

Final Resolution of Christ the King Lutheran Church, Hutchinson, MN,  
to Terminate Membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

**Whereas**, we, the congregation of Christ the King Lutheran Church, have been faithful members of the Southwest Minnesota District/Synod, beginning as a mission church in the American Lutheran Church in 1963; and, since 1988, as a member congregation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA); and,

**Whereas**, we have consistently provided leadership on synod and national church boards, as well as substantial financial support for the ELCA's mission efforts over the years; and,

**Whereas**, we have shared unity with sister congregations in the ELCA because of our common confession of the authority of the Word of God as stated in our constitution: "This congregation accepts 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" (C2.03); and,

**Whereas**, this unity has been seriously undermined by a major theological shift in the ELCA away from Scriptural and Lutheran confessional foundations, which has altered accepted teachings on the authority of God's Word in inter-church relationships, ordination practices and the definition of the office of ministry, the role of bishops, and the biblical teaching of traditional marriage, in order to make God's Word more relevant to current cultural settings; and

**Whereas**, this has resulted in a loss of unity within the ELCA, which has officially declared for the first time that irreconcilable readings of the Bible and teachings of the faith are all equally valid, because of a new understanding that an individual's "bound conscience" is the highest measure by which a teaching is judged true or false; and,

**Whereas**, following our first vote to terminate our affiliation with the ELCA on October 28, 2009, we consulted with our bishop, devoted ourselves to the study of Scripture, carefully listened and vigorously discussed with one another the impact of this decision on the current and future mission of Christ the King in an effort to find common ground for moving forward in mission, all the while earnestly seeking God's guidance through prayer; and,

**Whereas**, we have concluded that these new teachings and policy changes in the ELCA have broken the unity we share together, and are promoting *heterodoxy*, which is the belief in multiple truths and pathways to salvation besides the Gospel, and rejected by the Christian Church as heresy throughout history; therefore,

**Be it resolved**, that the congregation of Christ the King Lutheran Church, Hutchinson, MN, shall hereby terminate its affiliation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; and

**Be it further resolved**, that we will retain our membership in Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC), affirming our commitment to mission based on foundational principles we hold to be true and unchanging, and pursuing cooperative mission efforts with other Christian bodies as we see fit, all within a context of Lutheran theological integrity and unity in Jesus Christ as Lord of the Church.

Submitted by the Church Council of Christ the King Lutheran Church, Sunday, May 23, 2010.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THIS RESOLUTION

At a special congregational meeting in October 2009, we took the first vote to disaffiliate with the ELCA passing a resolution to terminate by nearly 70% of the voting members present. For the second vote, the church council agreed that we needed to stick to the wording of the original resolution itself (“Be it resolved...”), but that the “Whereas” paragraphs should be more inclusive of the issues with the ELCA with which our congregation experienced conflict over the years.

Admittedly, our first vote to terminate was mostly driven by the decisions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly in Minneapolis. The Assembly approved same-gender, monogamous sexual relationships, thereby redefining traditional marriage to accommodate qualified persons, who live in such relationships, to be rostered leaders in the ELCA. Though our first resolution passed, it became divisive for our congregation, as some felt we were saying to the gay community that they are simply not welcome here. The council and mission task force offered resource materials, conducted adult forums, and developed a Commitment to Mission Statement as a means of finding reconciliation and agreement for what we hold in common with each other, denouncing abuse and actions that would prevent anyone from feeling welcome. We acknowledge that all humans are sinful, but through repentance all may receive forgiveness by grace through faith in Christ alone.

But our struggles with ELCA leadership began long before the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. Since the ELCA’s beginnings in 1988, there have been changes in church policies and practices that have catered more to a particular political stance that has alienated people who hold a different view. Some pastors and lay people also felt that the ELCA was drifting away from its Scriptural and Lutheran Confessional moorings, and those of the Christian Church at large, by asserting a view that the **authority of God’s Word** is truth among other truths, rather than truth above other truths.

New interpretations of biblical texts were no longer based on “the plain sense of a text”, which was Luther’s measuring stick for interpretation, but rather on making them relevant to cultural and social nuances about the Word, according to an innovative definition of one’s “bound conscience”, making it off limits to questioning. It became evident that instead of the Word guiding and addressing society, society has become the guiding principle for interpreting the Word, in order to bless actions and behaviors that were otherwise contrary to the Bible’s traditional teachings. This then raised the question: **“By what new authority is God’s Word no longer saying what it has said for 2,000 years?”**

This was evident in our struggle over the establishment of full communion with the Episcopal Church (ECUSA) in 1999. ECUSA requires pastors in the ELCA to be ordained according to the “historic episcopate” (by bishops only, so that the line of ordained leaders can be traced back to Peter) before full communion can be established. This requirement made our practice of ordination by any ordained pastor in the ELCA no longer as valid or “truthful” as ordination by a bishop. But there is nothing in Scripture or the Lutheran Confessions to support turning one’s choice of ordination practice into a strict policy for all pastors. The office of the bishop, rather than Word and Sacrament, has become the new “mark of the Church”. And while cordial ecumenical relationships with other denominations are valued, they should not be at the expense of anyone’s theological groundings. In addition, a “top down” structure of the church was introduced that declared the Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA versus the local congregation as the highest expression of the church. Finally, marriage has been redefined so as to include the possibility of blessing same-sex unions, also without clear biblical support. All these actions has opened the door to **heterodoxy**, the teaching that multiple truths for life and salvation, besides the Gospel, are equally valid, whether they come from the Bible/church tradition or from the secular culture.\* This is the most serious dispute with the ELCA, for it is a contradiction to Jesus’ own exclusive claim in John 14:6, when he said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me”*, which foils other claims for truth, and asserts only one authority in all matters of faith and life in the Church: the Word of God – written, proclaimed, and made flesh in the Lord, Jesus Christ.

\*“Two paradigms are at work among our members that make agreement difficult on scriptural and theological matters.... there is a traditional and a contextual approach in interpreting Scripture both of which are valid and irreconcilable.” (Bishop Mark Hansen, quoting Dr. Craig L. Nesson, Wartburg Theological Seminary; from ELCA News Services, March 2005)