

“SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE”

“...Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

Ephesians 4:15-16

Questions and Answers Regarding Nazareth Evangelical Lutheran Church’s Affiliation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Our Response to Recent Churchwide Assembly Actions Pertaining to Human Sexuality

The following series of questions and answers are part of our congregation’s ongoing conversation and discernment in regard to our relationship with the ELCA and our positions with regard to biblical interpretation and authority generally, and issues of human sexuality specifically. Though much of the language of this document stems from a similar statement from our sister congregation, The Lutheran Church of Hope in West Des Moines, we offer the following responses as a faithful testimony to our own Congregation’s preaching and teaching:

1. What is the ELCA?

ELCA stands for “Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” and consists of approximately 4.6 million members and around 10,000 congregations.

2. What is the history of the relationship between Nazareth and the ELCA?

Nazareth has been an ELCA congregation since the denomination formed in 1988. Since then, we have been blessed by countless relationships with ELCA congregations, the Northeastern Iowa Synod, Colleges (Grand View, Luther, Waldorf, Wartburg), Bible camps (Riverside, Ewalu), ministries (Lutheran Services in Iowa), and global outreach organizations (Lutheran World Relief, ELCA Disaster Response).

3. Does Nazareth and/or our pastors have a financial reason for remaining in the ELCA?

No. Nazareth receives no money from the ELCA and our mortgage and other financial liabilities are not tied to the ELCA. Our pastors are enrolled in the ELCA health and pension plan, but other fiscally responsible arrangements and options are available.

4. What did the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly vote to change regarding sexual boundaries?

They voted to allow congregations who choose to do so to recognize same gender relationships, and to possibly call pastors who are in same gender, lifelong, monogamous relationships.

5. As a result of this vote, has anything changed at Nazareth Evangelical Lutheran Church regarding what we teach or practice?

No. Nothing has changed at Nazareth in what we teach, preach and practice.

6. What does Nazareth Evangelical Lutheran Church teach about sexual boundaries?

First, Jesus commands us to love all people – when Christians hate others, we lose our moral center and our ability to carry out Christ’s mission to “seek and save the lost.” Second, we are all sinners in need of a Savior, and people who are gay are not bigger sinners than people who are not gay. Third, according to the Bible, a full sexual relationship belongs only inside the boundaries of a marriage between one man and one woman. We believe and teach that all sexual boundaries established by God are good and intended for our safety and well-being in relationship to God and others.

7. Is God some sort of sexual prude?

No. God is definitely “pro-sex.” He invented it. Human sexuality is a gift God gives to a man and a woman who are married to share with one another for the sake of procreation, intimacy, and pleasure (see Song of Songs). God’s laws in regard to sexual boundaries are clear and good, and intended for our benefit, protection, and abundant life.

8. Is Nazareth “anti-gay?”

Absolutely not. We love and welcome all people at Nazareth, including those who identify themselves as gay. Nazareth is a hospital for sinners, not a hangout for morally perfect saints. We affirm Romans 3:23 which clearly states that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” It is not our intent to “see the speck in our neighbor’s eye,” and overlook the “log” in our own. Rather, we humbly desire to honor the Apostle Paul’s words to the Ephesians as we endeavor to “speak the truth in love,” to any and all who are separated from God.

9. How can we, as a church, claim to love gay people if we don’t bless, endorse, and agree with their sexual behavior?

We do love gay people, and we don’t think that love means full agreement with all behavioral choices. Most parents love their children more than life itself, but these same loving parents don’t bless, endorse, or agree with every aspect of their children’s behavior. Best friends rarely endorse all facets of each other’s behavior, yet their love for

one another is not called into question. Jesus commands us to follow his teaching and his example to love all people, without exception, and our love for gay people continues even when we announce God's law regarding homosexual behavior. We believe that sharing the biblical call to repent, or turn from destructive attitudes and/or behaviors, is in fact an act of love, not hate.

10. What if I disagree with what is taught at Nazareth regarding homosexual behavior?

Christians can disagree on all sorts of issues, and still find unity in Jesus Christ. We can still be a church together because the faith that unites us is stronger than the disagreements that could divide us. God calls families to stay together, even when they disagree on important issues. At Nazareth, we do not all agree on worship styles, social issues, politics, music, or cultural norms, and yet we are still one body, united in Christ. And though most at Nazareth do not see homosexual behavior as a disputable matter, we affirm that our unity in Christ is greater than all our disagreements.

11. Do all of the pastors at Nazareth agree on the Bible's teaching regarding sexual boundaries?

Yes. A church can remain united when members disagree on issues, but a church will rarely be able to hold together when teachers disagree on what they teach. At Nazareth, all of our pastors and teachers are in full agreement regarding what we teach on sexual boundaries, based on God's Word.

12. If the ELCA Churchwide Assembly and Nazareth Evangelical Lutheran Church do not align regarding what to teach about sexual boundaries, why would we, as a congregation, remain affiliated with the ELCA?

BIBLICAL: The New Testament lifts up church unity as a major theme. Jesus prays that his followers "will all be one" (John 17:21). Paul writes, "You are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28), and again, "There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5). God desires unity. The devil desires to divide the church into smaller segments, so he can more easily attack denominations and congregations. We prefer to give God's plan every chance to develop.

MISSIONAL: In spite of these specific decisions, God has used and continues to use the ELCA to bless millions of people, proclaim the Gospel globally, make disciples, establish churches, work for justice, serve the poor, and provide significant theological contributions. The ELCA has been, and continues to be, a major positive force in furthering the cause of Jesus Christ in this world. If the largest Lutheran denomination in the United States splits into several pieces, that would be a loss for Christianity, but it

may happen. So, for the sake of mission and the potential for renewal, we are in a season of discernment. After full opportunity for study and prayer on this issue, the Nazareth Evangelical Lutheran Church congregation will determine whether Nazareth remains affiliated with the ELCA or not.

CONFSSIONAL: Nazareth continues to affirm and subscribe to the historic Lutheran Confessions in regard to what constitutes the “one holy Christian church.” Article VII of the Augsburg Confession states that this is “The Assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel.” We assert that the Assembly’s actions demonstrate a misunderstanding of the Law of God. We are not prepared to say that the ELCA as a whole has ceased to preach the Gospel in its purity and administer the holy sacraments according to the Gospel. We do, however, believe that the Churchwide Assembly’s actions threaten the unity of the ELCA and hinder its larger witness in the world.

HISTORICAL: History has not been kind to Lutheran denominational splinter groups in this country. They have a difficult time establishing any momentum because they are too often based on self-righteous anger and immersed in church politics, rather than primarily driven by the call from God to transform the world by pointing people to the life-changing love of Jesus Christ. As the largest congregation within the Northeastern Iowa Synod, the second largest Lutheran congregation in the state of Iowa, and the twenty-seventh largest congregation of the ELCA, Nazareth has a role to play in this matter, and so any decision on whether to remain affiliated with the ELCA, or leave the ELCA, will be made only after prayerful study and careful consideration.

PRACTICAL: Nothing has changed at Nazareth regarding what we preach, teach or practice as a result of the 2009 CWA decisions. We believe that the ELCA Churchwide Assembly’s actions do not accurately represent the prevailing view in our denomination. Though we respect the representative process that allows for important decisions in regard to our life together to be made, we also acknowledge, as Luther did, that assemblies and councils “have often erred and contradicted themselves.” We do not believe that the Churchwide Assembly’s decisions trump the witness of scripture in this regard and the Assembly does not have the authority to change what we preach, teach or practice at Nazareth.

13. Is there a point at which Nazareth would consider becoming a part of a new or different Lutheran denomination?

Yes. If the Nazareth congregation decides that the prevailing view taught within the congregations of the ELCA has changed and aligned with the ELCA Churchwide

Assembly votes, and/or if the Nazareth congregation decides it can no longer teach and practice what we believe the Bible compels us to do regarding sexual boundaries, then the Nazareth congregation would have to decide whether or not Nazareth and the ELCA can continue to be church together.

14. Has the leadership at Nazareth considered becoming a non-denominational and/or non-Lutheran church, or officially drop “Lutheran” from our name and just be called, “Nazareth Evangelical Church?”

No. There is strong agreement at Nazareth that we want to remain Lutheran. However, we recognize that being Lutheran is not necessarily synonymous with remaining in the ELCA.

15. Didn’t Martin Luther, the leader of the Protestant Reformation and the man we name our churches after, leave the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th Century and start a new denomination?

No. Luther never left. Even though he knew that the church was engaged in biblically unsupportable practices, he stayed until he was excommunicated and worked the rest of his life trying to reform (thus the name “reformation”) the church he loved, rather than leave to start a new denomination. It wasn’t until after Luther died – several decades after the posting of the 95 Theses on the door of the Wittenberg Church – that those who agreed theologically with Luther realized the gap had grown too wide between them and the Roman Catholic Church, with no recognizable hope for reconciliation. Only then did they form a new denomination, and became known as “Lutherans.” It may well be that the gap between the ELCA and the Nazareth congregation has grown or may grow so wide that there is no hope for reconciliation, but that is a decision that will be made at the appropriate time by the Nazareth congregation.

16. Isn’t being Lutheran, no matter what, putting too much emphasis on our heritage and tradition?

No. We don’t believe God calls Nazareth to be Lutheran for the sake of heritage or tradition, but for the sake of furthering a Lutheran theological understanding. At the core of our Lutheran identity is a profound emphasis upon God’s love and amazing grace. We emphasize, as Lutherans, salvation by grace through faith in Christ apart from anything we could do to earn God’s eternal favor. We hold a high view of Scripture as the inspired and living Word of God, and we teach the priesthood of all believers. Historically and theologically, that is what it means to be Lutheran, and that is worth preserving.

17. Unity is important, but doesn't the Bible suggest that Christians should have nothing to do with sexually immoral people?

Paul warns the first-century Corinthian church not to associate with “sexual sinners” (1 Corinthians 5:11), but that law is contextual, not timeless. Church life for the Corinthians was spinning out of control: some were getting drunk on communion wine, some were speaking in tongues during worship without boundaries, and still others were endorsing perverse and abusive sexual behaviors within the church. Into this setting, Paul mandated a set of specific rules, including a call to expel sexual sinners for the sake of restoring order to the first-century Corinthian church. In the same letter, Paul also commanded women not to cut their hair, and to wear head coverings (1 Corinthians 11:5-6), as women with short hair in that first-century Corinthian culture were assumed to be prostitutes, causing further disorder in the church.

Unless we are going to insist that women who pray today in church wear head coverings (and there's no applicable biblical reason to do so), then for the sake of biblical consistency, we can not insist that Paul's command for the first-century Corinthian church to separate from sexual sinners applies to us, and certainly not to the relationship between Nazareth and the ELCA. That would be “proof texting” – a very dangerous game for Christians to play, and one that ultimately diminishes the significance of God's Word in a church (picking and choosing Bible texts to support our causes, rather than letting the full text and context of a particular passage compel, challenge, and guide our lives).

18. Aren't all of the commands in the Bible regarding sexual boundaries contextual, and therefore not applicable to our modern world?

No. Some laws in the Bible are clearly “contextual” (like “don't eat pork”), meaning they are written for the good of that particular community. Other biblical commands are “timeless” (like “love one another”), meaning they are intended for and applicable to all people at all times.

How can we tell the difference? It's not that difficult. Biblical laws that are repeated consistently across different times and places stand out as unchangeable and timeless. These laws are even more assuredly timeless if Jesus does not refer to them, challenge them, or offer a new revelation regarding them. When Jesus disagreed with the narrow and legalistic interpretations made by the religious leaders of his day, he routinely brought those laws into the light for a more timeless interpretation. For instance, Jesus says, “You have heard the law that says, ‘An eye for an eye’ (contextual) ... but I say, ‘Turn the other cheek’ (timeless).” Matthew 5:38-39 A few verses later, Jesus says, “You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy’ (contextual) ... but I say, ‘Love your enemies’ (timeless).” Matthew 5:43-44

Jesus had ample opportunity to do the same kind of timeless interpreting of Old Testament contextual laws regarding sexuality and marriage, but he did not, nor did he raise the issue of homosexual behavior as something that could – in some relationships –

be considered a God- blessed option. In fact, when the issue of marriage and sexual boundaries was brought to Jesus, he affirmed the Old Testament law established by God at the creation of the first human beings: “Haven’t you read the Scriptures? They record that from the beginning ‘God made them male and female and this explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united as one.’” Matthew 19:4-6 (see also Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:31). Clearly, then, here we have a mandate from God, established at the beginning of creation, affirmed by Jesus in the Gospels, and Paul in the epistles: God created the gift of sex to be shared within the boundaries of a marriage between a man and a woman. Throughout the Bible, there is not one hint of any kind of God-blessed alternative when it comes to sexual intimacy. So, this is not a contextual law, but a timeless law that definitely does apply to us, and to our world.

19. Doesn’t the Bible contain passages that speak against homosexual behavior that are contextual and therefore irrelevant?

Some passages found in Leviticus contain words of condemnation for homosexuality, and some scholars claim they are contextual and not directly applicable to us. Some scholars also claim that the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis is really about a condemnation of violence and rape, not homosexuality. Even if these points are granted, they still fall well short of an endorsement for homosexual behavior. Regarding Paul’s reference to homosexuality as “unnatural” (Romans 1:24-27), some suggest that Paul was ignorant of the distinction between homosexual orientation and behavior, and therefore this passage is irrelevant – not their strongest point, however, as it attempts to build a rather shaky bridge of logic between what Paul didn’t know, which is impossible to prove, and the false premise that orientation presumes behavior.

Still, even if all of the above were legitimate claims, those who want to use the Bible to endorse homosexual behavior have no challenge for the timeless biblical laws from God regarding sexual boundaries, announced at the creation of the first human beings, consistently affirmed throughout Scripture (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:6, Ephesians 5:31), and without any hint of an exception to the rule.

20. What about Abraham or Solomon, who had multiple wives and concubines? What about David, who committed adultery?

The Bible describes these relationships, but does not bless them. God does not bless polygamy. God does not bless adultery. God does not bless premarital sex. God does not bless homosexual behavior. God does not bless any sexual behavior, outside of marriage between one man and one woman, at any point in the Bible. The fact that the Bible describes all of these behaviors does not mean that God blesses the behaviors.

21. What about love? Jesus commands his followers to love, so doesn’t that mean a same-gendered couple ought to be free to express their love for one another in a sexual way?

Well, using this same logic, a case could be made for God-blessed adultery, incest, premarital sex, pedophilia, or any other kind of sexual behavior shared by people who are in love (from somewhat socially acceptable to highly illegal). Love expressed sexually is a wonderful gift from God that includes the clearly defined boundaries of a life-long marriage between one man and one woman.

22. How can a person who is born gay be expected to refrain from homosexual behavior?

While our culture continues to debate whether or not a person is “born gay,” the biblical reality is that it doesn’t matter. Galatians 5:22-23 makes it clear that one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit is “self-control.” That doesn’t mean it’s easy to resist temptation, particularly when the urge is strong. Nor does it mean that those who give into this temptation are somehow worse sinners than those who are involved in some other kind of sinful sexual behavior (adultery, lust, pornography, promiscuity, treating human beings like sexual objects, etc.). A casual reader of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount knows that almost all of us are guilty of sinful sexual behavior (Matthew 5:28), and therefore ought to be careful not to see the speck in our neighbor’s eye when we have a log in our own (Matthew 7:3-5). But being tempted to sin, or more specifically having been born with a desire to engage in homosexual behavior, does not mean we are powerless to stop short of acting on that orientation. The urge to get involved sexually with another human being, even when love is involved, does not prove the rightness of the behavior.

23. Isn’t homosexuality a justice issue, like the abolition of slavery, women’s suffrage, or the civil rights movement of the 1960s?

It is clearly true that people who are gay have far too frequently been criticized, ridiculed, verbally abused, or worse by religious people who misunderstand God’s Word, and misuse the Bible to try and make their “case” for bigotry. That’s unjust.

Historically, religious bigots also tried to use Scripture to support slavery, suppress women’s rights, or force African-Americans to live as second-class citizens. In each case, the Bible was applied inappropriately or dishonestly to further an unjust ideology. Over time, these biblically unsupportable claims were dismissed, while the faithful in the church led the charge for change and justice. Without the leadership of Christians inspired by God’s Word, the abolition of slavery would not have occurred when it did, women would not have been given the right to vote when they did, and the civil rights movement of the 1960s would not have happened the way it did.

Some claim that homosexuality is the new justice issue for our day, and the church will come along and eventually bless same gender sexual behavior. There are some similarities, but the biblical witness in each regard is not the same. Yes, the church has an obligation to stand up for anyone who is oppressed because of race, gender, ethnicity, or even sexual *orientation*. But that does not mean the church is also called to stand in favor

of homosexual *behavior*, which the Bible speaks against. This is an important distinction. Some would prefer to blur the lines between justice/oppression and morality/behavior when it comes to gay rights and homosexuality, but that's not honest or biblically faithful. The oppression of gay people is a justice issue over which the church is called to stand against, but homosexual behavior is a moral issue which the church does not have the authority to change with a vote. So, at Nazareth, we teach that oppression of people who are gay is unjust and sinful. We also teach that no one, even those who are oppressed, has a free pass from God to engage in sinful behavior.

24. Regarding Nazareth's teaching on sexual boundaries, aren't we concerned that large segments of our culture will say our teaching is either too loose or too strict?

No. The culture is not an authority for the church. We do not decide what to teach at Nazareth based on political or social worldviews, popular opinion, or rapidly changing cultural norms. The only foundation for our teaching as a church is God's Word. If we attempt to minimize the authority of, or modify God's Word, we erode the foundation of our faith.

25. Why not just be silent as a church about homosexuality, since it can be such a sensitive subject?

The Bible is not silent about homosexuality, so we can't be silent or pretend that God really has nothing relevant to say about the matter. Homosexuality, like it or not, has become a major social issue in the world today, and God has spoken powerful words that need to be heard in this discussion. Not only that, this current debate in the ELCA is about more than sexuality, it's about how we read and understand the Bible, and whether or not we will allow Scripture to be our final authority in all matters of faith and daily life.

26. I thought Nazareth was a mission-based church, not issues-based, so why are we talking about this issue?

A: Nazareth is mission-based, and we are not emphasizing this issue over mission. The mission of the church continues, stronger than ever. The culture and our denomination are, however, currently involved in finding clarity on this particular issue to the point where the future of the ELCA, and the future of how our culture defines marriage and family, is at stake. So, we have a responsibility to participate in the conversation, or run the risk of becoming irrelevant and, worse, unfaithful. Ultimately, we believe that our public stance on this issue is part of our witness to the love and grace of God shown through Jesus who frees us from our "bondage to sin" and is, thus, an extension of our mission to "make Christ known."

27. Who is the "leadership" at Nazareth that makes these decisions?

A properly called congregational meeting is the highest authority of our congregation. The congregation elects Council Members at Nazareth's annual meeting in January, and at this and similar meetings, establishes the policies and priorities that govern our life

together. The Church Council then acts as the Board of Directors for this Congregation in between congregational meetings carrying out the Congregation's policies and priorities. The senior pastor is accountable to the Church Council, and the other pastors at Nazareth are accountable to the senior pastor. We refer you to the timeline that appears at the back of this document as an appendix for an account of specific actions that have been taken to date.

28. Is Nazareth the only congregation that decided to discontinue open-ended benevolence giving to the ELCA's Churchwide offices?

No. A growing number of ELCA congregations are choosing the same path, not wanting to leave the denomination prematurely, and yet not wanting to provide ongoing financial support for a hierarchy that voted for a new social statement and ministry recommendations that stand in conflict with Scripture.

29. What will happen to the ELCA if churches don't financially support Churchwide ministries?

Hopefully, it will lead to a Christ-centered renewal for the ELCA, which might include less bureaucracy and fewer votes on social statements at Churchwide Assemblies, more of a commitment to God's Word as the final source and norm for all matters of faith and daily life, wider outreach to the lost and hurting, and a deeper expansion of God's Kingdom.

30. Why would Nazareth object to calling a pastor who is in an openly gay relationship? Aren't all pastors sinners?

All people, pastors at Nazareth included, are sinners. Being a sinner doesn't disqualify a person from being a pastor. Being an unrepentant sinner does. Repentant sinners acknowledge their sinful behavior, seek forgiveness, and do not claim by words or actions that their behavior is God-blessed and therefore something that should continue. Pastors involved in same gender sexual relationships are involved in ongoing, unrepentant sin. By words or actions, they embrace their sinful behavior and claim to know better than God when it comes to defining sexual boundaries. At that point, they are no longer qualified to serve as pastors. It's not sin that disqualifies pastors from church leadership or the Kingdom of Heaven, it's unrepentant sin.

31. Does that mean unrepentant sinners are not welcome at Nazareth?

All people are welcome at Nazareth. For the sake of order and consistency, unrepentant sinners are asked to refrain from participation in the sacraments and participation in church leadership positions.

32. Are there other Lutheran denominations that stand out as viable options to the ELCA, should Nazareth decide to leave?

There are several other Lutheran denominations, as well as Lutheran “movements” or “alliances” ...

The Lighthouse Covenant was started by the senior pastors of five of the ten largest congregations in the ELCA. It is not a denomination, nor does it seek to become one at this time. Instead, it is a newly developing and rapidly growing network of Lutherans who are planning prayer meetings and events for the sake of connecting, finding new ways to do church together, and providing a safe haven for smaller ELCA congregations.

Lutheran CORE is a rapidly growing organization with a strong emphasis on the authority of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. It is led by ELCA pastors and theologians who will not accept the votes of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) is an intentionally less structured denomination that shares some history with the Word Alone movement.

The North American Lutheran Church is a new denomination emerging in response to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly actions of 2009 and offering an alternative to conservative/orthodox Lutheran congregations, particularly those that are no longer able or willing to remain in the ELCA. According to its web site, “The NALC is committed to shaping its life around four attributes: Christ-Centered, Mission-Driven, Traditionally-Grounded, and Congregationally-Focused.”

All four of these groups are relatively new, so things can and probably will change as they grow and develop. The wise course of action for Nazareth is to pause, pray, and carefully examine and ponder all of our options. Ultimately, we seek only to be faithful to God in whatever decision we make.

33. But what if people leave Nazareth because they don't think we provide a strong enough condemnation of gay people, or on the other side of this debate, they feel like what Nazareth teaches is too strict?

God bless them. We will still love them, and we will welcome them back should they choose to return, but God didn't put Nazareth here to be popular. He put us here to be faithful. Those on either side of this issue who believe that the primary mission of the church is to win a culture war are, with all due respect, missing the point of Christianity and causing serious damage to the mission of the church.

The world tends to see things simplistically, and when it comes to this issue, the world insists that there are only two views: either you love gay people by agreeing with their behavior, or you hate gay people by disagreeing with their behavior. Jesus would offer a third and more faithful alternative view, and one that we embrace at Nazareth:

Love people. For the sake of love, do not bless sinful behavior. Remember that all of us are sinners in need of a Savior, and our only hope for salvation depends on God's grace, not our good behavior.

“We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.” Romans 3:22-24

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LIST OF RECENT ACTIONS AND STEPS BY NAZARETH LUTHERAN CHURCH
COUNCIL RELATIVE TO THE ISSUE OF HUMAN SEXUALITY ISSUE AND
ELCA AFFILIATION

- In response to The ELCA Task Force on Human Sexuality's invitation, a written response to the Draft Statement on Human Sexuality was formulated. A group of 35 members led by Pastor David Doely were involved in the review and drafting process. The statement was signed by 113 members before being sent to the ELCA task force in October 2008.
- Sent a letter to Word Alone Network in March 2009 along with \$1000 budgeted donation asking funds be used in efforts to maintain then current ministry standards for pastors at the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.
- Formulated, signed and sent a letter to ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hansen, the National ELCA Church Council, the Synod Council of the Northeast Iowa Synod, and Northeast Iowa Synod Bishop Stephen Ullestad in May 2009, regarding concerns about recommended changes in ministry standards that were to come before the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in August 2009. A copy of the letter is attached.
- Immediately prior to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, an open letter to the congregation was prepared expressing opposition to the proposals to change ministry standards and recognize persons in same-sex relationships as eligible for call to be pastors in the ELCA. A copy of the letter is attached.
- The ELCA Churchwide Assembly met in Minneapolis, MN, August 17–23, 2009.

- Held a special Church Council meeting to meet with a Nazareth member who served as a voting member to the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, on August 25, 2009, immediately after the Assembly, to gain a first-hand report of the decisions of the Churchwide Assembly and the discussions that took place at the assembly.
- At its September meeting the Nazareth Church Council appointed five members of Nazareth Evangelical Lutheran Church to attend the Lutheran CORE convocation on September 26-27, 2009, in Fishers, Indiana, to learn of Lutheran CORE's response to the decisions at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly.
- The Nazareth Church Council held a meeting with the Nazareth members who attended the Lutheran CORE convocation in October 2009, to obtain a first-hand report from them on the actions and discussions at the Lutheran CORE convocation.

- The Nazareth Church Council and Call Committee met in November, 2009 with the Northeastern Iowa Synod Bishop, Stephen Ullestad, to learn of the Bishop's perspective on the Churchwide Assembly decisions and the reasons for the ELCA Assembly vote.
- The Nazareth Church Council scheduled, planned and participated in a series of three congregational meetings as follows:
 - Meeting on December 3, 2009, to afford Nazareth members an opportunity to hear Bishop Ullestad report on the Churchwide Assembly decisions and respond to questions and concerns raised by Nazareth members.
 - Presentation on December 10, 2009, by Pastor Kenneth Kimball, member of the National Steering Committee of Lutheran CORE, and a pastor of two small ELCA churches in the Northeast Iowa Synod, to learn Lutheran CORE's response to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly decisions and its plans for reconfiguration of North American Lutheranism by establishment of a new Lutheran denomination.
 - Table talk among Nazareth members on December 17, 2009, to specifically discuss and receive congregational input on issues surrounding Nazareth's continued affiliation with the ELCA.
- The Nazareth Church Council recommended to the congregation at the 2010 annual meeting that funds normally forwarded to ELCA Churchwide ministries be designated for ELCA Disaster Response, world hunger, and world missions. This recommendation was passed by the congregation on January 28.
- The congregation also voted to affiliate with Call to Faithfulness a reform group working within the NE Iowa Synod of the ELCA.
- In May, 2010, Pastor King and the Nazareth Evangelical Lutheran Church Council released a document entitled, "Speaking the Truth in Love" as a teaching tool for members and non-members alike. Through a question and answer format, this document gives in-depth responses to questions related to the authority and interpretation of scripture from a conservative/orthodox, Lutheran perspective and discusses aspects of Nazareth's past, present and future relationship to the ELCA.
- In May and June of 2010 Nazareth hosted both pre- and post- Synod Assembly gatherings for members of "Called to Faithfulness," both for the purpose of educating voting delegates about pending resolutions before the Synod Assembly and to reflect upon Assembly decisions and to discern next steps following the Assembly itself.

- Also in June, Nazareth delegates to the Northeastern Iowa Synod Assembly voted in favor of a number of measures that called for the ELCA to rescind or re-visit the ministry recommendations that were made at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. These resolutions were defeated by the Synod Assembly.
- On July 15, a special congregational “round table” discussion with approximately 150 Nazareth members was held for the purpose of discerning/sharing various member viewpoints and concerns in the light of the preceding congregational meetings/forums, the release of the “Speaking the Truth in Love” document drafted by Pastor King and the Nazareth Church Council, and as a follow-up to the Synod Assembly actions of June. A series of five questions focused the table discussions around Nazareth’s mission statement. All table responses were gathered and shared with attendees, as well as made available to the whole congregation.
- On August 12, approximately 70 Nazareth members attended a congregational forum that allowed for members to share their own thoughts and reflections about possible next steps in regard to Nazareth’s relationship with the ELCA.
- Following its October meeting, the Nazareth Church Council made a series of three recommendations:
 - 1) The Nazareth Lutheran Church Council unanimously recommends the adoption of the “Speaking the Truth in Love” document as a position statement of the whole Nazareth congregation. We believe that there is consensus around this document as an accurate statement of our beliefs as a congregation regarding scripture and human sexuality.
 - 2) The Nazareth Lutheran Church Council unanimously recommends the adoption of a new by-law that will preclude the possibility of a pastor of this congregation “recognizing or supporting” any sexual relationship outside the boundaries of a marriage between one man and one woman and will also preclude this congregation from calling an ordained pastor who is in an “accountable, life-long, monogamous, same-gender relationship.”
 - 3) The Nazareth Lutheran Church Council, by a vote of 9-1, recommends a vote at the 2011 Nazareth Annual Congregational meeting to determine whether or not there is sufficient desire within the congregation to vote on whether to remain in the ELCA. The Council is in agreement that any less than decisive vote taken at this time would undermine our sense of unity, purpose, and mission. Even so, this interim measure is intended to discern whether a vote regarding our ELCA affiliation is truly the desire of the majority of our members at this time.