

Nazareth Evangelical Lutheran Church Affiliation Task Force Report

Updated May 4, 2023

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Executive Summary

The Nazareth Lutheran Church Affiliation Task Force was formed in February 2023 at the request of the Nazareth church council following the decision by leadership to hold a congregational vote on the question of whether Nazareth wishes to continue its affiliation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) or pursue/seek a new Lutheran affiliation.

The task force and the assignment

The task force was comprised of 12 individuals representing a cross section of the large and diverse Nazareth membership. No members of Nazareth church council served on the task force, nor did they attend or participate in the task force meetings.

The specific assignment given to the task force was to research and recommend an appropriate **alternative** to the ELCA, should the congregation elect to leave the denomination, not to conduct an analysis of the ELCA question itself. It should also be noted that the purpose of the task force and its work was not to bias that vote one way or the other. Instead, our purpose was to give the council and congregation information to inform the vote via a potential path forward *if* the congregation elects to leave the ELCA. The guardrails included with the task force assignment were that (1) Nazareth should remain a Lutheran church; and (2) the task force should investigate Lutheran denominations and affiliations vs. considering the option of becoming an independent Lutheran church.

The process

The process used to conduct the task force analysis included the development of criteria for evaluating potential affiliation candidates, as well as a step-by-step process to narrow the field of candidates from a starting list of 36 Lutheran denominations to a single alternative for the council and congregation to consider. Group brainstorming, voting, and ranking were employed at different stages to discern which affiliation would best (1) **help Nazareth spread the Gospel**; (2) **align with the Nazareth congregation's values**; and (3) **help heal and unite the congregation**. A series of “musts” and “wants” for the affiliation were developed to guide this discernment. While important factors such as staff benefits, proximity to other congregations in the same denomination/affiliation, and church growth were considered important “wants,” these were considered less important than such “musts” as the affiliation's view of the Bible, salvation, and Lutheran documents/doctrine; the practice of open communion; a well-defined seminary network for pastors; and a church culture of welcoming all.

Using the “musts” and “wants” criteria, the original list of 36 was narrowed to eight candidates that were personally interviewed and, finally, to two candidates—the **Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC)**, an affiliation that works at the congregational level, and the **North American Lutheran Church (NALC)**, which is a Lutheran denomination with a more traditional structure and seminary pathway. Leaders from both candidates responded to an in-depth questionnaire with close to 100 questions, as well as follow-up group interviews with the task force. It should be noted that *only* these two affiliations—along with the ELCA—practice open communion and ordain female pastors.

The recommendation

In keeping with the Nazareth church council assignment, the goal of the affiliation task force was to arrive at a recommendation we believed could fit with Nazareth's goals and values. Both final

candidates provided thoughtful responses to the task force’s questions and represented themselves as viable alternatives to the ELCA. **After much prayer, consideration and discernment, the task force reached consensus on a recommendation to consider the NALC as the best denominational option for Nazareth if the congregation elects to leave the ELCA.** While the NALC is smaller and less Midwest-centric than the LCMC—or the ELCA—we believe their structure and resources would not only give Nazareth the support we need to move forward but would also present Nazareth with an important opportunity to, in turn, serve the NALC church by sharing our experience and resources with fellow churches. We believe this recommendation is not *just* about what a new denomination could do for Nazareth—but also about what we could do for *them*—and, ultimately, for the Church as the Body of Christ.

Finally, we would remind both the church council and Nazareth congregation that determining a denominational affiliation—whether it remains the ELCA or changes—is not in and of itself a solution to Nazareth’s problems. As Pastor Mike Brost aptly reminded the task force on the evening of our final vote, **the work of Jesus Christ to build His church will continue, regardless of what we decide.** However, by adopting a spirit of humility, listening to the Holy Spirit, and working together, we can continue the mission and work of Nazareth Lutheran Church, renew our purpose, and continue to serve God.

Introduction

Why was a Task Force Created?

Council appointed an independent Affiliation Task Force (no one on Council was on the Task Force), to examine other Lutheran Church Groups and make a recommendation of which Lutheran Church Nazareth should affiliate with if the congregation votes to leave the ELCA. The intention of the appointments was to represent a cross section of the entire congregation.

The Job of the Affiliation Task Force

The Task Force set out to identify an existing Lutheran Church that would honor Nazareth's past, address current concerns with the ELCA, and unify Nazareth in the future to "put us and Nazareth Church in the best possible position to be the most faithful, effective witness to the gospel" (credit: Pastor Mike Brost).

The Task Force did NOT set out to find the "ideal" Church which best models the beliefs of every member of our congregation, because that Church does not exist. There are a couple of reasons for this:

- (1) For centuries, theologians have studied and debated the meaning and application of scripture to our lives. The result is dozens of Lutheran Churches (and hundreds of other Christian Churches) in the United States alone. While some people use phrases like "scripture is clear" or "that's not Biblical" to justify their beliefs, the fact is that each Christian Church bases its beliefs on scripture; they just interpret some portion of scripture differently.
- (2) Every individual's relationship with Christ is a personal experience, and each person's faith walk is different. No two people have identical beliefs and perceptions of how to best live the Christian life.

As an example, most Lutheran Churches prohibit the ordination of women as pastors. Some prohibit women in other positions of church leadership such as the church council. When looking at congregations like Nazareth, some would say we "interpreted the Bible in error" and "practice false teachings."

We can't all be right on everything, but we aren't going to learn some of the answers until we meet our Lord. What we can agree on as Lutherans is that salvation is a gift of grace given by God to us through faith in Jesus Christ according to scripture. Paul sums it up rather nicely:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—
and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—
not by works, so that no one can boast.

--Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

When we agree on this, we know any "errors" in our interpretation of scripture are forgiven by the grace of God. The Task Force focused on honoring Nazareth's most important historic values, knowing that, in some lessor areas, we may have to "agree to disagree" in the interest of unifying our congregation.

The Task Force considered what reasons were valid for making a change in affiliation. The Task Force also looked both at what concerns some Nazareth members have with the ELCA, and what benefits the ELCA provides that should be retained with a possible change in affiliation.

ELCA Pros and Cons

One of the first steps of the Task Force was to brainstorm factors that are good (“pros”) with Nazareth’s current relationship with the ELCA, and those that are concerning (“cons”) with our relationship.

This very preliminary discussion was not meant to define the evaluation criteria; rather, it was meant to inform the process of discerning which criteria to use. Once an initial list was created through brainstorming, each member of the Task Force indicated whether they personally thought a given factor should be considered and then ranked each factor in order of importance.

Below is a list ranking of the pros and cons, followed by the level of consensus within the group on whether the factor should be considered:

- PRO: Great Commission: Missional and Evangelical. (90%)
- PRO: Open communion. (90%)
- CON: Moving toward universalist position/honoring all faiths. (70%)
- PRO: Strong world mission support. (100%)
- PRO: Great Commandment: Missionally and social issues. (90%)
- PRO: Inclusive (trend toward social justice is an advantage). Not afraid to speak about the marginalized. People feel welcome here. (80%)
- CON: ELCA seminaries and bishops seem to believe that we can interpret Scripture based on cultural opinions. (60%)
- PRO: Flexibility to seek pastors outside ELCA. (90%)
- PRO: Welcoming and inclusive – younger generation has to take over, must feel welcome and comfortable here -what will it say to them if we leave the ELCA? (60%)
- PRO: ELCA hasn’t said that Nazareth has to stop doing what we are doing. We are allowed to practice our beliefs even if they are different from the beliefs of the ELCA leadership. (70%)
- PRO: Allows Female Pastors. (70%)
- PRO: Lutheran World Relief, Lutheran Social Services - could we still participate in LSS if we are not ELCA? (90%)
- CON: Doesn’t represent trajectory of Nazareth and historical position of Nazareth as a faithful, Bible-believing church. (60%)
- CON: ELCA topics are divisive – will they cause more divisiveness in the future? (80%)
- PRO: Use the pulpit to spread the word. (60%)
- PRO: Seminary system with accountability standards. (60%)
- PRO: Large network of other ELCA congregations to work with and learn from. (70%)
- PRO: Resources and logistics (70%)
- CON: Trending toward emphasis on social issues over spreading the Gospel. (50%)
- CON: Celebrate sin / accept it more than it should be accepted. (50%)
- CON: Governance structure / hierarchy – local congregation has no say in what the ELCA says or does. (70%)

- CON: Social statements vs. making disciples. (50%)
- CON: Perception issue. (60%)
- PRO: Good benefits package for the staff (70%).
- CON: Difficult to change ELCA from the local level. (80%)
- CON: Shrinking churches. (50%).

It is important to remember that, in a brainstorming session, there may be some clarification seeking but there is no judgment. We did not perform an in-depth analysis of these items; they were used to inform discussions on criteria, not set them.

Criteria Used for Evaluation

After brainstorming ELCA pros and cons, the next step was to brainstorm Nazareth needs and wants. Through a process of discussion, discernment, and analysis, that list was refined into the below list of “MUST” and “WANT” criteria for evaluating candidates.

Those criteria with the highest ranking and at least 75% consensus were considered “MUST,” while lower ranking criteria with at least 75% consensus were considered “WANT.” There were two exceptions made to elevate criteria to a “MUST” ranking that were not important doctrinal/religious considerations but would very likely be a poor fit for Nazareth:

- Not focused on a single ethnic group – there were some candidates that appear to focus primarily on benefiting a single ethnic group instead of all.
- Must have a working website – a Church without the resources to support a website likely doesn’t have the resources to support its congregations.

Following are the evaluation criteria from top to bottom, with highest importance first. The percentage numbers indicate the degree of consensus.

“MUST” Criteria

1. View of Bible and Lutheran documents and doctrine is consistent with Nazareth's. (92%)
2. Open Communion. (100%)
3. Salvation is a gift of grace that requires faith in Jesus Christ (not works, not universal) (83%)
4. Well-defined seminary network producing pastors with Master of Divinity (or comparable) (100%)
5. Baptize at all ages and stages of life. (100%)
6. Welcoming to all. (100%)
7. Allows female pastors. (83% - originally treated as “WANT”; elevated to “MUST” by unanimous consensus to screen out more candidates)

“WANT” Criteria

8. Only performs heterosexual marriage. (75%)
9. Would not prevent comparable employee benefits. (100%)
10. Flexibility to seek pastors outside the Lutheran Church. (100%)
11. Congregational autonomy (property control, governance, pastor selection, etc.) (75%)
12. Have other similar congregations in Iowa or within driving distance. (83%)

- 13. Ability to network with non-Lutheran churches (ecumenically focused). (100%)
- 14. Be with a Church that is growing. (92%)

Other “MUST” Criteria (Non-doctrinal screening category)

- 15. Not focused on single ethnic group. (67% - agreed to allow exception for screening)
- 16. Must have a working website. (83% - agreed to allow exception for screening)

Other “WANT” Criteria

- 17. Congregation’s ability to effect change in the Church (influential). (92%)

Candidates Eliminated Without Interviews

In total, through a series of website searches conducted by the Task Force’s co-chairs, a list of 36 Lutheran Churches/Affiliations were identified in the United States. Of those 36, the 24 listed here were eliminated without interviews based on information that was found on their websites, or by sheer lack of existence of an active website:

Church Group	Why Removed from Consideration
Alliance of Renewal Churches	Appears to exist as a resource for staff only.
Association of Confessional Lutheran Churches (ACLC)	Website is no longer active.
Association of Independent Evangelical Lutheran Churches a/k/a Association of Independent Evangelical Lutheran Congregations	Website no longer active. Appeared to be focused on Latino population. Possibly merged with Missionary Lutheran Church.
Augsburg Lutheran Churches (ALC)	Only four congregations.
Concordia Lutheran Conference (CLC)	Only five congregations.
Conservative Lutheran Association (CLA)	Unable to find a website.
Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America (ELDoNA)	Website is regularly updated, but has many broken links and little clear info about their beliefs and practices. No congregations in Iowa, and only eight in the immediately surrounding states and 24 in total. They describe themselves as a “diocese” of pastors which churches may affiliate with.
Fellowship of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (FELC)	Could only find one congregation.
General Lutheran Church (GLC)	Stated doctrine includes possibility of Universalism.
Illinois Lutheran Conference (ILC)	Only three congregations.
Independent Lutheran Diocese (ILD)	Only four congregations.
Laestadian Lutheran Church (LLC)	Focuses on Finnish population.
Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (LELBA)	Focuses on Latvian population. Website is not in English.
Lutheran Church - International (LC-I)	Only one congregation.
Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (LCMS)	(Generally) practices close(d) communion.

Church Group	Why Removed from Consideration
Lutheran Churches of the Reformation (LCR)	Split off from LCMS. Only 13 congregations.
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship (LCCF)	Only three congregations.
Lutheran Ministerium and Synod - USA (LMS - USA)	More of a forum than a church.
Lutheran Orthodox Church (LOC)	More like a Catholic church. (Example: seven sacraments.)
Missionary Lutheran Church (MLC)	Website no longer active.
Orthodox Lutheran Confessional Conference (OLCC)	Only two congregations in USA.
Protes'tant Conference	Split off from WELS. Only 4-5 congregations.
The Lutheran Evangelical Protestant Church a/k/a General Conference of Evangelical Protestant Churches (GCEPC)	Appears to be an organization to develop pastors instead of a Lutheran Church.
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS)	Close(d) communion.

The “Independent” Lutheran Church Option

A special circumstance was the option of becoming an “independent” church with no specific affiliation. Church Council stated that this was not an option, but the Task Force decided some discussion was warranted.

While a truly “independent” congregation essentially can set its own rules and only be accountable to itself, the Task Force eliminated this option because a seminary network from which to draw pastors would have to largely be built from scratch. However, the consensus was not unanimous.

Discussion centered whether becoming “independent” might be desirable should no existing affiliation option appear to be a good fit for a congregation. However, for a congregation to be successful in becoming independent, the Task Force felt a strongly united congregation with a clear vision and leadership would be required. Right or wrong, the consensus was that this does not describe Nazareth today.

Round 1 Interviews

To further narrow down the list of prospective Church affiliations, members of the Task Force conducted one-on-one interviews with the eight remaining candidates (including the ELCA) on relatively simple questions to see which candidates could be eliminated from the process.

The questions and responses can be found in **Appendix C – Round 1 Questions and Responses**.

Following are the conclusion from this round of interviews.

Conclusions

American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC):

Task Force discussed whether to make an exception for “Responsible Communion” instead of “Open Communion.” In the interest of narrowing down the candidates, decided to eliminate based on this form of communion.

Apostolic Lutheran Church of America (ALCA):

Eliminated due to their lack of response.

Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC):

Eliminated due to excluding female pastors.

Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America (CLBA):

Eliminated due to excluding female pastors.

Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC):

Eliminated due to close(d) communion and excluding female pastors.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA):

NOT eliminated.

Evangelical Lutheran Conference & Ministerium of North America (ELCM):

Eliminated due to “modified” open communion and general exclusion of female pastors.

Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS):

Eliminated due to closed communion and exclusion of female pastors.

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC):

NOT eliminated.

North American Lutheran Church (NALC):

NOT eliminated.

Old Apostolic Lutheran Church of America:

Eliminated due to incomplete or missing responses.

Mapping Round 2 Responses to Criteria

Round 2 of the process consisted of sending a detailed questionnaire to the remaining candidates (ELCA, LCMC and NALC) that not only addressed criteria identified by the Task Force, but potential questions that could come up from the congregation or church council. The questions focused on areas not yet dealt with in Round 1 interviews.

The Task Force then interviewed representatives from the LCMC and NALC (while the Task Force did not feel an interview with the ELCA was necessary, the ELCA was offered the opportunity to be interviewed to clarify their responses.

After the interviews, each Task Force member scored each Church on each criterion. The intent was not to base the final decision on a quantitative metric, but to help inform our discussion and discernment.

Finally, the Task Force had an open, honest discussion about each candidate to arrive at a final recommendation. Interestingly, this recommendation ended up corresponding very closely with the scoring exercise done prior to the discussion.

Recommended Alternative to the ELCA

*Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ,
if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,
then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love,
being one in spirit and of one mind.*

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,
not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

--Philippians 2:1-4 (NIV)

Individual members of the Task Force came from different backgrounds and experiences, and everyone brought different thoughts and opinions to the table. Nevertheless, everyone on the Task Force wanted what is best for Nazareth Evangelical Lutheran Church, trusted God to guide the process, and worked respectfully with each other to discern the best path forward should Nazareth choose to change its affiliation away from the ELCA.

There is no wrong answer here. Each option has different strengths.

Nazareth has been part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) since it was formed in 1988 by the merger of The American Lutheran Church, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, and the Lutheran Church in America. It was not the purview of the Task Force to make a case for or against leaving the ELCA, but the ELCA was included in discussions to understand where we are starting from. Like most mainline denominations, the ELCA continues to shrink, but it is worth mentioning that the ELCA is still the largest Lutheran Church in the United States (an order of magnitude larger than the LCMC or the NALC) and will likely continue to be so into the distant future. For more details on the ELCA, please refer to **“Appendix C – Round 1 Questions and Responses”** and **“Appendix D – Round 2 Responses from Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.”**

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) arose out of disagreement with the ELCA’s adoption of “Called to Common Mission” (CMC) in 1999, which was “in violation of our Lutheran Confessions.” The LCMC was subsequently constituted in 2001. LCMC is not a denomination, but rather an “association” of Lutheran congregations. The LCMC is growing but states their current focus is not on church planting. Arguably, the LCMC has the most flexible system of calling pastors (Lutheran or otherwise) to a congregation when compared to the ELCA or the NALC; however, there was some concern that their standards may be too flexible. Its doctrines and beliefs are closely aligned with those of Nazareth. It focuses on developing leadership among pastors, flexibility to seek pastors within or outside their seminary network, and helping congregations to network with each other and work together to resolve their own problems. For more details on the LCMC, please refer to **“Appendix C –**

Round 1 Questions and Responses” and “Appendix E – Round 2 Responses from Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC).”

However, a supermajority of the Task Force felt the best alternative to the ELCA for Nazareth would be the North American Lutheran Church (NALC). Constituted in 2010, this denomination also arose out of concern that the ELCA was moving away from the authority of the Bible and Lutheran confessions. The NALC is not as big as the LCMC and not as well known in middle America as the LCMC, but the NALC is one of the fastest growing Lutheran denominations in the United States.

There are many things the Task Force liked about the NALC, including:

1. “Christ Centered” doctrines and beliefs that are closely aligned with those of Nazareth.
2. A well-defined seminary network that requires pastors to learn and subscribe to the beliefs and teachings of the NALC before they can be ordained. (The NALC, like the ELCA, ordains pastors at the Church level; in the LCMC, pastors are ordained by individual congregations.)
3. A system in place to educate and approve (or not approve) pastors (Lutheran or otherwise) for service in the NALC who have not been through their seminary system.
4. A system in place to educate and approve laity for lay pastor positions at congregations within the NALC.
5. Compatible beliefs with Nazareth’s “Speaking the Truth in Love” social statement.
6. A “Congregationally Focused” core value to “strive to be a church that is organized to facilitate the ministries of local congregations in a posture of servanthood and a spirit of partnership, through the provision of resources, connections and information.”
7. Tools and resources to directly help congregations know Christ, grow in Christ, and make Christ known. A notable example is their “Life-to-Life Discipleship” program, designed to help train the members in congregations to be most effective in fulfilling the Great Commission. They also offer “renewal summits” for churches that are “stuck” and in need of help aligning member gifts with ministry.
8. Tools and resources to help congregations discern whether an NALC affiliation will be a good fit. (The LCMC has more of an application process than a discernment process.)
9. Initial success in church planting (something the LCMC is not currently working on).

If Nazareth were to join the NALC, it would not be the largest congregation in the NALC (there are larger congregations in Ohio and California), but it would be the largest NALC congregation in middle America. The Task Force did not feel this would be a significant issue for Nazareth who, at least in the view of most members of the Task Force, has historically operated independently of other ELCA congregations. However, it could be an opportunity for Nazareth to become a resource for other smaller congregations looking for leadership and guidance.

For more details on the NALC, please refer to “**Appendix C – Round 1 Questions and Responses**” and “**Appendix F – Round 2 Responses from the North American Lutheran Church (NALC).**”

Questions Not Addressed

Due to limited time, the Task Force was not able to explore some important areas. Should the congregation, in an initial vote, choose to consider switching affiliations, these are some areas that should be explored as part of the “due diligence” process:

- **Future relationships with organizations linked to the ELCA.** These include Lutheran Services in America (LSA - a ministry of the ELCA), Lutheran Services in Iowa (LSI - an affiliate of LSA), and Bremwood Residential Treatment Center (operated by LSI). These also includes ELCA-operated colleges, such as Wartburg and Luther. And they include relationships with congregations like Orchard Hill Church, a Reformed Church of America (RCA) congregation (the RCA is in full communion with the ELCA, which is why we were able to call Pastor Brost as an interim pastor). There may be others.
- **Comparison of available employee benefits and costs.** The NALC offers employee benefits through a third party (the same organization used by the LCMC), or congregations are free to establish benefits through independent sources. The Task Force heard conflicting information on whether Nazareth could continue obtaining benefits through Portico, the ELCA's in-house benefits provider. While the Task Force is confident that comparable benefits to Portico are available from other sources, there was insufficient time to do an apples-to-apples comparison, and a full enrollment process would be required to verify rates. It should also be noted that the health insurance plans developed by the NALC (and LCMC) do not cover elective abortions.
- **Contacting other NALC congregations.** Due to time constraints, the Task Force was unable to interview or conduct (official) visits with existing congregations in the NALC (or LCMC).

There are likely other considerations that the Task Force did not have time to address.

Recommended Next Steps

The Task Force recommends these next steps:

- Respect the ELCA and follow the procedures and processes in their model constitution for changing affiliation, even if they differ from Nazareth's By-Laws. Nazareth nearly got in trouble for trying to amend by-laws without following the ELCA's process. According to Bishop Jones, in rare circumstances, the ELCA has pursued legal action to retain property for the minority not wishing to change affiliation when the majority has not followed the procedures in their model constitution. The Task Force learned of two congregations trying to join the NALC which the ELCA is refusing to release, presumably because procedures were not followed. It would be advisable to make sure Bishop Jones is aware of our intent to follow the ELCA's process, and ask for guidance if necessary.

The ELCA's process for changing affiliation is intended to prevent rash decisions, not inflict pain on congregations. Nazareth is an ELCA congregation until it's not, and we are all part of one holy catholic church. Approaching the process with respect and humility will help Nazareth maintain an amicable relationship with the largest Lutheran denomination in America, even if we change affiliation.

- Engage the NALC. They have tools and resources to help congregations discern whether they will be a good fit together.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate. This is a congregational decision, not a Council decision. There is a tremendous amount of information to be relayed to the congregation to educate them about the NALC. Meetings, videos, Zoom calls, visits from NALC staff, visits to NALC congregations—all are options to involve the congregation.

- The first vote begins a due diligence step; it is NOT a commitment to change affiliations. This is the beauty of a two-vote process – the congregation authorizes an in-depth due diligence process on the first vote to make sure it will be a good match before a final vote.

Assuming Nazareth’s congregation authorizes a possible change of affiliation and due diligence, next steps would include:

- Again--communicate, communicate, communicate. The congregation has the need and the right to get to know the people behind the NALC.
- Address the unanswered questions.
- Discern, discern, discern. Take whatever steps are necessary to help Nazareth’s congregation to discern if this is where God is leading us.
- Respect the NALC and their process. They’ve been through this hundreds of times. Let them help us.
- Draft by-law amendments that will satisfy the NALC (they are far less restrictive than the ELCA’s model constitution).
- Put together a transition plan and timeline to go into effect should the second vote pass. There should be a target date for a clean transition from the ELCA that corresponds to the effective date of amended by-laws. Neither needs to take effect on the date of a second vote.

Nothing is set in stone until a second vote. This is a tremendous opportunity for the congregation to unite around a common cause to “put us and Nazareth Church in the best possible position to be the most faithful, effective witness to the gospel.” (credit: Pastor Brost)

Appendix A – Task Force Members

We wish to recognize and thank the members of the Task Force for their work in researching and completing this report:

Bill Formwalt, Co-Chair

Sue O'Brien

John Lehman, Co-Chair

Ali Parrish

Joyce Barbatti

Sue Roberts

Lloyd Dove

Dave Welter

Jim Glaspie

Pete Voorhees

Randy Husted

Pastor Mike Brost (advisory only)

Mallory Jensen (through March)

Appendix B – Summary of the Process

The Task Force used an abbreviated version of the “KT Analysis” process used by John Deere to narrow down the criteria and candidates.

In brief, the process included:

- Listing important criteria
- Ranking criteria
- Eliminating criteria without consensus (we decided at least 75% of the group must approve to mean consensus)
- Determining which criteria are “MUST” criteria (a candidate MUST meet the criteria), and which criteria are “WANT” criteria.
- Eliminate as many candidates as possible who do not meet “MUST” criteria.
- Submit remaining candidates to detailed questionnaires and interviews to determine finalists and recommendation.
- Score each candidate on each criterion to help inform decision making discussions.
- Through open and honest discussion, decide which candidate to recommend.

In the actual process used by John Deere, criteria would be weighted for scoring purposes. However, by the time we got to this step, we had eliminated all alternative candidates except the LCMC and NALC.

Rather than spend hours debating on specific weights to assign to each criterion, the Task Force determined to allow some scoring to inform the evaluation process, but make the final decision by discernment, discussion, and consensus.

Appendix C – Round 1 Questions and Responses

Following are the questions asked and responses received to “Round 1” interviews conducted by the Task Force.

Authoritative Contact for Questions

American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC): Presiding Pastor Rev. Dr. Cary Larson, as well as Pastor Mike Badenhop at Ascension Lutheran in Waterloo.

Apostolic Lutheran Church of America (ALCA): No response after multiple email attempts. No phone # on website.

Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC): Micah Hjermstad, President.

Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America (CLBA): Paul Larson, President

Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC): Pastor Michael Wilke, CLC President.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA): Kevin Jones, Bishop, Northeastern Iowa Synod.

Evangelical Lutheran Conference & Ministerium of North America (ELCM): Rev. Roy Steward, President.

Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS): Rev. Glenn Obenberger, Synod President.

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC): Pastor Stephen (pronounced "SteFan") Anenson, Iowa District Coordinator.

North American Lutheran Church (NALC): Rev. Dr. Amy C. Little, General Secretary (COO).

Old Apostolic Lutheran Church of America: Alfred (A.J.) Korpela.

Questions – Non-Doctrinal

1. *There can be a fine line between identifying a church body as a “denomination” and a non-denominational “affiliation.” Does your organization consider itself to be a denomination? If not, what does your organization consider itself to be? If YES, what characteristics does your organization have that qualify it as a denomination? If NO, what would you say differentiates your organization from a denomination? Does your organization allow congregations to affiliate with your group AND a denomination?*

American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC):

No - Association of Lutheran churches.

Apostolic Lutheran Church of America (ALCA):

No – it is a Federation.

Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC):

Denomination.

They are structured from the bottom up, with the congregations having the decision making power for their church. Churches have their own by-laws and constitutions but must also adopt the AFLC's model constitution to remain on the AFLC's charter. Their model constitution is structured to add clarity to some practices within the AFLC. The president of the AFLC does not have any direct power over the congregations but the AFLC does have committees that can make recommendations to congregations that have moved outside of the model constitution or Lutheran doctrine. This includes a committee vote, to remove a congregation from the charter.

Having a dual affiliation, for example, with the AFLC and LCMC is not allowed. Partnering with another congregation outside of the affiliation to pool resources, like youth activities, community outreach and disaster recovery is encouraged.

Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America (CLBA):

Denomination.

The CLB, as a denomination, exists to serve congregations in their obedience to the Great Commission, locally, nationally and internationally, as seen in Matthew 28:18-20.

The CLB exists to teach and develop churches with support for their missions and developing disciples - ministry happens at the church level.

Pastors are ordained at the denomination level, not at the church level. Pastors must pass exam and have multiple checks each year to ensure they are following the ""rules"" of the denomination. Pastors are held accountable and churches must have an approved statement of faith that aligns with the denomination.

Officers are elected. President is a 4 year term (not sure of any term limits, I didn't ask). Paul is on his 9th year as President. President is expected to make a strong effort to visit each church body annually. Preaching in West Union this Sunday.

For the first 50 years of existence over 50% of funds went towards overseas missions. Currently there is a stronger focus on local missions of lost people while continuing to have a major focus on world missions."

Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC):

We use the word synod. The root meaning denotes a "walking together." The congregations in our synod (the CLC) walk together in a united confession of faith. All our pastors and congregations believe and teach the same.

Every two years delegates from all of our synod's congregations meet in a convention to decide how we will carry out our Gospel work in the next biennium. Between conventions, the church officers, boards, and committees oversee and carry out the mandates of the convention.

Our CLC congregations are all members of our synod. We join together in mission work, and also work together to train future pastors, missionaries and Day School teachers. "

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA):

Denomination.

ELCA believes that the body of Christ is bigger than a local congregation. We can be more effective if we walk together and do ministry together. A denomination like the ELCA puts on churchwide and synod assemblies for congregations to work together, provides governance support, resources, etc.

The ELCA belongs to the Lutheran World Federation and the Lutheran Council of Churches, providing ways for congregations to impact the world.

Synods are important because different regions have different issues.

The ELCA constitution prohibits dual affiliation.

Evangelical Lutheran Conference & Ministerium of North America (ELCM):

They are a denomination. (They provided a copy of their constitution.)

They came out of the LCA church and separated at the time the ELCA merger took place (he mentioned that there weren't a lot of ALC churches in that part of the country); they considered being independent for a time but ultimately created a series of principles that defined their denomination (spent seven years observing before a decision was made to do this).

A defining characteristic is that nothing is decided by majority or supermajority voting; it is all consensus voting at Synod conventions, and everyone must agree to decisions in light of Scripture and the Lutheran confessions. This was because they observed that in other denominations and synods, most voting ends up with decisions that pull the denomination either to the right or left of congregations (left as in the case of the ELCA and right as in the case of the Missouri Synod) that would affect the whole church body. This distinction seemed very important to them. It also means that changes are not made very easily!

Their only advisements to congregations are that they must adhere to the Bible as the immutable and infallible word of God (not inerrant).

Congregations can have dual affiliation—they don't prefer it but allows it. They are also willing to loan their pastors to other congregations; one is currently serving an LCMC congregation.

Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS):

Lutheran Synod - not a denomination or affiliation - not also a separate Church.

Was confused by the question, so I didn't spend a lot of time on it. He did mention they have a fellowship with the Wisconsin synod.

I would 100% say the answer to this would be "no" after my conversation.

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC):

The LCMC is an "association" of self-governing and autonomous churches.

It is a legally recognized church body with ministry boards, etc., that is congregationally based. It is made up of congregations gathered around the word and sacraments. Each congregation is free to be creative. As an association, they do not take positions on social issues.

Dual affiliation is allowed.

North American Lutheran Church (NALC):

The NALC is a denomination which was organized in 2010 in Columbus, Ohio. (They provided a copy of their constitution.)

We have an elected Bishop who is the voted on by delegates who are representatives of their congregations. The NALC has an eight member Executive Council who are also elected by the convocation delegates: four clergy and four lay members. Our biennial in-person convocation requires 50% clergy and 50% laity. Any amendments to the constitution must be voted on by the congregations of the NALC in order to be ratified. In this way we are "congregationally focused" which is one of our four core values. The other of our core values are Christ Centered, Mission Driven, and Traditionally Grounded. We have a lean administrative structure as we want our congregations to use their resources for mission in their own contexts rather than sending money up a chain.

Old Apostolic Lutheran Church of America:

According to Alfred, churches that belong to the OALC are charter members of their "denomination."

They do not have a website that identifies their doctrines.

When asked about their "Lutheran beliefs" he shared that they do not have anything to share that may identify them and that they select preachers from the community, NOT pastors, to present their messages each Sunday.

Their preachers are NOT ordained. They do NOT require ordained ministers to celebrate the Lutheran sacraments.

2. *How many congregations do you have in total?*

American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC): 60-ish and growing.

Apostolic Lutheran Church of America (ALCA): 55 (from website)

Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC): 255

Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America (CLBA): 110 in US, 2,000 worldwide

Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC): 79 in US and Canada

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA): About 8,900 in US and Caribbean

Evangelical Lutheran Conference & Ministerium of North America (ELCM): 15

Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS): 130

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC): 782 in US, around 1,000 worldwide

North American Lutheran Church (NALC): 483

Old Apostolic Lutheran Church of America: 31 in US and Canada

3. *How many congregations do you have in Iowa?*

American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC): 10

Apostolic Lutheran Church of America (ALCA): none

Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC): 6 (planting 7th in Ankeny)

Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America (CLBA): 2

Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC): none

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA): approximately 400

Evangelical Lutheran Conference & Ministerium of North America (ELCM): none

Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS): 18-20

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC): 65

North American Lutheran Church (NALC): 32

Old Apostolic Lutheran Church of America: none

4. *How many members does your largest congregation have?*

American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC): soon-to-be 2,000 with a new affiliate

Apostolic Lutheran Church of America (ALCA): ???

Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC): over 1,000

Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America (CLBA): around 2,000

Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC): about 900

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA): about 10,000

Evangelical Lutheran Conference & Ministerium of North America (ELCM): about 400

Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS): 700-1000

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC): They track attendance, not members. Four Iowa congregations have weekly attendance of 700-1,000 (more than Nazareth). Their largest congregations have an attendance of around 4,800.

North American Lutheran Church (NALC): some with over 400.

Old Apostolic Lutheran Church of America: 350

5. *Does your organization focus on a particular ethnic group, and if so, what group?*

American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC): No

Apostolic Lutheran Church of America (ALCA): ???

Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC): NO. If a church happens to be more ethnic it is based on the location and the congregation.

Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America (CLBA): Not intentionally. Started as a Scandinavian movement and in America mostly comprised of Anglo Americans. More diverse in other parts of the world. Strong denomination in Japan, Taiwan, & Chad with a rapidly growing underground network in China.

Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC): No.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA): No, although it's hard to get away from immigrant heritage. Many of the original Lutheran immigrants were from Scandinavian countries or Germany, and many still celebrate their heritage. The ELCA is open to everyone, and is trying to reach out to different groups.

Evangelical Lutheran Conference & Ministerium of North America (ELCM): No

Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS): No. Their heritage is Norwegian, but are diverse now.

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC): No

North American Lutheran Church (NALC): If you mean German, Swedish, Finnish, Norwegian then no. However, we have a strong focus on assisting our multi-national congregations and pastors who speak languages other than English, specifically: Spanish, Korean, Chinese (Mandarin), Afan-Oroma, Amharic.

Old Apostolic Lutheran Church of America: No

Questions – Doctrinal

6. *What is your organization's position on whether congregations should practice open communion or close(d) communion? What does your organization do if a congregation does not follow this practice?*

American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC):

RESPONSIBLE COMMUNION.

The pastor shares what the church believes scripturally then encourages personal responsibility for people to discern and decide if they would want communion.

Not as rigid as the LCMS.

Apostolic Lutheran Church of America (ALCA):

???

Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC):

OPEN. It is believed that all should have the opportunity to commune.

The congregation has the final say.

Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America (CLBA):

OPEN. Faith is a requirement. Pastors are to discuss faith and that all believers are welcome in The Church and at God's table.

This would be handled at the Pastor level as it is a requirement of the Pastor more than it is of the church. This has never happened to his knowledge.

Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC):

CLOSED.

We need to make sure people who commune with us are 1. Christians 2. Understand the real presence 3. Are in doctrinal agreement with us.

What this means in practice is that those who commune at our altars are CLC members. Our practice is not intended to judge anyone's faith, but we want to be faithful to the Scriptures about the proper use of Sacrament.

REMOVE FROM SYNOD.

In brotherly love, we would admonish the pastor and/or congregation practicing open communion. Our prayer is that they have slipped into this practice out of weakness, and therefore are willing to be corrected. However, if it were to become clear that a pastor/congregation help to the practice of open communion, we would have to recognize that we are no longer in doctrinal agreement with them. They would no longer be part of our synod. (cf. Romans 16:17) To my knowledge, this has never happened in our church body in the 64-years of our existence. "

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA):

OPEN.

The ELCA officially allows open communion for any baptized Christian, but gives congregations authority to include some instructional requirements. Some congregations allow infants to commune, some give training to 5th or 6th graders, some require completing confirmation.

It depends on how far off a congregation wanders from policy. It would start with a conversation with the Bishop. There is a formally defined discipline process, up to and including termination. It really depends if there is a situation that creates a real liability to the congregation or the church.

Evangelical Lutheran Conference & Ministerium of North America (ELCM):

MODIFIED OPEN.

All are welcome as long as the person believes that Christ is present in the bread and wine. Pastors aren't required to examine people first; they hold that Paul was right in stating "let each one examine himself first."

The synod can remove a congregation or pastor if they adhere to approaches that are contrary to basic organizational principles. However, the congregation and pastor can make their own decisions about worship style and other matters, and they offer a lot of freedom.

They believe the congregation is the basic center of what happens in the life of a church.

Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS):

CLOSED.

I don't think he understood. They would not allow a congregation into their membership that wouldn't agree to only practice closed communion. However, he admitted there could be exceptions made with individuals in the congregation from time to time based on very unique circumstances.

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC):

OPEN.

The Ministry Board or Board of Trustees would investigate and discuss with church or pastor. In extreme, unresolved cases, the church would be taken off the roster.

North American Lutheran Church (NALC):

OPEN.

The NALC has an open table meaning all who are baptized and believe that Christ is the Lord of their lives are welcome to the Lord's supper.

We haven't had that issue.

Old Apostolic Lutheran Church of America:

???

7. *What is your organization's position on whether congregations should perform baptisms at any age and stage of life? What does your organization do if a congregation does not follow this practice?*

American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC):

YES. Baptize infants and anyone who has not been previously baptized.

Apostolic Lutheran Church of America (ALCA):

???

Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC):

YES. Infants and adults not baptized before can be baptized.

This is not in line with the Lutheran doctrine and possibly a committee recommendation would be made.

Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America (CLBA):

YES, baptism is available at all stages of life. This is a Lutheran requirement.

This is a strange question as all Lutheran churches baptize infants.

Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC):

YES. We believe that Christ's command to baptize all nations includes all people. Therefore, we practice infant baptism. We baptize adults and older children in cases where they have made a confession of faith in the Triune God, as well as a confession of faith in Christ as their only Savior for sin.

REMOVE FROM SYNOD. (See Communion).

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA):

YES. ELCA encourages baptism at any age.

If a congregation is abusing baptism (such as putting some additional requirements), the discipline process would begin.

Evangelical Lutheran Conference & Ministerium of North America (ELCM):

YES.

(See Communion)

Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS):

YES.

They promote infant baptism, but would baptize at any age. They strongly urge families to baptize their infants. If the family didn't want to baptize their infant, they would counsel the family and try to explain what the scriptures say about it in an effort to get them to change their mind.

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC):

YES.

(See Communion)

North American Lutheran Church (NALC):

YES. We believe in infant baptism which is the traditional Lutheran position on the sacrament.

We haven't had this problem but if we had a congregation who wouldn't baptize infants then we would have a serious discussion with them about whether or not they were a good fit for the NALC.

Old Apostolic Lutheran Church of America:

???

8. *What is your organization's position on whether congregations should be able to ordain female pastors? What does your organization do if a congregation does not follow this practice?*

American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC):

NO. According the Scriptural guidance.

Apostolic Lutheran Church of America (ALCA):

???

Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC):

NO. The AFLC does not ordain female pastors.

This has happened twice.

On one of the instances, the committee voted to remove the congregation from the charter. The vote to remove caused more push back from other congregations than original violation did.

The second instance, it was found that the congregation was wanting to be removed from the charter so that they could join the LCMC. The congregation was asked to have an honest internal discussion about where they would best serve the lord. The congregation made their own decision and left the AFLC.

Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America (CLBA):

NO. Congregations do not ordain pastors, it occurs at the denomination level. Females are not ordained. As a conviction of scripture for all pastoral roles.

Females are encouraged to be worship directors and leaders in other roles.

Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC):

NO.

Every Christian is equal before God in terms of their forgiveness and being heirs of eternal life. Every Christian is part of the body of Christ, with no member being more important than the others. Every Christian has the right and privilege to share the Gospel with others. However, God has established different roles for men and women in the church. Our pastors are men. We base this on the following Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 12:34; 1 Timothy 2:11-12; 1 Timothy 3:2.

CLC Statement of Faith & Purpose – Page 18 references 1 Timothy 2:11-14 by saying it teaches that women are not to be called to the pastoral ministry. This is clear section also informs us that women are not to function in any position in the church in which they teach or have authority over men.

REMOVE FROM SYNOD. (See Communion).

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA):

YES.

The ELCA has, through a process of learning and growth, concluded that women are fully human and should be given the same opportunities as men. The ELCA's position is that scripture prohibiting female leaders was written to speak in the context of a different culture/time.

In the ELCA, the Church, not individual congregations, ordain pastors, and the congregations calls pastors. A congregation is allowed to decide not to call a female pastor.

Evangelical Lutheran Conference & Ministerium of North America (ELCM):

GENERALLY speaking, NO.

They did loosen this rule and ordained a woman, but she said one thing and then acted in another way (it was a little hard to follow this). In order for a pastor to be approved, he/she must have unanimous consensus and many in the churches would vote no to women applicants.

He admitted that holding the line on this can be hard. Officially they allow that if the person (presumably a woman, too) can convince us they are "sola scriptura" in their focus and orientation, they would allow it.

He did mention that the majority of their pastors are men with Master of divinity degrees. They are open to pastors who were trained at non-Lutheran seminaries (they have one church with a trained Baptist minister); however, they must assure their examining committee that they align with the ELCM's Biblical and Lutheran confessional understandings. They try to be creative but remain biblical and solidly "Lutheran."

They also authorize lay leaders to be "catechists" when pastors aren't available—especially with smaller churches—and these catechists can eventually be trained and approved for ordination (this follows a very early practice from colonial America when there was a shortage of pastors (which is the case again today)."

Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS):

NO.

They do not ordain female pastors in any role or capacity. They do allow females to teach in their schools. They also have allowed females to perform lay person visitation ministries and pray and read scripture with people, but not give communion.

They wouldn't receive them into membership if they had a female pastor or were going to call a female pastor.

They have welcomed previous ELCA congregations into the ELS in the past that would have allowed female pastors and they worked to counsel and teach them about what the scriptures say about it to educate them about why it is wrong."

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC):

YES. Strives to support men and women."

(See Communion)

North American Lutheran Church (NALC):

YES.

We ask that all our congregations and pastors recognize that this is where we stand.

Also, it is not the congregation that ordains in the NALC, it is the Church herself. The call of God comes from the people of God and for the sake of good order, the Bishop is the one who ordains all candidates for ministry (unless there is a rare exception).

If they don't agree with it - based on doctrine and not just preference - we ask them not to cause a conflict over it. If a pastor cannot abide by this and refuses to live in harmony with the pastors of the NALC who are women, they will not be welcomed into the fold.

Old Apostolic Lutheran Church of America:

???

9. *What is your organization's position on whether congregations should ONLY perform heterosexual marriage? What does your organization do if a congregation does not follow this practice?*

American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC):

ONLY HETEROSEXUAL.

Only perform and recognize God's divine plan for marriage with one man and one woman.

Apostolic Lutheran Church of America (ALCA):

???

Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC):

ONLY HETEROSEXUAL.

This is contrary to "Homosexuality: God's Word and Our Witness" teaching. To date, this has not been an issue. That being said, committee review maybe warranted.

Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America (CLBA):

ONLY HETEROSEXUAL.

God created man and women and designed marriage to be between a man and a woman. The denomination has created position papers on this and other sensitive topics to assist with discussions and biblical understanding at the church level.

REMOVED.

If a pastor performed a wedding outside of the biblical definition they would no longer be a CLB pastor and would be removed as a pastor within the denomination. If it was the church that was encouraging this, the church would be suspended and eventually removed if it continued. (has not happened)"

Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC):

ONLY HETEROSEXUAL.

Our understanding of what constitutes marriage is determined by Scripture. The Lord, the everlasting and eternal God, created the world (Genesis 1-2). On the 6th day of creation God created male and female (Genesis 1:26-27). God saw that it was not good for man to be alone so He created a woman and brought her to the man. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and they (male and female) shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5). The creation account in Genesis clearly shows that, when God instituted marriage, He intended it to be a lifelong union between one man and one woman. When no helper suitable was found for Adam, the Lord created a woman (Genesis 1:26-27, 2:18-25). Any contrary interpretation of God's action and intent is a consequence, at least in part, of the evolutionary mindset of those who refuse to accept the Bible as the authoritative Word of God.

REMOVE FROM SYNOD.

(See Communion).

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA):

CONGREGATION DECIDES.

The ELCA recognizes that in some communities, a congregation may feel they need to allow gay marriage or ordination of gay pastors in order to effectively reach those communities.

Left up to congregations.

Evangelical Lutheran Conference & Ministerium of North America (ELCM):

ONLY HETEROSEXUAL.

ELCM churches can only be used for "Biblical" marriages between men and women.

Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS):

HETEROSEXUAL ONLY.

Heterosexual marriage is the only marriage recognized. If a pastor or congregant struggled with same-sex attraction, but was repentant, celibate and chaste, they would allow that person to be a pastor or join the church.

A same-sex married couple would not be allowed to join the church unless they repented and got divorced, joining as celibate/chaste individuals.

They would not be allowed to be a member.

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC):

HETEROSEXUAL ONLY.

See separate document "A Pastoral Admonition" (See Communion)

North American Lutheran Church (NALC):

HETEROSEXUAL ONLY.

The clergy of the NALC are not permitted to preside at homosexual weddings, in a church building or outside of a church. NALC clergy represent their congregation and the denomination.

This would be cause for discipline. We have a whole process for discipline when it is needed.

Old Apostolic Lutheran Church of America:

???

10. *Do you have materials you could share with us that compares your organization with other Lutheran affiliations in terms of similarities and differences in beliefs, teachings and practices?*

American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC):

Great conversation with Pastor Cary. The four foundations they believe are: 1.) The word of God is inerrant and infallible. 2.) The belief in the Lutheran documents (Luther's Small Catechism, Book of Concord and the Augsburg Confession) BECAUSE they are in step with the Holy Scriptures. 3.) Evangelism and mission is crucial to who the AALC is. Takes stewardship of the mission monies very seriously. 4.) All AALC congregations are empowered; not autonomous but there is not a heavy top-down governance structure. The AALC is there to assist and support the congregations but no ownership rights of any properties belonging to the church.

Pastor Cary served in the Navy and in education and industry before the Lord called him to ministry. He counts Homer Larsen as one of the guiding voices who the Lord put into his life at a brief but crucial time. Pastor Cary was previously affiliated with the ELCA and graduated from Luther College. At the ELCA convention in 2010 the Lord showed him the issues of the ELCA that led to Pastor Cary leaving.

(Provided document titled “American Lutheran Denominations: A Comparison Sheet,” an independently prepared summary of nine Lutheran Churches in the US.)

Apostolic Lutheran Church of America (ALCA):

Use King James Bible exclusively.

Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC):

The AFLC website contains easy to find literature about their teachings. Reverend Micah is willing to meet with anyone from Nazareth that seeks more information or additional clarity to his answers.

Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America (CLBA):

No.

By comparing denominations or churches we have the same problem that individuals have when they compare themselves to someone else. We tend to focus on the negative and end up defining ourselves and the others by the negative things.

Instead we focus on delivering a clear message about who we are and what we stand for. "This is who we are and that's what we believe and that's what we are."

Paul took the time to look into Naz and read many documents available on our website. He recognizes and understands the problems we are working through. He also recognizes that a switch from ELCA to CLBA would be difficult for many people and the societal norms that people accept. He specifically pointed out that many might be challenged not allowing female pastors.

He recommends that if we are faced with opposition on that or other difficult issues that we look at Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC) or Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC)."

Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC):

Provided several documents:

- The Brief Statement of 1932 – 11 page document summarizing their beliefs
- CLC Statement of Faith and Purpose
- CLC Same Sex Marriage Policy
- “We Still Believe” – 1 page document of beliefs

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA):

Not aware of any materials on the ELCA or Synod websites.

The ELCA is NOT an “anything goes” church, but there are some people within the ELCA that push the envelope and give the ELCA a bad name, even when the ELCA pushes back.

The ELCA has existed longer than any of its three(3) predecessor groups. One of the ways it has done so is by trying to deal with ideological differences in a respectful manner.

Evangelical Lutheran Conference & Ministerium of North America (ELCM):

At one time they had a chart comparing ELCA with ELCM and other more rigid churches. Not sure if applies anymore and he didn't seem to know where to find it. He mentioned something about allowing people to be in the boy scouts and girl scouts. On their website, they describe themselves as "centrist."

I did ask him if they consider their churches to be "welcoming to all" and he said they were. Sinners of all description are welcome, but they do not want to see the pulpit occupied by someone who "doesn't know the difference between sin and God's Word."

(Provided a copy of their constitution.)

Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS):

Provided a 2013 document titled "The ELS & the ELCA: Are we so different?"

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC):

Provided documents:

- Our Statement of Faith
- Statement on Ecumenical Relationships
- A Pastoral Admonition

North American Lutheran Church (NALC):

We don't like to speak for other denominations/ affiliations. They can do that better than we can.

I am attaching some documents that tell you who we are in the NALC and what we believe. We are committed to discipleship, mission locally and abroad, and we seek to empower each of our parishes to greater service in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord.

Provided documents:

- NALC Constitution
- Discernment Process for Joining the NALC

Old Apostolic Lutheran Church of America:

???

Appendix D – Round 2 Responses from Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

1. Doctrine, Teaching and Practices

In this section, we explore the compatibility of existing views between the congregation of Nazareth and your Church.

1.1. Compatible Views of Bible and Lutheran Documents

In Nazareth's current By-Laws, "Article II – Confession of Faith" (attached) we list our congregation's position on the Bible and other Lutheran Documents as the basis of all that we believe, teach and practice. In this section, we explore similarities, differences and potential conflicts between our congregation and your Church.

There can be many interpretations of scripture. Nazareth's position is that the Bible is "the divinely inspired, revealed, and inerrant Word of God and submits to this as the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life." How would affiliation with your Church align with the teachings that we subscribe to at Nazareth?

The position of the ELCA is that the canonical scriptures are divinely inspired and are the source and norm for our lives.

What are the views of your Church in relation to the Bible, the historic creeds (Nicene, Apostles, Athanasian) and the Lutheran documents (Augsburg confession, small catechism) as the foundation of what you believe and their use in preaching and teaching?

These are the foundational documents of the ELCA. We are in agreement.

Is there anything from our By-Laws "Article II - Confession of Faith" that concerns you?

The words "inerrant" and "infallible" are not words that accurately reflect what we have learned about the scriptures in the past 150 years. ELCA congregations and members are welcome to hold to these beliefs but not everyone in the ELCA is required to do so.

[Task Force Note: the LCMC and the NALC also agree on using "inspired" in place of "inerrant."]

1.2. Accepting vs. Affirming

In this section, we explore some specific ways in which your Church helps – and limits – congregations to accept all.

1.2.1. Welcoming to All

The Church is a hospital for sinners. Some forms of sin are more visible than others, and right or wrong, some congregations and Churches have set more defined boundaries for some types of more visible sin than they do less visible sin. In this section, we explore what your Church does to encourage – and limit – the marginalized from participation in your congregations, as well as how you support your congregations to be Welcoming to All.

When it comes to being a "welcoming" Church, what limitations, if any, are placed on members and staff by your Church? What situations are congregations allowed to decide, and what situations are dictated by your Church?

There are no limitations placed on congregations for what it means to be “welcoming” in the ELCA. The ELCA recognizes four separate stances towards welcoming those who identify as LGBTQ+. Because we hold space for a wide range of beliefs, it is possible, and even likely, that one will encounter others in our church and in our congregations who feel differently than they do. ELCA congregations are free to choose their own pastors and create governing documents that reflect what the congregation feels is a faithful interpretation of Scripture and response to Christ’s call to welcome and care for others.

How does your Church advise congregations struggling to be welcoming to all but also do not believe in affirming sin nor allowing people to live in opposition to God’s Word?

Continued prayer, scripture study, and conversation within the congregation around these issues.

How does your Church encourage people to love their neighbors as themselves when they don’t agree on social positions or positions taken by your Church?

Loving the neighbor means doing what is best for that person, recognizing that we are all sinful and in need of God’s grace. None of us are ever fully aligned with God’s will in this life (righteous) apart from God’s proclaiming us so for Christ’s sake.

How do you address the appearance of a lack of “repentance” for a behavior - particularly in situations where someone professes and strives to love God and love his neighbor in other areas?

In cases like divorce and remarriage, we accept that living in adultery (remarriage) is sometimes more in line with God’s will than continuing to foster a broken relationship or demanding that the divorced person lives a single and celibate life. Because we are all sinful, Jesus reminds us to clear the log from our own eye before removing the speck from our neighbor’s.

Some may say the opposite of “welcoming” is “rejecting.” How do you respond to that? How does a Church that “rejects” sinners survive?

Since we all sin and fall short of the glory of God, the church cannot “reject” sinners without falling into sin itself. We have to be comfortable with the idea that the church is leaven in the dough, and that not everyone will feel comfortable with our proclamation. The gift of the Body of Christ is that everyone doesn’t need to be the same part or function the same way. A single congregation or a single denomination generally can’t be all things to all people but the Body of Christ and the Kingdom of God can (and we should try).

If someone is suffering from sinful behavior but doesn’t know Jesus, how does your Church provide a welcoming umbrella that allows them to feel safe and get to know Jesus?

By sharing the Good News that we are all in bondage to sin and are freed by the grace of God through the faith of Jesus, whose life, death, and resurrection reveal God’s welcome and life-renewing love. The ELCA provides that welcoming umbrella through our understanding that we are one in Christ, not in our mindset.

Does your Church have any resources to help congregations reach the unchurched in their communities?

Yes.

1.2.2. Sexual Sin

The ELCA has come under much criticism for its positions on accepting and affirming homosexuals. In this section, we take a deeper look at your Church and its positions on sexual sin, both homosexual and heterosexual, as well as how consistent your positions are on both types of sin.

The question of sexuality is a difficult one for many churches as we strive to be like Christ and be loving and welcoming. Explain how your position on sexuality plays out in your policies regarding pastors, congregants, and staff.

As a church, the ELCA holds its rostered ministers to a high standard when it comes to sexual expression. These standards are laid out in Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline. A copy can be found here:

https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Definitions_and_Guidelines_for_Discipline_2021.pdf

Because the ELCA allows for four separate stances in regard to LGBTQ+ people, church policy is determined by the specific expression of the church in question. Congregations determine congregational policy. Synods set policy for the Synod (staff and committees/networks). Churchwide policy is determined by churchwide assembly for the staff and task groups of the whole church.

What positions are congregations allowed to decide, and what positions are dictated by your Church?

Congregations are able to set their own policy in regard to who they call, hire, and put into leadership positions.

What is your reaction to Nazareth Lutheran Church's "Speaking the Truth in Love" document? Are there any conflicts with your Church?

Nazareth is free to have this as one of their defining documents if they choose. I would recommend putting it prominently on your website so that people are aware of it before visiting or joining.

How do you counsel congregations with members that aren't unified on matters of sexuality and sexual sin? Do you have any specific examples of how this was resolved?

To engage in the hard work of conversation, bible study and prayer in the congregation. The ELCA has study documents to help lead a congregation through such conversations with respect for one another.

Does your Church allow celibate homosexual pastors to serve?

Yes. We also allow homosexual pastors who are in marital relationship serve.

Does your Church allow pastors to perform homosexual marriages under any circumstance? If so, under what circumstances?

Yes. Where it is legal and where the pastor and congregation are in agreement that the pastor can preside at such ceremonies.

What (if any) counseling and discipleship/support groups/care ministries does your Church have for various sinful temptations (ex. AA, gambling, porn addiction, homosexual attraction)?

The Northeastern Iowa Synod has a substance abuse network. Several congregations host AA groups. The ELCA also has support for rostered ministers (ordained pastors and deacons) through Portico insurance.

How do you respond to the statement: “Any sexual relationship outside of marriage is a sin. Your sexuality and who you chose to love is not for me to judge. Sexuality and/or gender are the same thing to me, and I do not believe that sexuality and/or gender decides if you are a good employee, leader, or human being.”

The ELCA does not condone sexual relationship outside of marriage. Sexuality and gender are not the same thing. These are two different terms that mean different things. They have been conflated in the past and we need to be careful how we use words and terms. Sexuality and gender do not determine if you are a good employee, leader, or human being.

1.3. Inerrancy without Literalism

At Nazareth, when we confess that the Bible is inerrant, we mean that the lessons and meanings taught in the Bible are 100% true. However, we allow that this can be compatible with some accounts in the Bible not being recorded as they literally occurred. (Example: we allow that Creation and Theistic Evolution are compatible.) In this section, we explore the positions of your Church on the Inerrancy and Literalism in the Bible.

How does your Church define inerrancy as it pertains to the Bible?

The ELCA does not use the word “inerrant.” However, the ELCA is in alignment with the way you are using it here.

[Task Force Note: the LCMC and the NALC also agree on using “inspired” in place of “inerrant.”]

Under this definition, does your Church consider the Bible to be inerrant?

Yes.

Does your Church allow congregations to discuss Theistic Evolution as compatible with the Creation story? If so, does this present a conflict to the Creation story being inerrant?

Yes. No.

What (if any) position does your Church have on other accounts in the Bible that may not be recorded as they literally occurred?

There are people within the ELCA that have, no doubt, issues with literal interpretations of many accounts. They do not necessarily speak for the whole church and we are welcome to state that disagreement.

Has this created conflict in your Church? If so, how have you dealt with it?

Of course. We deal with it by staying in relationship and talking about it. Sometimes we have to admit that we may not ever agree but this disagreement is not strong enough to deny the unity we have in Christ.

1.4. Trends and Boundaries

There are situations where individuals or groups may push the boundaries of a Church's purported beliefs. Sometimes these stories are picked up by news and social media, putting their congregations in a "guilt by association" position. In this section, we explore areas that your Church has dealt with/are dealing with where boundaries within your Church are being challenged or are changing.

Does your Church teach that salvation comes as a gift of grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and there is no other means of salvation? If not, explain who is, and who is not, saved.

Yes. This is what we confess.

Have you at any time had leaders in your Church that suggest they believe in universalism (i.e. all are saved regardless of their religious beliefs)? If so, how have you dealt with them?

Please see the letter from Bishop Eaton in response to Nazareth's letter of Concern and Dissent. She makes a crucial distinction between universalism and the universality of Christ's atoning work.

Have you at any time had leaders in your Church that suggest they believe that other faiths outside of Christianity lead to salvation? If so, how have you dealt with them?

Yes. We continue to be in relationship and conversation about what they mean and believe by such statements.

What (if any) discussions or trends are happening in your Church that suggest your positions may be changing on social or theological topics? How does it appear they will be resolved?

It appears that the ELCA is moving towards full inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community. This is just my view based on the actions of the Churchwide Assemblies the past 12 years or so.

1.5. Non-Lutheran Relationships

No congregation is an island unto itself. We are part of the holy catholic Church. This section explores how congregations can work with others outside of your Church.

1.5.1. Ecumenically Focused

This section explores your positions on, and resources for, your congregations to work with congregations of other denominations.

Do you permit a congregation to work with non-Lutheran congregations for outreach or mission projects? Can you give some examples of existing partnerships?

Yes. In fact we encourage ecumenism, aware that we are one, made so by God in Christ Jesus. Naz's partnership with Orchard Hill for BASIC is one example. Another at UNI is the Lutheran Student Center sharing ministry with other Christian organizations at ThreeHouse.

What (if any) restrictions does your Church have that discourage or prevent a congregation from working with a non-Lutheran congregation or Church?

No restrictions that I am aware of.

Do you permit the use of resource materials supplied by non-Lutheran organizations for Sunday School curriculum, small group studies, etc.? Can you give some examples?

Congregations are free to use resource materials by other denominations/organizations. It has been my experience that it is wise to review the material and make edits to align with Lutheran theology – especially if the material is from a decision-based theological background.

What (if any) resources or opportunities do you provide to assist in establishing partnerships with non-Lutheran congregations?

The ELCA has a person in charge of ecumenical partnerships. We also have full-communion relationships with a number of denominations so that we can share pulpits and provide pastoral coverage to congregations.

1.5.2. Outside Pastors

We believe there is a general shortage of Lutheran Pastors available to meet the needs of congregations, and in fact, there is a shortage of Pastors for all denominations. The ELCA has established agreements with other denominations (some of which are not Lutheran) that allow for the possibility of a Pastor from those denomination to be approved for service in an ELCA church. This section focuses on what abilities and restrictions you place on congregations to seek Pastors outside of your Church, Lutheran or otherwise.

What requirements and restrictions does your Church have for a congregation to call a pastor who has been ordained in another denomination, Lutheran or non-Lutheran?

Pastors need to be in good standing with one of our full-communion partners to be eligible to serve in an ELCA congregation. On rare occasions the local bishop can provide Synodical Authorization to an ordained pastor from a church that we are not in a full-communion relationship.

Are these requirements and restrictions the same for an interim pastor as a permanent pastor?

Yes.

Does your Church have a process in place for calling pastors outside your denomination (Lutheran or non-Lutheran)? If so, please briefly describe it.

The Synod works with a congregational call committee to determine the leadership needs of the congregations. The Synod helps identify potential candidates, whether from the ELCA or from

other denominations. Congregations can also identify candidates and the Synod assists in making connections and making sure the pastor is in good standing with their church.

What assistance will you provide a member congregation if they choose to seek a non-Lutheran pastor?

The same as above providing the pastor is in good standing with a full-communion partner church.

Must pastoral candidates for congregation be approved by your Church?

Yes.

2. Expectations of Church from Congregations

When two organizations partner together, each hopes and expects that that partnership will bring benefits to both sides. In these sections, we explore topics where Nazareth's congregation has expectations of benefits that would be realized by affiliating with your Church, and whether they are compatible with what your Church feels is appropriate to provide.

2.1. Assistance in Calling Pastors

Luke 10: 2: And [Jesus] said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (ESV)

One of the key needs of any Christian congregation is the availability of qualified Ordained Pastors to lead the congregation. In these sections, we explore how your Church helps match up congregations to qualified, Ordained Pastors.

2.1.1. Seminary Network

The ability of a Church to seek qualified, Ordained Pastors for a congregation is largely dependent on the partnerships that Church has established with existing Seminaries to promote and train new Pastors. In this section, we explore your Seminary Network.

What (if any) seminaries does your Church operate that produce pastors with Masters of Divinity (or comparable) degrees?

The ELCA has six accredited seminaries.

What (if any) seminaries does your Church partner with that produce pastors with Masters of Divinity (or comparable) degrees?

Pastoral candidates can attend the seminary of their choosing that offer an accredited Divinity degree. We have pastors that have graduated from Princeton, Duke, Bethel, Fuller, and other seminaries.

Do the seminaries you use produce pastors at a rate consistent with the needs of your congregations?

The ELCA produces approximately the same ratio of pastors to lay people as in the past. The one pastor for every congregation model that we became accustomed to in the 1950's-60's is considered an anomaly and we seem to be returning to a pastor/congregation ratio that was common before World War II. Part of the discrepancy we have with more congregations than pastors may be that we have too many congregations.

Do you partner with non-Lutheran seminaries to identify pastors? If yes, how do you ensure adequate training on Lutheran doctrine? What standards do you apply?

A person can receive a Divinity degree at any accredited Christian seminary. They can become eligible for the ELCA roster by going through the candidacy process (specific to each Synod) and affiliating with an ELCA seminary. The affiliation usually includes specific Lutheran studies on theology, history, and confessions.

Do you believe that students at the seminaries you work with would be theologically aligned with Nazareth's beliefs? If yes, why? If no [understanding that "no" might mean "sometimes"], what do you believe might be the points of difference?

The ELCA does have students in our seminaries that are theologically aligned with Nazareth's beliefs. Why? Because we have students that have grown up in congregations like Nazareth.

Can you provide a list of the network of seminaries you use and the number of students graduating each year?

The latest figures I am aware of show about 240 graduates across ELCA seminaries. This number has been fluctuating a bit lately because of the pandemic.

Does your Church ordain pastors or do congregations? Why?

The local Bishop ordains pastors once they receive their first call to a congregation. This is because of our belief that the person is called to pastor the whole church/community and not just one congregation.

2.1.2. Resources for Calling Pastors

When pastors retire or leave to serve new callings, congregations need support in identifying candidates and filling these positions. As a large and diverse church family, we need strong pastoral leadership. In this section, we explore how your Church helps match congregations to pastors available for call.

Nazareth is seeking to call a senior pastor and probably an associate pastor. Explain the process for how you would work with us to identify and call a pastor that would be a fit--and what you consider the defined qualifications of pastors in your Church.

- Someone from the Bishop's staff meets with the Council to determine pastoral needs during the transition and to go through the call process, including information on putting together a call committee.
- The Synod works with the call committee as they complete a Ministry Site Profile (MSP), sharing demographic and ministry information with potential candidates.
- The Synod assists in identifying appropriate candidates and can follow up with candidates identified by the congregation. The position is posted on the Synod website and on the ELCA page for pastors looking for a new call. The bishop can also "advertise" the position among all the ELCA bishops when there is a particular or special need in a congregation.
- The Synod looks for pastors with the gifts and abilities defined by the congregation in the Ministry Site Profile. Pastors that don't match the profile (i.e. not enough experience) are dissuaded from having their names submitted unless the call committee has asked to see everyone interested. Frequently we find pastors with the right gifts who are not aware that they would be a match and we suggest that they look at the MSP in their discernment.
- The Synod serves as a resource for compensation and other questions the call committee has along the way. We meet with the council/call committee three times, and sometimes more if necessary.

- After the call committee recommends a candidate to the Council, a Synod representative attends the congregational call meeting to attest that everything is done correctly.

Do these qualifications differ for senior, associate and interim pastors?

The congregation determines the qualifications for each pastoral position. We work with what the congregation gives us. We provide feedback on the MSP but the call committee and congregation have the final say in what they are looking for.

What are the typical time frames for matching a congregation with senior, associate and interim pastors?

It usually takes three to four months to complete the MSP when done well. Identifying, interviewing, and follow-up can take anywhere between 2 months or a couple years depending on the congregation, the community, and other factors. Small town and rural congregations are the hardest to find matches for right now.

Interim pastors are in great demand across the church. Again, depending on the congregation and location it can take anywhere between a month or more. In some cases we have not been able to find an interim pastor.

How many ordained pastors in total are working in your US congregations today?

Approximately 16,000 people are ordained to Word and Sacrament ministry in the ELCA (pastors). Another 1200 are ordained to Word and Service ministry (deacons).

Does your Church assist congregations in performing background checks of prospective pastors?

The ELCA has an extensive vetting process for pastoral candidates. We also get personal references from other bishops when a pastor is seeking a call from another Synod. We require regular boundary and ethics training for all rostered ministers. Congregations are still encouraged to perform background checks on all called, hired, and volunteer positions that work with vulnerable populations like youth, people with special needs, and the elderly.

Are congregations in your Church allowed to employ lay pastors? Why or why not? If yes, in what capacity(ies)?

Yes. Lay pastors are not allowed to preside at the sacraments (baptism and communion) without special permission from the Synod bishop. The Northeastern Iowa Synod is currently working to provide a lay training program to assist in identifying, training, and certifying lay people who are called to ministry but not to ordained ministry.

2.2. Mission Beyond our Walls

The Great Commission requires that the Church spread the Gospel throughout the world. A Church can help congregations have greater impact by establishing their own, or partnering with existing, mission programs or missionaries. In this section, we explore the partnerships and resources your

Church has established, both domestically and internationally, to help congregations match with mission partners.

How does your Church stress the importance of your congregations being involved in, and supporting, missions and missionaries?

We encourage and provide connection with ELCA missionaries around the world. We also have an extensive program for Youth Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) who serve for a year in Lutheran ministries around the Globe.

Please list and briefly describe any mission programs operated by your Church.

- Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM)
- ELCA Missionaries
- Lutheran Disaster Relief
- ELCA World Hunger Appeal
- Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities (AMMPARO)
- Federal Chaplaincy (military, prison)
- Peace not Walls (Middle East accompaniment)
- School kits
- Health kits
- Quilts distributed domestically and around the world
- Lutheran Services in America (LSI here in Iowa)
- More.

Please list any mission programs your Church currently partners with.

- Lutheran World Federation projects
- World Council of Churches projects
- The ELCA partners with Lutherans around the globe through our “Companion Synod” relationships. Northeastern Iowa accompanies churches in Namibia and in Hungary. Other companion synods include those in Tanzania, Mozambique, Libya, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Japan, Guatemala, Peru, and more.

Does your Church sponsor any missionaries either domestically or internationally? If so, explain the rationale or vetting process used for determining which missionaries are supported by your church.

Yes. Ordained clergy who are interested apply with the Service and Justice home area of the ELCA (formerly Global Missions). They are interviewed, vetted, and well trained before being deployed for several years.

Do your congregations have the freedom to partner with or support any mission or missionaries?

Yes.

2.3. Mission Within our Walls

Any mission of a congregation starts with equipping members to be knowledgeable and effective at spreading the Gospel, and supporting staff to aid in that mission. These sections focus on how your Church helps congregations accomplish these things.

2.3.1. Resources for Teaching and Evangelism

Congregational teaching and evangelism outreach to non-members are two of the most important needs of any church we affiliate with. Spreading the Gospel starts with teaching. This section explores what resources your Church offers congregations to aid in educating their congregants and staff.

Does your Church produce specific resources and materials to aid in teaching congregations, training staff, and evangelism? If yes, please give examples.

The ELCA's publishing arm, Augsburg Fortress (<https://www.augsburgfortress.org/>) provides numerous materials. We also provide faith and bible-based study guides for social issues faced by congregations. The NE Iowa Synod provides two events for pastoral renewal (fall & spring), an annual treasurers training, occasional president's zoom meetings, workshops at Synod Assemblies (that is in transition this year) and more.

Does your Church partner with other organizations to provide resources and materials to aid in teaching congregations, training staff, and evangelism? If yes, please give examples.

On occasion we will have outside organizations lead a program. These tend to be more expensive than in-house training opportunities so we don't use them because the cost becomes prohibitive for many small congregations.

Do you have a resource person or database that can help a member congregation in improving or setting up discipleship and evangelism classes or programs?

The Synod staff is available for recommendations. We continue to put resources on our website as we can. Our Networks are another good resource for congregations. The Synod is also partnering with other Synods to develop a network of coaches who can work with pastors or congregations in these areas.

2.3.2. Employee Benefits

Most congregations rely on paid staff who depend on their congregations to provide for their financial needs. Among those needs are benefits like health insurance, retirement plans, etc. This section explores the ways in which your Church helps, or restricts, congregations meet the employee benefit needs of their paid staff.

Nazareth currently obtains employee benefits through Portico Benefit Services, a ministry of the ELCA. Are congregations affiliated with your Church allowed to (continue to) obtain employee benefits through Portico?

Yes.

Do you endorse, recommend, or require member congregations to provide employee benefits through a designated provider?

We require that pastors are insured through Portico unless they are covered under a spouse's insurance. Retirement is through Portico.

We encourage lay staff to be covered but make no recommendations as to who that coverage is with.

If yes, list the provider and describe the benefits provided or required.

If no, are there guidelines or requirements for congregations with regard to employee benefits?

Are congregations restricted to a specific company for providing benefits, or can they put together their own best package with an independent provider?

Pastors are required to be enrolled in Portico. Lay staff are not.

Please provide a summary of employee benefit packages (if any) currently available to your congregations through your Church.

Portico provides a variety of coverage options with the ability of the pastor or employee to buy up if they wish. Primary health and mental health coverage are included. There are also a number of wellness programs available to those who are enrolled. Retirement benefits are also available.

2.4. Better Together

Congregations can be more effective in many ways, from sharing the Gospel to basic operational decisions, by sharing work and knowledge with other congregations. In this section we explore the congregations that exist today, and potentially in the future, that would be convenient for Nazareth to partner and network with.

2.4.1. Nearby Congregations

Some forms of collaboration are simply more effective face-to-face. Some joint projects can only be undertaken when all parties involved are relatively close to each other. In this section, we explore what congregations of your Church are relatively near to Nazareth for the purposes of collaboration and joint projects.

What congregations with an average in-person attendance of at least 150 does your Church have within a 150-mile radius of Nazareth?

Because that radius extends beyond our Synod I am not able to provide a complete list. There are at least six in our Synod.

What congregations with an average in-person attendance of at least 700 does your Church have within a 300-mile radius of Nazareth?

There are no other congregations of this size in our Synod, although Trinity in Mason City averages over 500. Des Moines, Davenport, Rochester, MN, and the Twin Cities all have one or more congregations that are this large.

How does your Church promote collaboration between congregations?

Northeastern Iowa is divided into eight Conferences. Pastors meet regularly and conferences meet annually to determine local collaboration.

The Synod Assembly brings all the congregations together to determine ministry priorities for Northeastern Iowa.

We are also working on developing “hub churches” that work together to promote ministry in all congregations and in the community.

The ELCA also hosts a large church pastors conference for our largest congregations. This is an excellent networking opportunity for leaders of large congregations.

What joint programs or internal networks does your Church have that are actively used by your congregations?

Currently the Northeastern Iowa has active networks for

- Care of Creation
- Racial Justice
- Disaster Response (local)
- Substance Abuse
- Global Ministry Partners (companion synods)
- Colleague groups for pastors

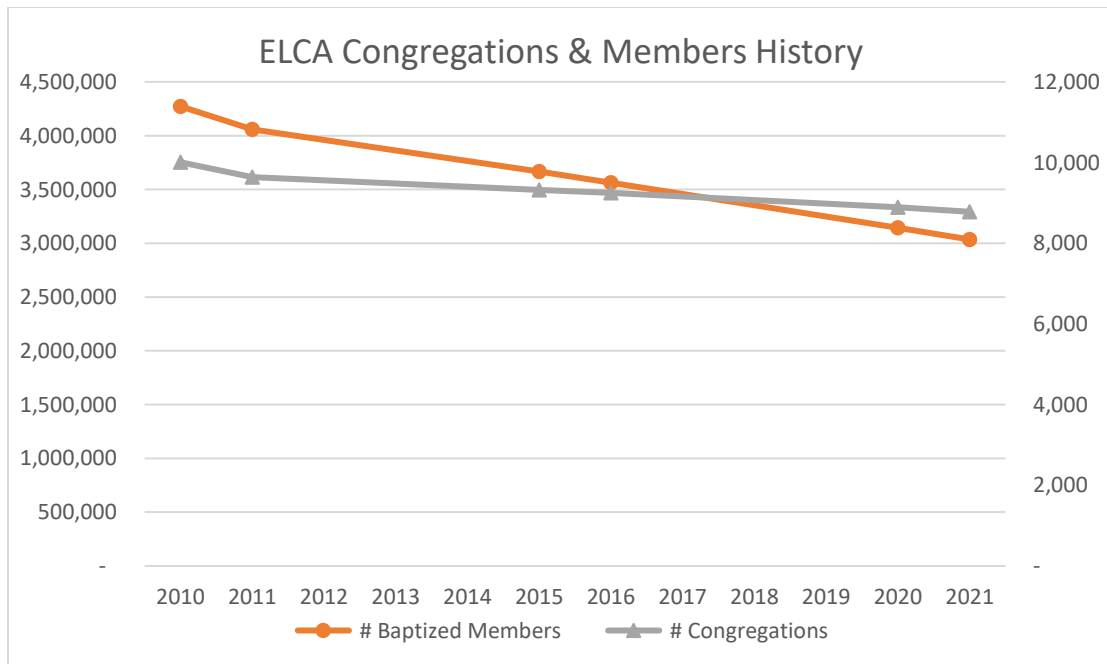
2.4.2. Church Growth

It is no secret that many mainline congregations and denominations are shrinking in size. Shrinking membership presents a very real sustainability issue when it comes to maintaining staff and resources to support that membership. This section focuses on whether your Church is growing, in what ways, and how it impacts your Church and congregations.

How many US congregations and members were affiliated with your Church 10 years ago, 5 years ago, 2 years ago and today?

[Task Force Note: at the time of this writing, Bishop Jones was waiting for this information to be provided by the ELCA’s headquarters.]

The graph below was created by the Task Force from annual congregation data obtained from the ELCA’s website.]



How many new congregations (as opposed to those transferring in) have been established in the US over the last 5 years?

[Task Force Note: at the time of this writing, Bishop Jones was waiting for this information to be provided by the ELCA's headquarters.]

How many congregations have dissolved or left your Church in the US over the last 5 years?

[Task Force Note: at the time of this writing, Bishop Jones was waiting for this information to be provided by the ELCA's headquarters.]

How has the growth (or shrinkage) in your Church affected the resources you have to support your congregations?

There has been a continued decrease in mission giving. The ELCA has responded by reorganizing and decreasing the number of churchwide staff while trying to maintain support of mission partners and ministries. The church has also taken advantage of technology to decrease travel and printing expenses.

Do you have a plan or program in place to help your congregations grow? If so, please briefly describe.

Currently the ELCA has a goal to engage one million new young and diverse people. Resources from the Churchwide level, like new online community gatherings for young adults, are already available. Grants are also being made to ministries aimed at young adults like the one BASIC received this year.

How are you helping your congregations to attract young people into your Church?

In addition to the programs listed in the previous answer, the ELCA holds a triennial youth gathering for high school aged youth and leadership development opportunities like WIYLDE

(Wholly Iowa Youth Leadership and Discipleship Education) at the Synod level. ELCA camps provide outdoor ministry for youth and adults that combines worship, Bible study, fellowship, and fun while camp staff go on to be congregational leaders, volunteers, pastors, and deacons.

Can you provide any kind of demographic breakdown by age of your Church?

[Task Force Note: at the time of this writing, Bishop Jones was waiting for this information to be provided by the ELCA's headquarters.]

3. Expectations of Congregation from the Church

Just as congregations have expectations from their Church, Churches have expectations from their congregations. In these sections, we explore the areas in which your Church has expectations from its congregations, and whether those expectations are compatible with what Nazareth has historically believed is appropriate.

3.1. Autonomy

Within any Church-to-congregation relationship, there are certain levels of autonomy an individual congregation is allowed to have, and certain areas where a congregation is expected to fall in line with the larger Church. In this section, we explore the positions of your Church on the ability of a congregation to govern itself.

Does your Church have a model constitution for congregations? If so, please provide a copy. What is the process and flexibility in reconciling the differences and updating of the existing governing documents of a congregation?

Yes. You can find a copy here: <https://www.elca.org/Constitution>

Besides governing documents, what other rules does your Church place on congregations, and how are they communicated?

I am not aware of any other rules placed on congregations.

Are your congregations allowed to retain ownership of, and full control over, their property? If not, what are the exceptions (example: a split in a congregation)?

In most cases the congregation retains ownership and full control over their property. Depending on state law, abandoned property frequently reverts to the denomination. In rare cases the Synod can use legal means to retain property for those who want to remain in the ELCA after a split, primarily in cases where the model constitution has not been followed.

If a congregation dissolves, does your Church help with the orderly disposition of their property?

We are ready to help if the congregation asks for assistance. We prefer to begin working with a congregation long before they are ready to dissolve as there are many options that congregations are frequently not aware of. We do not provide legal help but can point to the places where legal assistance is necessary.

How is discipline handled when a congregation or pastor does not follow the rules of your Church?

Discipline is handled by the local bishop. The Synod has a consultation committee and a discipline committee elected by the Synod Assembly to help the bishop when necessary. Each case is handled differently depending on the circumstances, the severity of the transgression, and the likelihood of further damage should the activity continue. Following an investigation, the bishop works with the pastor and council leadership to lay out next steps. A disclosure to the congregation is made to be transparent.

3.2. Church Structure

Just as a Church has policies and practices in place that govern its relationship with its congregations, a Church also has a structure which affects what those relationships look like, as well as what ability a congregation has to affect change on the Church. This section explores the structure of your Church.

Describe the governance structure of your Church. Would you describe it as “top down”, “bottom up” or something in between?

The ELCA exists as three “expressions” of the church: Congregation, Synod, and Churchwide. Each has its own constitution and ministries. In each expression an annual meeting or regularly held Assembly of the people is the highest level of authority. Each expression has a council, which carries out the directives of the assembly or annual meeting, and is authorized to conduct business within certain parameters.

How do congregations find their “place” within this structure?

Congregations have autonomy over their local ministry and participate in the ministry of the Synod, Region (a geographic collections of Synods – Iowa is in Region 5 along with Wisconsin and Illinois), and churchwide.

In what ways are congregations involved when Church-wide decisions are made?

Congregations elect voting members to the Synod assembly. The Synod Assembly elects people to the Synod Council and as voting members to Churchwide Assemblies. The highest level of authority in the ELCA are the voting members of the Churchwide Assembly, 60% of whom are lay members of our congregations, and 40% are ordained ministers. Churchwide Council members are elected by Synod Assemblies on a rotating, formulaic basis. Currently NE Iowa does not have a person on the Church Council but did for the past four years.

What is the process for congregations to affect change in Church-wide policies or positions? What determines the weight or influence of individual congregations in the process?

Congregations can affect change by bringing concerns to:

- The Bishop’s office
- The Synod Council
- Synod Assembly by way of resolutions
- Churchwide Assembly way of memorials

Larger congregations are allowed to bring more voting members to Synod Assemblies. Otherwise, every congregation has the same ability to influence change as any other congregation.

3.3. Financial Expectations

A Church and a congregation are both non-profit businesses that require a certain level of financial resources to be sustainable and to grow. In this section, we explore the financial support expectations that your Church puts on its congregations, and the stewardship of your Church with those contributions.

What amount of financial support does your Church expect from its congregations? Are these expectations suggested or mandatory?

Traditionally, the ELCA has encouraged between 10-15% of a congregation's general offerings be shared for mission support with the Synod. In turn the Synod has traditionally been expected to share 50% of that mission support with the Churchwide expression. In reality our congregations give between 0 and 12% of their general offerings. The NE Iowa Synod is currently sending approximately 30% of what we receive to Churchwide. Giving to the Synod or Churchwide is not mandatory, simply encouraged as part of good stewardship and support of neighboring congregations as we work together.

Relative to inflation, in the past 10 years, has the total financial support your Church has received from your congregations increased or decreased? How have Church-wide programming and operations changed as a result?

The recent trend in designated giving by congregations is changing our expectations. When we factor in designated giving to ELCA World Hunger and Disaster Response (which used to be funded mostly through mission giving), we find that our congregations continue to be extremely generous.

How is your Church accountable to its congregations for the ways in which money is spent?

Through the Synod and Churchwide Assemblies, members of our congregations approve budgets and receive financial reports. The Synod Council receives financial reports every two months when we meet. Those reports are available to anyone who requests them.

Do you allow congregations to designate how their contributions to your Church are to be used, or are they all considered unrestricted?

Congregations can designate their offerings.

What significant long term (5-10 year) goals does your Church have? What is your progress on achieving them?

NEto be a leader in raising up pastors for our church. The Fund for Leaders now makes sure that our seminary students do not need to pay tuition or fees, lowering the amount of student debt for pastors. We are taking steps to address the needs of small congregations through lay- training. The ELCA's goal of engaging one million new, young and diverse people is guiding much of our programing efforts at the churchwide and synod levels.

3.4. Liturgical

Attached is a copy of "Article III – Liturgy" from Nazareth's By-Laws, where we state we will be guided by the ELCA in our liturgies, rituals, worship and teachings. In this section, we explore how this is similar and different to your Church, including which requirements are mandatory and which can be relaxed, particularly at "contemporary" worship services.

What is the source (or sources) of liturgies, rituals, and music that your Church uses for worship services?

The ELCA has a number of published hymnals that congregations are able to access in print and electronic form. Congregations are free to use these liturgies and hymns, or portions of them, as they are comfortable. Congregations are also able to create their own liturgies if they so desire.

Which liturgies and rituals are suggested, and which are required? For those required, what frequency are they required?

Traditionally Lutheran worship has included one of the Creeds (Apostles', Nicene, or Athanasian), and the Lord's Prayer in addition to scripture readings, singing, and a sermon. Scripture readings can be from one of the lectionaries (prescribed readings) or determined by the congregation as when doing a topical sermon series or walking through a book of the Bible. Holy Communion should be shared regularly, where the congregation determines the frequency. Most ELCA congregations celebrate communion twice a month or every week. Baptisms should be celebrated within a worship service whenever possible and only done in private when absolutely necessary.

How does your Church view and address the difference between a "traditional" and "contemporary" worship service? Are there any differences in liturgical or ritual requirements?

The ELCA does not differentiate between traditional and contemporary worship. It has been my practice to talk about the difference by describing which principal instruments accompany the worship. Traditional worship is primarily accompanied by organ, piano, and sometimes wind instruments. Contemporary worship is normally accompanied by an ensemble of guitar, keyboard, and percussion. Contemporary worship also tends to take liberty with the exact wording of traditional liturgies and the order in which we put them into worship.

4. Affiliation Transition Process

Whenever a congregation (existing or new) considers affiliating with a Church, it is likely that the Church has more experience with the steps and processes in discernment and transition than the congregation. In this section, we explore the resources provided by the Church to aid congregations (and the Church) in discernment and transition to an affiliation relationship with the Church.

Do you have a written process for how a congregation goes about affiliating with your Church? If so, please provide a copy.

This can be found in the Synod constitution <https://www.elca.org/Constitution>

If your Church does not have a written process, would you briefly share the process of how a congregation and your Church come to the mutual decision they are a good match? How long does it usually take?

Being currently affiliated with the ELCA I assume this is not necessary.

Is there a dedicated person that deals with the affiliation of new congregations in your church office?

The Bishop and the Synod office.

What tools and resources do you provide to help a congregation with the affiliation decision making and the affiliation process?

Consultation and reference material as necessary.

Are there congregations of similar size we could talk to that made the decision to affiliate with your Church in the last three years? And more than three years ago?

Yes. I would have to do some investigation but am aware that there have been large congregations that have been through a similar affiliation studies that have stayed within the ELCA. I am also aware of one LCMS congregations that is in the process of joining the ELCA. The congregations are outside of the Northeastern Iowa Synod.

How are congregations welcomed and integrated into the network of the other congregations of the Church?

They would be recognized through Synod publications and lifted up/introduced at a Synod Assembly.

5. Additional Comments or Questions

Please feel free to add any additional comments that you feel we should consider about your Church or our discernment process.

Please let me know if there is anything that need clarification.

I am waiting on the demographic information (section 2.4.2) from the Office of the Secretary. Unfortunately, I didn't ask for the information before I went on vacation and they evidently needed more lead time to get answers. I will supply that information as soon as I can.

Are there any specific questions you would like us to answer for you?

Can I use this as a template for other congregations in Northeastern Iowa who are thinking about their affiliation? I have been impressed by the thoroughness of this document. I think that other task forces would benefit from taking this large picture view of what it means to be affiliated with a denomination.

Appendix E – Round 2 Responses from Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC)

[Task Force note: the following introduction was inserted by the LCMC prior to their responses to questions.]

As you read through our responses for LCMC, please be aware of the fact that LCMC is intentionally created as an association of congregations. This means that much responsibility and authority for life and ministry that was given to synods and national offices in other expressions of the Lutheran church, in LCMC lies with the congregation and their relationships with other LCMC congregations. LCMC is not a top-down, heavy handed hierarchy and is created intentionally not to be. We intentionally have a small Association or “national” staff. That is so that we do not create a huge bureaucracy or large budget that member congregations have to support. We do have expenses to be sure, but we try to keep as much money in our congregations for their support of staff, ministries, and missions as possible.

LCMC is not the same type of organization as other Lutheran bodies. We expect our congregations to take seriously the task of embracing the radical freedom of the gospel, and the responsibility for the work of their congregation. This work will often happen in collaborative partnerships between congregations. For instance, you may find great relationship with St. Mark’s Lutheran in Cedar Rapids and their lead pastor, Paul Hennings. But you will not experience the responsibility lying primarily with our Association Staff. Their job is to support, encourage, and at times bring correction into the life of a congregation, but not to lead them in some top-down, heavy handed type of way. Therefore, as an association, we may not be “everyone’s cup of tea.”

We are a Lutheran body which is rooted in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, seeks to be faithful to both, and embraces the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit for life and ministry in the world today. Our hope and prayer is that through the Spirit and Word, millions of people might be impacted with God’s love and God’s power. I look forward to visiting with you more and being as helpful as I can – Mike Bradley, Service Coordinator, LCMC.

1. Doctrine, Teaching and Practices

In this section, we explore the compatibility of existing views between the congregation of Nazareth and your Church.

1.1. Compatible Views of Bible and Lutheran Documents

In Nazareth’s current By-Laws, “Article II – Confession of Faith” (attached) we list our congregation’s position on the Bible and other Lutheran Documents as the basis of all that we believe, teach and practice. In this section, we explore similarities, differences and potential conflicts between our congregation and your Church.

There can be many interpretations of scripture. Nazareth’s position is that the Bible is “the divinely inspired, revealed, and inerrant Word of God and submits to this as the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life.” How would affiliation with your Church align with the teachings that we subscribe to at Nazareth?

Our association is rooted in the Bible as God’s Word, divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit.

[Task Force Note: the ELCA and the NALC also agree on using “inspired” in place of “inerrant.”]

What are the views of your Church in relation to the Bible, the historic creeds (Nicene, Apostles, Athanasian) and the Lutheran documents (Augsburg confession, small catechism) as the foundation of what you believe and their use in preaching and teaching?

We believe the Bible to be the Word of God, and the historic creeds and Lutheran confessions are faithful summaries of the Word and that they and the small catechism provide a solid foundation for a responsible proclamation of God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Is there anything from our By-Laws "Article II - Confession of Faith" that concerns you?

No

1.2. Accepting vs. Affirming

In this section, we explore some specific ways in which your Church helps – and limits – congregations to accept all.

1.2.1. Welcoming to All

The Church is a hospital for sinners. Some forms of sin are more visible than others, and right or wrong, some congregations and Churches have set more defined boundaries for some types of more visible sin than they do less visible sin. In this section, we explore what your Church does to encourage – and limit – the marginalized from participation in your congregations, as well as how you support your congregations to be Welcoming to All.

When it comes to being a "welcoming" Church, what limitations, if any, are placed on members and staff by your Church? What situations are congregations allowed to decide, and what situations are dictated by your Church?

First, my answer would depend on your definition of "Welcoming." What do you mean by this?

With that said, because we are an association of congregations, not a top-heavy denomination, we have entrusted the authority for making such decisions to the local congregations. What, if any, limitations are placed upon members or staff, in so far that they are in agreement with the Scriptures, historic creeds, and Lutheran confessions, are decided by the local congregation.

How does your Church advise congregations struggling to be welcoming to all but also do not believe in affirming sin nor allowing people to live in opposition to God's Word?

We are called by God to love our neighbor and to welcome the stranger. Therefore, love must always be the lens through which we view all situations and relationships. We can love someone while at the same time establish healthy boundaries regarding sin – that which is not God's design or best for us.

How does your Church encourage people to love their neighbors as themselves when they don't agree on social positions or positions taken by your Church?

We encourage people to love their neighbors through the proclamation of the Gospel, a call to obedience to Christ as Savior and Lord, and by setting an example as leaders.

How do you address the appearance of a lack of “repentance” for a behavior - particularly in situations where someone professes and strives to love God and love his neighbor in other areas?

Answering this question would require more specific context.

Some may say the opposite of “welcoming” is “rejecting.” How do you respond to that? How does a Church that “rejects” sinners survive?

You can welcome someone, and more than that, want them to be in relationship with you while not agreeing or affirming everything they may think or do. Jesus did that all the time in the gospels.

If someone is suffering from sinful behavior but doesn’t know Jesus, how does your Church provide a welcoming umbrella that allows them to feel safe and get to know Jesus?

Through how we relate to them, as Jesus related to those who were caught in sinful behavior but did not yet know Him as Savior and lord.

Does your Church have any resources to help congregations reach the unchurched in their communities?

In the context of our structure of districts and churches relationships with one another, they are able to share resources that have been helpful for them.

1.2.2. Sexual Sin

The ELCA has come under much criticism for its positions on accepting and affirming homosexuals. In this section, we take a deeper look at your Church and its positions on sexual sin, both homosexual and heterosexual, as well as how consistent your positions are on both types of sin.

The question of sexuality is a difficult one for many churches as we strive to be like Christ and be loving and welcoming. Explain how your position on sexuality plays out in your policies regarding pastors, congregants, and staff.

An answer to this would require more context from you. What is it you are wanting to know?

With that said, we call pastors, congregants, and staff to live within the healthy boundaries of sexuality as expressed in the Scriptures.

What positions are congregations allowed to decide, and what positions are dictated by your Church?

LCMC is an association of congregations meaning that congregations have the authority to decide what positions they take on various issues in so far as they are in agreement with the revealed Word of God in Scripture, the historic creeds and confessions..

What is your reaction to Nazareth Lutheran Church’s “Speaking the Truth in Love” document? Are there any conflicts with your Church?

After only a cursory reading of a lengthy document, as is this list of questions, I found myself in agreement with much of what I read. It is obviously a document that has required much thought and reflection on your part. Well done.

How do you counsel congregations with members that aren't unified on matters of sexuality and sexual sin? Do you have any specific examples of how this was resolved?

We would counsel members to maintain a respect and love for one another in theological matters they may disagree on. Their relationship with one another is a witness to the world, i.e., "By your love they will know you are my disciples."

Does your Church allow celibate homosexual pastors to serve?

This is a more complicated question than the one you write.

Does your Church allow pastors to perform homosexual marriages under any circumstance? If so, under what circumstances?

We encourage pastors and congregations to wrestle with this issue as they come to their own position based on the Scriptures, the historic creeds and Lutheran Confessions

What (if any) counseling and discipleship/support groups/care ministries does your Church have for various sinful temptations (ex. AA, gambling, porn addiction, homosexual attraction)?

Various congregations in LCMC are involved in support groups that relate to the issues mentioned above.

How do you respond to the statement: "Any sexual relationship outside of marriage is a sin. Your sexuality and who you chose to love is not for me to judge. Sexuality and/or gender are the same thing to me, and I do not believe that sexuality and/or gender decides if you are a good employee, leader, or human being."

This is a confusing group of sentences. What are you trying to ascertain here?

Is any sexual relationship outside of marriage a sin? Yes.

I am not called to judge or condemn someone for their sexuality and whom they choose to love, but I am at the same time called to maintain healthy boundaries that are in keeping with Scripture. While not judging, this may require a discerning and a willingness to say no to sexual sin outside of marriage .

What are you trying to ascertain when you ask about sexuality and/or gender deciding if someone is a good employee?

1.3. Inerrancy without Literalism

At Nazareth, when we confess that the Bible is inerrant, we mean that the lessons and meanings taught in the Bible are 100% true. However, we allow that this can be compatible with some accounts in the Bible not being recorded as they literally occurred. (Example: we allow that Creation

and Theistic Evolution are compatible.) In this section, we explore the positions of your Church on the Inerrancy and Literalism in the Bible.

How does your Church define inerrancy as it pertains to the Bible?

In the LCMC statement of faith we confess that the Scriptures are the inspired Word of God. We use the term “inspired” because that is how Scripture describes itself. Many individuals and congregations within LCMC use the terms inerrant and infallible when describing Scripture. LCMC’s official position of upholding Scripture as “inspired” does not preclude this. Despite not using the terms inerrant and infallible, LCMC holds a high view of Scripture and recognizes its authority over us. The use of “inerrant” and “infallible” to describe an understanding of Scripture, while common, is a relatively recent development in Christianity. “Inspired” and “authoritative” have a longer history and we find them to be more helpful.

[Task Force Note: the ELCA and the NALC also agree on using “inspired” in place of “inerrant.”]

Under this definition, does your Church consider the Bible to be inerrant?

See Above

Does your Church allow congregations to discuss Theistic Evolution as compatible with the Creation story? If so, does this present a conflict to the Creation story being inerrant?

This would be a decision made within the local congregation and leadership. Whatever discussion ensues would be held in the context of the first answer to this section.

What (if any) position does your Church have on other accounts in the Bible that may not be recorded as they literally occurred?

It is important to recognize there are various genre of literature represented in the Bible – historical, narrative, poetry – and that there are writings of metaphor and hyperbole, and that these require discerning application and interpretation regarding various Scriptural passages.

Has this created conflict in your Church? If so, how have you dealt with it?

At this point, no, it has not created conflict in our association.

1.4. Trends and Boundaries

There are situations where individuals or groups may push the boundaries of a Church’s purported beliefs. Sometimes these stories are picked up by news and social media, putting their congregations in a “guilt by association” position. In this section, we explore areas that your Church has dealt with/are dealing with where boundaries within your Church are being challenged or are changing.

Does your Church teach that salvation comes as a gift of grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and there is no other means of salvation? If not, explain who is, and who is not, saved.

Yes, we do teach that salvation comes as a gift of grace through faith in Christ and Christ alone. He alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Have you at any time had leaders in your Church that suggest they believe in universalism (i.e. all are saved regardless of their religious beliefs)? If so, how have you dealt with them?

No, we do not teach nor embrace universalism.

Have you at any time had leaders in your Church that suggest they believe that other faiths outside of Christianity lead to salvation? If so, how have you dealt with them?

No, we have not.

What (if any) discussions or trends are happening in your Church that suggest your positions may be changing on social or theological topics? How does it appear they will be resolved?

We do not have any indication that there will be changes on social topics at this point In our association.

1.5. Non-Lutheran Relationships

No congregation is an island unto itself. We are part of the holy catholic Church. This section explores how congregations can work with others outside of your Church.

1.5.1. Ecumenically Focused

This section explores your positions on, and resources for, your congregations to work with congregations of other denominations.

Do you permit a congregation to work with non-Lutheran congregations for outreach or mission projects? Can you give some examples of existing partnerships?

Of course. As Christian congregations we are all part of the body of Christ, and we need everyone to be involved in the mission of the gospel in communities where we are located. We have numerous examples around the country of our congregations partnering with others in various ways in evangelistic endeavors and in serving their communities.

What (if any) restrictions does your Church have that discourage or prevent a congregation from working with a non-Lutheran congregation or Church?

We do not have any restrictions other than encouraging our congregations to be aware of what their non-negotiables are theologically, and to find areas they can partner with other congregations as much as possible.

Do you permit the use of resource materials supplied by non-Lutheran organizations for Sunday School curriculum, small group studies, etc.? Can you give some examples?

That decision is up to each individual congregation in LCMC because we are an association of congregations.

What (if any) resources or opportunities do you provide to assist in establishing partnerships with non-Lutheran congregations?

That is left to the local congregations to initiate and to share with one another any resources they have developed for working together with other congregations in their communities.

1.5.2. Outside Pastors

We believe there is a general shortage of Lutheran Pastors available to meet the needs of congregations, and in fact, there is a shortage of Pastors for all denominations. The ELCA has

established agreements with other denominations (some of which are not Lutheran) that allow for the possibility of a Pastor from those denomination to be approved for service in an ELCA church. This section focuses on what abilities and restrictions you place on congregations to seek Pastors outside of your Church, Lutheran or otherwise.

What requirements and restrictions does your Church have for a congregation to call a pastor who has been ordained in another denomination, Lutheran or non-Lutheran?

We do allow our congregations to call such pastors, but we expect them to agree with our statement of faith, the historic creeds and Lutheran confessions, and encourage them to take a core group of five Lutheran theological classes that are available at some of the seminaries we work with.

Are these requirements and restrictions the same for an interim pastor as a permanent pastor?

Yes

Does your Church have a process in place for calling pastors outside your denomination (Lutheran or non-Lutheran)? If so, please briefly describe it.

Addressed above.

What assistance will you provide a member congregation if they choose to seek a non-Lutheran pastor?

We can counsel the congregation and make them aware of the classes we'd encourage the pastor to take

Must pastoral candidates for congregation be approved by your Church?

No, that is the responsibility of the local congregation who theologically is the one that calls, ordains, and installs women and men to the office of pastor.

2. Expectations of Church from Congregations

When two organizations partner together, each hopes and expects that that partnership will bring benefits to both sides. In these sections, we explore topics where Nazareth's congregation has expectations of benefits that would be realized by affiliating with your Church, and whether they are compatible with what your Church feels is appropriate to provide.

2.1. Assistance in Calling Pastors

Luke 10: 2: And [Jesus] said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (ESV)

One of the key needs of any Christian congregation is the availability of qualified Ordained Pastors to lead the congregation. In these sections, we explore how your Church helps match up congregations to qualified, Ordained Pastors.

2.1.1. Seminary Network

The ability of a Church to seek qualified, Ordained Pastors for a congregation is largely dependent on the partnerships that Church has established with existing Seminaries to promote and train new Pastors. In this section, we explore your Seminary Network.

What (if any) seminaries does your Church operate that produce pastors with Masters of Divinity (or comparable) degrees?

n/a

What (if any) seminaries does your Church partner with that produce pastors with Masters of Divinity (or comparable) degrees?

The seminaries we work with are listed on our website. They include St. Paul Lutheran Seminary, the Institute of Lutheran Theology, The Master's Institute, Sioux Falls Seminary and its Lutheran House of Studies, Gordon Conwell Seminary and its Lutheran Theological Seminary.

Do the seminaries you use produce pastors at a rate consistent with the needs of your congregations?

No, we like most associations or denominations have a shortage of pastoral candidates.

Do you partner with non-Lutheran seminaries to identify pastors? If yes, how do you ensure adequate training on Lutheran doctrine? What standards do you apply?

Addressed above.

Do you believe that students at the seminaries you work with would be theologically aligned with Nazareth's beliefs? If yes, why? If no [understanding that "no" might mean "sometimes"], what do you believe might be the points of difference?

Yes, because we have vetted those seminaries in regard to their training in solid, Lutheran theology.

Can you provide a list of the network of seminaries you use and the number of students graduating each year?

The list of seminaries is on our website and the seminaries themselves would have to provide the number of students you are looking for.

Does your Church ordain pastors or do congregations? Why?

Congregations ordain pastors because it is in the context of the community of faith that a woman or man is called and ordained for the office of pastor.

2.1.2. Resources for Calling Pastors

When pastors retire or leave to serve new callings, congregations need support in identifying candidates and filling these positions. As a large and diverse church family, we need strong pastoral leadership. In this section, we explore how your Church helps match congregations to pastors available for call.

Nazareth is seeking to call a senior pastor and probably an associate pastor. Explain the process for how you would work with us to identify and call a pastor that would be a fit--and what you consider the defined qualifications of pastors in your Church.

We have a Coordinator for Leadership and Pastoral Development on our staff who would help connect you with resources and counsel for a call committee. We also have a district structure that includes the Iowa District which can provide a network of relationships to help make you aware of potential pastoral candidates. And as Service Coordinator I am often able to provide a list of potential candidates that would be worthy to consider.

Do these qualifications differ for senior, associate and interim pastors?

The defined qualifications are something that you would identify yourselves.

What are the typical time frames for matching a congregation with senior, associate and interim pastors?

That varies from congregation to congregation and region of the country to region of the country. A year or more is sometimes normal, however.

How many ordained pastors in total are working in your US congregations today?

I do not have that number.

Does your Church assist congregations in performing background checks of prospective pastors?

No, that is the responsibility of the individual congregation.

Are congregations in your Church allowed to employ lay pastors? Why or why not? If yes, in what capacity(ies)?

Yes, you are allowed to call a lay person as pastor in what we call a "contract pastor" position in LCMC. We encourage that person to take the six core Lutheran theological classes mentioned earlier.

2.2. Mission Beyond our Walls

The Great Commission requires that the Church spread the Gospel throughout the world. A Church can help congregations have greater impact by establishing their own, or partnering with existing, mission programs or missionaries. In this section, we explore the partnerships and resources your Church has established, both domestically and internationally, to help congregations match with mission partners.

How does your Church stress the importance of your congregations being involved in, and supporting, missions and missionaries?

First, it is in our name – Lutheran Congregations in MISSION for Christ. We also seek to share stories of mission involvement in our annual gathering, and in our publications/newsletters.

Please list and briefly describe any mission programs operated by your Church.

Each congregation or district in LCMC is responsible for developing relationships with mission agencies and ministries they partner with.

Please list any mission programs your Church currently partners with.

That is the responsibility of each individual congregation.

Does your Church sponsor any missionaries either domestically or internationally? If so, explain the rationale or vetting process used for determining which missionaries are supported by your church.

That is the responsibility of each individual congregation.

Do your congregations have the freedom to partner with or support any mission or missionaries?

That is the responsibility of each individual congregation.

2.3. Mission Within our Walls

Any mission of a congregation starts with equipping members to be knowledgeable and effective at spreading the Gospel, and supporting staff to aid in that mission. These sections focus on how your Church helps congregations accomplish these things.

2.3.1. Resources for Teaching and Evangelism

Congregational teaching and evangelism outreach to non-members are two of the most important needs of any church we affiliate with. Spreading the Gospel starts with teaching. This section explores what resources your Church offers congregations to aid in educating their congregants and staff.

Does your Church produce specific resources and materials to aid in teaching congregations, training staff, and evangelism? If yes, please give examples.

No, we do not produce resources as an association. Various member congregations may develop and share such materials.

Does your Church partner with other organizations to provide resources and materials to aid in teaching congregations, training staff, and evangelism? If yes, please give examples.

We do provide some seminars that may be taught by members of our Association Staff and/or network congregations with one another to provide training in those areas.

Do you have a resource person or database that can help a member congregation in improving or setting up discipleship and evangelism classes or programs?

No, we do not have an Association person that can help a congregation in those areas. We can network congregations with one another in sharing what they are doing in the areas of discipleship and evangelism with one another.

We are an Association of Congregations, and it is the congregations who are involved in developing and presenting such classes and training.

2.3.2. Employee Benefits

Most congregations rely on paid staff who depend on their congregations to provide for their financial needs. Among those needs are benefits like health insurance, retirement plans, etc. This section explores the ways in which your Church helps, or restricts, congregations meet the employee benefit needs of their paid staff.

Nazareth currently obtains employee benefits through Portico Benefit Services, a ministry of the ELCA. Are congregations affiliated with your Church allowed to (continue to) obtain employee benefits through Portico?

If they choose to do so, yes they are.

Do you endorse, recommend, or require member congregations to provide employee benefits through a designated provider?

The decision on where they seek their employee benefits is a decision the congregation has the authority to make. So, no, we do not require member congregations to work with only one designated provider.

If yes, list the provider and describe the benefits provided or required.

If no, are there guidelines or requirements for congregations with regard to employee benefits?

Are congregations restricted to a specific company for providing benefits, or can they put together their own best package with an independent provider?

They can put together their own best package with an independent provider.

Please provide a summary of employee benefit packages (if any) currently available to your congregations through your Church.

We do have a source for Retirement Plan (One America) and for Health Insurance we partner with Hahn Financial Group. Information on both of these benefit packages are on our website.

2.4. Better Together

Congregations can be more effective in many ways, from sharing the Gospel to basic operational decisions, by sharing work and knowledge with other congregations. In this section we explore the congregations that exist today, and potentially in the future, that would be convenient for Nazareth to partner and network with.

2.4.1. Nearby Congregations

Some forms of collaboration are simply more effective face-to-face. Some joint projects can only be undertaken when all parties involved are relatively close to each other. In this section, we explore what congregations of your Church are relatively near to Nazareth for the purposes of collaboration and joint projects.

What congregations with an average in-person attendance of at least 150 does your Church have within a 150-mile radius of Nazareth?

Lutheran Church of the Cross in Altoona, IA and Zion Lutheran Church in Clear Lake, IA. There are others in your area that have less than 150 people in attendance.

What congregations with an average in-person attendance of at least 700 does your Church have within a 300-mile radius of Nazareth?

In Minneapolis, MN: Hosanna; Shepherd of the Valley; Golden Valley Lutheran; Community of Grace; Northgate. St. Mark's in Cedar Rapids, IA

How does your Church promote collaboration between congregations?

We encourage our congregations to be members of a geographical district which helps plans some collaborative events and ministries together such as LeaderCare retreats. Out of such gatherings relationships are developed that often lead to collaboration between congregations.

What joint programs or internal networks does your Church have that are actively used by your congregations?

Our Association staff is not responsible for developing joint programs for our congregations. This will happen on a congregational basis as leaders of congregations develop relationships with one another.

2.4.2. Church Growth

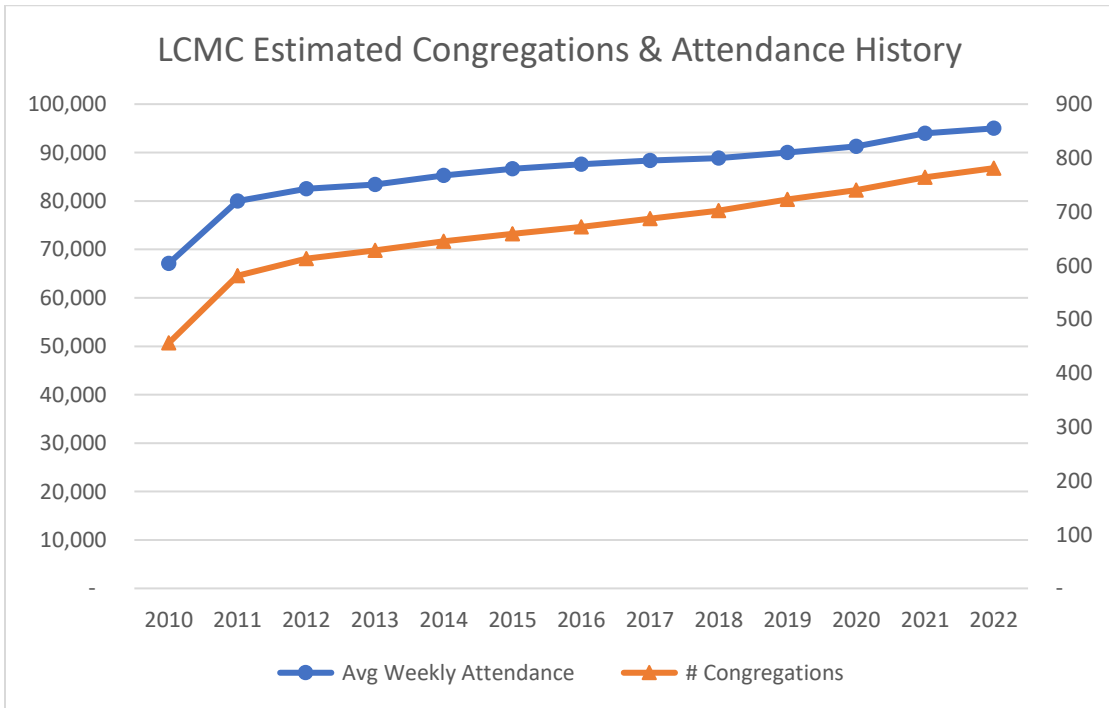
It is no secret that many mainline congregations and denominations are shrinking in size. Shrinking membership presents a very real sustainability issue when it comes to maintaining staff and resources to support that membership. This section focuses on whether your Church is growing, in what ways, and how it impacts your Church and congregations.

How many US congregations and members were affiliated with your Church 10 years ago, 5 years ago, 2 years ago and today?

Today we have 788 in the United States and 973 total, including churches in 15 countries

[Task Force Note: the graph below was estimated using the current congregation list on the LCMC's website. The LCMC tracks average attendance, not membership. Because the history

was estimated using only the *current* congregation list, it is possible that prior years understate the number of congregations that have since dropped affiliation, and that the growth trend may be overstated as a result.]



How many new congregations (as opposed to those transferring in) have been established in the US over the last 5 years?

We do not track this statistic

How many congregations have dissolved or left your Church in the US over the last 5 years?

In the last two years, 31 congregations have dissolved or left LCMC

How has the growth (or shrinkage) in your Church affected the resources you have to support your congregations?

Our association has grown over the years, providing more relationships with other congregations that can help support one another.

Do you have a plan or program in place to help your congregations grow? If so, please briefly describe.

No, we do not have a plan or program from the association level. That is the responsibility of our congregations in their relationships with one another.

How are you helping your congregations to attract young people into your Church?

Again, that is the responsibility of individual congregations.

Can you provide any kind of demographic breakdown by age of your Church?

No.

3. Expectations of Congregation from the Church

Just as congregations have expectations from their Church, Churches have expectations from their congregations. In these sections, we explore the areas in which your Church has expectations from its congregations, and whether those expectations are compatible with what Nazareth has historically believed is appropriate.

3.1. Autonomy

Within any Church-to-congregation relationship, there are certain levels of autonomy an individual congregation is allowed to have, and certain areas where a congregation is expected to fall in line with the larger Church. In this section, we explore the positions of your Church on the ability of a congregation to govern itself.

Does your Church have a model constitution for congregations? If so, please provide a copy. What is the process and flexibility in reconciling the differences and updating of the existing governing documents of a congregation?

No, we do not have one model constitution that congregations must adopt. Development of a church's constitution is the responsibility of each congregation. We do have sample constitutions on our website which they can access and use in the development of their own.

Besides governing documents, what other rules does your Church place on congregations, and how are they communicated?

We do not have rules that we place on congregations other than the expectation that they will agree with our statement of faith, our pastoral admonition, and a commitment to be faithful to God's Word and the Lutheran confessions.

Are your congregations allowed to retain ownership of, and full control over, their property? If not, what are the exceptions (example: a split in a congregation)?

Yes, they are. We as an association do not own property.

If a congregation dissolves, does your Church help with the orderly disposition of their property?

We can help network a congregation with other leaders and congregations who have disposed of their property to learn from and support one another.

How is discipline handled when a congregation or pastor does not follow the rules of your Church?

We have a Ministry Board that works with issues regarding pastors for training, support, and discipline when needed. Our Board of Trustees works with congregations in any matters that may necessitate some intervention and/or discipline.

3.2. Church Structure

Just as a Church has policies and practices in place that govern its relationship with its congregations, a Church also has a structure which affects what those relationships look like, as well as what ability a congregation has to affect change on the Church. This section explores the structure of your Church.

Describe the governance structure of your Church. Would you describe it as “top down”, “bottom up” or something in between?

We do not have a heavy handed top down structure at all. We have more of a peer to peer structure, and our Association Staff’s purpose to support, encourage, and equip the members of our congregations.

How do congregations find their “place” within this structure?

We encourage congregations to join a district (usually a geographic district) where they can develop relationships with other leaders and congregations for equipping, encouragement, and support.

In what ways are congregations involved when Church-wide decisions are made?

If there is a need for a church-wide decision those are dealt with at our Annual Gathering the first week of October each year. Of late, the only such decision has been the presentation and approval of the annual budget.

What is the process for congregations to affect change in Church-wide policies or positions? What determines the weight or influence of individual congregations in the process?

We do not have church-wide policies or positions in LCMC. Policies and positions are developed by individual congregations.

3.3. Financial Expectations

A Church and a congregation are both non-profit businesses that require a certain level of financial resources to be sustainable and to grow. In this section, we explore the financial support expectations that your Church puts on its congregations, and the stewardship of your Church with those contributions.

What amount of financial support does your Church expect from its congregations? Are these expectations suggested or mandatory?

We do not have mandatory expectations for financial support. We ask member congregations to prayerfully decide how they want to financially support the LCMC Association staff and ministry management plan (budget)

Relative to inflation, in the past 10 years, has the total financial support your Church has received from your congregations increased or decreased? How have Church-wide programming and operations changed as a result?

The financial support for the LCMC Association has had a slight increase over the past few years.

How is your Church accountable to its congregations for the ways in which money is spent?

There is a presentation at our Annual Gathering as to what the expenses of the previous year have been.

Do you allow congregations to designate how their contributions to your Church are to be used, or are they all considered unrestricted?

Contributions to the Association ministry management plan (budget) are unrestricted.

What significant long term (5-10 year) goals does your Church have? What is your progress on achieving them?

We have a strategic plan in place, and are making progress in the implementation of that plan.

3.4. Liturgical

Attached is a copy of "Article III – Liturgy" from Nazareth's By-Laws, where we state we will be guided by the ELCA in our liturgies, rituals, worship and teachings. In this section, we explore how this is similar and different to your Church, including which requirements are mandatory and which can be relaxed, particularly at "contemporary" worship services.

What is the source (or sources) of liturgies, rituals, and music that your Church uses for worship services?

We do not provide resources for worship for our churches. Each congregation has the authority to decide what source they want to use.

Which liturgies and rituals are suggested, and which are required? For those required, what frequency are they required?

There are no liturgies or rituals that are required. This is the responsibility of each congregation.

How does your Church view and address the difference between a "traditional" and "contemporary" worship service? Are there any differences in liturgical or ritual requirements?

We do not have any requirements for such worship services. This is the responsibility of the local congregation.

4. Affiliation Transition Process

Whenever a congregation (existing or new) considers affiliating with a Church, it is likely that the Church has more experience with the steps and processes in discernment and transition than the congregation. In this section, we explore the resources provided by the Church to aid congregations (and the Church) in discernment and transition to an affiliation relationship with the Church.

Do you have a written process for how a congregation goes about affiliating with your Church? If so, please provide a copy.

A copy of the application for membership in LCMC is on our website.

If your Church does not have a written process, would you briefly share the process of how a congregation and your Church come to the mutual decision they are a good match? How long does it usually take?

Most often we encourage congregations to reach out to LCMC leadership to develop relationships, and ask any questions you may have. If possible, we try to make someone available for in person meetings. If not, we make use of Zoom. We encourage congregations to ask questions and to meet as often as they feel they need to in order to make sure that we might be a good fit for them. This can take on the average, 6-12 months.

Is there a dedicated person that deals with the affiliation of new congregations in your church office?

Mike Bradley, our Director, and Cathy Nichol our administrative assistant work with the affiliation of new congregations.

What tools and resources do you provide to help a congregation with the affiliation decision making and the affiliation process?

We have our website filled with information for a congregation to study, and then meeting with Mike Bradley, our Director, or with other LCMC pastors in their region is often recommended.

Are there congregations of similar size we could talk to that made the decision to affiliate with your Church in the last three years? And more than three years ago?

There are congregations of a similar size that you can speak to in Cedar Rapids, Des Moines, and in Minneapolis, MN

How are congregations welcomed and integrated into the network of the other congregations of the Church?

We have a plan in place to welcome new congregations which includes networking them with members of our Association staff, with the District Coordinator in their region, and with other leaders of LCMC congregations in their region.

5. [Additional Comments or Questions](#)

Please feel free to add any additional comments that you feel we should consider about your Church or our discernment process.

Are there any specific questions you would like us to answer for you?

Appendix F – Round 2 Responses from North American Lutheran Church (NALC)

[Task Force note: Responses from the NALC included several hyperlinks to resources on the internet. These are underlined blue within the text.]

1. Doctrine, Teaching and Practices

In this section, we explore the compatibility of existing views between the congregation of Nazareth and your Church.

1.1. Compatible Views of Bible and Lutheran Documents

In Nazareth's current By-Laws, "Article II – Confession of Faith" (attached) we list our congregation's position on the Bible and other Lutheran Documents as the basis of all that we believe, teach and practice. In this section, we explore similarities, differences and potential conflicts between our congregation and your Church.

There can be many interpretations of scripture. Nazareth's position is that the Bible is "the divinely inspired, revealed, and inerrant Word of God and submits to this as the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life." How would affiliation with your Church align with the teachings that we subscribe to at Nazareth?

Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by the Holy Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them the Holy Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world."

Furthermore, Article 2.03 states: "The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life, 'according to which all doctrines should and must be judged.' (Formula of Concord, Epitome, Part I)."

Although the NALC does not employ the term "inerrant" (refer to Section 1.3 - "Inerrancy without Literalism" later in this document), our theological statement [The Bible as the Word of God](#) asserts: "The Bible is a truthful, reliable book that will not lead us into error and falsehood, nor does it contain error or falsehood."

[Task Force Note: the ELCA and the LCMC also agree on using "inspired" in place of "inerrant."]

We also adhere to the [Common Confession](#) of 2005, with Article 3 stating: "The Authority of Scripture: We believe and confess that the Bible is God's revealed Word to us, spoken in Law and Gospel. The Bible is the final authority for us in all matters of our faith and life."

Consequently, we believe that the NALC's teachings and practices are entirely consistent with your views.

What are the views of your Church in relation to the Bible, the historic creeds (Nicene, Apostles, Athanasian) and the Lutheran documents (Augsburg confession, small catechism) as the foundation of what you believe and their use in preaching and teaching?

The *NALC Constitution*, in Articles 2.04–2.08, addresses this query by stating that we confess:

2.04 The Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds as true declarations of the faith of the Church.

2.05 The Unaltered Augsburg Confession as a true witness to the Gospel, acknowledging as one with it in faith and doctrine all churches that likewise accept the teachings of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.

2.06 The other confessional writings in the Book of Concord, namely, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles and the Treatise, the Small Catechism, the Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord, as further valid interpretations of the faith of the Church.

2.07 The Gospel, recorded in the Holy Scriptures and confessed in the ecumenical creeds and Lutheran confessional writings, as the power of God to create and sustain the Church for God's mission in the world.

2.08 The NALC honors and accepts The Common Confession (2005), attached in an appendix hereto, as a summary of teachings otherwise affirmed in the Lutheran Confessions.

Is there anything from our By-Laws “Article II - Confession of Faith” that concerns you?

Not at all; it is well-written and commendable!

1.2. Accepting vs. Affirming

In this section, we explore some specific ways in which your Church helps – and limits – congregations to accept all.

1.2.1. Welcoming to All

The Church is a hospital for sinners. Some forms of sin are more visible than others, and right or wrong, some congregations and Churches have set more defined boundaries for some types of more visible sin than they do less visible sin. In this section, we explore what your Church does to encourage – and limit – the marginalized from participation in your congregations, as well as how you support your congregations to be Welcoming to All.

When it comes to being a “welcoming” Church, what limitations, if any, are placed on members and staff by your Church? What situations are congregations allowed to decide, and what situations are dictated by your Church?

In the spirit of embracing all individuals, the NALC acknowledges that everyone is a sinner in need of grace. Consequently, all people are welcome to participate in worship services and events at NALC congregations. However, NALC clergy members are explicitly prohibited from officiating same-gender marriages, both within and outside church premises, as they represent both the local parish and the NALC as a whole.

As a church body, the NALC actively engages in ongoing dialogue, learning, and support for individuals who self-identify as LGBTQ+. During a recent [Pastors' Conference](#), the guest speaker, Dr. John Grabowski, author of *Unraveling Gender*, facilitated a two-day discussion on ministering

to those experiencing gender dysphoria. Additionally, the conference addressed how the Church can assist parents grappling with these issues within their families. The NALC endeavors to remain informed while striving to “speak the truth in love,” as your document articulates.

Given the NALC’s “Congregationally Focused” approach, the church encourages decision-making at the level of local church councils. The NALC provides support and assistance in situations of difficulty or conflict, typically intervening only when invited or when the NALC constitution is not being adhered to.

How does your Church advise congregations struggling to be welcoming to all but also do not believe in affirming sin nor allowing people to live in opposition to God’s Word?

Numerous congregations within the NALC have grappled with the challenge of welcoming all individuals without affirming sinful behavior or permitting actions that contradict God’s Word. These congregations, whether established or newly formed, adhere to the NALC’s convictions, continuously guiding believers to renounce sin and embrace Christ’s forgiveness and mercy.

How does your Church encourage people to love their neighbors as themselves when they don’t agree on social positions or positions taken by your Church?

In situations where the Bishop’s office intervenes in local congregational conflicts, the NALC emphasizes the teachings of Matthew 18, outlining appropriate treatment of fellow members within the body of Christ. Many of the NALC’s pastors, having left the ELCA to join a more orthodox and confessional church body, possess the experience and knowledge to handle such situations effectively.

How do you address the appearance of a lack of “repentance” for a behavior - particularly in situations where someone professes and strives to love God and love his neighbor in other areas?

The NALC maintains the Lutheran tradition of preaching the Law-Gospel dialectic, wherein God’s law leads to repentance and His gospel liberates from sin. The act of repentance is beyond human control and is solely the work of the Holy Spirit. The NALC encourages prayer, speaking the truth, genuine love, and preaching both law and gospel, entrusting the outcome to the Lord.

Some may say the opposite of “welcoming” is “rejecting.” How do you respond to that? How does a Church that “rejects” sinners survive?

The term “welcoming” has developed a political connotation, which can be misleading. The NALC embraces genuine hospitality, inviting all to worship and participate in congregational life. While the church does not condone any form of abuse towards parishioners or visitors, it also does not equate welcoming with endorsing sin, regardless of the specific transgression.

If someone is suffering from sinful behavior but doesn’t know Jesus, how does your Church provide a welcoming umbrella that allows them to feel safe and get to know Jesus?

For individuals grappling with sinful behavior but unfamiliar with Jesus, the NALC encourages gradual exposure, beginning with non-threatening invitations to meals or events outside of church settings. Over time, wise pastors and lay leaders introduce newcomers to the teachings

of Christ, the significance of Baptism, and the role of the Lord's Supper. This approach can help demystify the unique language of church culture for those unfamiliar with it.

Does your Church have any resources to help congregations reach the unchurched in their communities?

Since its inception, the NALC has prioritized discipleship and provides numerous resources for congregational renewal through its [Life-to-Life Discipleship Initiative](#). Every new pastor is trained to incorporate discipleship as a cornerstone of their ministry. This investment in discipleship empowers church members to spread the gospel to their neighbors and foster new disciples.

1.2.2. Sexual Sin

The ELCA has come under much criticism for its positions on accepting and affirming homosexuals. In this section, we take a deeper look at your Church and its positions on sexual sin, both homosexual and heterosexual, as well as how consistent your positions are on both types of sin.

The question of sexuality is a difficult one for many churches as we strive to be like Christ and be loving and welcoming. Explain how your position on sexuality plays out in your policies regarding pastors, congregants, and staff.

The NALC's position on sexuality is clearly delineated in our [Standards of Pastoral Ministry](#), which outlines expectations for NALC pastors in all aspects of life. This document explicitly states that sexual activity should occur within the confines of a marriage between one man and one woman, and that ordained ministers are expected to adhere to this biblical standard:

The NALC recognizes and affirms that, according to the Bible, the normative setting for sexual activity is within a marriage between one man and one woman. Therefore, chastity before marriage and fidelity within marriage are the norm. Ordained ministers of the North American Lutheran Church are expected to preach, teach, and live in accordance with this Biblical standard. Adultery, promiscuity, the sexual abuse of another or the misuse of counseling relationships for sexual favors constitutes conduct that is incompatible with the character of the ministerial office. Persons who engage in sexual activity outside the marriage covenant of one man and one woman, whether homosexual or heterosexual, are precluded from the ordained ministry of the North American Lutheran Church.

Additionally, the document addresses matters related to marriage and divorce, emphasizing the importance of preserving the sanctity of marriage:

Divorce and re-marriage. The North American Lutheran Church considers divorce to be a violation of God's plan for marriage. Divorce affects the pastor and the family, the congregation and the community. The pastor facing divorce or separation will make every effort to restore the marriage relationship. While guilt or fault in the dissolution of a marriage is often difficult to discern, the pastor may need to acknowledge responsibility for the failure of the marriage.

What positions are congregations allowed to decide, and what positions are dictated by your Church?

Congregations are granted autonomy in making decisions based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ and their local parish traditions, provided they adhere to their own constitution and do not contradict the NALC's constitution. The NALC, however, discourages congregations from seeking pastoral candidates outside of the NALC, as we have a rigorous vetting and certification process in place to protect our churches from potential conflict or harm, especially when it pertains to heresy, unfaithfulness, or other hidden character traits.

What is your reaction to Nazareth Lutheran Church's "Speaking the Truth in Love" document? Are there any conflicts with your Church?

The "Speaking the Truth in Love" document is well-conceived and comprehensive, with no apparent conflicts with NALC teachings.

How do you counsel congregations with members that aren't unified on matters of sexuality and sexual sin? Do you have any specific examples of how this was resolved?

Congregations joining the NALC generally share a unified perspective on issues of sexuality. Specific examples of conflict resolution in this area would need to be examined at the congregational level.

Does your Church allow celibate homosexual pastors to serve?

The NALC permits celibate homosexual pastors to serve. All pastors, regardless of sexual orientation, are expected to either live celibate lives or remain faithful within a biblical marriage, and each pastor signs a covenant called *Living and Serving Faithfully* affirming this. In cases of temptation or potential violation of this covenant, pastoral support and counseling are provided before discipline.

Does your Church allow pastors to perform homosexual marriages under any circumstance? If so, under what circumstances?

The NALC prohibits pastors from performing homosexual marriages under any circumstances.

What (if any) counseling and discipleship/support groups/care ministries does your Church have for various sinful temptations (ex. AA, gambling, porn addiction, homosexual attraction)?

The NALC has developed [Life-to-Life Discipleship](#) resources, available online, to support congregations in discipleship and spiritual growth. Support groups for various issues are implemented at the congregational level, with the endorsement of the NALC.

How do you respond to the statement: "Any sexual relationship outside of marriage is a sin. Your sexuality and who you chose to love is not for me to judge. Sexuality and/or gender are the same thing to me, and I do not believe that sexuality and/or gender decides if you are a good employee, leader, or human being."

To address the statement provided, we must examine each component separately:

- We concur that any sexual relationship outside of marriage is a sin.

- The notion of judgment regarding an individual’s sexuality or choice of romantic partner is beyond our purview, as our primary concern lies in adhering to the principles established within the Holy Scriptures. While we do not condone sin, our stance does not equate to condemning one to eternal damnation. Rather, it is an acknowledgment of Law and the Gospel given to us by Jesus Christ and His apostles. It is important to recognize that sexuality can become an idol, much like material wealth, athletic pursuits, or social status, and the NALC does not support idolatry in any form.
- The conflation of sexuality and gender may be a matter of personal perception; however, it is crucial to acknowledge that neither of these factors solely determines one’s capacity for goodness, leadership, or humanity. As Jesus proclaimed, “No one is good but God alone.” Consequently, we are inherently incapable of achieving goodness independently. St. Paul also emphasized that all individuals fall short of God’s glory due to sin. In light of these teachings, we cannot trivialize God’s forgiveness or indulge in sinful behavior under the guise of divine pardon. From a biological and genetic perspective, sex and gender are indeed intertwined, rooted in the fundamental composition of our DNA—males possess XY chromosomes, while females have XX chromosomes. This genetic reality is evident in every cell of the human body. In contemporary society, secular humanism has attempted to disassociate the concepts of sex and gender, resulting in the proliferation of myriad gender identities that lack a basis in truth. This phenomenon exemplifies a form of idolatry, wherein individuals erroneously believe they can determine their gender based on subjective emotions. The NALC adheres to the narrative found in Genesis, wherein God created human beings in His image, as male and female. The notion of selecting one’s gender is a fallacy, and confronting the ramifications of this deception—and caring for those involved—is a significant task for the Church of this age. While the forces of falsehood may be at work, it is essential to remember that Christ has already triumphed in this spiritual struggle.

1.3. Inerrancy without Literalism

At Nazareth, when we confess that the Bible is inerrant, we mean that the lessons and meanings taught in the Bible are 100% true. However, we allow that this can be compatible with some accounts in the Bible not being recorded as they literally occurred. (Example: we allow that Creation and Theistic Evolution are compatible.) In this section, we explore the positions of your Church on the Inerrancy and Literalism in the Bible.

How does your Church define inerrancy as it pertains to the Bible?

[Task Force Note: the ELCA and the LCMC also agree on using “inspired” in place of “inerrant.”]

While the NALC does not use the term “inerrant,” we understood the Bible being a fully truthful, reliable book that will not lead us into error and falsehood. The NALC Commission on Theology & Doctrine produced a full statement and study guide entitled [The Bible as the Word of God](#) in which we state this clearly:

“The Bible is a truthful, reliable book that will not lead us into error and falsehood, nor does it contain error or falsehood.”

Scripture's truthfulness is primarily a truthfulness about God and His Christ. In the Bible, we are presented with "the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom [he has] sent" (John 17:3 NIV).

In speaking about God and Christ, the Bible also speaks of God's plan as it has been carried out in history. Here too, the Bible speaks truly and reliably.

However, there is more than one way in which language can communicate truth. We should not approach the Bible with our own preconceived ideas of what it must be like if it is truthful. We must take our lead from the texts themselves and respect their actual character.

Much harm has been done in recent centuries by the imposition on the Bible of standards of truth derived from modern science and modern historical research. Whether done by "conservatives" or "liberals," this is simply another way of subjecting Scripture to human reason.

The Holy Spirit has incorporated a wide range of literary forms into the written Word of God. Different kinds of writing communicate truth in different ways. A psalm or a prophecy of Christ is true in a different way from the Gospel accounts of His crucifixion.

Furthermore, in order to speak understandably, the Holy Spirit permitted the writers of the biblical text to write in ways familiar to them, so long as this did not defeat His purpose. For example, the Bible does not recount historical events in the manner of modern historians, but in ways typical of the ancient world.

Faith in the reliability of Scripture rests on faith in the Triune God, not on apologetic arguments of human reason. Because God has acted to save us, and because He wants His salvation to be preached, believed and celebrated, we are confident that the Holy Spirit has provided us with trustworthy testimony to His purpose and His saving deeds.

The study guide expounds upon this concept, as well:

This section can be of immense help in getting past controversies about the six days of creation, for example, and whether the Bible is reliable for information about archeology and such. A key idea is this:

We should not approach the Bible with our own preconceived ideas of what it must be like if it is truthful. We must take our lead from the texts themselves and respect their actual character.

When reading a passage of the Bible, we should ask the question, "Is this the kind of literature that should be taken as a *factual* account?" Not every *true* account of an encounter is a *factual* account. Let us take a famous example. The parable of the Good Samaritan starts off this way:

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. (Luke 10:30 KJV)

This verse is true, and is reliable in teaching us about God and Jesus Christ, *whether or not* there really was a man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. And so it is that "We should not approach the Bible with our own preconceived ideas of what it must be like if it is truthful." We must not permit the standard of truth used by a modern historian to deprive us of the Gospel truth of this passage.

Another key idea of this section concerns the individual gifts and limitations of the writers of the Bible:

Furthermore, in order to speak understandably, the Holy Spirit permitted the writers of the biblical text to write in ways familiar to them, so long as this did not defeat His purpose. This goes back to our statement's wonderful line in Section 4 of "Where Does the Bible Come From?":

The Holy Spirit worked with the human authors of Scripture, weaving their purposes into His own, so that their human words bear witness to Christ in ways that reveal not only their own minds but the mind of God who was intent on Christ from the beginning.

Again, we can admire the sublime complexity of this. Our God intended that the Bible should be a true and reliable book about God, Christ, the Church, salvation, and life in Christ. To accomplish this, the Holy Spirit permitted the writers of the Bible "to write in ways familiar to them, so long as this did not defeat His purpose."

For Discussion:

If there are inconsistencies, say, in the way the four evangelists describe the length and sequence of our Lord's public ministry, does this mean that at least one of them must be false?

No, none of the evangelists is wrong. Each Gospel should be read as a true and reliable account of Jesus. In Him, there is no confusion. A modern historian might say that at least one of the Gospels must be wrong, but that is because the modern historian is using a standard of truth appropriate to his or her discipline, but that standard of truth is different from the standard of truth of the Bible. The Bible's standard of truth concerns true witness to Jesus. This is not to say that the Bible's standard of truth is inferior to that of the modern historian, but rather to say that it is different. It is a different category from that of the historian or the archaeologist. The Bible is true because it reliably teaches us about God.

But does not this notion of the Bible having its own "standard of truth" leave the Bible subject to liberal interpretation? Cannot one say, for example, "The Bible is about love. None of its historical or scientific claims matter. It is simply about love?"

Two answers seem important here: (1) For Christians, the notion of "love" receives its content from the Bible, and therefore we cannot set aside the Bible in favor of our antecedent notions of "love." We learn about love by watching God at work in the Bible. What we learn about love from the Bible is different from what we might learn about love from popular culture. So, to say that the Bible has its own "standard of truth" does not mean that the Bible can be summarized (and then dismissed) by some notion of love. The Bible's standard of truth is the literal meaning of the long text, from Genesis to Revelation, understood as revelation of Jesus Christ. And (2) "liberal interpretations" of the Bible are bound to tend wrong precisely because a "liberal interpretation" does not consider itself constrained by the literal text and by the Church's traditional interpretation of that text. But our teaching statement does not do that. Our statement is devoted to the literal text of the Bible and to the Church's traditional interpretation of that text.

Under this definition, does your Church consider the Bible to be inerrant?

We acknowledge that the Bible emerged from a combination of oral tradition and divine inspiration leading from the apostolic proclamation (*kerygma*), resulting in the sacred canon of Scripture that serves as the Word of God for all people across time and space. Even for Martin Luther, however, “‘inspiration did not insure inerrancy in all details. Luther recognizes mistakes and inconsistencies in Scripture and treated them with lofty indifference because they did not touch the heart of the Gospel.’ When Matthew appears to confuse Jeremiah with Zechariah in Matthew 27:9, Luther wrote that ‘Such points do not bother me particularly’” (Roland H. Bainton, “The Bible in the Reformation,” in *The Cambridge History of the Bible Vol 3: The West from the Reformation to the Present*, ed. S.L. Greenslade [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1963], 12–13).

At the same time, we wholeheartedly concur with Luther’s assertion that “God’s Word cannot fail” (Large Catechism, IV, 57). In fact, the majority of our congregations have chosen to affiliate with the NALC due to our unwavering commitment to upholding the authority of Scripture as the *norma normans non normata* (Latin for “the ruling rule that is not ruled”). This term characterizes Scripture as the absolute norm of faith (*norma primaria, norma decisionis*) and is definitive by its own merit. The indispensability of Scripture as the decisive norm lies in its ability to discern the veracity or falsehood of doctrines, ensuring the integrity of our faith. The NALC’s statement declares that the Bible is a truthful, reliable book that will not lead us into error and falsehood, nor does it contain error or falsehood. Under this definition, we indeed consider the Bible to be inerrant.

Does your Church allow congregations to discuss Theistic Evolution as compatible with the Creation story? If so, does this present a conflict to the Creation story being inerrant?

The NALC does not impose restrictions on discussions pertaining to various topics, including the compatibility of theistic evolution with the Creation narrative. As long as theistic evolution emphasizes the role of God in the creation process, it remains a valid subject for exploration and dialogue within our congregations.

What (if any) position does your Church have on other accounts in the Bible that may not be recorded as they literally occurred?

Addressing inquiries of this nature necessitates consultation with individual congregations, as the NALC does not maintain a denominational structure that issues official statements regarding political issues or specific biblical passages. It is essential to recognize that certain portions of Scripture should not be interpreted literally; for instance, when God is metaphorically referred to as a rock or a high tower. Despite their metaphorical nature, these sections of the Bible remain truthful and significant.

In the NALC, our organizational approach is “Congregationally Focused,” though not strictly “congregationalist.” This emphasis implies that matters are primarily deliberated and resolved at the local level. As such, pastors within the NALC receive training specific to the denomination’s *ethos*, which engenders trust in their capacity to serve as adept teachers and shepherds. This trust enables a diverse range of pedagogical and pastoral approaches within the NALC’s congregational context.

Has this created conflict in your Church? If so, how have you dealt with it?

Occasional conflicts may emerge within the NALC due to the influence of other Lutheran bodies, such as the [Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod \(LCMS\)](#), or more conservative and fundamentalist denominations that advocate for a more literal interpretation of biblical inerrancy and infallibility. Despite these sporadic disagreements, the NALC community predominantly concurs with the denomination’s statement on *The Bible as the Word of God*. This consensus reflects a shared understanding of the complexities and nuances inherent in interpreting and engaging with Scripture as a foundational source of theological and spiritual guidance, while still affirming its complete truthfulness and reliability.

1.4. Trends and Boundaries

There are situations where individuals or groups may push the boundaries of a Church’s purported beliefs. Sometimes these stories are picked up by news and social media, putting their congregations in a “guilt by association” position. In this section, we explore areas that your Church has dealt with/are dealing with where boundaries within your Church are being challenged or are changing.

Does your Church teach that salvation comes as a gift of grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and there is no other means of salvation? If not, explain who is, and who is not, saved.

The foundational teaching of the NALC asserts that salvation is indeed a gift of grace, attained through faith in Jesus Christ, and there exists no alternative means for salvation.

Have you at any time had leaders in your Church that suggest they believe in universalism (i.e. all are saved regardless of their religious beliefs)? If so, how have you dealt with them?

The NALC has not experienced instances of leaders advocating for universalism. However, should such a situation arise, an inquiry panel would be convened to assess the matter, and if the individual were found guilty, they would be removed from the clergy roster.

Have you at any time had leaders in your Church that suggest they believe that other faiths outside of Christianity lead to salvation? If so, how have you dealt with them?

Our clergy remain steadfast in the belief that Christianity is the sole path to salvation, rejecting the notion that “all roads lead to the same God.” We uphold Jesus’ words in John 14:6, asserting that He is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one can access the Father except through Him.

What (if any) discussions or trends are happening in your Church that suggest your positions may be changing on social or theological topics? How does it appear they will be resolved?

While the NALC’s stance on social and theological issues remains consistent, we are currently navigating the complexities of addressing sensitive topics, such as transgenderism, with compassion and understanding. We acknowledge the concerns of younger pastors, who seek a more empathetic approach towards individuals—sometimes their friends—experiencing gender dysphoria. The NALC is committed to fostering open dialogue and learning from the valuable insights of our younger theologians in order to enhance our ministry.

1.5. Non-Lutheran Relationships

No congregation is an island unto itself. We are part of the holy catholic Church. This section explores how congregations can work with others outside of your Church.

1.5.1. Ecumenically Focused

This section explores your positions on, and resources for, your congregations to work with congregations of other denominations.

Do you permit a congregation to work with non-Lutheran congregations for outreach or mission projects? Can you give some examples of existing partnerships?

Indeed, if such collaborations advance the kingdom, they are permissible. We maintain full communion and concordat agreements with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church – Mekane Yesus (EECMY) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania (ELCT) respectively, the two largest Lutheran churches globally. We engage in ecumenical dialogues with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) and Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC), as well as non-Lutheran denominations, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA), and the emerging Global Methodist Church. Our most robust partnership with non-Lutherans is with the Anglicans, encompassing several clergy and congregations working in tandem or shared capacities, including a member of the NALC Executive Staff. Our seminary network is also centered at an Evangelical Anglican seminary, and the majority of our network seminaries are likewise in ecumenical settings.

What (if any) restrictions does your Church have that discourage or prevent a congregation from working with a non-Lutheran congregation or Church?

Collaboration with non-Christian congregations, such as Mormons or Jehovah’s Witnesses, is discouraged, as joint worship could convey a conflicting message.

Do you permit the use of resource materials supplied by non-Lutheran organizations for Sunday School curriculum, small group studies, etc.? Can you give some examples?

We neither explicitly permit nor forbid such usage. However, we do encourage congregations to utilize Sola Publishing materials, which have been thoroughly assessed and deemed as adhering to our Lutheran and Confessional principles. Concordia Publishing House materials, originating from the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), are also widely used but may occasionally present theological discrepancies. Congregations likely employ resources from a variety of Lutheran and non-Lutheran sources.

What (if any) resources or opportunities do you provide to assist in establishing partnerships with non-Lutheran congregations?

In collaboration with the Anglicans, the NALC has produced four [Pastoral and Educational Affirmations](#) addressing “Jesus Christ, the Gospel and Justification,” “Holy Baptism,” “Holy Communion,” and “Holy Scripture.” These affirmations aim to fortify faith and discipleship within our Churches, enact our shared commitment to the Great Commission, foster interactions between Lutherans and Anglicans, stimulate discussions on the essentials of Christian faith, celebrate the existing unity between ACNA and NALC leaders, clergy, and followers, and cultivate relationships at local and regional levels to bolster mission, outreach, church planting, and the advancement of the Kingdom of God across North America. In 2020, the NALC and the ACNA organized a joint conference titled “[DiscipleLife](#)” providing a platform for Anglicans and Lutherans rooted in biblical teachings to connect, network, and invigorate

mission and ministry at the local level. The conference aimed to inspire and empower attendees to participate actively in discipleship and disciple-making, regardless of congregation size or individual experience.

1.5.2. Outside Pastors

We believe there is a general shortage of Lutheran Pastors available to meet the needs of congregations, and in fact, there is a shortage of Pastors for all denominations. The ELCA has established agreements with other denominations (some of which are not Lutheran) that allow for the possibility of a Pastor from those denomination to be approved for service in an ELCA church. This section focuses on what abilities and restrictions you place on congregations to seek Pastors outside of your Church, Lutheran or otherwise.

What requirements and restrictions does your Church have for a congregation to call a pastor who has been ordained in another denomination, Lutheran or non-Lutheran?

In regards to the requirements and restrictions for a congregation to call a pastor ordained in another denomination, whether Lutheran or non-Lutheran, the NALC adheres to a comprehensive process. This procedure ensures that the pastor in question aligns with our theological convictions and possesses the necessary qualifications to effectively serve our congregations. The candidate must undergo a period of discernment and evaluation, which may include theological coursework, mentorship, and an examination of their ordination credentials. Furthermore, the candidate must demonstrate a commitment to the NALC's Core Values and teachings.

Are these requirements and restrictions the same for an interim pastor as a permanent pastor?

The requirements and restrictions for interim pastors are generally similar to those of permanent pastors. However, there may be some variations in the process, depending on the specific needs of the congregation and the interim pastor's duration of service. The NALC is committed to ensuring that interim pastors meet the same standards of theological understanding and pastoral competence as permanent pastors.

Does your Church have a process in place for calling pastors outside your denomination (Lutheran or non-Lutheran)? If so, please briefly describe it.

The NALC does indeed have a process in place for calling pastors from outside our denomination, whether Lutheran (certification) or non-Lutheran (colloquy). This process typically begins with an evaluation of the candidate's theological background and ordination credentials. If not a Lutheran, the candidate may be required to complete additional theological education and engage in a period of mentorship to become acquainted with the NALC's beliefs and practices. Upon successful completion of these requirements, the candidate can be considered for a pastoral position within our denomination.

What assistance will you provide a member congregation if they choose to seek a non-Lutheran pastor?

If a congregation chooses to seek a non-Lutheran pastor, the NALC is prepared to offer assistance throughout the process. To call the pastor, though, the person must go through colloquy which as noted above includes Lutheran theological courses. A non-Lutheran pastor cannot be called to an NALC pastor per our constitution. They can, however, decide to come onto our clergy roster and then be called.

Must pastoral candidates for congregation be approved by your Church?

Yes, pastoral candidates for a congregation must be approved by the NALC, as they serve as members of the ministerium for the whole NALC, not just as clergy in a local congregation. This approval process is an essential aspect of our commitment to maintaining a high standard of pastoral care and theological integrity within our congregations. By ensuring that all pastoral candidates adhere to the NALC's Core Values and teachings, we can foster a cohesive and supportive community of faith.

2. Expectations of Church from Congregations

When two organizations partner together, each hopes and expects that that partnership will bring benefits to both sides. In these sections, we explore topics where Nazareth's congregation has expectations of benefits that would be realized by affiliating with your Church, and whether they are compatible with what your Church feels is appropriate to provide.

2.1. Assistance in Calling Pastors

Luke 10: 2: And [Jesus] said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (ESV)

One of the key needs of any Christian congregation is the availability of qualified Ordained Pastors to lead the congregation. In these sections, we explore how your Church helps match up congregations to qualified, Ordained Pastors.

2.1.1. Seminary Network

The ability of a Church to seek qualified, Ordained Pastors for a congregation is largely dependent on the partnerships that Church has established with existing Seminaries to promote and train new Pastors. In this section, we explore your Seminary Network.

What (if any) seminaries does your Church operate that produce pastors with Masters of Divinity (or comparable) degrees?

The NALC operates a [comprehensive seminary network](#) known as the North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS). This network comprises five regional seminaries, each featuring Lutheran-focused curricula and faculty. This distinctive structure affords seminarians the opportunity to select from an array of locations and contexts while ensuring rigorous, faithful instruction and formation. The Seminary Center and primary offices of the North American Lutheran Seminary are situated at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania.

Additional programs are located at Beeson Divinity School (Birmingham, Alabama), Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena, California and Houston, Texas), Sioux Falls Seminary (Sioux Falls, South Dakota), and Concordia Lutheran Seminary (Edmonton, Alberta). Furthermore, the NALC is actively working on incorporating another seminary into the network in Charlotte, North Carolina. In addition to these centers, the NALC maintains several cooperative agreements with undergraduate institutions.

Each institution within the seminary network has undergone a thorough theological and formational evaluation by the NALC, ensuring their adherence to the church's teachings and Core Values. Moreover, all network schools are fully accredited by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), which represents the benchmark for graduate-level theological education.

In instances where seminarians have particular reasons for wishing to attend alternative seminaries, the NALC permits them to collaborate with the church's candidacy committee to explore available options.

What (if any) seminaries does your Church partner with that produce pastors with Masters of Divinity (or comparable) degrees?

Apart from the seminaries previously mentioned, we also accommodate seminarians who have pursued their education at diverse ecumenical institutions. However, we require that they undergo a comprehensive Lutheran year of studies, which can be completed through online or in-person modalities.

Do the seminaries you use produce pastors at a rate consistent with the needs of your congregations?

The seminaries we work with generate pastors at a rate that aligns with the needs of our congregations. Typically, the seminary education process spans four years, with the final year dedicated to a mandatory internship. Additionally, we have instituted an alternative ordination pathway called "Ordination Under Special Circumstances," which facilitates the cultivation of suitable individuals from within congregations, particularly for smaller churches that cannot sustain a full-time pastor. This process involves one year of online coursework, followed by ordination and an additional year of online studies.

Do you partner with non-Lutheran seminaries to identify pastors? If yes, how do you ensure adequate training on Lutheran doctrine? What standards do you apply?

We do establish partnerships with non-Lutheran seminaries, provided that they have been meticulously assessed and integrated into our seminary system. These institutions must employ trusted confessional Lutheran theologians and ensure that seminarians receive thorough education and formation in Lutheran theology and doctrine through participation in intensive summer terms at our Seminary Center in Ambridge, PA.

Do you believe that students at the seminaries you work with would be theologically aligned with Nazareth's beliefs? If yes, why? If no [understanding that "no" might mean "sometimes"], what do you believe might be the points of difference?

We are confident that students from the seminaries we collaborate with would be theologically congruent with Nazareth's beliefs. This alignment is achieved through our rigorous candidacy process and our comprehensive seminary system, which emphasizes the importance of the Bible as God's Word, Lutheran Confessions, traditional marriage, and the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death, along with the central tenet of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Can you provide a list of the network of seminaries you use and the number of students graduating each year?

Besides the seminaries previously enumerated, some students attend the Institute of Lutheran Studies in Brookings, SD, and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte, NC. Other institutions may be approved on a case-by-case basis by the NALC candidacy committee. We typically maintain an average of 40 seminarians within the NALC, resulting in approximately 10 graduates each year, evenly distributed between fall and spring terms.

Does your Church ordain pastors or do congregations? Why?

Within the NALC, pastors are ordained under the authority of the broader Church rather than by a singular congregation. Throughout their ministry, pastors serve multiple congregations and

remain accountable to the entire NALC instead of simply being bound to a specific congregation. As the body of Christ, the Church comprises a multitude of interconnected members, precluding any congregation from functioning or existing in isolation. With this in mind, it is important to note that nearly all ordinations transpire within the context of a local congregation, frequently involving the candidate's home congregation or the congregation to which they are called. While the NALC as a whole, symbolized by the officiating bishop, bestows ordination, the local congregation and the pastor called to serve there represent the voice of the entire Church during the ordination ceremony.

2.1.2. Resources for Calling Pastors

When pastors retire or leave to serve new callings, congregations need support in identifying candidates and filling these positions. As a large and diverse church family, we need strong pastoral leadership. In this section, we explore how your Church helps match congregations to pastors available for call.

Nazareth is seeking to call a senior pastor and probably an associate pastor. Explain the process for how you would work with us to identify and call a pastor that would be a fit--and what you consider the defined qualifications of pastors in your Church.

The NALC provides a comprehensive [Call Process Manual](#), accessible to congregations, pastors, and candidates for ministry. More information for congregations entering the call process can be found at our online [Call Process Portal](#). While we have a process, our primary goal is to help pastors and congregations discern God's will. Rather than attempting to match pastors and congregations, we allow pastors to express interest in particular congregations, while granting congregations the autonomy to select which pastor to interview from the submitted pastoral profiles. We have a call process coordinator who offers support, encouragement, and assistance throughout the process. Additionally, our [Standards for Pastoral Ministry](#) are also available to learn more about the qualifications of our pastors.

Do these qualifications differ for senior, associate and interim pastors?

We maintain high standards and expectations for all clergy, regardless of their position.

What are the typical time frames for matching a congregation with senior, associate and interim pastors?

For full-time congregations seeking a senior or solo pastor, the call process typically takes one year. Smaller congregations (with 20–70 average worship attendance) and those seeking associate pastors may require more time. We emphasize that our role is not to “match” pastors and congregations, but rather to support and assist in the discernment process, ultimately leaving the decision to the congregation and pastor.

How many ordained pastors in total are working in your US congregations today?

Currently, 700 pastors serve in the NALC, including 20 in Canada. This figure comprises both active and retired clergy, as many “retired” pastors continue to serve.

Does your Church assist congregations in performing background checks of prospective pastors?

The NALC requires background checks covering financial and criminal conduct for all pastors prior to certification, for candidates applying to be seminarians, and for pastors transitioning between congregations.

Are congregations in your Church allowed to employ lay pastors? Why or why not? If yes, in what capacity(ies)?

Numerous NALC congregations employ certified lay ministers in various capacities. Some are certified by the NALC, while others are employed directly by the congregation. Lay ministers seeking certification undergo the same candidacy process as candidates for ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament. They may serve as liturgical assistants, music leaders, educational and youth directors, etc. The NALC also aims to revive the biblical and historical role of ordained deacons, representing another vocation of church ministers with distinct requirements from pastors.

2.2. Mission Beyond our Walls

The Great Commission requires that the Church spread the Gospel throughout the world. A Church can help congregations have greater impact by establishing their own, or partnering with existing, mission programs or missionaries. In this section, we explore the partnerships and resources your Church has established, both domestically and internationally, to help congregations match with mission partners.

How does your Church stress the importance of your congregations being involved in, and supporting, missions and missionaries?

Emphasizing our second Core Value, “Mission Driven,” we have an active and developed missions team that focuses on congregational mission and outreach, renewal, and international missions. Our biennial [Lutheran Week](#) includes a Mission-Convocation, which offers reports, budget considerations, and mission presentations. This year, for instance, we will host the [Global Confessional and Missional Lutheran Forum](#) (43 leaders representing Lutheran bodies and organizations in 15 nations) in conjunction with our Lutheran Week, spotlighting and connecting our congregations with missions worldwide.

Please list and briefly describe any mission programs operated by your Church.

Alongside the global workers (missionaries) and mission partners listed below, we have established the Great Commission Society to support and encourage various NALC mission outreach efforts. This society primarily focuses on fostering encouragement and providing financial support from congregations and individuals.

Please list any mission programs your Church currently partners with.

The NALC partners with over 30 missions, extending the reach of the gospel far beyond our individual capacities. A few examples include the Malawi Orphan Care Project, Spiritual Orphans Network, Madagascar Mission, Bariadi Orphanage in Tanzania, Water Mission, China Service Ventures, and church plants in Sierra Leone, among others. Our global workers are diligently serving in diverse locations such as Dubai, Ethiopia, Gambia, Belarus, India, and Cambodia, among others.

Does your Church sponsor any missionaries either domestically or internationally? If so, explain the rationale or vetting process used for determining which missionaries are supported by your church.

We collaborate with [Awakening Lives to Global Mission](#), the [World Mission Prayer League](#), and the [Spiritual Orphans Network](#) to vet and support global workers (missionaries) while overseeing financial support and accountability. Some of our missionaries include Pastor Heidi Punt in Haiti, Pastor William Obaga in Kenya, Pastor Valery Hryhoryk in Belarus, Stephen Katterhenrich with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Tanzania, Randy Stubbs with Tumaini Music Ministry in Tanzania, and Pastor Didi Panzo in Ecuador, to name a few.

Do your congregations have the freedom to partner with or support any mission or missionaries?

Congregations within the NALC have the freedom to partner with and support any mission and missionary of their choosing, in accordance with their discernment and commitment to advancing the gospel. This flexibility allows individual congregations to engage with mission work that aligns with their unique values, resources, and priorities.

2.3. Mission Within our Walls

Any mission of a congregation starts with equipping members to be knowledgeable and effective at spreading the Gospel, and supporting staff to aid in that mission. These sections focus on how your Church helps congregations accomplish these things.

2.3.1. Resources for Teaching and Evangelism

Congregational teaching and evangelism outreach to non-members are two of the most important needs of any church we affiliate with. Spreading the Gospel starts with teaching. This section explores what resources your Church offers congregations to aid in educating their congregants and staff.

Does your Church produce specific resources and materials to aid in teaching congregations, training staff, and evangelism? If yes, please give examples.

Indeed, our missions team offers numerous opportunities to inspire, educate, and prepare pastors, leaders, and congregations in the areas of mission, outreach, renewal, and church-planting. We provide regular online courses, including recent offerings on small and rural church ministry, congregational renewal through senior-focused ministry, Fresh Eyes for Mission summits, and our Life-to-Life Discipleship Initiative, which is an integral part of our NALC-wide emphasis on the Great Commission and discipleship.

Does your Church partner with other organizations to provide resources and materials to aid in teaching congregations, training staff, and evangelism? If yes, please give examples.

While the NALC has not formed specific partnerships with organizations, our congregations and mission districts make use of various groups depending on local needs and objectives.

Do you have a resource person or database that can help a member congregation in improving or setting up discipleship and evangelism classes or programs?

Pastor David Keener serves as our staff member responsible for connecting, guiding, and teaching in relation to our Life-to-Life Discipleship Initiative. Pastor Brad Hales regularly offers online and in-person courses and teachings on mission, evangelism, and renewal. Both are able to provide more resources and connections based on a congregation's context, as well.

2.3.2. *Employee Benefits*

Most congregations rely on paid staff who depend on their congregations to provide for their financial needs. Among those needs are benefits like health insurance, retirement plans, etc. This section explores the ways in which your Church helps, or restricts, congregations meet the employee benefit needs of their paid staff.

Nazareth currently obtains employee benefits through Portico Benefit Services, a ministry of the ELCA. Are congregations affiliated with your Church allowed to (continue to) obtain employee benefits through Portico?

NALC congregations, pastors, and employees may select whichever employee benefit programs they prefer.

Do you endorse, recommend, or require member congregations to provide employee benefits through a designated provider?

Approximately half of NALC clergy and congregations obtain benefits through [Hahn Financial Group](#), the official NALC provider based in Sioux Falls, SD, which has been the case since the NALC's inception.

If yes, list the provider and describe the benefits provided or required.

Hahn Financial offers comprehensive health, pension, disability, life, and ancillary services, in addition to financial coaching for pastors and employees.

If no, are there guidelines or requirements for congregations with regard to employee benefits?

The NALC provides guidelines for NALC-wide "called" staff and employees. We also have a document, *Clergy Compensation Guidelines and Expectations*, which offers advice and counsel rather than mandates. The NALC does not impose guidelines or requirements for congregational employees, but we trust that our congregations will employ best practices in caring for and supporting non-ordained employees.

Are congregations restricted to a specific company for providing benefits, or can they put together their own best package with an independent provider?

NALC congregations are free to develop their own optimal benefit packages.

Please provide a summary of employee benefit packages (if any) currently available to your congregations through your Church.

Full-time congregational employees have access to similar benefit packages through Hahn Financial Group as do clergy, which include health, pension, disability, life, and ancillary services.

2.4. Better Together

Congregations can be more effective in many ways, from sharing the Gospel to basic operational decisions, by sharing work and knowledge with other congregations. In this section we explore the congregations that exist today, and potentially in the future, that would be convenient for Nazareth to partner and network with.

2.4.1. Nearby Congregations

Some forms of collaboration are simply more effective face-to-face. Some joint projects can only be undertaken when all parties involved are relatively close to each other. In this section, we explore what congregations of your Church are relatively near to Nazareth for the purposes of collaboration and joint projects.

What congregations with an average in-person attendance of at least 150 does your Church have within a 150-mile radius of Nazareth?

According to our records, there are two congregations in the Iowa Mission District with an average attendance of 150+:

- St. John's Lutheran Church in Le Mars, Iowa (Pastor Christian Meier)
- First Evangelical Lutheran Church in Manchester, Iowa (Pastor Tony Ede)

What congregations with an average in-person attendance of at least 700 does your Church have within a 300-mile radius of Nazareth?

Currently, there are three churches in the NALC that have at least 700 attendees for Sunday worship services. One is located in California and two are in Ohio.

How does your Church promote collaboration between congregations?

While we encourage collaboration and cooperation among congregations, such relationships typically develop at the local level and within our Mission Districts. Local Mission District deans often provide guidance and support for these relationships.

What joint programs or internal networks does your Church have that are actively used by your congregations?

Primary tools include the NALC website, the NALC Network (an online forum for NALC clergy and laypeople serving on internal teams and task forces), and several NALC Facebook groups designed for fellowship and discussion.

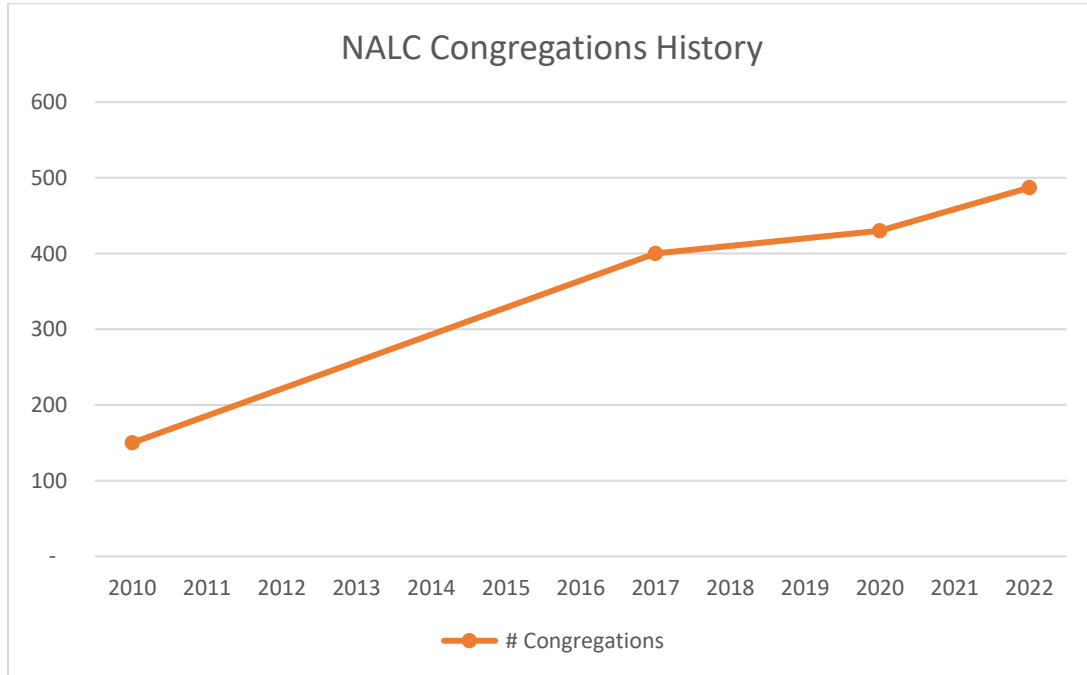
2.4.2. Church Growth

It is no secret that many mainline congregations and denominations are shrinking in size. Shrinking membership presents a very real sustainability issue when it comes to maintaining staff and resources to support that membership. This section focuses on whether your Church is growing, in what ways, and how it impacts your Church and congregations.

How many US congregations and members were affiliated with your Church 10 years ago, 5 years ago, 2 years ago and today?

The NALC began 13 years ago with an initial 150 congregations. Five years ago, the number of congregations increased to approximately 400. Two years ago, the figure stood at around 430 congregations. Currently, we have 487 congregations, with the number continuing to grow.

[Task Force Note: the below chart represents that data provided in response to this question.]



How many new congregations (as opposed to those transferring in) have been established in the US over the last 5 years?

In the past 5 years, approximately 10 church plants have matured into full congregation status.

How many congregations have dissolved or left your Church in the US over the last 5 years?

We have witnessed two congregations depart—one joining the LCMS and another returning to the ELCA. In the past decade, 5 to 10 congregations have dissolved. Numerous congregations have combined to form two- or three-point parishes.

How has the growth (or shrinkage) in your Church affected the resources you have to support your congregations?

The NALC has experienced consistent growth rather than shrinkage. Financial support has increased each year, as congregations and individuals demonstrate enthusiasm and commitment towards the NALC.

Do you have a plan or program in place to help your congregations grow? If so, please briefly describe.

All of the aforementioned mission, outreach, and renewal opportunities are directed towards congregational growth. Various renewal programs, such as our Fresh Eyes for Mission Summits,

as well as seminars on rural ministry and aging ministry, have significantly impacted local congregations and the NALC as a whole.

How are you helping your congregations to attract young people into your Church?

The NALC supports and encourages local congregations, as outreach and involvement primarily occur through pastors and congregations serving in their respective contexts. We have two Youth and Family staff members within the NALC, responsible for providing resources, courses, events, and opportunities for engaging and increasing youth participation in our congregations. Additionally, regional activities are offered by Mission Districts.

Can you provide any kind of demographic breakdown by age of your Church?

We do not systematically record such statistics; however, anecdotally, many of our mid-to-large size congregations exhibit a balanced membership distribution across children, youth, middle-aged, and senior populations. A significant portion of our smaller, rural, and small-town congregations reflects the demographics of those areas, with younger families migrating away from agricultural regions, resulting in increased senior populations. The NALC remains committed to fostering engagement across all age groups to ensure a thriving, diverse, and holistic faith communities.

3. Expectations of Congregation from the Church

Just as congregations have expectations from their Church, Churches have expectations from their congregations. In these sections, we explore the areas in which your Church has expectations from its congregations, and whether those expectations are compatible with what Nazareth has historically believed is appropriate.

3.1. Autonomy

Within any Church-to-congregation relationship, there are certain levels of autonomy an individual congregation is allowed to have, and certain areas where a congregation is expected to fall in line with the larger Church. In this section, we explore the positions of your Church on the ability of a congregation to govern itself.

Does your Church have a model constitution for congregations? If so, please provide a copy. What is the process and flexibility in reconciling the differences and updating of the existing governing documents of a congregation?

The NALC does offer a [Model Constitution for Congregations](#). The sole requirements we impose on incoming congregations are that their respective constitutions must not conflict with the NALC model constitution concerning the Confession of Faith (Chapter 2) and the guidelines outlined in Chapter 6 pertaining to Church Affiliation and the calling of pastors.

Besides governing documents, what other rules does your Church place on congregations, and how are they communicated?

One of our four Core Values is “Congregationally Focused.” Consequently, we do not impose rules on congregations joining our church body. Instead, we have established processes for support, encouragement, and accountability. We are organized into Mission Districts (geographical areas) overseen by Deans (acting as an extension of the bishop’s office), providing resources and support for congregations as necessary or requested.

Information detailing the aforementioned structure and resources can be easily accessed through our main office or [our website](#). The NALC’s understanding of the role of the congregation and the “Ministry of Oversight” is provided [online](#), as well. A packet of materials is provided to congregations upon joining the NALC.

Are your congregations allowed to retain ownership of, and full control over, their property? If not, what are the exceptions (example: a split in a congregation)?

Yes, congregations retain exclusive ownership of all their property. The NALC neither involves itself in property ownership nor claims any rights to property owned by a congregation affiliating with the NALC. Any exceptions to maintaining ownership are governed by each congregation’s constitution as determined independently.

If a congregation dissolves, does your Church help with the orderly disposition of their property?

We stand ready to support the orderly disposition of congregational property upon request. Our assistance can include legal counsel and pastoral support during transitional periods.

How is discipline handled when a congregation or pastor does not follow the rules of your Church?

Our bishop leads the ministry of oversight, acting as pastors to the pastors, which occasionally necessitates involvement in conflict resolution among pastors and congregations. Our primary objective in addressing conflicts is to facilitate reconciliation. We adhere to the model provided by Matthew 18 in all our engagements with conflict situations.

For more severe cases, we have instituted an Inquiry Panel responsible for investigating the details of a situation and offering recommendations to the bishop. Additionally, we have established a Court of Adjudication to address situations requiring more severe action or discipline. Fortunately, in our 13-year history, this final disciplinary step has only been taken once, resulting not in discipline but in a resolution between the involved parties.

3.2. Church Structure

Just as a Church has policies and practices in place that govern its relationship with its congregations, a Church also has a structure which affects what those relationships look like, as well as what ability a congregation has to affect change on the Church. This section explores the structure of your Church.

Describe the governance structure of your Church. Would you describe it as “top down”, “bottom up” or something in between?

As a “Congregationally Focused” church body, we maintain the conviction that the Gospel’s work primarily transpires within congregations rather than larger institutional structures. Consequently, our governance framework empowers decision-making at biennial Mission Convocations and through our Executive Council, which represents the denomination between Convocations. In this regard, we perceive our approach as more “bottom-up” than “top-down,” delegating governing authority to elected leaders as deemed appropriate.

For decisions that necessitate alterations to our NALC Constitution, a 2/3 majority of Convocation attendees must adopt the changes, followed by ratification by a 2/3 majority of NALC congregations. This process ensures that congregations retain the ultimate decision-making authority in significant changes.

How do congregations find their “place” within this structure?

Upon joining, each congregation is assigned to a Mission District, typically comprising 8–15 congregations based on geographic proximity. These congregations convene annually to foster encouragement, support, and collaborative ministry endeavors. There are exceptions wherein congregations in specific regions have agreed to exceed the 8–15 congregation guideline, opting to operate within larger groups to fulfill the same objectives.

In what ways are congregations involved when Church-wide decisions are made?

As previously mentioned, the Mission Convocation possesses the authority to adopt budgets, elect leaders, and collaborate on initiatives beneficial to the NALC, provided these decisions do not alter or impact the agreed-upon NALC Constitution.

For constitutional amendments, a 2/3 majority of Mission Convocation attendees must adopt the changes, followed by ratification by a 2/3 majority of NALC congregations. This process grants congregations the ultimate decision-making authority in significant changes.

What is the process for congregations to affect change in Church-wide policies or positions? What determines the weight or influence of individual congregations in the process?

Congregations and Mission Districts can submit requests to the Executive Council for consideration and present proposals at the biennial Mission Convocations. Each pastor serves as a voting delegate at the Convocations, with congregations allotted a specific number of voting lay delegates based on congregation size.

3.3. Financial Expectations

A Church and a congregation are both non-profit businesses that require a certain level of financial resources to be sustainable and to grow. In this section, we explore the financial support expectations that your Church puts on its congregations, and the stewardship of your Church with those contributions.

What amount of financial support does your Church expect from its congregations? Are these expectations suggested or mandatory?

The NALC does not mandate a specific giving amount from its congregations. Giving is voluntary, however, stewardship is considered a core aspect of being a disciple of Jesus Christ, and the NALC's Living and Giving Stewardship Task Force provides annual resources to help pastors engage their congregations in biblical stewardship. During Convocation, our treasurer informs congregations of the percentage of their giving that would fulfill the NALC's budget.

Relative to inflation, in the past 10 years, has the total financial support your Church has received from your congregations increased or decreased? How have Church-wide programming and operations changed as a result?

Over the past ten years, adjusted for inflation, the total financial support the NALC has received from its congregations has increased. As a result, denominational programming and operations have expanded and evolved to accommodate this growth. It is essential to note that our giving has increased due to the growth in the NALC, which now encompasses nearly 500 congregations. Consequently, the NALC, has embarked on its 2020 Vision initiative, which includes a financial appeal to accomplish our goals over the next five years.

How is your Church accountable to its congregations for the ways in which money is spent?

The NALC remains accountable to its congregations for the ways in which money is spent by providing regular financial reports and budgetary information. At each Convocation, NALC congregations must vote on the budget. Our treasurer is available for pre-Convocation forums to discuss the financial report and proposed budget. To ensure full transparency, we also offer [annual audit findings and other financial reports, including staff compensation information](#).

Do you allow congregations to designate how their contributions to your Church are to be used, or are they all considered unrestricted?

Along with the General Operating Fund, the NALC permits congregations to designate how their contributions are to be used, allowing for both restricted and unrestricted funds. This flexibility enables congregations to allocate their financial support according to their priorities and preferences. Funds include the Great Commission Fund, the Theological Education Fund, the

Disaster Response Fund, the John Bradosky Fund for Life-to-Life Discipleship, the Women of the NALC Fund, and the forthcoming NALC Foundation primarily intended for planned legacy gifts.

What significant long term (5-10 year) goals does your Church have? What is your progress on achieving them?

In terms of significant long-term goals (5-10 years), the NALC's [2020 Vision initiative](#) outlines various objectives, including expanding theological education, fostering global and local mission partnerships, and enhancing discipleship development. Progress on achieving these goals is continuously assessed and communicated to the congregations to ensure ongoing collaboration and shared commitment to the NALC's mission. In January, we reached the \$1,000,000 milestone for the initiative.

3.4. Liturgical

Attached is a copy of "Article III – Liturgy" from Nazareth's By-Laws, where we state we will be guided by the ELCA in our liturgies, rituals, worship and teachings. In this section, we explore how this is similar and different to your Church, including which requirements are mandatory and which can be relaxed, particularly at "contemporary" worship services.

What is the source (or sources) of liturgies, rituals, and music that your Church uses for worship services?

The NALC is firmly grounded in the Lutheran tradition, drawing from a diverse range of liturgical pieties prevalent in North America, such as those of Evangelical Catholics, Confessionalists, Pietists, and others. While there is a large amount of diversity from congregation to congregation, the *Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW)*, *LBW Occasional Services*, and *With One Voice (WOV)* continue to be the primary liturgical resources for English-speaking congregations in North America. These resources have been designed to unify congregations across the Lutheran liturgical and ethnic spectrum. Additionally, many congregations utilize the *ReClaim Hymnal* from Sola Publishing. Although numerous congregations have adopted the *Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW)* hymnal, published in 2006, the NALC urges caution when using the *ELW* due to potential theological differences. A comprehensive analysis of these sources and their potential issues can be found in [an article by Philip Pfatteicher](#).

Music within NALC congregations is sourced from the aforementioned resources; however, as the *LBW* was published in 1978, nearly 50 years of music and hymnody exist post-publication. With no definitive Lutheran resource available, identifying new musical resources faithful to Lutheran theology can be challenging for lay musicians and service planners. The NALC aims to offer increased theological training for lay leaders in congregations to select quality, accessible music that avoids the pitfalls of problematic cultural values that have infiltrated the Church in a post-modern, individualistic, North American society.

Time in prayer and scripture are central to the NALC's understanding of discipleship. The NALC offers a calendar for prayer and scripture reading, [Devoted to Prayer](#), which provides an adaptable structure for daily prayer and scripture reading within the Lutheran tradition, following the rhythms of the liturgical calendar and including a list of "saints" as exemplary models of faith.

In line with the NALC's "Traditionally Grounded" core value, congregations are encouraged to utilize liturgical, ritual, and musical resources faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

Which liturgies and rituals are suggested, and which are required? For those required, what frequency are they required?

While the NALC does not prescribe specific liturgies or rituals, it offers guidelines and resources for congregations. The foundational importance of worship in Christian communities can be articulated as: "devoted to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42).

Regarding Holy Communion, the NALC upholds the Lutheran understanding of the Sacrament, as detailed in the [pastoral guidance](#) by Bishop Emeritus John Bradosky on admission to the Lord's Supper. Although not binding for NALC congregations, this pastoral letter provides helpful guidelines for the proper administration and reception of the Lord's Supper and its relationship to Baptism from a Lutheran and broader Church tradition perspective. The NALC generally supports the regular celebration of Holy Communion, although its frequency may vary among congregations.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, NALC congregations grappled with the concept of "virtual communion." Two pastoral letters from Bishop Dan Selbo ([here](#) and [here](#)), accompanied by essays from the NALC Commission on Theology & Doctrine, urged congregations to approach virtual communion with caution and discernment, emphasizing the importance of the Sacrament's physical nature and the need for a gathered community.

How does your Church view and address the difference between a "traditional" and "contemporary" worship service? Are there any differences in liturgical or ritual requirements?

The NALC acknowledges the diversity in worship styles across congregations and supports contextualized worship services, as long as they are faithful to the Scriptures, creeds, and Lutheran Confessions. The NALC values the liturgical heritage of the Lutheran church while recognizing the need for accessible and meaningful worship for all generations. Martin Luther reformed worship services to make them accessible to a German-speaking population, adhering to the Scriptures through his *Deutsche Messe*. However, the *Augsburg Confession* (Article 24) clearly states, "Falsely are our churches accused of abolishing the Mass; for the Mass is retained among us, and celebrated with the highest reverence." As long as worship services are grounded in the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions, there is room for flexibility in terms of music, language, and format. It is essential to recognize that the labels "traditional" and "contemporary" are somewhat ambiguous, and both types of services should strive to be liturgical in the sense that they are celebrated with intentionality, the participation of the community, rootedness in the Church's history, and reverence for God's glory, mission, and work.

Fascinatingly, a multitude of younger individuals, encompassing both church and unchurched populations, have discovered the beauty and mystery of the Church's worship practices spanning the past two millennia as a captivating and persuasive invitation into the Christian faith. The NALC is recognizing that accentuating the fundamental rhythms of the church year and the Lutheran liturgy has emerged as an effective missional strategy for engaging the bustling, consumer-driven generations who were not nurtured in the faith and remain unfamiliar with the Gospel of Jesus

Christ. Ultimately, any differences in liturgical or ritual requirements between traditional and contemporary worship services would be primarily determined by the individual congregation's context and needs.

4. Affiliation Transition Process

Whenever a congregation (existing or new) considers affiliating with a Church, it is likely that the Church has more experience with the steps and processes in discernment and transition than the congregation. In this section, we explore the resources provided by the Church to aid congregations (and the Church) in discernment and transition to an affiliation relationship with the Church.

Do you have a written process for how a congregation goes about affiliating with your Church? If so, please provide a copy.

Indeed, we have created a discernment document for congregations to utilize, along with supplementary materials to ensure strict adherence to the ELCA's constitution.

If your Church does not have a written process, would you briefly share the process of how a congregation and your Church come to the mutual decision they are a good match? How long does it usually take?

The process generally spans a period of 3 to 6 months. We introduce the NALC's principles and objectives to prospective congregations and allow them to determine if the affiliation is an appropriate fit. We hope that congregations choose to join the NALC based on our Core Values and operational approach. It is not uncommon for congregations to simultaneously join both the NALC and a network called Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) to increase their pool of potential pastoral candidates. However, the distinct differences in polity between the two organizations may occasionally lead to minor conflicts. For instance, when a dually-affiliated congregation faces issues concerning the pastor or congregation, it may be unclear which organization should intervene. We collaborate with the LCMC to address such matters, but a clear resolution is not always guaranteed.

Is there a dedicated person that deals with the affiliation of new congregations in your church office?

Pastor Amy Little, the NALC General Secretary, primarily oversees this process. Additionally, our Mission District Deans and Area Assistants to the Bishop contribute by delivering presentations and conducting on-site visits to congregations.

What tools and resources do you provide to help a congregation with the affiliation decision making and the affiliation process?

We provide phone calls, Zoom meetings, and documentation, which will be forwarded to Sue and John.

Are there congregations of similar size we could talk to that made the decision to affiliate with your Church in the last three years? And more than three years ago?

In the previous year, Bethany Lutheran Church in La Porte, IN joined the NALC, along with their pastor, Dennis Meyer, who became a clergy member. This congregation is slightly larger than many of our parishes. Cary Garwood, the secretary, played a crucial role in the transition. Her email address is garwood13@hotmail.com.

How are congregations welcomed and integrated into the network of the other congregations of the Church?

Welcoming and integration occurs primarily through the Mission Districts, with local connections in Iowa being particularly robust.

5. [Additional Comments or Questions](#)

Please feel free to add any additional comments that you feel we should consider about your Church or our discernment process.

We are immensely delighted by the diligent efforts and exceptional discernment exhibited by you and your congregation throughout this decision-making process. It is evident that you have approached this matter with the utmost seriousness, and we highly commend the caliber of your research and prayerful contemplation. Regardless of your ultimate choice to join the NALC or otherwise, please be assured that our prayers accompany you as you continue to navigate your journey of faithfulness to our Lord.

We remain available to provide support in any capacity required, acknowledging the complexity of this undertaking. Please do not hesitate to contact us for assistance at any time.

Are there any specific questions you would like us to answer for you?

Would it be beneficial to arrange a meeting with the Dean of the Iowa Mission District or an Area Assistant to the Bishop to facilitate connections with other congregations that have experienced a similar journey? How can we extend support and care during a process that has likely been laden with stress and emotional turmoil?