

Starting a New Lutheran Church

Where Are We to Go?

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." ~ St. Peter's response to Jesus inquiry if he and the other disciples will abandon him as others have. John 6:68b-69

You have raised your concerns to the called pastor of your congregation and you have raised your concerns to the church council that the congregation is at risk of abandoning the Word of God, even Jesus Christ Himself in leu of a social progressive gospel which, of course, is not the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. There might have been a congregational vote to leave the ELCA and it failed to carry the congregation into the next phase to leave the ELCA. The congregation for one reason or another desire to stay in the ELCA. Finally, you have surveyed the surrounding area and there are no other Lutheran congregations that adhere to the Word of God alone or there is no such Lutheran congregation within a respectable distance from home. So where are you to go?

Starting up? Starting over? "Where two or more are gathered..."

In November of 2009 Christ the King Lutheran Church in the southern Minnesota community of Waseca (pop. About 9000) was founded. At the time of its founding, the congregation did not believe the available Lutheran synods (LCMC, NALC, LCMS, AALC, WELS & ELS etc.) were necessary to execute their desire to form a new congregation. In 2012 Word Alone Network visited with the pastor and founding members to provide useful information in creating a new congregation. The below is a copy of this report published on the Word Alone Network website but is no longer accessible. The author is unknown. Some of the resources are dated and may not exist.

Christ The King Lutheran Church of Waseca, Minnesota

This series will begin with the story of Christ the King Lutheran Church in Waseca, Minnesota. The WordAlone staff wishes to express its most sincere and heartfelt gratitude to the folks at Christ the King for their most generous efforts in supplying us with a huge array of documentation with which we are now able to begin this series of "building" pages.

Christ the King is located adjacent to a beautiful lake in Waseca, Minnesota in what originally had been an insurance company building. The folks who put it all together put together a building committee who set about finding a suitable location. The original idea was to simply find a place to worship. Their first stop was an annex to the courthouse. This lasted for a short time in which the services were basically Bible studies. Their building committee found a couple of other locations each having pros and cons. What was finally settled upon was the aforementioned insurance building. A Minnesota church overlooking a lake...why not?

After some negotiation, they were able to secure a lease that they felt was affordable. This opens the first chapter.

Christ the King Lutheran Church, Waseca, Minn.

Richard (Butch) Dufault and Greg Easton, president and vice-president, respectively, of Christ the King's council, are quick to advise all who would follow this path to gather your congregations and first agree on a statement of faith, the statement adopted at Christ the King is as follows and bear in mind there will likely be many such "statements" offered throughout this series. They are offered as examples that you may copy, or edit as your congregations deem necessary:

CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH OF WASECA CONFSSION OF FAITH

Christ the King Lutheran Church of Waseca accepts without exception all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as a whole, and in all their parts, as 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.

We accept without reservation and declare adherence to the Symbolic books of the Lutheran Faith as the presentation and explanation of the pure doctrine of the Word of God and a summary of our faith as an Independent Lutheran Church. This congregation accepts, confesses and recognizes the following as normative for its theology: The ancient ecumenical Creeds: the Apostolic, the Nicene, and the Athanasian; The unaltered Augsburg Confession; The Book of Concord including the Apology of the

Augsburg Confession; the Smalcald Articles; Luther's Small and Large Catechisms; and the Formula of Concord.

Frequent Asked Questions:

What does this church believe in?

We believe in and share the same Christian faith as taught by Jesus Christ and the Apostles, and as expressed by Martin Luther and the other Lutheran

church fathers. We hold Holy Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, as the inerrant and wholly inspired Word of God. We believe the Christian faith is accurately summarized in the historical Lutheran confessions, namely: The Ecumenical Creeds; Apostle's, Nicene, and Athanasian The Augsburg Confession, The Smalcald Articles, The Formula of Concord, Luther's Small and Large Catechisms.

I know what I am when I say I'm an LCMS Lutheran, WELS Lutheran or ELCA Lutheran.

What will I be if I join and independent Lutheran congregation?

You will continue to be a Lutheran; the same as you have been! Be believe and adhere to the same doctrinal articles of faith that the Lutheran Church was founded upon; the Holy Scriptures as inerrant and wholly inspired by God and the Christian faith as demonstrated in the Lutheran articles of faith contained in the Book of Concord. The Lutheran doctrine was established in the mid to late 1500's, well before the modern-day synods were established. You will continue to be a Lutheran, who is a member of an independent congregation.

What if I have a child; what faith will they be baptized into or confirmed in?

Children and adults will continue to be baptized into the Christian faith, just as Lutherans have always done. Our Lord instituted Holy Baptism as a Christian sacrament, not as a Lutheran ordinance. Baptism in any synod does not convey membership in the synod. And baptism outside of a synod does not in any way invalidate the baptism.

Likewise, confirmands are taught in the Christian faith using Luther's Small Catechism as a brief summation of that faith. Confirmation classes of the LCMS, WELS, ELCA, and most other Lutheran congregations are taught using the same catechism. Confirmands will publicly confess their Christian faith, as has been Lutheran practice for ages.

Are there successful independent Lutheran churches?

YES! And we are one of them! There are successful independent Lutheran congregations in every state of the country. In fact, there are many successful independent Lutheran congregations right here in

Minnesota and the Metro area. The development of "synods" is a relatively recent (historically speaking) human institution or association. From the earliest days of Christianity, congregations were independent, sharing a faith with other congregations, but not having any formal association.

How would an independent congregation call a pastor when a vacancy occurs?

We will begin the call process that most Lutheran congregations use. The qualifications of a pastor and the call process are defined in our by-laws. In an independent congregation, all names considered are nominated by the membership. In addition, we will not be limited to pastors from one particular synod. Strong pastors who hold firmly to Lutheran doctrine could be called regardless of synodical affiliation.

Could the congregation join a synod in the future?

It will always be the prerogative of the congregation to join a synod or association if they so choose. The by-laws of the congregation hold this authority for the voting membership of the congregation, not to be exercised by any group or organization other than the congregation as a whole. The decision to join a synod would be an intentional process, involving prayer and examination to ensure the congregation and the synod truly share the same doctrine and beliefs.

Is the congregation going to build its own building?

YES! The congregation has established both Capital and Property committees to handle the work of building. Identifying available properties, financing possibilities and location planning are items of high priority for our congregation. A building fund has been established and is growing monthly.

What We Believe

The Bible is the infallible source of knowledge about God and the Good News about His Son, Jesus Christ. We recognize that the Bible was written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and is without error. That the two main messages of the Bible are Law and Gospel; the law showing us our sin and need for a Savior, and the Gospel revealing God's grace in Jesus Christ. We also believe that the Gospel must always predominate.

That God created the world in 6 days and that He sustains it with His mighty power. We believe that He created Adam and Eve, our first parents, in His own image to live in fellowship with Him.

That Adam and Eve rebelled against God and so brought sin and death into the world. We believe all people have inherited this sin and can do nothing to change their human nature. we believe that all people need forgiveness and new life that God provides for us freely by His grace.

That God send His Son to be our Savior from sin, death, and the power of the devil. We believe that Jesus Christ took on Himself the punishment for our sin when He died on the cross. God raised Him from the dead to demonstrate to the world that His sacrifice had been accepted and that humanity's sin had been paid for. That we receive forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus Christ. Faith receives the free gift of God's grace.

That faith is created in the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit who works through the "means of grace." The means of grace are the Word of God and the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

That Holy Baptism is the means by which the Spirit creates faith and through which God adopts us as children. We practice infant baptism because we believe they also are born in sin and that God's promise of forgiveness extends also to them.

That Holy Communion is the means by which the Spirit nurtures faith. We believe that the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper actually deliver to us the true Body and Blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of sin.

That the Church is the fellowship of all those who have come to faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. The purpose of the Church is to nurture faith through the Word and the Sacraments and to share the love of God through word and deed with the whole world in order to make other people disciples of Jesus Christ.

That Christ has given to His church the right and authority to preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments, and establish the office of the ministry, and that Christ alone has authority over His church.

That the fellowship God has established with believers on earth will continue forever and that after this life we will live forever with Him in Heaven for all eternity.

The secular side - paperwork

It can be done with help...from above and here

Before going much further, it should be pointed out that "who" you have in your congregation, by way of skill sets, while not critical, is extremely important where it comes to "boots on the ground" or, rolling up your sleeves. Such skills as business management, accounting, carpenters, cabinet builders, plumbers, electricians, perhaps even a lawyer or two, will be of invaluable assistance as you work through the governmental and regulatory side of setting up a church. That said, let us begin.

The Confession of Faith (above) is actually the first piece of paperwork created and it straddles the secular side and the spiritual side. Here, it establishes "who we are" in the second document, "The Articles of Incorporation."

This church is established in Minnesota so all state-required documents are based on Minnesota law and regulation. Other states will likely have similar regulations but the names of the documents might be different.

Articles of Incorporation

Articles of Incorporation (Minnesota) governing statutes: 317A and 315.

Required:

Name of organization

Slate of officers (names and addresses)

An address for church (address can be changed later for a fee) Note: Can be the home address of the president or other officer.

In Minnesota there are two ways to incorporate. (1) Under 317A with the Secretary of State and/or (2) under 315 with the local county. We did both!

Why? 317A or 315 Non-Profit Incorporation allows you to collect offerings that are legally tax-free. 315 appears easier but it is best to do both. 315 does not require annual recertification, while 317A requires annual recertification of state. So, 315 is an insurance policy in case the church fails to certify each year.

File the 317A with the Secretary of State's office in St. Paul (takes about 20 minutes) and the certificate will arrive at your address about 10 days later. When the certificate arrives check the Secretary of State's website to see if you are there.

Incorporation under MN Statute 315 - You must post "Intent to incorporate/vote on officers" for a period of at least 15 days in the place of worship. After that you may file your affidavit with the county courthouse. This duplicates the 317A filing but it is permanent!

Federal Employee Identification Number (EIN)

File online. Formal paperwork will arrive via U.S. Mail. NOTE: Call the IRS ((877) 829- 5500) and ask for their follow-on "letter" establishing you as a 501(3)(c) - They will give it on a phone call. You will need this letter to get your Minnesota State Sales Tax Exemption #.

Minnesota-Revenue

Minnesota-Revenue: Certificate of Exemption (Minnesota form ST3). In Minnesota you may use this temporary document in lieu of the more permanent ST16 (next). Fill out and go shopping! Other states likely have a similar form and you may likely find them through Google or other search engines putting "(state abbreviation) Revenue forms" in the search criteria.

Minnesota-Revenue: Certificate of Exemption (permanent MN State tax-free number - MN Form ST16) You may fill this form out online, print it out, add the required enclosures:

A copy of your signed Articles of incorporation or Constitution

A copy of your federal letter granting exemption from income tax along with the application you submitted to the IRS for federal income tax exemption (the federal government will provide this based on a phone call. After you have your EIN (Federal Employee Number), call the IRS @ 877-829-5500. Calling this number and requesting this letter will save you much time and effort!

And such others as may be indicated in your case listed on this form

CAVEAT! This listing of forms is not to be construed as complete. There may be other forms your state, county, or local municipality (including Minnesota) require.

Back to the Spiritual Side - Calling a pastor

Christ the King has supplied us with digital copies of documents used in their call process. These documents range from the initial advertisement through the official Letter of Call.

Advertisement letter - WordAlone received and used to place ad in Clergy Connect. WordAlone Ministries' Clergy Connect supplied a total of 42 respondents, 26 of these were inside the 3 week allotted time frame. Of these, 5 interviews were held. Christ the Kings Council visited all of these interviewees in their home churches and considered that expense in both money and time to be well worth the effort.

Response letter to pastors inquiring about advertisement

Gentle letter of rejection - sent via email to candidates that did "not make the cut" for interview.

Interview Questions - This list of questions took over 15 hours of council time to develop. The interviews were for 90 minutes and Christ the King's council conducted 5 in 3 nights! Christ the King did not form a separate Call Committee. Rather, they reduced the council to 9 members and proceeded to become the de facto Call Committee...an added duty but well worth it. They claim it kept up the momentum.

Once more - THANKS!

The staff of WordAlone Ministries would like to, once again, extend their most sincere and heartfelt gratitude to the leadership of Christ the King Lutheran Church in Waseca, Minnesota. The in-depth conversations held, the time consumed in developing for sharing all of these materials and experiences are an invaluable resource that all faithful Lutheran Orthodox Christians may use in their own quest to raise up new edifices in which to worship our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

END OF WORDALONE ARTICLE

Some Things Have Changed

With the changes of the WordAlone Network to Word Alone Ministries there is no longer an independent resource (Clergy Connect) to locate pastors outside of synodical rosters. There may be Lutheran pastors that are comfortable to a call to an independent Lutheran congregation but there is no way of knowing who they are outside of word of mouth.

Now after 10 years of existence by the grace of God, there are some lessons learned about being an independent Lutheran congregation.

- The congregation most likely will not be in a position of providing retirement and health benefits. This is a tremendous risk to ask a called pastor to assume. In Christ the King Lutheran's case, the pastor is required to plan his own retirement plan with addition funds beyond payroll provided by the congregation and he is currently a dependent on his wife (a teacher) health plan with the congregation paying his portion of the addition to the spouse's plan.
- There is an ever-present temptation to abandon the Lutheran Confessions. It is extremely hard not to get caught up into numbers. How many at worship, the number of children in Sunday School and the budget. All these numbers are important so it is very tempting to believe that if the congregation becomes more like the larger non-denomination church across town or the county, we can grow. But nowhere will you find this in Holy Scripture. Christians are called to be faithful to the Word of God and let God be concerned about the growth. He has promised that His Word will not return to Him empty (Is 55:11). We Lutherans believe that the Lutheran Confessions are in complete agreement with the Word of God. We are not like the Protestant churches; we stand on the Word of God alone!
- There is no support beyond the congregation. Being freed of a synodical benevolence may seem very appealing as it is one less expense to the congregation but it is easy to just focus on the congregation's own needs. Christ calls His church to be evangelical and missional. It is tough for a congregation to do this alone. Synods offer resources to participate in to proclaim the word of God around the globe. Synods offer programming to evangelize locally. Faithful Lutheran synods provide constructive oversight, in other words what or who will keep the called pastor accountable. There is a real risk that with a popular pastor who had personally decided not to be Lutheran or a faux-Lutheran may lead the congregation away from the Lutheran confessions. The major concern is where will you get your next pastor? Whether you grow to support a second pastor or first called pastor has moved on, one day you will need to call another pastor. Even in a decade, things have changed.

- Don't look back! Jesus himself said this is an impossible task (Luke 9:62). You cannot define yourself as a congregation as who you are not or what you do not stand for. Again, this is not supported in Scripture. We first must proclaim who we are and what we stand for. The temptation to look back at the old congregation is real and leads to temptation and sin. Move forward fixing your eyes on Jesus!

I pray that the Lord guides you in this earnest desire to be faithful to Him and to His eternal Word. Recourses are available. Keep up the good fight!

¹¹ But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, ¹⁴ to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. 1Timothy 6:11-16

Your servant in Jesus Christ.

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