

Q & A – Answers from your Church Council

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

Please send additional questions to council@naz.org

Question: Who is part of the Church Affiliation Task Force?

Answer (2/26/2023): Task force members include: Bill Formwalt (co-chair), John Lehman (co-chair), Joyce Barbatti, Lloyd Dove, Jim Glaspie, Randy Husted, Mallory Jensen, Sue O'Brien, Ali Parrish, Sue Roberts, Pete Vorhees, and Dave Welter. Interim Pastor Mike Brost attended the first meeting and will attend others. Julie Creeden attended the beginning of the meeting to explain the Council's request. Maureen Hanson attended the meeting to share about the process and take notes.

Question: I heard the ELCA affiliation vote is being postponed. Why?

Answer (2/26/2023): The Church Affiliation Task Force held their first meeting on Feb 16. One of the things they did at that meeting was create a timeline for their work. They determined that they will need until at least the end of April to finish. The ELCA affiliation vote will not occur until after their work is complete and congregation members have a chance to learn about their process and results. A new date for the ELCA affiliation vote will be determined at a later time.

Question: How will it be determined who is an eligible voting member if we hold a vote to disaffiliate?

Answer (2/12/2023): Voting eligibility is the same for all congregational votes. Nazareth uses a computer system called Shepherd Staff for our membership and finances. The current roster of eligible voters contains those who are listed as current members in the Shepherd Staff database, are confirmed (or welcomed to Nazareth through our Adult Confirmation aka BELONG class) and baptized. Prior to congregational meetings when there will be a vote, the Membership Secretary creates a Voting Member List, compiled of all Members meeting the voting criteria. The list changes when members inform the Membership Secretary of a status change. If it comes to the attention of the Membership Secretary that someone is inactive, they are contacted by letter to let them know that their membership will be moved to inactive. If the person doesn't respond within 30 days, they are moved to an inactive status.

Question: Does the vote on leaving/staying in the ELCA require a majority vote of all Naz members or just a majority of the members who vote?

Answer (2/12/2023): Per the Nazareth bylaws, Article IV, Section 6: *Severance of membership in The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America requires a two-thirds majority vote of all voting members present at a legally called meeting. Such a decision shall not be effective until at least*

ninety days after the Synod Bishop has been notified and until the initial action has been ratified by a two-thirds majority vote at a subsequent legally called meeting.

Question: It was stated that decisions are passed down by the ELCA and that we have no “say.” Yet don’t we send delegates to the church wide assembly? Are you simply stating that the number of delegates in support of the social positions of the ELCA outweigh those delegates who are like-minded with Nazareth?

Answer (2/12/2023): Delegates are voted on at the Synod Assembly. The Northeast Iowa Synod may send 15 voting members to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, which occurs every three years. The number of delegates is based on the number of congregation members and the number of congregations in each synod. There are 147 congregations in the Northeast Iowa Synod, so it is not likely that there will be a delegate from Nazareth to each Churchwide Assembly. The delegates that are elected may or may not be like-minded with Nazareth.

Question: Has the ELCA responded to the letter we sent in 2011?

Answer (2/12/2023): We did not receive a reply to the “Speaking the Truth in Love” document sent in 2011.

Question: Has the ELCA responded to the letter of Dissent and Concern the Church Council sent in 2022?

Answer (2/12/2023 – revised 2/19/2023): The Northeast Iowa Synod Bishop (Kevin Jones) and the Rev. Steve Brackett came to the December Church Council meeting to discuss the Letter of Dissent and Concern. They did not believe they could speak for the ELCA Presiding Bishop, but they told us she was drafting a response. They were not aware of any disciplinary or other action taken by any of the churchwide bodies (assembly, council, Council of Bishops) regarding the Presiding Bishop’s comments about hell. In response to the letter of dissent’s comments about the four bound consciences being studied, Bishop Jones read aloud the four bound conscience positions listed in the Human Sexuality statement and commented that congregations holding “bound conscience position number one” are feeling unheard and left out. He believes the ELCA is heading more and more toward “bound conscience position number four”. Nazareth’s by-laws make it clear that we agree with “bound conscience position number one”. To read more about the four positions of bound conscience listed in the Human Sexuality statement, go to this link: [ELCA Human Sexuality Statement](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySS.pdf?_ga=2.195752683.651188182.1675802155-1985794746.1628708834) and read pages 19-21. (If the hyperlink doesn’t work, here is the entire link – you will have to copy and paste it into your browser window: https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySS.pdf?_ga=2.195752683.651188182.1675802155-1985794746.1628708834)

The Council recently received a letter from Presiding Bishop Eaton. Both the Bishop’s letter and the Council’s response are posted on the naz.org website.

Question: I believe that pointing out a problem without proposing a solution can actually make a problem worse. While I am not opposed to bringing an ELCA affiliation vote to the congregation, I am concerned that doing so without at the same time recommending an

alternative could increase division rather than begin the healing process. Is Council exploring specific alternatives to an ELCA affiliation with an objective of presenting that alternative to the congregation at the same time as a potential ELCA affiliation vote?

Answer (2/12/2023): The Council has heard this request. We identified a task force that will look into the options that would be available to Nazareth if we should vote to disaffiliate with the ELCA. We will be sure the task force knows that the decision to disaffiliate is not a foregone conclusion. The task force is working toward a March 30 deadline.

Question: Will the congregation vote on our ELCA affiliation, and if so, when?

Answer (2/12/2023): Once the task force looking into affiliation options is complete (goal: March 30), the council will review the task force's work and make a recommendation to the congregation regarding disaffiliation, including which church body we would recommend affiliating with if we would leave the ELCA. The targeted deadline for the first vote on ELCA affiliation is April 16, 2023.

Question: If we decide to leave the ELCA it was mentioned staff could still use ECLA healthcare and retirement programs which we are currently are using. If we do leave would the costs remain the same even though we are no longer considered members?

Answer (2/12/2023): The affiliation task force will include staff insurance in its research. Our current understanding is that we could continue with Portico as long as we affiliate with a Lutheran Church Body that allows the use of Portico. We can also look at other providers, and we would do so. The council is committed to continuing to offer a benefits package similar to the current benefits package.

Question: ELCA issues have not changed in 20 years. What has been the negative impact on Nazareth? How have we been able to maintain a strong congregation?

Answer (2/12/2023 – revised 2/19/2023): Every three years, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly meets, and additional issues come up. ELCA issues have taken time away from our ministries to address ELCA concerns. Each time this has happened, our congregation has been divided. People have left the congregation because of those issues. We have had to rebuild after each of those times. If the ELCA continues to head toward “bound conscience position number four” and continues to address other divisive social topics, we will have more issues to deal with in the future. It will take up more time, divide the congregation repeatedly, and cause more members to leave Nazareth.

Question: How has the hierarchy of the ELCA affected the ministry at Nazareth? Provide examples

Answer (2/12/2023): As mentioned in the answer above, the Churchwide Assembly continues to pass resolutions with which many Nazareth members disagree. These topics take time away from our ministry in order to discuss those resolutions and work toward agreement on how to handle those issues. In addition, the current ELCA Constitution requires a congregation that amends any

of its governing documents to adopt all required sections of the ELCA “Model Constitution for Congregations” without alteration or amendment of the text in any manner (*i.e.*, neither additions nor deletions are permissible). This requirement is based on provision 9.52. in the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, which requires that when a congregation of this church “wishes to amend any provision of its governing documents, the governing documents of that congregation shall be so amended to conform to 9.25.b.” in the ELCA constitution. Provisions in the *Model Constitution for Congregations* identified by [*] are those required under ELCA constitutional provision 9.25.b.

Question: How will we be able to get a pastor when we are in such chaos?

Answer (2/12/2023): We are in the process of hiring an Interim Pastor. There are pastors whose ministry gift is to work with congregations in turmoil. We have no doubt we will be able to hire an Interim Pastor and later, call a Senior Pastor.

Question: With the vacancies of both senior and associate pastors, who is providing leadership to and for the Church right now? This would include the staff, the Council, and, more broadly, leadership for the congregation?

Answer (2/12/2023): Leadership is being provided by the Church Council and the staff. When an Interim Pastor is hired, he will provide leadership.

Question: Reading past council minutes, the letter of Dissent and Concern was initiated by action of the ELCA 2022 Churchwide assembly. Please give me the specific actions taken at that the 2022 Assembly that led the Council to these actions.

Answer (2/12/2023): The specific actions were detailed in the Letter of Concern and Dissent. Here is part of that letter: An official summary of the 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly reported that the Assembly authorized revisions to the social statement “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust (2009),” and also approved exploration of reconsideration of the four stated positions of “bound conscience.” (See Assembly Actions CA22.01.07 and CA22.03.23) A more detailed report shared that the Assembly had earlier voted overwhelmingly, without discussion, and with no concerns expressed “to authorize a social statement reconsideration to revise Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust (2009) so that its wording reflects current church understanding, church policy, civil law, and the acceptance of marriage of same-gender and gender non-conforming couples.” (Assembly Action CA22.01.07)

The letter goes on to explain that both historic and prevailing contemporary Christian scriptural norms define marriage as being between one man and one woman, and that the idea of “bound conscience” in the Human Sexuality Statement is either a corruption of Luther’s original words shared at the Diet of Worms in 1521, or an intentional attempt to misrepresent his words and the context in which they were shared.

For more information, see:

<https://elca.org/News-and-Events/8166> (CA22.01.07)

<https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/8169> (CA22.03.23)

For a more complete look at the memorials (or resolutions) from the 2022 Churchwide Assembly, go to this link: <https://www.elca.org/Resources/Churchwide-Assembly> For the Human Sexuality memorial info, see “Section VII: Report of the Memorials Committee” – pages 75-76. In addition to seeing the Human Sexuality memorial, this document lists all of the memorials recommended by the Memorial Committee. You will be able to see most of the topics discussed at the Churchwide Assembly. To see the number of votes for each memorial, see this link: https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/CWA_2022_Legislative_Updates.pdf

Question: Please describe what has been done to try to reform the ELCA from within.

Answer (2/12/2023): Nazareth joined Word Alone Network and Called to Faithfulness, groups within the ELCA that were trying to reform the ELCA from within. Nazareth sent delegates to the Churchwide Assembly in 2003, 2006, and 2009. The memorials our delegates supported were not adopted by the Assembly. In 2009, Nazareth sent a letter to the ELCA sharing our concerns, and in 2011, Nazareth sent the “Speaking the Truth in Love” document to the ELCA. Last fall, the Church Council sent a Letter of Concern and Dissent to the ELCA. None of these measures has had an effect on ELCA actions or decisions.

Question: How does disaffiliation affect our 501(c)(3) status?

Answer (2/12/2023): If we affiliate with another church body, we will retain our 501(c)(3) status. We can also retain that status if we become independent, but it will require more work.

Question: What steps are being taken to address staff concerns about job security and leadership?

Answer (2/12/2023): Church Council members have been meeting with the staff on a regular basis to discuss concerns. The 2023 budget (which was adopted by the congregation on January 29 at the annual meeting) includes funding for all of our current staff, plus some new hires. The budget also includes a 4% raise for all staff members.

Question: Are we going to vote on ELCA affiliation at the Annual Meeting?

Answer (1/29/2023): No. We have not scheduled a vote. In order to follow the Synod bylaws, we must notify the Bishop 30 days prior to our vote. We have not yet contacted the Bishop and have not set a date when we will do so.

Question: Will we schedule a time when Northeast Iowa Synod Bishop Kevin Jones will come to Nazareth to speak about our ELCA affiliation?

Answer (1/29/2023): Bishop Kevin Jones is out of the office until February 8. We have asked him to get back to us when he returns so we can agree on a date when he can come and speak at a meeting at Nazareth. In the meantime, Bishop Jones sent us a document titled “Why be part of the ELCA?” The document is available on the Church Council Updates Page on our website. Use the following URL to check it out: naz.org/church-council-minutes

Question: What is the status of an interim pastor?

Answer (1/29/2023): Church Council members met informally with a potential interim pastor on Saturday, Jan 21. Bishop Kevin Jones provided us with this person’s name. The candidate is not an ELCA pastor, but is a pastor in a church with which the ELCA is in full communion. The Council has scheduled a formal interview on Feb 9. Following that interview, the Council will prayerfully discern whether or not to offer a contract to this candidate.

Question: When will I see the Q&A from the forums?

Answer (1/29/2023): The Council is working to provide answers to all of the questions that were asked at and after the forums. We are also working on a timeline. We will post these documents on the naz.org website.

Question: Please tell me about the upcoming ELCA Q&A/Comment Open Forums.

Answer (1/22/2023): There are currently two open forum Q&A/Comment forums scheduled. The first is on Thursday, January 19, from 6:30 – 8:30 pm, and the second is on Sunday, January 22, from 3:00 – 5:00. The open forum Q&A/Comment forums will allow congregation members time to ask questions and share comments/concerns. All forums will be held in the Worship Center. Childcare will be available. If more time is required in order to allow all congregation members to have an opportunity to speak, the council will schedule up to two additional forums.

In order to allow as many people to speak as possible, guidelines and other information for the forums include:

- Ron Martin has graciously agreed to be the moderator for the forums.
- The forums will focus only on Nazareth’s ELCA affiliation. Everyone is welcome to attend; however, since it is probable that congregation members will be voting about our affiliation in the future, the intent is that speakers will be current congregation members.
- If you have questions about something other than our ELCA affiliation, please send your questions to council@naz.org and we will answer them in a future *Naz News*.
- Each person will be asked to introduce him/herself, and will then have up to four minutes to ask a question or make a comment. Please be sure you are able to complete your question or comment within the four allotted minutes.

- Council responses to questions will be limited to two minutes. If there are questions that council members are unable to answer at the forum, we will research the answers and provide them in the *Naz News*.
- The Council will listen to all comments, but will not respond in order to maximize time to everyone wishing to speak.
- If there is additional time after everyone who wants to speak has spoken, people will have an opportunity to speak a second time.
- We will end each meeting on time. Please be prepared to come to another meeting if you are unable to ask your question or make your comment at the first forum.

Question (1/22/2023): Will we hear from the Northeast Iowa Synod regarding our ELCA affiliation?

Answer: Bishop Kevin Jones sent us a document titled “Why be part of the ELCA?” The document is available on the Church Council Updates Page on our website. Use the following URL to check it out: naz.org/church-council-minutes

Question: I can't make it to either of the ELCA Information Sessions. How can I view the information that was shared?

Answer (1/15/2023): The presentation will be available on our naz.org website after the second session on Sunday, January 15. The presentation includes all of the speaker notes (this is what each speaker said) as well as links to all of the sources used for the information that was shared.

Question: Why has our local mission committee cut our Iowa Bible camps, Boys and Girls Club and all ELCA Iowa synod ministries from its budget? (I understand the funds have been transferred to world missions.)

Answer (1/15/2023) (provided by chair of the Local Missions Committee): Psalm 139:13-14 says, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." All adults have the right to choose the lifestyle they live. However, to teach/promote/encourage children to explore alternative lifestyles at a young, impressionable age goes against what God has "wonderfully made." All three of these organizations in one way or another teach/encourage and promote alternative lifestyles. The Committee feels that to help fund any organization that does so is not the best way to use God's resources and the funds that the congregation entrusts to us.

More importantly, Jesus says in Mark 9:42, “And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.” Children have a God-given right to live an innocent childhood without adults teaching them that they are anything but "wonderfully made" by God. Christian organizations should have nothing to do with this (Boys & Girls Club excluded). If they choose to do so, we should not support them financially. Of course, each individual has a right to donate their time, talents & resources as they so choose. The responsibility of the Local Missions Committee is to use Nazareth's resources to God's Glory to the best of our ability. The majority of the committee felt we did that in making these decisions.

Question: When will we start talking about the ELCA?

Answer (1/8/2023): The first of two informational meetings for the congregation regarding our ELCA affiliation will be held Sunday, January 8, from 3:00–5:00 pm. The second meeting will be held Sunday, January 15, from 3:00–5:00 pm. The first two meetings will be informational presentations only and will be identical in content, and congregation members need only attend one of the two meetings. Topics will include a history of Nazareth’s affiliation with the ELCA, an ELCA review that Pastor Brian King shared with the council in 2022, and concerns with the ELCA that have prompted discussions to disaffiliate. The informational presentations will be followed by open forum Q&A/Comment sessions on Thursday, January 19, from 6:30 – 8:30 pm, and Sunday, January 22, from 3:00 – 5:00. The open forum Q&A/Comment sessions will allow congregation members time to ask questions and share concerns. All sessions will be held in the Worship Center. We hope to have childcare available at all sessions.

Question: Does leaving the ELCA require a 2/3 vote of congregation membership or just those who attend the meeting?

Answer (1/8/2023): According to our current bylaws, leaving the ELCA requires a 2/3 vote of those attending two separate meetings held ninety days apart: *Severance of membership in The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America requires a two-thirds majority vote of all voting members present at a legally called meeting. Such a decision shall not be effective until at least ninety days after the Synod Bishop has been notified and until the initial action has been ratified by a two-thirds majority vote at a subsequent legally called meeting.*

There must be a quorum at each meeting, although different people may attend the two meetings. The current bylaws state: *A quorum for the conducting of business at annual and special congregational meetings shall consist of 10% of the average weekly worship attendance using the previous year’s attendance average.*

The Church Council is proposing some bylaws amendments that will be voted on at the Annual Meeting on January 29. One of those proposals is to change the “ninety days” requirement to “thirty days.” The time between the two meetings can be a time of uncertainty and turmoil, and the council would like to minimize the time between the meetings.

Question: Where do we stand with the Bylaws?

Answer (12/18/2022): Since the proposed Bylaws revisions did not receive a 2/3 majority at the December 11, 2022 meeting, they did not pass. This means we are still operating under the same Bylaws we have had since 2014.

Question: How many Church Council positions will be voted on at the Annual Meeting in January?

Answer (12/18/2022): There will be five positions to fill at the Annual Meeting in January. Every year, three people rotate off of the council and three new people are elected. In addition, two Council members are currently serving by appointment of the Council. According to the

current Bylaws, each appointee serves until the next Annual Meeting. Those two positions will also need to be voted upon at the Annual Meeting.

Question: Where do we go from here?

Answer (12/18/2022): The Council recognizes that healing is needed. The first ELCA Information Session will be held on January 8, 2023 at 3:00 pm. This will be an opportunity for all of us to come together and have a conversation about the ELCA, and we pray that we can use this meeting to begin the healing process. The December Council meeting will be held on December 20, 2022, and council members will identify additional next steps at that meeting.

Question: Does changing the Bylaws require a 2/3 vote of congregation membership or just those who attend the meeting?

Answer (12/11/2022): According to our current bylaws, changing the bylaws requires a 2/3 vote of those who attend the meeting. There must be a quorum at the meeting. The current bylaws state: *A quorum for the conducting of business at annual and special congregational meetings shall consist of 10% of the average weekly worship attendance using the previous year's attendance average.*

Question: How many people are required for a quorum?

Answer (12/11/2022): For the bylaws meeting on December 11, a quorum is 52 people. Fifty-two is 10% of the average weekly worship attendance in 2021. The number of people required for a quorum at the Annual Meeting in January will be different, as it will be based on the average weekly worship attendance in 2022.

Question: If I cannot attend a congregational meeting, how can I vote?

Answer (12/11/2022): According to our current bylaws, you must be present to vote. The bylaws state: *No proxies are authorized, nor shall any proxies be recognized at any meeting. Neither shall any absentee ballots be accepted.*

Question: What if I don't agree with the current and/or proposed bylaws?

Answer (12/11/2022): Members can propose amendments to the bylaws at the Dec 11 congregational meeting. The current bylaws remain in effect until any revised bylaws are adopted. Any changes adopted at the Dec 11 meeting will not go into effect until after that meeting. Please see Q&A below to understand more about proposing an amendment and the associated voting process.

Question: How do I propose an amendment to the Bylaws?

Answer (12/11/2022): Congregation members may propose amendments to the current or the recommended bylaws at the Dec 11 congregational meeting. If at all possible, bring your proposed amendment in writing. Please refer to the appropriate Bylaws Article (Roman

numeral), and subheadings (letters and/or numbers). You will also share your amendment verbally at the meeting. Each amendment requires a second. There will be an opportunity for discussion prior to voting on the amendment. Please try to identify any other Articles in the Bylaws that will also need to be amended in order to maintain consistency with your proposed amendment.

Question: What is the process for voting on the Bylaws?

Answer (12/11/2022): Proposed amendments from the floor will be voted upon individually. Amendments require a majority to pass. After all proposed amendments have been voted upon, those at the meeting will vote on the Bylaws – as amended – in their entirety. A 2/3 majority is required for passage of the Bylaws.

Question: Why is a 2/3 majority required for passage of the Bylaws?

Answer (12/11/2022): The Bylaws are the governing document of our church. The 2/3 majority (e.g. a super majority) requirement ensures that the bylaws will not be changed if the church is almost equally divided on proposed changes.

Question: Why are we voting on the Bylaws before we vote on the ELCA?

Answer (12/11/2022): There are proposed changes that will impact the work of the Nominating Committee, and they need to complete their work prior to the Annual Meeting. There are other proposed changes that will impact the process for leaving the ELCA, if we decide we would like to leave.

Question: Are we not having Advent soup suppers because of our transition between pastors?

Answer (12/11/2022): That is correct. We are not having Advent soup suppers because we are not holding Advent services this year. And we are not holding services because we don't have a pastor.

Question: How was the By-Laws Task Force selected?

Answer (12/03/2022): The By-Laws Task Force was appointed by the Church Council at the May 2022 meeting.

Question: What is the main concern with the ELCA?

Answer (12/03/2022): The main concern is that the ELCA has shared words and actions that indicate it no longer views the Bible as the source of truth. This will be discussed in much more detail in upcoming congregational forums. Both sides of the issue will be presented at these forums. (see question below)

Question: When will the congregation have an opportunity to start talking about our affiliation with the ELCA?

Answer (12/03/2022): The Council voted to schedule the first congregational forum on the ELCA at 3:00 pm on Jan 8, 2023.

Question: What is the Letter of Concern and Dissent and where can I read a copy?

Answer (12/03/2022): The Letter of Concern and Dissent was sent to Bishop Eaton and the NE Iowa Synod from the Church Council on November 18. Pastor Brian was the main author of the letter. The intent of the letter is to point out issues of concern and to ask the ELCA to repent and return to the original ELCA Confession of Faith which states: “We accept 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.” (ELCA Constitution 2.03) The letter focuses on two issues that bring into question whether “it remains true that ‘the Gospel is rightly taught’ among the leadership of the ELCA as represented by our Presiding Bishop and as legislated by the recent ELCA Churchwide Assembly.” You can find the letter in the “Church Council Updates” link on the naz.org website. Here is a direct link: [Letter of Concern and Dissent](#).

Question: Which council members resigned?

Answer (12/03/2022): Juanita Kimpston resigned in September, and Troy Olson resigned in November. The Council appointed Julie Creeden and Chris Hansen to fill those openings, respectively.

Question (repeated below, but this answer contains more information): How can I make a pledge without knowing what is going to happen to Nazareth in the future?

Answer (12/03/2022): One thing some people on both sides of the ELCA issue seem to agree is that it is OK not to pledge and/or support Nazareth Church until the ELCA issue is resolved. This will cause some very difficult budget decisions, and most of the people that will be impacted are not involved in the ELCA discussions. Those impacted could include: Nazareth-supported missionaries, Nazareth-supported local mission organizations, children and students who come to Nazareth for the children’s and student’s programming, and Nazareth staff members who depend on congregation members’ giving for their livelihood. Please read Mark 12:41-44; Jesus draws attention to the poor widow for her sacrificial giving to God, even though Jesus disagreed with many things the chief priests, teachers of the law, and elders were saying and doing. Please prayerfully consider making your pledge, and continuing to support Nazareth. In spite of our disagreement on one issue, Nazareth is doing Kingdom work and making a difference in people’s lives! We pray that no matter what happens, we can remain united as a church. Jesus prayed for his church to be one (John 17, especially verses 20-26). Our prayer is that, after we have all learned about the ELCA, we will be of one mind in whichever decision we make. We ask you to make your pledge joyfully and worshipfully, with unity and a desire to please Jesus in mind.

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

Answer (11/20/2022): No. At the November 8th Council meeting, a motion was made to recommend Nazareth leave the ELCA pending approval from the congregation. The motion failed, which means that at the current time, the Council does not support recommending that Nazareth leave the ELCA. However, since a large number of congregation members have requested that we look into our affiliation with the ELCA, the Council is working toward holding education sessions that will focus on studying the Bible, understanding how Nazareth benefits from its affiliation with the ELCA, understanding ELCA positions on biblical issues, and learning about other Lutheran organizations that exist that might be potential options should Nazareth choose to look for another organization. Bryce Formwalt (who grew up at Nazareth, was an ELCA pastor for several years, and is now the Director of Mission Growth for the LCMC Texas District) was visiting from Texas last week and offered to teach Council members about Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC). This was strictly an information session, and several members of the Council attended.

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

Question: Who approves the budget?

Answer (11/20/2022): The congregation approves the budget at the annual meeting in January. A proposed budget will be shared prior to the meeting. Congregation members will have the opportunity to propose amendments to the budget. Amendments will be voted on prior to voting to approve the entire budget.

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

Answer (11/20/2022): Everyone will receive information about the recommended changes in the mail shortly after Thanksgiving. Our by-laws require mailing written notice at least 10 days in advance of a proposed congregational meeting. Nazareth staff members are working to get the mailing out more than 10 days in advance so members have time to study the recommended changes prior to the education sessions and the congregational meeting. Your packet will include a letter containing the notice of a congregational meeting and information about the education sessions, a document that summarizes the recommendations, and a copy of the complete by-laws document that clearly shows every recommended change. Only the congregation can change the by-laws, and a 2/3 vote is required. Prior to voting on changes, congregation members can

propose amendments to change one or more recommendations. The congregation would vote on any amendments prior to voting on the by-laws.

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

Answer (11/20/2022): No. The by-laws were initially approved on Jan 26, 1993. Since then, they have been revised nine times (Jan 1999, Jan 2001, May 2001, Jan 2003, Jan 2004, Jan 2005, Jan 2011, Sep 2011, and Apr 2014). By-laws are revised regularly for many different reasons, and there were several reasons to recommend changes now. In addition to many other change recommendations, you will notice that there are several places in the by-laws where the recommendation is to change “ELCA” to “the church body with which we are affiliated.” This change would make the by-laws generic enough to allow Nazareth to continue to affiliate with the ELCA or to affiliate with another church body without having to revise the by-laws again. Although individual members of the task force may hold views on whether or not to remain in the ELCA, the recommended changes to the By-Laws are not based on any person’s views and are not intended to influence congregation members in one direction or another. The recommended changes were arrived at by consensus. Pastor Brian was a member of the Task Force, and the Task Force completed its work prior to Pastor Brian leaving Nazareth.

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

Answer (11/20/2022): If we were to leave the ELCA, there are many possible Lutheran organizations Nazareth could affiliate with. Some of them include: American Association of Lutheran Churches, Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ, and North American Lutheran Church. There are others. Nazareth could also become an independent church that is not affiliated with any church body. If we were to leave the ELCA, we would have to learn about the different options as a congregation and determine which one best aligns with our beliefs and needs. There currently is no provision in the by-laws for affiliating with another church body; however, there is a proposed change that would provide for affiliating with another church body if 2/3 of the congregation voted to do so.

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

Answer (11/13/2022): Please take all pastoral concerns to Andy Walser. Until we have an interim pastor, Andy is the first contact for pastoral concerns.

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

Answer (11/13/2022): Pastor Brian recommended that the council establish a task force to review the by-laws and recommend changes, and Pastor Brian was part of the task force.

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

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

Answer (11/13/2022): Our current by-laws state that we need to consult the Bishop. The appropriate section from the by-laws is below:

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

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

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

Answer (11/13/2022): The congregation decides. Our current by-laws state:

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

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

Answer (11/13/2022): The Council is working toward holding educational forums. We hope to hold these in December and/or January. We will hold educational forums on the by-laws prior to the forums on the ELCA as some of the by-laws recommendations will impact the vote on ELCA affiliation.

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

Answer (11/13/2022): The Council believes it is everyone's best interests to learn about the ELCA first (both ELCA benefits and reasons to leave), then to make opportunities available for people to share their thoughts. Current plans are to schedule forums that will take place after the education sessions are complete. You are always welcome to send your comments to council@naz.org, and/or to talk with individual council members.

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

Answer (11/13/2022): The Council is working toward being able to hold a congregational vote in early 2023.

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

Answer (11/13/2022): We are not aware of any other ELCA churches in the CF area considering leaving the ELCA.

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

Answer (11/13/2022): We pray that no matter what happens, we can remain unified as a church. Jesus prayed for his church to be one (John 17, especially verses 20-26). Our prayer is that, after we have all learned about the ELCA, we will be of one mind in whichever decision we make. We ask people to make your pledges with that unity in mind.

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

Answer (11/13/2022): At the November meeting, the Council appointed Julie Creeden to fill the current vacancy.

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

Answer (11/6/2022): We cannot call a Senior Pastor from the ELCA until we make that decision. It would be unfair to call an ELCA pastor and then decide to leave the ELCA shortly afterward. Our Synod Bishop was clear that we need to make a decision about our affiliation prior to issuing a call. It could be possible to call a non-ELCA pastor before making the decision, but it's unclear whether a non-ELCA pastor would want to accept a call before we make that decision, and we would need to do more research to understand whether we would be allowed to remain affiliated with the ELCA if we called a non-ELCA pastor as our Senior Pastor.

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

Answer (11/6/2022): We do not foresee any changes to our worship services or the way we conduct our ministry and missions. Nazareth has historically made those decisions independently of our affiliation with the ELCA and would most likely continue to make those decisions independently of an affiliation with a different Lutheran church body.

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

Answer (11/6/2022): We could use those monies in whatever way we think best fulfills our Nazareth mission statement. This includes continuing to support the ELCA missionaries we are currently supporting.

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

Answer (11/6/2022): Nothing would change. All of our small groups would continue to meet just as they have been meeting.

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

Answer (11/6/2022): Please pray! Pray individually, or as part of a team. We are in the process of identifying people who are willing to participate on prayer teams – one team that will pray specifically for the Council and Staff, one that will pray for the Nominating Committee, and one that will pray for the Call Committee and Nazareth's affiliation (starting even before we have a Call Committee in place). If you are willing to participate on one of the teams, please send your name to council@naz.org.

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

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

Answer (10/30/2022): At their October 11 meeting, the Council voted to postpone sending the letter of dissent to the ELCA. When the letter of dissent was voted on at the August 23 Council meeting, the Council also voted to hold a Town Hall Forum. We were planning to incorporate appropriate input from the congregation into the letter. Since we have not yet held the Town Hall Forum or had another formal opportunity for congregational input, a majority of the Council voted to postpone sending the letter.

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

Answer (10/23/2022): Before Pastor Denny retired, he and Pastor Brian discussed potential replacement options. They decided to let Pastor Brian be our only pastor for a few months while he investigated other alternatives to calling a full time Associate Pastor. There are many ELCA churches in the Cedar Valley that don't have a pastor, and the thought was that we could help them out by using a different model (e.g. not a full time Associate Pastor at Nazareth). The Core Team and the Council supported Pastor Brian's recommendation. During those months, Pastor

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

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

Answer (10/23/2022): The teaching team has developed a schedule that extends over the next 3 months, with each Sunday covered by a member of the team. After the ALPHA Sermon Series is complete, we will transition back to the lectionary schedule. When an Interim Pastor is brought in, the schedule may change as they adjust into the role. We can be assured that we'll continue to have relevant, biblical messages from a variety of speakers each week. Additionally, the worship team that plans and prepares the music and liturgy for services will continue to do a great job sharing their gifts and leading us in praise. Andy Walser will be the chair of the Worship Committee going forward.

Question: Why was the pulpit removed?

Answer (10/14/2022): The original reason for a pulpit was to elevate the pastor so everyone could hear the Sunday teaching. With a sound system (especially with our new sound system!), the original reason no longer exists. The pulpit must be removed whenever we need more space, such as for VBS and for the festival music that is now occurring on the second Sunday of each month. It is large and very heavy, making it difficult to move. For these reasons, the Worship Committee decided to leave the pulpit in storage for now.