

Summary Overview Regarding Concerns with the ELCA

- **Who is the ELCA?** ELCA stands for “Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” and as of the latest ELCA 2017 census consists of approximately 3.5 million baptized members and around 9,000 congregations.
- **What is the history of the relationship between Our Savior Lutheran Church (OSLC) and the ELCA?** OSLC has been an ELCA congregation since the denomination was formed in 1988.
- **Is our Church Council actively working toward leaving the ELCA?** No. At the March 8th Council meeting, as noted in the minutes, some congregation members had expressed concerns about recent findings of approved social actions/statement and policy changes within the ELCA. A motion was made for a special council meeting to be held in two weeks, March 22, to discuss further. The topic of the ELCA’s approved Social Statements was a key item of discussion at the 22 March special meeting, and again at the 12 April regular meeting. An eMail was sent out to the congregation on 23 April with a .pdf document to help the Congregation navigate the on-line path to the ELCA website (<https://www.elca.org/>) and the thirteen (13) ELCA approved social statements. This file was provided as an aid to congregation members in finding and reading for themselves the current values and beliefs the ELCA desires for their member congregations. In addition to this information paper, the Council plans to hold congregation wide in-person education sessions that will focus on studying the Bible, understanding how OSLC 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 OSLC choose to look for another organization.
 - The Council believes it is in everyone’s best interest to learn about the ELCA first (both ELCA benefits and reasons to leave), and then make opportunities available for people to collectively share their thoughts.
- **What are the main concern(s) that were brought to the Council about the ELCA?** The main concern was that the ELCA has shared words and actions that indicate it no longer views the Bible as the inerrant Word of God. The ELCA needs to 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)
- **Is OSLC the only congregation that is working to decide if they wish to stay with the ELCA’s Churchwide Assembly?** No. A growing number of ELCA congregations are reviewing their membership with the ELCA; not wanting to leave the assemble prematurely, and yet not wanting to support an assembly that has approved new social statements and policies that stand in conflict with Scripture.
- **Describe what has been done to try to help heal the ELCA from within.** Pastor Tom Brock, *WordAlone Network, First Things*, and many others are trying to keep the ELCA from turning into an “evolving” church, that is increasingly departing from the Word of God. In addition, Churches more influential than OSLC, are attempting to effect change from within. They have sent letters of concern to the ELCA Bishop, and are requesting that the ELCA return to more biblical path in its policies & social statements.
- **Are there examples of recent actions within the ELCA that have concerned congregation members?** The official summary of the 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly reported that the Assembly authorized revisions to the social statement “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust (2009)”. The Assembly voted “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.” Biblical Christian scriptural norms define marriage as being between one man and one woman, and that the idea of “bound conscience” could be considered 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. To read more about the four positions of bound conscience listed in the Human Sexuality statement, go to the ELCA Human Sexuality Statement, and read pages 19-21.

- **Is there a point at which OSLC would consider becoming a part of a new or different Lutheran Church Assembly?** If the OSLC congregation decides that as an ELCA member we can no longer support and promote the ELCA's teachings and social practices, then the OSLC congregation would have to decide whether or not OSLC and the ELCA can continue to be a church together.
 - **Who is the "Leadership" at OSLC that makes that decision?** The congregation. A properly called congregational meeting is the highest authority of our congregation. The congregation elects Council Members at OSLC annual meetings, and at this and similar meetings, establishes the policies and priorities that govern our life together. The Church Council then acts as the "Board of Directors" for this congregation in between congregational meetings carrying out the congregation's policies and priorities. The pastor is accountable to the Church Council.
- **Are we going to vote on ELCA affiliation?** Not at this time. We have not scheduled a vote. Following Synod bylaws, we must notify our ND Synod Bishop 30 days prior to any vote. We have not yet contacted the Bishop to set a date for when they will visit OSLC to answer our questions and concerns
- **Does OSLC have a financial reason for remaining in the ELCA?** No. OSLC receives no money from the ELCA, and our mortgage and other financial liabilities are not tied to the ELCA; we fully own the Church and Parsonage.
- **Can we call a new Pastor before deciding about our ELCA affiliation?** We should not call a Pastor from the ELCA until we make a decision. It would be unfair to call an ELCA pastor and then decide to leave the ELCA shortly afterward. 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.
- **How will we be able to get a Pastor while we are studying the ELCA?** We will continue to use lay and guest Pastors. These Pastor's ministry gifts currently work well with our congregation. We have no doubt that we will be able to call a Pastor when our analysis and congregation decision process is complete. With the vacancy of our Pastor, Leadership to and for the Church is being provided by the Church Council and the staff. When a Pastor is called, they will provide Leadership.
- **Should OSLC 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?** We do not foresee any changes to our worship services or the way we conduct our ministry and missions. OSLC 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.
- **I know the Council and Church are going through a lot right now. How can I help?** The Council requests your prayers. We also request your patience. We welcome and value your input. If you are willing and able to help, please contact a Church Council member, and/or come to a Council Meeting.
- **Where do we go from here?** The Council recognizes that more evaluation is needed. Our first OSLC ELCA congregation information/education session is in the planning. 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 further the process. Then we will set up a meeting to have the Synod Bishop come and meet with the Church. After these meetings, the Church Council will identify additional next steps.

The Council's intention is to give all interested members of OSLC the opportunity to participate in the information/education sessions mentioned above. This will give us the appropriate background for studying ELCA decisions and actions so that all of us 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.