



## **Should St. Mark's Lutheran Church affiliate with Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC)?**

### **Questions & Answers<sup>\*</sup>**

**January 2010**

- 1. Why is St. Mark's considering affiliating with Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ?**
  - A. It provides a place for members of our congregation who currently feel disenfranchised by the ELCA and desire a larger church body to whom they can feel connected.
  - B. It allows St. Mark's to maintain its evangelical Lutheran identity and to be connected with other Lutheran churches for mission while – as an affiliation rather than a denomination – it also allows decisions to be made at the local church level.
  - C. It aligns in values with the majority of our congregation on specific issues, such as Biblical authority and a focus on the Great Commission.
  - D. It maintains basic long-held mainline Lutheran practices such as open communion and inclusion of women in ministry.
  - E. Our church council has recommended that we bring LCMC affiliation to a vote of the congregation.
  
- 2. What is Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC)?**

LCMC defines itself as “an association of congregations and individuals who are: free in Christ; accountable to one another; rooted in the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions; and working together to fulfill Christ’s Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations.”
  
- 3. What is distinctive about LCMC?**
  - LCMC is a centrist Lutheran church body, recognizing Scripture as the sole source and norm of faith and life, and therefore being a light to, rather than a reflection of, the world.
  - LCMC is congregationally based. It recognizes that the congregation, gathered around Word and Sacrament, is the church.
  - LCMC celebrates the priesthood of all believers at every level. LCMC also constantly strives to support and uphold the pastoral ministry of the men and women called to serve its member congregations.
  - Congregations are entitled to send representatives to the annual gathering and convention of LCMC. Constitutional changes made at the annual convention require approval by two thirds of the member congregations in order to take effect. By-law changes made at the annual convention do not take effect if a majority of congregations register a negative vote.
  
- 4. What other issues besides sexuality would lead us to consider the LCMC?**
  - The LCMC is an evangelical Lutheran body which rejects the teaching of ‘universalism’ – that all people are saved whether or not they have faith in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>\*</sup> Compiled from LCMC and other sources and edited for St. Mark's Lutheran Church by Dave Brauhn, Pastor Perry Fruhling, Pastor David Hagstrom, and Chris Lindell.

- The LCMC is firmly committed to the final authority of the Holy Scriptures in all matters of faith and practice. While science, personal experience, and tradition certainly contribute to our discussions and deliberations, they are never placed on equal footing with the Bible.
- The LCMC rejects the ‘historic episcopate’ and does not require its pastors to be ordained by a bishop in historical succession. (None of our current pastors was so ordained.)
- The LCMC does not take political positions on matters such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

**5. *Why choose the LCMC?***

LCMC seems like the best fit for a few reasons:

- Like-minded, theological stance (evangelical, biblical Lutheranism)
- Like-minded view of mission
- A number of congregations similar to St. Mark’s in size and ministry-scope

**6. *Why should we join any Lutheran body? Can’t we just be independent?***

Yes, we could become independent at the potential risk of our property. However, the Bible portrays congregations as interdependent parts of the one body of Christ. There are many benefits to such interdependence:

- The support of like-minded believers
- Accountability of witness and leadership
- Pooling of resources to accomplish larger tasks for the greater good
- Support and encouragement

**7. *What repercussions does joining the LCMC have as regards our church property?***

Our constitution states that if we join another Lutheran body (such as LCMC), then title to our property would continue to reside with us. However, if we choose not to join another Lutheran body, then title to our property would continue to reside with us only with the consent of the Southeast Iowa Synod Council, ELCA.

**8. *Can a congregation belong to the ELCA and LCMC simultaneously?***

- The position of LCMC is that congregations may retain ELCA membership as well as associating with LCMC. This understanding is part of what makes LCMC “post-denominational.” LCMC congregations may belong to as many groups as can assist them in fulfilling the Great Commission from Jesus, providing they subscribe to LCMC’s statement of faith and constitution.
- The position of the ELCA is less clear. Although many LCMC congregations have been and are “dual-rostered” in the LCMC and ELCA, a recent opinion from the Secretary of the ELCA disallows dual-rostering. Bishop Burk has suggested that such “non-compliance” with ELCA expectations could lead to disciplinary procedures. If so, this would be the first case of such action.

**9. *What are the financial obligations of joining the LCMC?***

Membership in the association imposes no financial obligations on a congregation. The association depends entirely on contributions from congregations and individuals. If we so choose, we could give a portion of benevolence dollars to the general fund of the LCMC to help pay for communication, conventions, and expenses associated with coordinating the activities of its congregations. Additionally, LCMC has two restricted funds available for direct contribution: the Seminary Debt Relief Fund, and the Mission Congregation Fund.

**10. *Does the LCMC maintain ministry standards and provide training for pastors?***

LCMC works cooperatively with a number of seminaries around the country. LCMC has ministry standards that include course requirements for ensuring its pastors have a solid confessional Lutheran

theological education. The association expects pastors and congregations to abide by its governing documents and Statement of Faith.

**11. *How would we call a pastor in LCMC?***

The process would be more congregationally driven. ELCA congregations have to run their possible choices for interviews past the synod Bishop. LCMC congregations choose for themselves who to interview and call. In addition to LCMC, we could also look to other Lutheran bodies for candidates, including the ELCA. They wouldn't need to be in the LCMC to be interviewed by us. Again, the LCMC is more congregationally based. The power is in the local church, not the headquarters or Bishop's office. This just means that the congregation needs to be very careful in its process of choosing a pastor . . . which is always a good idea anyway!

**12. *What support does LCMC provide in the call process?***

A call packet is available to guide congregations through the process, however, responsibility for performing due diligence lies with the congregation. LCMC also provides a list of pastors that are available for call, with no "filtering" of the list. LCMC takes seriously the goal of healthy and mature local congregations. It's committed to empowering each church to take seriously its responsibilities and not give them away to someone else, such as a synod Bishop. If, for some reason, a church needs help in this goal of being healthy, LCMC is available to advise and offer assistance.

**13. *Would our pastors' retirement benefits be portable should they choose to be rostered with the LCMC?***

Yes. At the ELCA Board of Pensions, pastors are fully vested with the contributions made into their retirement account. Money in their retirement account is their money, similar to any other 401(k) or 403(b) retirement account. Retirement accounts can be transferred to church plans that have a reciprocity agreement with the Board of Pensions, which LCMC does. It is also possible for congregations that were part of the ELCA as of 2005, but at some later point chose to leave the ELCA, to still continue to provide their pastors and staff with the benefits offered through the Board of Pensions. So even if a congregation leaves the ELCA, that same congregation can remain with the ELCA Board of Pensions for benefits. In similar fashion, the retirement benefits received by retired pastors are theirs regardless of the congregation in which they worship and serve.

**14. *How would affiliating with the LCMC affect our relationship with Thrivent, Lutheran Services of Iowa, Lutheran camps, etc?***

Thrivent Financial Association for Lutherans maintains a working relationship with all Lutheran church bodies, including the LCMC. We could continue to use and support Lutheran Services of Iowa, Lutheran Camps, and other Lutheran ministries as we choose.

**15. *What about the missions and missionaries we support?***

We can continue to support them as we have always done.

**16. *Does LCMC address social issues?***

LCMC views the congregation as the primary expression of the church and generally does not speak for its members. However, in circumstances where the truth of God's Word is being consistently challenged, the association may decide to speak to the issue. Therefore, a Pastoral Admonition on the Sanctity of Marriage has been adopted. It reads:

*"We affirm that God created us male and female, and that it is God's will and intention that human sexual expression and fulfillment take place only within the boundaries of marriage between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24-25; Matthew 19:4-6; and Mark 10:2-9). And, we confess as individuals and as congregations that we have not fulfilled God's will in our decisions, modeling, and teaching."*

While neither adopting a social statement nor a pastoral admonition, the medical and benefits plan sponsored by LCMC does not cover abortion.

**17. *Isn't the LCMC quite young for us to consider joining?***

The LCMC was formed in 2001, developed out of the WordAlone Network. One benefit of joining it now is that we truly can have a voice in the future direction of this young body. Currently there are approximately 300 congregations in the LCMC, so the chances of making a difference in it are much greater than making a difference in the ELCA with its 10,000-plus congregations.

**18. *What is the geographic distribution of the LCMC? Are there congregations from our area who have moved to the LCMC?***

Of the 246 LCMC congregations in the United States, there are currently LCMC congregations in 38 states – including 17 in Iowa. In addition, one of the exciting things about the LCMC is that it is already an international body of Lutherans after only nine years. There are currently LCMC congregations in Canada (6), Cambodia (9), Mexico (3), Nicaragua (12), Belarus (4), Russia (1), and Vietnam (14).

**19. *What about accountability for our pastors and staff? Where do we go if we have an issue that needs resolving?***

The goal of the LCMC is to empower congregations to deal with their issues from within. They encourage each congregation to set up policies and procedures for dealing with internal issues that arise. If, after working through the internal process within the congregation, the issue remains unsolved, then the congregation or individual congregational members can consult the Ministry Board of the LCMC. This board acts similarly to how the ELCA has normally handled these situations. That is, LCMC representatives will come in and present the choices for the congregation to consider to resolve the issue.

**20. *Is the LCMC truly Lutheran, and what does that mean?***

Yes! The constitution of the LCMC puts it this way:

- We believe, teach, and accept the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the sole authoritative source and norm of our proclamation, faith, and life.
- We accept the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds as true declarations of the scriptural faith we believe, teach, and confess.
- We believe, teach, and accept the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism as true witnesses to the Word of God, normative for our teaching and practice. We acknowledge that we are one in faith and doctrine with all churches that likewise accept the teachings of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. We believe, teach, and confess the other confessional writings in the Book of Concord, namely, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise, the Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord, as further valid expositions of the Holy Scriptures.
- We believe, teach, and confess 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 priesthood of all believers for God's mission in the world.

**21. *How does a congregation join LCMC, or discontinue membership if so desired?***

Congregations join LCMC by voting to do so by means appropriate to their congregation. After voting to join, a subscription form is filled out, signed by the proper congregational officers, and forwarded to the LCMC office. Congregations may terminate their association with LCMC at any time simply by informing LCMC of their decision. LCMC makes no claim to property rights, nor does it attempt to influence congregational decision-making.