

Q & A – Answers from your Church Council

This is a compilation of all of the questions and answers that have been shared in the Naz News. The letter that was sent to the congregation containing several additional questions and answers can be found at this link: [October 4, 2022 Letter to the Nazareth Congregation](#)

Please send additional questions to council@naz.org

Question: Is the Church Council currently working toward leaving the ELCA?

Answer: No. At the November 8th Council meeting, a motion was made to recommend Nazareth leave the ELCA pending approval from the congregation. The motion failed, which means that at the current time, the Council does not support recommending that Nazareth leave the ELCA. However, since a large number of congregation members have requested that we look into our affiliation with the ELCA, the Council is working toward holding education sessions that will focus on studying the Bible, understanding how Nazareth benefits from its affiliation with the ELCA, understanding ELCA positions on biblical issues, and learning about other Lutheran organizations that exist that might be potential options should Nazareth choose to look for another organization. Bryce Formwalt (who grew up at Nazareth, was an ELCA pastor for several years, and is now the Director of Mission Growth for the LCMC Texas District) was visiting from Texas last week and offered to teach Council members about Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC). This was strictly an information session, and several members of the Council attended.

The Council's intention is to give all interested members of Nazareth the opportunity to participate in the education sessions mentioned above. This will give us the appropriate background for studying ELCA decisions and actions so that all of us (including Council members) can share our thoughts based on facts. We do not want to make emotional decisions, but instead spend time in prayer and study, then make decisions based on biblical truth. We want to ensure that our decision is grounded in prayer, which is why we are asking everyone interested in participating on a prayer team to please let us know by sending your name to council@naz.org. Whichever decision we make as a congregation, we would like to make it together, and we pray that we can all come to a consensus. We understand it is difficult to live in uncertainty, especially for multiple months. It is difficult for Council members, also. We request your prayers and your patience as we work toward learning together. You are always welcome to send your comments to council@naz.org, and/or to talk with individual council members.

Question: Who approves the budget?

Answer: The congregation approves the budget at the annual meeting in January. A proposed budget will be shared prior to the meeting. Congregation members will have the opportunity to propose amendments to the budget. Amendments will be voted on prior to voting to approve the entire budget.

Question: When will we learn about the recommended changes to the by-laws?

Answer: Everyone will receive information about the recommended changes in the mail shortly after Thanksgiving. Our by-laws require mailing written notice at least 10 days in advance of a proposed congregational meeting. Nazareth staff members are working to get the mailing out more than 10 days in advance so members have time to study the recommended changes prior to the education sessions and the congregational meeting. Your packet will include a letter containing the notice of a congregational meeting and information about the education sessions, a document that summarizes the recommendations, and a copy of the complete by-laws document that clearly shows every recommended change. Only the congregation can change the by-laws, and a 2/3 vote is required. Prior to voting on changes, congregation members can propose amendments to change one or more recommendations. The congregation would vote on any amendments prior to voting on the by-laws.

Question: Are changes to the by-laws being recommended because the By-Laws Task Force wants Nazareth to leave the ELCA?

Answer: No. The by-laws were initially approved on Jan 26, 1993. Since then, they have been revised nine times (Jan 1999, Jan 2001, May 2001, Jan 2003, Jan 2004, Jan 2005, Jan 2011, Sep 2011, and Apr 2014). By-laws are revised regularly for many different reasons, and there were several reasons to recommend changes now. In addition to many other change recommendations, you will notice that there are several places in the by-laws where the recommendation is to change “ELCA” to “the church body with which we are affiliated.” This change would make the by-laws generic enough to allow Nazareth to continue to affiliate with the ELCA or to affiliate with another church body without having to revise the by-laws again. Although individual members of the task force may hold views on whether or not to remain in the ELCA, the recommended changes to the By-Laws are not based on any person’s views and are not intended to influence congregation members in one direction or another. The recommended changes were arrived at by consensus. Pastor Brian was a member of the Task Force, and the Task Force completed its work prior to Pastor Brian leaving Nazareth.

Question: If we were to leave the ELCA, what would be our future affiliation? Is there a list of potential affiliations that we would vote on?

Answer: If we were to leave the ELCA, there are many possible Lutheran organizations Nazareth could affiliate with. Some of them include: American Association of Lutheran Churches, Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ, and North American Lutheran Church. There are others. Nazareth could also become an independent church that is not affiliated with any church body. If we were to leave the ELCA, we would have to learn about the different options as a congregation and determine which one best aligns with our beliefs and needs. There currently is no provision in the by-laws for affiliating with another church body; however, there is a proposed change that would provide for affiliating with another church body if 2/3 of the congregation voted to do so.

Question: Who should I go to with a pastoral concern?

Answer: Please take all pastoral concerns to Andy Walser. Until we have an interim pastor, Andy is the first contact for pastoral concerns.

Question: Why was a by-laws task force convened?

Answer: Pastor Brian recommended that the council establish a task force to review the by-laws and recommend changes, and Pastor Brian was part of the task force. Nazareth by-laws had not been revisited since 2014. Some items were out-of-date and others needed revision to provide more clarity. The task force was convened in June, before any discussion about leaving the ELCA occurred. The task force met eight times between June 15 and Sep 27. The Church Council reviewed the recommendations at their regular October meeting.

Question: Why are we relying on the ELCA for an interim pastor?

Answer: Our current by-laws state that we need to consult the Bishop. The appropriate section from the by-laws is below:

The authority to hire a Contract or Interim Pastor shall rest with the Church Council and shall be exercised by at least a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting at a Church Council meeting convened for that purpose in consultation with the Bishop and in accordance with the Option for Calling a Pastor of the Northeastern Iowa Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.

We have been in consultation with the Bishop and have committed to wait three months, which we believe is a reasonable amount of time to identify a potential interim pastor. After three months, the Bishop will continue to look for someone in the ELCA, and at the same time, the Council will start looking outside the ELCA.

Question: Who decides whether or not Nazareth remains in the ELCA?

Answer: The congregation decides. Our current by-laws state:

Severance of membership in The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America requires a two-thirds majority vote of all voting members present at a legally called meeting. Such a decision shall not be effective until at least ninety days after the Synod Bishop has been notified and until the initial action has been ratified by a two-thirds majority vote at a subsequent legally called meeting.

Question: When will the congregation learn more about the reasons to remain in or leave the ELCA?

Answer: The Council is working toward holding educational forums. We hope to hold these in December and/or January. We will hold educational forums on the by-laws prior to the forums on the ELCA as some of the by-laws recommendations will impact the vote on ELCA affiliation.

Question: When will the congregation have input into the decision about the ELCA?

Answer: The Council believes it is everyone's best interests to learn about the ELCA first (both ELCA benefits and reasons to leave), then to make opportunities available for people to share their thoughts. Current plans are to schedule forums that will take place after the education

sessions are complete. You are always welcome to send your comments to council@naz.org, and/or to talk with individual council members.

Question: When will we make a decision about whether we will remain affiliated with the ELCA?

Answer: The Council is working toward being able to hold a congregational vote in early 2023.

Question: Are any of the other ELCA churches in the CF area considering leaving the ELCA and is Nazareth working with them?

Answer: We are not aware of any other ELCA churches in the CF area considering leaving the ELCA.

Question: How can I make a pledge without knowing what is going to happen to Nazareth in the future?

Answer: We pray that no matter what happens, we can remain unified as a church. Jesus prayed for his church to be one (John 17, especially verses 20-26). Our prayer is that, after we have all learned about the ELCA, we will be of one mind in whichever decision we make. We ask people to make your pledges with that in mind.

Question: A council member has left our congregation. Will she be replaced?

Answer:

At the November meeting, the Council appointed Julie Creeden to fill the current vacancy.

Question: Can we call a new Senior Pastor before deciding about our ELCA affiliation?

Answer: We cannot call a Senior Pastor from the ELCA until we make that decision. It would be unfair to call an ELCA pastor and then decide to leave the ELCA shortly afterward. Our Synod Bishop was clear that we need to make a decision about our affiliation prior to issuing a call. It could be possible to call a non-ELCA pastor before making the decision, but it's unclear whether a non-ELCA pastor would want to accept a call before we make that decision, and we would need to do more research to understand whether we would be allowed to remain affiliated with the ELCA if we called a non-ELCA pastor as our Senior Pastor.

Question: Should Nazareth decide to leave our affiliation with the ELCA, what, if any changes would there be to our worship services or the way we conduct our ministry and missions?

Answer: We do not foresee any changes to our worship services or the way we conduct our ministry and missions. Nazareth has historically made those decisions independently of our affiliation with the ELCA and would most likely continue to make those decisions independently of an affiliation with a different Lutheran church body.

Question: If our financial giving to the ELCA is currently designated for missions, couldn't we just use those additional monies for our missionaries and our mission outreach organizations (thus making a bigger difference for those missions that we've identified as important)?

Answer: We could use those monies in whatever way we think best fulfills our Nazareth mission statement. This includes continuing to support the ELCA missionaries we are currently supporting.

Question: If we leave the ELCA, what would happen to all of the different small groups at Nazareth?

Answer: Nothing would change. All of our small groups would continue to meet just as they have been meeting.

Question: I know the Council and Church are going through a lot right now. How can I help?

Answer: Please pray! Pray individually, or as part of a team. We are in the process of identifying people who are willing to participate on prayer teams – one team that will pray specifically for the Council and Staff, one that will pray for the Nominating Committee, and one that will pray for the Call Committee and Nazareth's affiliation (starting even before we have a Call Committee in place). If you are willing to participate on one of the teams, please send your name to council@naz.org.

Your Council knows that God knows where we are, and he will lead us to wherever he wants us to be. We have been here before and we got through it. God is still in control, and we will get through this again. Please pray that we will be stronger and more faithful because of struggling with these issues. And give thanks to God for all of the ways that Nazareth continues to fulfill our mission!

Question: What is the status of the letter of dissent?

Answer: At their October 11 meeting, the Council voted to postpone sending the letter of dissent to the ELCA. When the letter of dissent was voted on at the August 23 Council meeting, the Council also voted to hold a Town Hall Forum. We were planning to incorporate appropriate input from the congregation into the letter. Since we have not yet held the Town Hall Forum or had another formal opportunity for congregational input, a majority of the Council voted to postpone sending the letter.

Question: Why wasn't Pastor Denny replaced after he retired?

Answer: Before Pastor Denny retired, he and Pastor Brian discussed potential replacement options. They decided to let Pastor Brian be our only pastor for a few months while he investigated other alternatives to calling a full time Associate Pastor. There are many ELCA churches in the Cedar Valley that don't have a pastor, and the thought was that we could help them out by using a different model (e.g. not a full time Associate Pastor at Nazareth). The Core Team and the Council supported Pastor Brian's recommendation. During those months, Pastor

Brian discerned that it was time to look for a new call. At that point, he wanted to give the new Senior Pastor the opportunity to call an Associate Pastor, to ensure the two pastors were compatible and had complementary strengths. Once discussions started about possibly leaving the ELCA, we could no longer in good faith call any pastor. We have to make the ELCA decision before we can do that. Note: We are able to contract with an interim pastor before we make that decision.

Question: Who will be leading the services and preaching once Pastor Brian departs?

Answer: The teaching team has developed a schedule that extends over the next 3 months, with each Sunday covered by a member of the team. After the ALPHA Sermon Series is complete, we will transition back to the lectionary schedule. When an Interim Pastor is brought in, the schedule may change as they adjust into the role. We can be assured that we'll continue to have relevant, biblical messages from a variety of speakers each week. Additionally, the worship team that plans and prepares the music and liturgy for services will continue to do a great job sharing their gifts and leading us in praise. Andy Walser will be the chair of the Worship Committee going forward.

Question: Why was the pulpit removed?

Answer: The original reason for a pulpit was to elevate the pastor so everyone could hear the Sunday teaching. With a sound system (especially with our new sound system!), the original reason no longer exists. The pulpit must be removed whenever we need more space, such as for VBS and for the festival music that is now occurring on the second Sunday of each month. It is large and very heavy, making it difficult to move. For these reasons, the Worship Committee decided to leave the pulpit in storage for now.