal immigration into the United States. There *appears to be* [emphasis added] no screening of aliens before they receive funding. The ELCA has at least two programs AMMPARO and RRRMP to assist migrants (aliens) in many areas.

Response:

These statements are not true, including the “appears to be” phrase. The Lutheran church has for many years been a leader in refugee resettlement, with funding from the ELCA and the Federal Government. The AMMPARO program (“Accompany Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities”) is an ELCA effort explained here: <https://www.elca.org/our-work/relief-and-development/ammparo>. See a lengthier response from the SC Synod to point 32 in the “Responses to 46 Points.” In short, the SC Synod document states the following: “**No individual, congregation, or synod is asked or encouraged to break the law.** Participation is not mandated by the ELCA and is voluntary ...”.

Lutheran Services of the Carolinas, like other regional Lutheran services organizations, is active in support of refugees, as indicated at this website – <https://lscarolinas.net/new-americans-program/>. This effort, known as the New Americans Program, focuses on refugee support and refugee resettlement. This program is designed to welcome New Americans to our country and help them on their journey to achieve self-sufficiency. An introduction to this effort follows, including with an explanation of what “refugee” means:

“Millions of people worldwide have been forced to flee their home countries due to their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. These individuals are granted legal “refugee” status by the UNHCR (United Nations Refugee Agency) and the U.S. government. Many have to live in designated refugee camps or move from place to place seeking shelter for years, even decades. While getting here is difficult, it accounts for only part of their journey.” (<https://lscarolinas.net/new-americans-program/>)

NOTE: The second effort identified in this point, the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RRMRP), is **NOT** an ELCA initiative. This is an effort by over 200 participating organizations to address the challenges faced by migrants and refugees from Latin America and the Caribbean (<https://www.r4v.info/en>).

9. According to projections from the ELCA the denomination will have fewer than 67,000 members in 2050 and less than 16,000 in worship on an average Sunday by 2041. If the current trends continue, the ELCA will cease to exist within the next generation.

Response: The decline in ELCA membership and the membership of our own church create a great challenge. The projection referenced here is found in an article by Dwight Zscheile, a well-respected author and professor at the Luther Seminary, posted on the “faithlead” website. (<https://faithlead.org/blog/decline/>) His data source is the ELCA Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation.

The ELCA drop in membership is consistent with the trends in other mainline denominations, according to the Pew Research Center in its Religious Landscape Study. Also, the Pew Center’s research demonstrates that the *percentage of U.S. adults who identify as Protestants* has dropped substantially over the past ten years, but may have leveled off since 2000. The Baptists, followed by the Methodists, exhibited the greatest reductions among Protestant denominations in this measure, with the Lutherans dropping approximately the same percentage as the Presbyterians. The nondenominational Protestants were the only group showing a ten-year increase.

Source: <https://www.pewresearch.org/collections/religious-landscape-study/>

Appendix C
“What Is Going On With The ELCA Today?”
(26-Point List of Concerns)

NOTE: The 46 “points” and the introductory statement that follow were developed by a church member in a document dated March 13, 2025, quoted here verbatim.

Introduction to the 46 points in the Document: The following synopsis pertains to the present teachings and position of the ELCA. The list is the title of instruments and publications concerning this matter that have been researched and collected over approximately the last twenty-four (24) months. The information is factual with the resources of each entry presented. This list not [SIC] all inclusive as each day brings about new findings of current and future ELCA Doctrine. [edited only to remove the name of the author]

Point 1. Lord's Prayer rewritten to say: "Our Mother who art within us" - San Francisco, Ebenezer Lutheran Church, ELCA- Now worships a "goddess" and has a resident witch on staff.

Response:

This church now calls itself “herchurch.” It has 180 members according to the ELCA, with an average in-person attendance of 50 (<https://www.elca.org/directory/congregations>). This church worships God in their unique way, with a very diverse membership in terms of beliefs and sexual orientation. They do not worship a goddess, defined by Mirriam Webster as “a female god or deity.” They worship God but incorporate in their beliefs regarding the feminine/nurturing qualities of God, such as reflected in the Old Testament pericope lesson from July 6, 2026:

“For thus says the Lord: I will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream; and you will nurse and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.” Isaiah 66:12-13

The herchurch is an aberration and does not have any impact on SPLC. We do not agree with rewriting the Lord’s Prayer as this church has done.

Point 2. Preferred pronouns are *more common* in the ELCA - Lutheridge Day Camp pamphlet, 2023 used he/she/they for counselors to indicate their preferred pronouns.

Response:

It is unclear what “more common” refers to, since an *isolated example* of a camp pamphlet is used. The 2023 Day Camp pamphlet is not currently online, so this point cannot be confirmed. Preferred pronouns are frequently used to create a more welcoming/inclusive environment in showing respect to transgender and nonbinary people, who are all children of God, created in His image. The use of gender-neutral personal pronouns dates back to the 14th Century and has been more prevalent over the last 15 to 20 years because of the awareness and visibility of transgender people.

SPLC does not and likely never will apply pronouns in referring to staff or congregation members. However, some churches and other organizations feel the need to apply pronouns to demonstrate inclusiveness for the organizations’ members. The current Lutheridge online registration links do not contain pronoun labels, and the staff are not listed with preferred pronouns (<https://novusway.org/staff/>).

Point 3. Trinity Lutheran Church (ELCA), Greenville, South Carolina

- a. Hosted "Queerly Beloved Youth Day" - Saturday, January 27, 2024
- b. Hosts "Queer Led" services as well as Drag Shows
- c. PRIDEFEST on June 8, 2024
- d. As of April 2024, has on their staff a Queer and Justice Ministry - Patrick Preaches, Intern
- e. Has declared certain parts of the Old Testament "Null and Void"

Response:

The first four points are consistent with this church's inclusive approach based on church membership and attendance. However, item "e" is false. Based on their website, my correspondence with the senior pastor, and confirmation by a representative of the SC Synod, this is an extremely active downtown church that serves a very diverse congregation, in terms of sexual preference, race, and economic status. The following is from an email that I received from the Trinity Senior Pastor on July 11, 2025. The first paragraph highlights the church's ministry, and the second, their very Lutheran approach to the Old Testament:

"Trinity is deeply committed to serving vulnerable communities to include the LGBTQIA+ community, immigrants and refugees, people of color, and those living in poverty. Trinity also values diversity, equity, inclusion, and works very hard to create safe, brave spaces for all people to belong, to grow in faith, and to serve. Justice ministry is a cornerstone of our ministry as we strive to speak truth to power from both the pulpit and in our daily lives."

"As Lutherans, we believe that Old Testament law is fulfilled and transformed by Jesus. Followers of Christ are no longer bound to old laws that serve to oppress and minimize women, queer people, persons of color, or any other marginalized community. Salvation is through grace by faith, not law-keeping. ... God in Christ frees us from bondage to law. Romans 6:14 says "You are not under law, but under grace." And Galatians 3:24 says, "The law was our guardian until Christ came." Paul argued that the law served its purpose, but is now superseded by Christ."

This point is not relevant to SPLC, since our church is not required by the ELCA to sponsor events similar to Trinity's. Also, the Church Council has not been asked for the church to sponsor "gay pride" type activities.

Point 4. Happy International Pronouns Day - Facebook post by ELCA - E. R. Kegler (Pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in NE Minneapolis and founder and editor of Queer Grace, an online resource for LGBTQ life and faith.)

Response:

As stated in the response to item #2, preferred pronouns are frequently used to create a more welcoming/inclusive environment that demonstrates respect to transgender and gender nonconforming people, who are all *children of God, created in His image*. International Pronouns Day is *not* a creation of Pastor Kegler or the ELCA. It occurs on the third Wednesday in October (<https://pronouns.org/day>), and Pastor Kegler posted the following announcement on the ELCA Facebook page :

"Happy International Pronouns Day! Research has correlated using someone's correct pronoun (and name, if they've changed it from what we previously knew them as) with a decline in suicidal ideation. The right pronoun can literally save a life. Even as faithful people wrestle with new

concepts of gender identity, we can all practice a small change in our vocabulary to directly contribute to everyone's abundant life."-Emmy Kegler

Pastor Emmy Kegler is the *former, not current*, pastor of this small ELCA church (140 baptized members per ELCA). She describes herself as "a queer Christian, mama, wife, author, pastor, and speaker called to ministry at the margins of the church." She holds a Master's in Divinity from Luther Seminary.

(<http://emmykegler.com/about/>) Pastor Kegler's Facebook posting about International Pronouns Day is irrelevant to SPLC.

Point 5. ELCA caused controversy in 2020 for posting prayer on Twitter and Facebook addressing God as "Mother" instead of Father, April 28, 2020

Response:

This posting from an Augsburg Fortress daily devotional book referred to "Mother God." (quoted below) According to an AI search, this "reflects a growing recognition within some Lutheran circles of feminine imagery for God, alongside the traditional masculine language." The ELCA has NOT changed its doctrine to refer to God as "Mother." See the Isaiah scripture quoted in point #1, indicating the mother-like aspects of God. See point #21 for a sample of feminine references to God.

Referenced Facebook Post: "Mother God, you have fed us with the nourishment of your spiritual food. Raise us up into salvation and rid us of our bitterness, so that we may share the sweetness of your holy word with all the world." Source: "Bread for the Day: Daily Bible Readings and Prayers," Augsburg Fortress

Point 6. ELCA Facebook page Thanksgiving Day, November 22, 2022-National Day of Mourning Not Thanksgiving

Response:

The ELCA expressed support for the National Day of Mourning, which dated back to 1970 and which was not intended to replace Thanksgiving. This was NOT an ELCA event, but rather, an event sponsored by the United American Indians of New England, with the support of several native Indian tribes. The stated purpose of the day is:

"An annual tradition since 1970, Day of Mourning is a solemn, spiritual and highly political day. Many of us fast from sundown the day before through the afternoon of that day. We are mourning our ancestors and the genocide of our peoples and the theft of our lands."

(<https://www.facebook.com/events/801565021291224>)

The ELCA's support for this day, sponsored by these *children of God* to show support for native Indian tribes, exhibits our parent church's honoring Jesus's command to love our neighbors.

Point 7. ELCA, August 2016, released a marriage ceremony supplement (Augsburg Fortress, publisher) to accommodate same sex marriages.

Response:

After the Supreme Court approved same sex marriages as a "fundamental right" of citizens in 2015, the ELCA took a logical step in also endorsing same sex marriages but NOT requiring churches to conduct such services. SPLC's Constitution prohibits same sex marriage services but also welcomes members who are in a same sex relationship, married or not.

Point 8. National presiding Bishop Eaton messages supporting Black Lives Matter, which supports radical issues such as defunding the Police. She links to BLM on the ELCA website.

Response:

The ELCA's endorsement of the Black Lives Matter movement reflects the national church's strong support for racial justice, a concept right out of the Bible. This is NOT a radical issue. Note the Romans 10:12 passage: "For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" The BLM movement favors increasing the investment in community programs and addressing police brutality. Defunding the police is an extreme position that is NOT a realistic solution to racial injustice. However, *reforming* police departments with a history of police brutality and increasing the investment in community program are approaches advocated by the BLM movement and seem to be steps in the right direction.

SC Synod Report – "The 2013 ELCA Social Statement, *The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries*" calls for restorative justice, community-based alternatives to incarceration, sentencing reform, reentry support, and addressing racial disparities—all of which it insists must be funded and supported, not cut back. Nowhere does it advocate reducing or eliminating law-enforcement budgets. There is no official ELCA policy endorsing 'defunding the police.' "

NOTE: The bishop has made many other statements decrying racism, including recent statements remembering the Emanuel Nine shooting and highlighting Juneteenth, the holiday that celebrates the official end of slavery in our country. The ELCA assumes a compassionate, Christ-like position in our country and world, and our Bishop addresses social concerns on behalf of all congregations. This is not intended to take political positions on issues, but some may construe such statements as being political.

Point 9. The ELCA allows society norms and influences to change the meaning of the scripture which the ELCA views as a "living document" that evolves with society. [duplication of point 2 of 9]

Response:

The Lutheran Church encourages all of us to study The Bible in light of our own experiences and also to rely heavily on our pastors and other experts to guide us through this lifelong study of God's Holy Word. See the following ELCA guidance regarding our reading of The Bible:

- The SC Synod's statement regarding the authority of scripture follows:
"The ELCA is rooted in Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and gospel-centered theology. As stated in the ELCA Constitution: 'The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.' (Chapter 2, Confession of Faith, 2.02.c)."
- See the SC Synod's "Lutheran F.A.Q." episode entitled "How Do Lutherans Read the Bible?" (<https://scsynod.com/teaching-resources/>) presented by Assistant to the Bishop, Rev. Emily Edenfield.
- See the five-part series in the Living Lutheran publication by former ELCA Presiding Bishop Herbert Chilstrom" that addresses how Lutherans interpret the Bible. (<https://www.livinglutheran.org/2019/08/the-core-issue-how-we-interpret-the-bible/>)

Point 10. The ELCA, through the implementation and dissemination of its social statements, has imposed political views on its members that are contrary to biblical and traditional beliefs.

Response:

The following is the response in the SC Synod paper to concerns that the ELCA “imposes” political agendas:

“The ELCA develops social statements through extensive study of scripture, listening across the church, and a 2/3 majority vote at churchwide assembly. These statements give a framework of reference so that the church may engage current matters in thoughtful, faith-filled ways. *These statements are guides, not church doctrine.* [emphasis added] Additional information about social statements and their formation may be found here - <https://www.elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements>.”

A further response in the SC Synod document to concerns that the ELCA is “too political” through its social statements follows:

“Social Statements are teaching and policy documents offering broad, faith-rooted frameworks to guide moral formation and thoughtful engagement with social issues, not campaign materials. ... In short, ELCA resources equip congregations and individuals to *live out their faith in the world, not to promote specific political agendas.*” [emphasis added]

This attitude that the ELCA dictates to pastors the content of their messages was reflected in the discussion at one of the NALC information sessions at SPLC. One member stated this point that the Social Statements controlled pastors, while another indicated that our former pastor “protected” our congregation from the ELCA. These are absurd notions that we have never experienced in any of the ELCA churches where we have held memberships. In fact, it is likely that an extremely small portion of our fellow church members have even read any of the Social Statements.

Point 11. The ELCA, has embraced "universal salvation" in contradiction to traditional belief. The Lutheran Study Bible (ELCA) says "Jesus includes in salvation people who do not believe in him or even know about him." The ELCA website confirms it.

Response:

This reference to “traditional belief” is an expression of opinion by the writer of these points. The following is the Synod’s response to the claims regarding the Lutheran approach to salvation:

“The ELCA constitution affirms that salvation comes through Jesus Christ: ‘This church confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe’ (Chapter 2, Confession of Faith, 2.02). At the same time, it also recognizes that God alone is judge. It encourages humble witness, not condemnation.”

Point 12. Local congregations of the ELCA have little or no control regarding financial support of the mission of the World Church. (Compare to the North American Lutheran Church, which encourages local churches to give to missions/causes of their choice instead. - Pastor D Tholstrup, Dean, North American Lutheran Church (NALC), Pastor Steven King, NALC, Mebaney, North Carolina)

Response:

There can be no valid comparison between the ELCA’s world mission efforts and the NALC’s. The ELCA’s efforts include these programs:

- Fund for Leaders
- Global Church Sponsorship
- New Congregations
- Vision for Mission
- World Hunger
- Disability Ministries, and
- Lutheran Disaster Response.

The scope of the international programs is beyond the capacity of a single synod or congregation, and the collective efforts of the ELCA make a difference world-wide. (<https://www.elca.org/our-work/global-mission>)

In regard to control and implied transparency of funding priorities, the SC Synod’s response from the 5/21/2025 document is the following:

“Each ELCA congregation sets its own budget and giving levels. Congregations are invited to give to the ministries of the ELCA and SC Synod to further God’s mission in the world in ways which are often beyond the capability of any one local congregation, such as support for World Hunger Appeal, ELCA Disaster Response, and larger church-wide initiatives. The SC Synod’s proposed 2026 budget is transparent and is publicly available, as is the ELCA budget. Budgets are approved annually by each synod and the churchwide assembly.”

It is unclear from the NALC’s website the scope of their global efforts, although at SPLC we witness the efforts of Pastor Martha Shanka’s Ethiopian Church, housed and partially supported financially by SPLC. It is clear that this church could not have succeeded without our church’s support in funding, space for worship and state-wide meetings, and assistance to the pastor in securing affordable housing in Columbia. The following are links to the NALC mission efforts: <https://thenalc.org/nalc-missions-office/> and <https://thenalc.org/mission-partners/>.

Point 13. Benevolence – what percent goes to administrative costs, missions? Repeated attempts to obtain this from our ELCA Synod for this information has not produced an answer concerning this. [SIC]

Response:

The is addressed in the proposed Synod’s proposed 2026 budget, found here:

<https://scsynod.com/wp-content/uploads/documents/2025assembly/26-27%20Funding-Spending%20Plan%20Approved%20by%20Synod%20Council.pdf>

Point 14. Our call process is limited per the SC Synod. The Synod supplies ELCA pastors’ names only. Compare to the NALC constitution, which allows ANY rostered pastor to be called on. (Source: Call Committee, NALC, Pastor D. Tholstrup)

Response:

The ELCA call process that involves support and screening by the SC Synod is essential for congregations, but not obtrusive. Our church began this process with the SC Synod’s help and then dropped the effort because of the drive to pull the church out of the ELCA. The following three points are critical in reviewing where the NALC is on pastor recruitment.

- NALC Recruitment and Vacancies: The NALC, which does not have local synods, does not provide the level of support that we enjoy in the ELCA. Also, according to the NALC and Lutheran CORE websites,

the NALC is experiencing many vacancies here in South Carolina and nationally. This is labeled as a “crisis.” See the following links. The second article encourages congregation members to step forward: “Given the increasing shortage of ordained pastors available for call, now is the time when many churches will need to take the initiative to enlist one or two (or three) active members to be equipped and eventually called to serve their own congregation.”

- <https://thenalc.org/en-us/2022/05/23/thinking-outside-the-box-for-your-congregation/>
- <https://lutherancore.website/2024/09/12/addressing-the-clergy-supply-crisis/>.
- The NALC is encouraging the development of lay pastors who are not seminary trained, an initiative known as the “Congregational Lay-leadership Initiative (CLI).” This is an unacceptable substitute to a fully training pastor. See:
 - <https://lutherancore.website/congregations/the-congregational-lay-led-leadership-initiative-cli/>
 - <https://lutherancore.website/2023/03/13/how-your-congregation-can-identify-enlist-and-train-part-time-lay-ministers/>
 - <https://lutherancore.website/2023/01/12/the-need-for-more-lay-led-lutheran-congregations/>.
- The NALC is also having a problem in identifying and placing ordained *supply* pastors for congregations with pastoral vacancies. Our church has had no such problem thanks to the S.C. Synod.

Allowing ANY rostered pastor to be called eliminates the valuable screening process, which has brought to SPLC excellent supply pastors and an outstanding interim pastor, who resigned due to backlash from selected congregation members who may have felt that her Gospel-based messages were too “pointed” and hit too close to home.

Point 15. Termination of relationship (disaffiliation) is unnecessarily complicated compared to other Lutheran organizations (source: ELCA Constitution 9.60, approximately two pages of legal verbiage, vs NALC Constitution 6.06, which is one step).

Response:

The SPLC process includes several specific steps, since leaving the ELCA is a very consequential step that must be approached carefully. Disaffiliation is perhaps the most consequential action that a congregation can make. It is unclear what the relevance of this comment is. Individuals supporting disaffiliation have advocated hiring an attorney to “short circuit” or “fast track” the process. The danger of taking shortcuts to the ELCA and SPLC process is that the congregation could be taking this step prior to having the facts of all implications of the action.

Point 16. Married homosexuals are allowed to be ordained in the ELCA, as well as openly transgender individuals. Examples: Bishop of ELCA, Southeastern Synod, same sex marriage. Also, Newberry College campus pastor, same sex marriage, as well as Bishop Megan Rohrer, openly, Transgender Bishop, Sierra Pacific Synod, ELCA, May 2021

Response:

The first sentence is true, and this is a commendable and Christ-like position taken by the ELCA. Is our own church open to all “children of God,” and does this include homosexual and transgender people? If so, then why would the ELCA prevent these individuals, with proper credentials, to serve as ordained clergy? People who fit into one of the categories of LGBTQ are *children of God, created in his own image*. The NALC does not permit this, and their “Ecumenical Affirmation of Marriage,” jointly approved with the

Missouri Synod Lutheran Church and other denominations, also opposes same sex marriages. (<https://thenalc.org/en-us/our-work/commission-on-theology-and-doctrine/>) This does NOT mean that we need to reach out to call pastors who fit into a LGBTQ category.

The ELCA's position does NOT dictate to congregations that they must hire a pastor who is openly gay and/or a pastor who is in a monogamous, same sex relationship. The following is the Synod's response regarding LGBTQ people in same sex relationships:

"Since 2009, the ELCA has allowed LGBTQ persons to serve as ordained pastors or deacons in this church after they – like all candidates – are fully examined and vetted through the lengthy candidacy process to discern whether they have the gifts for ministry.

Congregations make their own decisions about whom to call as their leaders and call only the pastors or deacons they feel are good fits for their congregation. No congregation is required to call an LGBTQ pastor, although they are invited to do so if such a candidate is a good fit for them.

Since 2009, congregations may bless same-sex couple unions, and since 2015 when civil law changed, can perform weddings for LGBTQ couples. However, congregations, their leadership, and their pastors determine whether or not they wish to do so – they are not required to perform such ceremonies."

NOTES:

1. The ELCA Social Statement on human sexuality is found here: <https://elcamediaresources.blob.core.windows.net/cdn/wp-content/uploads/SexualitySS.pdf>. This statement acknowledges that there are various positions on human sexuality and also various interpretations of the scriptures on this subject.
2. As previously noted, science tells us that being gay, lesbian, or bisexual is neither a lifestyle or a mental disorder. The American Psychological Association published this overview article: American Psychological Association. (2008, October 29). *Understanding Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality*. <https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq/orientation>
3. The NALC was formed in 2010, one year after the ELCA approved its position on this matter. Their opposition to the ELCA's position appears to be the principal reason for the NALC's formation.

Point 17. Shrinking membership trend in ELCA vs other Lutheran Churches

- a. 41% membership decline from 1987 to 2021 (sowhatfaith.com)
- b. Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia scheduled to close 1-1-2025 (WLTX News)
- c. NALC membership has grown from approximately 20 churches to approximately 500+ today (Pastor Dave Thostrup, Dean, NALC)

Response:

- a. The drop in ELCA's membership reflects the nationwide trends experience with most other mainline, Protestant denominations according to the Pew Research Center. Nondenominational community churches represent the one area of growth, according to Pew.
- b. The low number of students left at the Seminary made the change essential, to shift the LTSS to the Hickory NC campus of Lenoir Rhyne University.
- c. The NALC growth as a relatively new church appears to be associated with the disaffiliation of ELCA churches as they join the NALC.

Point 18. The perception of a number of St. Paul's members is that ELCA has more of a focus on congregations assisting the National Church body, instead of the National Church body assisting the ministry of congregations.

Response:

This is an undocumented, personal opinion.

Point 19. Members not being proud of the National Church (ELCA) and cannot defend its actions.

Response:

This is an undocumented, personal opinion. Our church has many members who are proud, ELCA Lutherans.

Point 20. Biblical References concerning sexual activity:

Leviticus 18:22

Matthew 19:4-6

Romans 1:26-27

1 Corinthians 6:9-10

Jude 1:7

Response:

This unsound technique of "cherry picking" biblical references must be considered as an incomplete, slanted way of studying the Bible. For example, the single Gospel reference in Matthew is to Jesus' response to the question related to divorce, not a statement that same sex relationships are sinful. In regard to sexual activity, there are many books written that give in-depth interpretations of the Bible's approach to homosexuality, which appears to be a major issue in the creation of the NALC church. Jesus did not give us parables or other teachings about homosexuality.

Point 21. Biblical references concerning masculine references to God:

Genesis 1:27

Psalms 23:1

Matthew 6:9

John 10:30

2 Samuel 7:14

Psalms 89:26

Response:

"Father" is frequently used to refer to God, especially in the New Testament, including in the Lord's Prayer, referenced above. Jesus consistently refers to God as "father." There are also many passages that depict God as "mother," as shown below.

- Isaiah 66:12-13 – a mother comforting her child
- Deuteronomy 32:18 – God giving birth to Israel and image of a woman in labor
- Isaiah 42:14, 49:15, 66:13 – God depicted as groaning like a woman in labor and comforting as a mother comforts her child
- Hosea 11:3-4 – God as a mother teaching her child to walk
- Psalm 131:2 – description of God's soul like a weaned child with her mother
- Matthew 23:37, Luke 13:34 - Jesus comparing himself to a hen gathering chicks under her wings
- Psalm 22:9-10, 71:6, Isaiah 66:9 – God described as caring for a newborn like a midwife

Point 22. Biblical references regarding universal salvation:

Mark 16:16
Matthew 13:49-50
Revelations 20:15
2 Thessalonians 1:8-9
John 3:18

Response: As indicated previously, this is another “cherry picking” effort by the author.

Point 23. A review of the ELCA Church wide Assembly August 2022; “The Revisionists have completely taken over”- Author: Dennis D. Nelson, Director of the Lutheran Coalition for Renewal (CORE) – A Voice and Network for Confessing Lutherans.

Key findings:

- a. One needs to look no further than the ELCA’s total embrace of Reconciling Works and its choice of keynote speakers for the 2018 Youth Gathering to realize that confessional Lutherans with traditional views are not welcome.

Findings are:

- Candidacy committees and seminaries will no longer need to pretend to work with traditional candidates. They can reject them outright.
 - Seminaries will be able to openly purge any traditional professors who remain, in the name of the ELCA policy.
 - Synods will no longer need to work with congregations who do not want to call I LGBTQIA+ pastors. These congregations can be told “either call on LGBTQIA+ person or you will not get a pastor at all.” It will be difficult for a pastor who holds traditional views to move to a new synod or a new call. A bishop” will be able to refuse to recommend a pastor for a new call if that pastor is unwilling to do same sex weddings.
 - It will be easier to sue congregations for not doing same sex weddings.
- b. ELCA may remove Evangelical from its name
 - c. ELCA advocates selling buildings and land of closed congregations to balance the budget, adding it is stolen land and they can sell it when they chose. [SIC]
 - d. There is speak by the ELCA to give land from congregations to Native Nations under certain conditions that suit the ELCA. [SIC]
 - e. A woke movement was predominate [SIC] throughout the whole assembly
 - f. In summary of this Assembly – the ELCA has totally obliterated any reason why anyone with traditional views would ever trust the ELCA. The damage to the body is irreparable.

Response:

First, it is unclear why this item addresses an assembly that occurred back in 2022 and why the author did not include the opinion of local, SPLC and other South Carolina participants’ “review” of the assembly.

The Lutheran CORE (<https://www.lutherancore.website/>) and Lutheran Congregational Support Network (<https://lutherancongregationalupportnetwork.org/>) share one common theme – “What’s wrong with the ELCA?” The “findings” for this item are based on opinions from one individual, Dennis Nelson, who appears to be the director of Lutheran CORE and pastor of Living Water Lutheran Church in Scottsdale, AZ (no affiliation indicated on this church’s website). It appears that a good bit of the material presented by those advocating for disaffiliation came from these two organizations, including the contents of the PowerPoint presented at the “brunch and learn” meeting at St. Paul’s featuring the NALC.

This lengthy item is full of false information intended to create an atmosphere of fear that if SPLC does not pull out of the ELCA soon, the results could be disastrous. For example, item “c” indicates that the

ELCA could sell the property of “closed congregations” to make money to “balance the budget.” This is preposterous and completely untrue. The referenced organizations identify selected special cases to prove their points. If a church dissolves and does not affiliate with another denomination legally, then it loses its status as a non-profit organization under South Carolina state law. If that church does not immediately move to change its status under the law, then its assets are then “in limbo.”

It would require too many pages to counter the many untruths presented in point #23, so we will only address two – (a) forcing congregations to perform same sex weddings and (b) the untrue claims about seizing property. In regard to same sex weddings, SPLC’s Constitution does not allow this, and the Synod staff assure us that *this is an individual church’s choice*. Below is the entire response in the SC Synod document about *property seizure*.

“The guiding principle of ownership of property is that deeds and titles remain with congregations. Congregations retain title to their property in all cases of discipline or transfer to another Lutheran body.

If a church votes to become independent or joins a non-Lutheran church body, Synod Council approval is required to retain title. However, whichever way the Synod Council decides, “in neither case does title to the congregation’s property transfer to the synod.” (ELCA Constitution, Chapter 9, Ownership of Property, 9.70)

Title of church property only passes to the synod in two circumstances:

- 1) if the congregation truly ceases to exist (ELCA Constitution C7.01 and SC Synod Constitution †S13.24) or
- 2) if it has accepted property from the synod under deed restriction and the Synod Council later decides that the property is not being used to serve the mission of the church or that the congregation has taken action regarding the property without prior approval of the Synod Council (ELCA Constitution 7.05, SC Synod Constitution †S13.23).

No changes to these constitutional provisions have been proposed for amendment and none are expected.”

NOTE: Use of the term “woke” in item “e” of this point again introduces partisan politics into this discussion. Based on the Merriam-Webster definition, woke means that a person is “aware of and actively attentive to important societal facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice.” That a woke movement permeated the event is a positive point about the conference.

Point 24. SC Church to offer biblical message from a drag queen. – The State Paper – May 1, 2022 – An account of Trinity Lutheran Church, Greenville

Response:

This comment is redundant of point #3 about this downtown ELCA church in Greenville. This is irrelevant to St. Paul’s and seems to be an inclusive effort by Trinity Lutheran to involve people who are different from us.

Point 25. “ELCA hits bottom” – Robert Benne, Professor of Religion Emeritus at Roanoke College, October 2018- This is an accounting the 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering held in Houston in late June with 31,000 youngsters. The prime keynote speaker was ELCA Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber and has been a featured celebrity of the ELCA. She

spoke of promotions for the “full acceptance and inclusion of gays and transgender people.” She asks the youth, “Do you renounce the lie that queerness is anything other than beauty?” The youths dutifully chanted back “I renounce them.” There were other shocking claims’ [SIC] made also. Second speaker was Tuhina Rasche, ELCA pastor. Among her amazing information was a blog for two Advent devotionals entitled “Fxxx this Sxxt and #ShuttheHellup.” Of white people she told the youth: Whiteness is such a hell of a drug, white people are willing to blow up the entire fxxxing world in order to maintain white supremacy. These are just two examples of similar information presented to the youth at the gathering. There was much more.

Response:

This is an unfair and biased account of this 2018 youth gathering. The author should have sought Input from one of our own members who attended this event. (According to a father we contacted, it is likely that one or more SLPC youth attended the event.) No source is provided for Dr. Benne’s critique of the youth gathering. The description above labels “full acceptance and inclusion of gays and transgender people” and accepting queerness as “shocking claims.” To label these as shocking claims is contrary to the treatment of “different gender” people as *children of God* and also is contrary to Jesus’ command that we love our neighbors.

The theme of the event was “God’s Call Changes Everything. ” The two speakers noted in Point 25, Nadia Bolz Weber and Tuhina Verma Rasche, are both ordained Lutheran pastors who both have numerous publications and devotional materials online. They are also controversial and sometimes use colorful language. However, it appears that they challenged the attendees to tackle some tough topics. Below are some of the reviews of the gathering from various sources

- <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2018/08/reflecting-on-the-2018-elca-youth-gathering/>
- <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/ecopreacher/2018/07/a-thousand-points-of-lutheran-light-2018-elca-youth-gathering/>
- <https://www.gcsynod.org/news/michaela-shelley-lighthouse> - written by a youth participant from a Grand Canyon Synod church
- <https://vasynod.org/2018-elca-youth-gathering/>

The description of this youth gathering from the Virginia Synod follows: “The theme ‘This Changes Everything’ constantly focused participants’ attention on how God’s call, love, grace, and hope shapes everything we do.”

Point 26. A taste of what to expect at the 2024 Youth Gathering in New Orleans – call for youth to be disruptive and to work for justice. No agenda was available from the ELCA.

Response:

The theme of this Youth Gathering was, in fact, “We are created to be disruptive, working for justice for all.” Point #26 is apparently intended to be a criticism, but the event’s theme seems to be excellent in stimulating youth take their Christianity into the world outside church buildings as “movers and shakers” in spreading and putting into practice the Word of God. Based on the reports of the gathering, the aim was to encourage youth to be “disruptive,” not in breaking the law, but in acting as “movers and shakers” in seeking equality and justice for all, consistent with the lessons taught by Jesus. *Is this not what Jesus’ early followers were?* Below are samples of four greatly positive reports about this event:

- <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2024/08/behind-the-scenes-of-the-youth-gathering/>

- <https://www.wvlv.com/article/news/local/new-orleans-lutheran-youth-gathering-brings-thousands-volunteers-picking-up-trash-storm-cleaning-drains/289-d1189ec3-f667-4233-a2af-163e84c6151a>
- <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2024/07/2024-elca-youth-gathering-kicks-off-in-new-orleans/>
- <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2024/07/2024-elca-youth-gathering-day-2/>

Point 27. A summation of the ELCA efforts regarding DEIA by Elizabeth K. Leibach, PhD, EdD for Pastor David Hunter - A two page report saying that the DEIA is not Christ centered and if it continues will further divide and discourage the Church. [SIC]

Response:

It is difficult to comment on point #27, since the two-page report is not made available. Dr. Leibach appears to be the Director of International Student & Scholar Services at the University of Kentucky. Any statement that Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility are *not* Christ-centered terms does not make any sense, and it is unclear what the context is here. All of these four terms are definitely Christ-centered as they apply to the church. What the term “discourage the church” means is unclear.

- Diversity – We should seek diversity in our congregations, diversity of race, national origin, socio-economic status, sex, marital status, and sexual preference.
- Equity – We should strive for equality for all, as God does with all of us – “*God treats everyone the same.*” (Romans 2:11)
- Inclusion – Our churches must follow Jesus’s example of including *everyone* at His Table – “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” (Romans 15:7)
- Accessibility – This relates to a church’s infrastructure and the limitations that the buildings place on people with physical disabilities. SPLC provides excellent access to people, with the exception of the downstairs youth area.

Other Biblical references pertaining to this point follow:

- 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 – unity and diversity in the church body
- Galatians 3:28 – “you are all one in Jesus”

Point 28. Major disaster on its way - a preview of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, August 8-12, 2022 by Dennis Nelson - Director of CORE- a voice of network for confessing Lutherans. This meeting deals with proposed amendment changes to the ELCA Constitution to be considered in the August 2025 of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly. In summation: Amendment 8.22 and 8.22.01 changed relating to the Mission of Colleges and Institutions. Basically, any reference to God's mission in the world and dedication to Lutheran tradition is removed. God is struck from all wording. Amendment 7.31.02 and 7.61.02 - The Role of Rostered Ministers: All references to God have been removed regarding the responsibilities of Rostered Ministers. Revision of Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust Category C3: Human Sexuality - There are eight points in this which relate to allowing all variations of sexual activity that is not allowed in Biblical teachings. A key sentence in this reading is: "society has much greater awareness of the spectrum of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression"- Note: As time has passed this led to such things as polygamy, which has been endorsed by an ELCA Bishop in Metro D.C., and other worldly sexual acts.

Response:

There is no comment on this item, which was a *preview* of the 2022 assembly. See the response in point #23, which also identified a pastor Dennis Nelson, director of the anti-ELCA Lutheran CORE organization, which has as its principal objective finding fault with the ELCA.

Point 29. A request for the amount of how an individual Lutheran Church's apportionment sent yearly to the SC Synod is used is answered by the Synod in a general sense with references to certain programs. It is not obvious how many of the programs are used with no amounts of money or percentages for programs offered.

Response:

As a repeat of the response to item 13, the proposed Synod's proposed 2026 budget is found here:

<https://scsynod.com/wp-content/uploads/documents/2025assembly/26-27%20Funding-Spending%20Plan%20Approved%20by%20Synod%20Council.pdf>

Point 30. An overview of the ELCA amendments set for approval at the 2025 Church Assembly: These amendments to the Constitution are in response to the DEIA Audit and are presented by the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC). Congregations are encouraged to review the amendments and incorporate only changes into their constitutions.

The amendments include:

- a. Changes involving rostered ministers
- b. A review of the human sexuality

Gift and Trust Social Statement:

- c. The constitutional amendment process and professionalizing investigations.

Response:

There is no response to point #30, since this seems to be an admonition to review the proposed amendments and not a criticism of the ELCA.

Point 31. ELCA Church Council meeting in Chicago, November 4, 2024 - Preparations for the ELCA Churchwide meeting in 2025: Vision Items:

- a. The church that is becoming
- b. DEIA audit
- c. Affirming support for the Jubilee USA Network (Assists poor nations in the world with debt relief, hunger, poverty in the world and USA)
- d. Received reports of approved actions related to the creation of racial justice.
- e. Acknowledged the amendment relating to non-binary inclusion and to gendered language in the constitution.
- f. Received report on sacramental practice relating to Holy Communion practices.
- g. Recommendations on the ELCA strategy regarding black migrants.
- h. Received reports on racial justice and gender justice education.

Response:

Like Point 30, it is unclear why this out-of-date point is included, since it does not critique these items, only report on them. No response is necessary.

Point 32. Accompanying Migrants with Protection, Advocacy, Representation, and Opportunities - the ELCA AMMPARO - in its simplest form, becoming a sanctuary denomination means that the ELCA is publicly declaring walking alongside immigrants and refugees is a matter of faith. We are a church that values and encourages diverse voices and lively dialogue in our faith and life. Living Lutheran is an opportunity for church members to express individual perspectives and does not necessarily reflect the official positions of the ELCA.

Response:

The meaning of point #32 is unclear, since there is no requirement that congregations participate in the AMMPARO strategy. The ELCA has been known for refugee resettlement for many years. Below is the SC Synod's response to the following question posed by a SPLC member at the Synod panel meeting: "Does the Synod have a position on providing aid to undocumented immigrants?" The response follows:

"The ELCA does have a 1998 social message (slightly different from a social statement, in that it builds on the work of a previously written social statement) on Immigration. The message calls on the church to be a place of compassion, not for the sake of agreeing or disagreeing with any political position, but in light of our profound biblical calling to welcome the stranger (see, for instance, Leviticus 19:34, Matthew 25:35, Hebrews 13:2). In 2015 the ELCA adopted the AMMPARO strategy (Accompany Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities) to use legal means to oppose family separation and connect people with legal and humanitarian aid. *No individual, congregation, or synod is asked or encouraged to break the law.* [emphasis added] Participation is not mandated by the ELCA and is voluntary, but commended. Details on the four priorities of AMMPARO may be found here."
(https://elcamediaresources.blob.core.windows.net/cdn/wp-content/uploads/AMMPARO_Priorities.pdf)

Point 33. The Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) document is a plan that provides humanitarian and protection assistance to vulnerable refugees and migrants. This program is supported by money and funding from the ELCA. (Researcher's note: from information on this website, this includes all illegal aliens including those involved in criminal activities. There is no mention of screening those that have entered the US.)

Response:

The researcher's note is an inference and not a fact. See the response to point #32.

Point 34. Lutheran Coalition for Renewal (CORE) - January 2025 - Pastor David Chariton, Pastor of a North American Lutheran Church (NALC) in Florida - Pastor Chariton addresses the hesitancy of some ELCA traditional Bishops to address the radical changes in the ELCA. Also, discussed was a review of the resolutions in the ELCA Social statement, "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust. Also, included is a four page accounting of how the National ELCA advocates to assume control and church property if a congregation leaves the ELCA.

Response:

This expresses an opinion of Pastor Chariton and not a statement of facts. The statement that the ELCA "advocates to assume control and church property if a congregation leaves the ELCA" is false. See the lengthy response to point #23. As previously stated, the Lutheran Coalition for Renewal (CORE) is an organization that's principal objective is to identify "what's wrong with the ELCA," whether the information is true or not. NOTE: We were unable to find any information about the referenced pastor.

Point 35. From CNN - August 8, 2019 - The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America voted Wednesday to become the country's first "sanctuary church body." It is stated that:

- a. Provide shelter for undocumented immigrants
- b. Respond to raids, deportations and the criminalization of immigrants and refugees
- c. Fight individual cases of deportation and press for the end of mass deportations

Response:

This is correct, but this should not be seen as a criticism. The ELCA has developed talking points and guidelines to address what it means for this church to become a sanctuary denomination. In defining what this means for its congregations, the ELCA states that a sanctuary church will look different in the different contexts across the ELCA. The church cannot mandate or direct ELCA congregations and ministries to respond in certain ways. This statement summarizes the ELCA's position: "Being a sanctuary denomination is about loving our neighbors. While we may have different ideas about how to fix this broken system and may have different ways of loving our neighbors, our call to love our neighbor is central to our faith." (<https://www.elca.org/our-work/relief-and-development/ammparo/sanctuarychurch>)

Point 36. Presiding Bishop Eaton issues statement on Immigration Executive Orders, January 28, 2025- New Policy Changes for the ELCA are to oppose:

- a. Orders to suspend refugee re-settlement
- b. New and sweeping enforcement priorities
- c. The summons of military personnel to the boarder [SIC]
- d. The decision to revoke special guidance regarding enforcement activity at or near sacred or protected places.

Response:

Members of SPLC may support or oppose this position, but St. Paul's is not involved in refugee resettlement, as are many ELCA churches. This does not affect St. Paul's.

Point 37. CORE Director, Pastor Dennis Nelson, is removed from the ELCA Clergy Facebook group by the ELCA. He is a rostered ELCA retired pastor and a member in good standing at an ELCA Congregation.

Response:

Facebook groups have administrators and typically have rules that group members must follow, such as being courteous and avoiding misstatements. Pastor Nelson's statements, quoted in previous points by the report's author, include numerous falsehoods. He is the pastor of the Living Water Lutheran Church in Arizona, which is not an ELCA church. As stated, CORE, whose main objective is to discredit the ELCA, does not list Pastor Nelson as their director. This action of dropping him from a Facebook group does not affect SPLC.

Point 38. A statement on Hope in Action from the Bishops of ELCA Region Nine - January 27, 2025 - This statement basically reaffirms the ELCA's desire for illegal immigration and LGBTQIA+ policies and actions. "Justice requires everyone, including immigrants to be treated fairly and equitably." While upholding the rule of law is important, it must not be done in ways that dehumanize or exploit vulnerable people." This is signed by Bishop Aebischer first with five others after her.

Response: See response to point #32.

Point 39. ELCA DEIA overview - January 27, 2025 - The Chicago law firm Fox Swibel Levin and Carroll was retained by the ELCA to perform a diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility audit of the ELCA Constitution, By-Law, Continuing Resolutions, Roster Manual, etc. Key findings: ELCA Leadership seems more committed to DEIA than

do congregations Suggested that ELCA institutional culture be adjusted to accommodate mandates Provide incentive to congregations that comply - voting power, grants, financial assistance Required annual DEIA training using an approved provider for pastors, church staff, and lay leaders. Require relationship with DEIA church with opposite demographics as your church All proposed DEIA constitutional changes are to be grounded on a "Biblical" basis to guard against legal claims At least 10% of goods/services purchased by a congregation must be from businesses owned by person of color, and an additional 10% shall be purchased from historically underrepresented groups such as LGBTQIA+.

Response: These are not requirements of congregations, and this does not affect SPLC. See response to point 27.

Point 40. 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly summary of Actions - August 14, 2019 Among actions items are: Approved Social Statement - "Faith, sexism and justice a call to Action, Includes, in part, the church action on a range of issues, including gender-based violence, workplace discrimination and economic inequality. Adopted the "Strategy Toward Diversity in the ELCA" Adopted a memorial that affirms the ELCA's long standing commitment migrants and refugees and declares the ELCA a sanctuary church body. to Adopted a resolution to condemn white supremacy calling all ELCA congregations to engage in "a study of the structures and rhetoric that empower and fuel racism and white supremacy.

Response: It is unclear what the objection is to these actions by the ELCA. These are all consistent with our Christian values.

Point 41. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) use American tax dollars to relocate migrants. News Nation, June 7, 2023 - NGO's receive billions of taxpayer funds through several federal departments to like Department of Homeland Security and Health and Human Services. According to Forbes, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services reported more than \$93.1 million in US Government grants in its 2021 Financial Statement, making taxpayer funded grants more than 80% of its total support.

Response:

The ELCA has historically been an international leader in its refugee resettlement efforts. The current administration has been very aggressive in reducing and eliminating many grants, including those supporting the ELCA's efforts. Prior administrations have sought assistance from non-governmental organizations such as the ELCA to help carry out federal immigration laws. See the responses to points #32 and #35. Since SPLC is not involved in this effort, this action does not affect our church.

Point 42. So What Faith - ELCA membership cut in half. May 25, 2024-Pastor Greg Smith, Pastor at Advent Lutheran Church, Arlington, Texas-The ELCA was formed in 1988 and almost every year since, the denomination has experienced a decline in membership. According to ELCA reports, baptized membership between 1988 to 2020 has declined from : 1988-5,251,534 2020-3,142,777

Response:

We did not try to verify these figures but do not question the trend (see note below). The ELCA drop in membership is consistent with the trends in other mainline denominations, according to the Pew Research Center in its Religious Landscape Study. Also, the Pew Center's research demonstrates that the *percentage of U.S. adults who identify as Protestants* has dropped substantially over the past ten years, but may have leveled off since 2000. The Baptists, followed by the Methodists, showed the greatest reductions among Protestant denominations in this measure, with the Lutherans dropping approximately

the same percentage as the Presbyterians. The nondenominational Protestants were the only group showing a ten-year increase. (<https://www.pewresearch.org/collections/religious-landscape-study/>)

NOTE: According to Greg Smith's website, he is the *interim pastor* of Advent Lutheran Church in Texas and is ordained by the *United Church of Christ*. We could not verify the figures cited in this point and could not find online article about an ELCA membership drop. On Pastor Smith's website there is the following article – "Southern Baptist Membership Drops Every Year Since 2006."

Point 43. ELCA Bishop Support Polygamy - Exposing the ELCA, August 5, 2019 - Bishop Leila Ortiz, ELCA Metro D.C. Synod - From Bishop Ortiz: "How do you judge and how do you point fingers and condemn people that don't know any other way of being? People have been polygamous relationships for decades, they have just been private about it. So now we are in a place where it's public. This isn't just a fad. This is a reality that has always been." This is an ELCA Bishop proclaiming support for polygamous relationships. Polygamy is against God's will as He has clearly outlined in Scripture. Definition of Polygamy: having more than one mate at the same time.

Response:

From the article posted online about this local bishop's statement, this bishop apparently is NOT supporting polygamy: "How do you judge and how do you point fingers and condemn people that don't know any other way of being?" (https://www.exposingtheelca.com/exposed-blog/elca-bishop-supports-polygamy#google_vignette) She is simply expressing an acceptance of people ("children of God") who choose this lifestyle, not speaking for the ELCA or presenting an official position by the church. See the introductory pages to this response document in regard to this extremely unprofessional and "muckraking" styled website criticizing this bishop (exposingtheelca.com).

Point 44. Produced by the ELCA - "Dismantle, An Anti-White Supremacy Lenten Devotional" - March 2025 - A 29 page Lenten Devotional claiming there is white supremacy and the ELCA condemns it as racism in Lutheran Churches. (Condemnation of White Supremacy and Racist Rhetoric SPR19-ELCA Resources)

Response:

This Social Policy Resolution condemning white supremacy, racism, and Christian Nationalism is very well-written and fully reflects our Christian and Lutheran values. In the current, highly polarized political climate, there are organizations and politicians advocating white supremacy by their words and actions. As stated in this resolution,

"We are called by Jesus to 'love our neighbors as ourselves.' As persons called to love one another as God has loved us, we therefore proclaim our commitment to speak with one voice against racism and white supremacy." (https://elcamediaresources.blob.core.windows.net/cdn/wp-content/uploads/Condemnation_of_White_Supremacy_and_Racist_Rhetoric.pdf)

Point 45. Model Constitution for Congregations of the ELCA - current as of November 2022- The timing of this concurs with the 2022 - ELCA Churchwide Assembly Meeting. A copy is included with changes underlines it is not clear if this is part of Constitutional changes to be considered in the Churchwide Assembly in 2025, however it was created by the ELCA and is worth consideration. [SIC]

No Response

Point 46. The Story of the North American Lutheran Church (NALC) and a brief history of the American Lutheranism from its beginning until 1988 is offered for information. Also, an accounting of the ELCA from 1988 to recent times is also included.

No Response

March 13, 2025 *[date of congregation member's paper that includes these 46 points]*