

FAQs

How does the disaffiliation issue affect Nazareth's ability to call a new senior pastor? The Council came to the conclusion prior to their first recommendation for disaffiliation, that the best gift we could give to our new senior pastor was to resolve our affiliation issue first. That is why the Church Council has put that search on hold until the congregation can work through this very important decision. Once we have joined the NALC, the pastoral call committee will have a more open field of candidates who are in alignment with Nazareth's beliefs and values.

Will current small groups still be able to gather at Nazareth even though we are no longer part of the ELCA?

Absolutely! All current small groups are encouraged to continue to gather, and new ones are encouraged to form. Current Bible study resources may continue to be used, or there are many Bible study resources also available through the NALC.

Will Nazareth look and feel differently after we join the NALC?

The NALC is rooted in the same traditions that have been a part of Nazareth since its inception. The main difference moving forward will be that our leaders will no longer be forced to address the constant distractions that come with partnering with a denomination whose beliefs don't align with our own. Our striving to bring the message of the Gospel to lost people and to bring honor and glory to God remains unchanged and will finally be able to be our only focus.

How will leaving the ELCA affect staff benefits?

Since our previous insurance package was connected to our affiliation, the Church Council has already explored and approved a new benefits package for the staff that is comprehensive and also saves Nazareth a considerable amount of money. It has been in effect since March of 2024.

Why can't we vote by proxy or absentee ballot?

It is stipulated in both Nazareth's Bylaws and the ELCA Constitution that only in-person voting is allowed.

Will Nazareth be able to continue to participate in *Lutheran World Relief*? Definitely! *Lutheran World Relief* is not specifically an ELCA organization, but is a "generic" Lutheran organization which serves several Lutheran bodies by coordinating world hunger, disaster relief, quilting, and other mission efforts. *Lutheran World Relief* is the NALC's official international relief and development partner. In addition, *Lutheran World Relief* welcomes the participation of any Lutheran individual or congregation that wishes to engage with *Lutheran World Relief*.

Will we be able to continue to host visiting choirs from area colleges? Yes! This has been a long-standing tradition that we look forward to continuing at Nazareth.

How did this affiliation question arise here at Nazareth?

There were some member and pastoral concerns about the ELCA going as far back as its formation in 1988. These concerns grew over time, and Nazareth started responding to this issue back in 2005 when the original Affiliation Task Force was formed by the Church Council to study the question of whether or not Nazareth should remain affiliated with the ELCA. That task force unanimously came to the same conclusion about the ELCA – that there was reason to be concerned because it was drifting from the authority of scripture. Even back then, leadership within the ELCA was beginning to allow the interpretation or modification of scripture based on culture or popular opinion. However, the task force was split on how Nazareth should react to this problem. Half of the task force recommended staying in the ELCA and trying to be a voice for change. The other half recommended disaffiliation from the ELCA since they believed that the ELCA's beliefs no longer fully aligned with those of Nazareth. At that time, the congregation voted to stay and try to be a voice that could bring about reform within the ELCA. Nazareth joined the *Word Alone* network of churches, a group of churches who joined together at that time to try and affect reform within the ELCA, but soon found, because of the hierarchical governance of the ELCA, change was next to impossible. Since 2005, Nazareth has lost well over a thousand members. When Bishop Jones visited Nazareth last year, he mentioned that the "Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church" had been established. Their job is to review the current governance and structure of the ELCA. Their report will be delivered to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in 2025. After that report is delivered, it is probable Nazareth can no longer ignore the ELCA and will be forced to compromise our beliefs in order to align with those of the ELCA. It is the hope of the Church Council that Nazareth can disaffiliate now, before that happens.

Why can't we just agree to disagree and continue to remain in the ELCA? We can no longer agree to disagree because the ELCA is encouraging congregations to maintain unity at the expense of sound theology. By remaining in the ELCA, Nazareth passively participates in compromising the faith that we believe, teach, and is rooted in scripture, for the sake of a false unity which is not rooted in Christ's teachings.

What makes the NALC different from the ELCA?

The NALC holds to traditional Biblical interpretations and practical applications which are in full alignment with Nazareth's Confession of Faith found in Article II of our Bylaws. In contrast, the ELCA appears to have moved to a view of Scripture that allows human reason, personal experience, and contemporary social attitudes to interpret what the Bible says. Additionally, major decisions that are made on the churchwide level within the NALC require a 2/3 ratification process of all NALC congregations as opposed to the ELCA, where there is no congregational ratification. This eliminates the possibility of Nazareth being forced into changes made by churchwide assemblies unilaterally making decisions on behalf of all congregations as has been our experience with the ELCA.

If we disaffiliate from the ELCA, will some people not be welcome at Nazareth? Absolutely not! Every single person has always been welcomed at Nazareth, and that will never change. Within our belief statements that can be found on our naz.org website it states, “We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity.” Nazareth will continue to strive to be faithful to the Word of God and to love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

What is the proposed timeline for leaving the ELCA and joining the NALC? The constitutional process for leaving the ELCA stipulates that two congregational votes separated by at least ninety days and carrying a 2/3 majority are required. April 17, 2024 is the date for the first vote. If it achieves a 2/3 majority vote, it will be followed by the anticipated second vote on August 28th, 2024. If the second vote also achieves a 2/3 majority vote, another motion to join the NALC will occur at that same congregational meeting. The vote to join the NALC will require a simple majority.