



*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*

October 3, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a time of change for Nazareth Evangelical Lutheran Church. We (the Nazareth Church Council) are going to answer as many questions as we can in this letter. We will be communicating regularly with you using the *Naz News* as our main communication tool. Read the *Naz News* each week to stay updated. If you are unable to access the *Naz News* online, please contact the church office so we can send you information through the U.S. Postal Service.

If you have additional questions or comments, please submit them to council@naz.org and we will provide responses.

Nazareth has been through many times of uncertainty in the past, and we have always come through them with renewed faith and commitment. We ask you to join us in rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks in all circumstances. We thank God for each of you. We ask for your prayers as God leads us into a new phase of our church life.

In Christ,

George Nederhoff, Council President (George.Nederhoff@naz.org)

Bob Saathoff, Council Vice-President (Bob.Saathoff@naz.org)

Craig Blanchard, Council Treasurer (Craig.Blanchard@naz.org)

Danielle Terrell, Council Secretary (Danielle.Terrell@naz.org)

Lisa Arenholz, Council Member (Lisa.Arenholz@naz.org)

Mike Christiason, Council Member (Mike.Christiason@naz.org)

Maureen Hanson, Council Member (Maureen.Hanson@naz.org)

Troy Olson, Council Member (Troy.Olson@naz.org)

We offer the following responses to questions we have received:

1. **What changes are occurring at Nazareth?**

Nazareth is going through several changes right now. Pastor Brian has accepted a new pastoral call and will be leaving Nazareth at the end of October. A task force began meeting in June of this year and has been reviewing and revising Nazareth's by-laws. Discussions surrounding Nazareth's affiliation with the ELCA have started. All of these changes at the same time can seem overwhelming, but we know that God is in control, God is good, and God wants His Church to thrive. We believe that together, with God's leading, we can get through all of these changes.

2. What is the ELCA?

ELCA stands for “Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.” The ELCA was formed in 1988 when three Lutheran Church organizations merged: The American Lutheran Church, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, and the Lutheran Church in America. Prior to the merger, Nazareth was part of the American Lutheran Church. With the merger, Nazareth became part of the ELCA. If you would like to learn more, Britannica has an article on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, including the various mergers and disagreements within the Lutheran Church that occurred over time: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Evangelical-Lutheran-Church-in-America>

3. Is Nazareth going to leave the ELCA?

The congregation has the final say in whether or not we leave. Our current by-laws require the congregation to hold two meetings, 90 days apart, to vote on whether or not to leave the ELCA. At least two-thirds of the congregation must vote in favor of leaving at each meeting.

4. Why are we having discussions about leaving the ELCA at this point in time?

There have been several concerns expressed over time. Recent actions ahead of and at the 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly have been concerning enough that some Nazareth members asked the Council to consider leaving the ELCA. A summary of the actions from the Churchwide Assembly can be found at: <https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/8172>. The possibility of Nazareth leaving the ELCA has been discussed in the past, most recently in 2008-2010.

5. Why didn't we hold the Town Hall Forum as scheduled?

Pastor Brian announced his new call just prior to the forum. After holding two emergency meetings to discuss the Town Hall Forum, the Church Council determined that finding an interim pastor was our highest priority right now.

6. Will the town hall forum be rescheduled?

We believe it is very important that the entire congregation learns more about the ELCA, and we will be sharing about the ELCA regularly – both the benefits and the reasons for possibly leaving. After this information is shared with the congregation, the council will discuss the need for a town hall forum.

7. What are by-laws and do we have to follow them?

According to Merriam-Webster, by-laws are “rule[s] adopted by an organization for the government of its members and the regulation of its affairs.” The purpose of by-laws is to guide the Council and Staff’s actions and decisions. Iowa law requires corporations to adopt by-laws. Nazareth is a non-profit corporation and our by-laws were approved in 1993. The by-laws have been revised nine times since they were adopted. By-laws are not suggestions. They are mandatory.

8. What is happening with our by-laws?

A committee started meeting in June of this year (2022) to complete a by-laws review. Nazareth has reviewed and revised its by-laws regularly, and it was time to go through another review. The committee completed its work on September 27 and their recommendations have been forwarded to the Church Council for possible action at the Council's October meeting. Once the Council agrees upon a revised by-laws document, a congregational meeting must be called so the congregation can vote whether or not to approve the revisions.

9. Is Pastor Brian leaving?

Yes. Pastor Brian has accepted a call to Chisago Lake Lutheran Church in Center City, Minnesota. His last Sunday at Nazareth will be October 30. Pastor Brian sent a communication about this to all Nazareth members. Please contact the church office if you did not receive his letter and would like a copy.

10. Is Pastor Brian leaving because of the ELCA discussions?

No. Pastor Brian discerned the need to look for another call before the recent ELCA discussions started.

11. Who will be our next Senior Pastor?

We do not know. At the appropriate time, we will convene a Call Committee to start looking for our next Senior Pastor. A congregational vote is required to approve the Call Committee members.

12. Why do we need an interim pastor?

We need an interim pastor to perform baptisms, administer communion, counsel grieving families, conduct funerals, conduct weddings, be available for members to call when they need counseling or other pastoral care, give sermons, help the Worship Director determine how we will do worship each week (including the sermon topic so the appropriate hymns can be selected), work with the Administrator when there is a staff member that needs pastoral care, make the multiple leadership decisions that arise each week, and more.

13. What all is the Church Council doing?

George Nederhoff, Church Council President, met with NE Iowa ELCA Synod Bishop Kevin Jones on September 27 to discuss the process of finding both an Interim and a new Senior Pastor. The Bishop will attend the October Church Council meeting. The Council will be meeting with some Nazareth members who were on the Church Council during the 2008-2010 timeframe when Nazareth had several of the same concerns. The Council will be working with the staff to ensure that all pastoral responsibilities are covered. We want to encourage congregation members to pray. God listens to our prayers and we want to be asking for His guidance at every step. You can expect to see more about this very soon.

14. When will all of these topics to be resolved? How can I stay up to date?

We will be working to put together a time table and sequence of events that we can share with all of you. Read the *Naz News* each week to stay up to date.

15. How can I (as a Nazareth member) help?

The Council requests your prayers. We also request your patience. We welcome and value your input. Please talk with a council member or send your thoughts to council@naz.org, but most importantly, please pray that Nazareth will continue to be a light in a dark world, and that we will continue to live out our mission: Living together in God's amazing grace, we invite all people to know Christ, grow in Christ and make Christ known.