

Fact Checker

Re: Claims Made about the ELCA Indiana-Kentucky Synod, ELCA

The "fact checker" below was prepared and shared by Bishop Duane Pederson of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin in response to misinformation shared with ELCA congregations by some groups and individuals. Such "talking points" typically rely on particular instances that are framed as representative of the entire ELCA, or taken out of context, or misrepresent or cast in the most negative light possible. The following table intends to correct misinformation, draw our attention to honoring the 8th Commandment and to foster a culture understanding and clarity rather than suspicion and mistrust. For more information and documentation, please consult the Indiana-Kentucky Synod Web site (www.iksynod.org) and click the "Resources to live in creative engagement..." link on the home page.

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Claim	Response
The ELCA disregards the authority of the Bible	<p>False. The official teaching of the ELCA regarding the authority of the Word is stated in our governing documents:</p> <p>*C2.02. This congregation confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.</p> <p>a. Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, through whom everything was made and through whose life, death, and resurrection God fashions a new creation.</p> <p>b. The proclamation of God's message to us as both Law and Gospel is the Word of God, revealing judgment and mercy through word and deed, beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ.</p> <p>c. The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.</p> <p>*C2.03. 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.</p>
The ELCA does not consider the Bible to be "inerrant"	<p>True. "Inerrant" is a non-Confessional term that those who are literalist or fundamentalist in orientation have adopted to describe the Bible. The ELCA uses the Confessional terms of "inspired" and "authoritative" to describe the Holy Scriptures.</p>
The ELCA does not abide by the Lutheran Confessions	<p>False. The Confessional position of the ELCA is described as follows:</p> <p>*C2.04. This congregation accepts the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds as true declarations of the faith of this congregation.</p> <p>*C2.05. This congregation accepts the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as a true witness to the Gospel, acknowledging as one with it in faith and doctrine all churches that likewise accept the teachings of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.</p> <p>*C2.06. This congregation accepts the other confessional writings in the Book of Concord, namely, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles and the Treatise, the Small Catechism, the Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord, as further valid interpretations of the faith of the Church.</p> <p>*C2.07. This congregation confesses the Gospel, recorded in the Holy Scripture and confessed in the ecumenical creeds and Lutheran confessional writings, as the power of God to create and sustain the Church for God's mission in the world.</p>

The ELCA is drifting from sound Lutheran theology	False. The ELCA holds to the above confessional, biblical statements. The ELCA endeavors to build relationships with other Christian bodies, finding primary areas of theological common ground where partnerships can be established for the sake of mission in Christ’s name. Thus, the ELCA does not seek to separate itself from others through claims of theological purity or superiority; rather, the ELCA affirms its confessional, biblical foundation while reaching out to others for the sake of evangelical outreach and mission.
The ELCA is hierarchical in structure	False. Although the Churchwide Assembly is the highest legislative body in the ELCA, the structure of the denomination is similar to a representative democracy. Representatives to both synod and churchwide assemblies are 60% lay and 40% clergy. In the ELCA, congregations partner together as synods to carry out mission in ways they could not do alone – campus ministry, Seafarers ministry, scholarships for seminarians, Lay School of Ministry, Synod Resource Center, synod youth organization, global companion relationships, etc. Congregations partner together as the whole ELCA to carry out mission that the congregation or synod cannot do alone – global missions, ecumenical relationships, Lutheran Disaster Relief, World Hunger Appeal, national or worldwide mission initiatives, worship/outreach/stewardship/education resource material, chaplaincies, etc. Congregation, synod, and churchwide are three expressions of the church that enable the people of God to be engaged in Christ’s mission and both locally and globally.
The ELCA has “voting members” not “delegates” at synod and churchwide assemblies.	True. Lutheran history has never had voting members or delegates who have been bound to vote in particular ways. Persons who attend synod assemblies are elected by local congregations; persons who attend churchwide assemblies are elected by congregational voting members at synod assemblies. Persons have been historically elected to such representative positions based upon their commitment to the Lord and his church, prayerfulness in discernment, and common sense in making faithful decisions on behalf of all. Assemblies seek the Spirit’s guidance and movement through conversation and deliberation.
The ELCA mixes politics and religion	The ELCA holds that faith is more than a spiritual relationship with Jesus. Faith also involves “love in action” for the sake of neighbor. Scripture and our baptismal vocation call us into the world to advocate for peace, mercy, and justice. This call means that the people of God are engaged in the public square, speaking and acting on behalf of the poor, dispossessed, and those whose voices are not heard by the powers of this world. Further, the ELCA engages disaster relief, HIV/AIDS, hunger, sustainability, access to health care, etc. – all of which have political implications – close to home and around the world. Promises made at Baptism: “. . . trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace” (<i>ELW</i> , p. 228); and in Affirmation of Baptism: “. . . to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?” (<i>ELW</i> , p. 236)
The ELCA endorses “universalism”	False. The ELCA does not endorse universalism nor is it taught at any of the eight seminaries of the church. An old article posted on the ELCA website that some interpreted as universalism and an editing error in the first printing of the <i>Lutheran Study Bible</i> gave rise to this claim. *C2.02.a states the ELCA confession of faith regarding the salvation work of Jesus. *C2.02.b addresses Law and judgment, Gospel and mercy.
The ELCA is abandoning the Lord’s Prayer, the virgin birth, the resurrection, praying in the name of Jesus, the Bible as Word of God, Jesus as the Son of God, etc.	False. Anecdotal rumors are sometimes spread and then embraced as facts by those looking to find fault with the ELCA. Again, to review the theological position of the ELCA, refer to Chapter 2 of the constitution for congregations, “Confession of Faith.” Anything else is <i>not</i> representative of the teaching of the ELCA.

The ELCA is abandoning the Trinitarian language of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit	False. The ELCA's primary authorized worship resource is the <i>Evangelical Lutheran Worship</i> . It faithfully maintains the historic practice and understanding that there is but one name into which, and by which we baptize, namely, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Other uses (like invocations) are not "fixed" historically or theologically; for example, in addition to the more familiar Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, <i>ELW</i> includes alternative language that does not seek to "name" God in a different way, but to describe our understanding of the Triune God. These additional options are drawn from Scripture, as is so much of our liturgical language.
The ELCA supports the marriage of homosexuals	False. A ministry policy adopted at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly permits local congregations, if they choose to do so, to "recognize" the relationship between same gender, committed persons. The ELCA has no authorized rite of blessing for such unions. The ELCA defines marriage as between one man and one woman: "Marriage is a covenant of mutual promises, commitment, and hope authorized legally by the state and blessed by God. The historic Christian tradition and the Lutheran Confessions have recognized marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman, reflecting Mark 10: 6-9." <i>A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust</i> , 2009, p. 15.
Congregations of the ELCA may be sued if they refuse to interview a pastor in a committed, same-gender relationship	False. Local congregations are free to determine who they wish, or do not wish, to have as their pastor. In the same way that most Lutheran bodies deny the pastoral office to women without legal liability, so too local congregations may choose not to consider any pastoral candidate for any reason.
The ELCA is less committed to global mission than in the past	False. The ELCA has <i>always</i> been and will continue to be highly committed to global mission. How global mission is done, however, is somewhat different than in years past. The ELCA and its predecessor bodies typically sent missionaries to countries needing the witness of Jesus Christ. Now, however, most of those countries have an indigenous church and leadership such that our mission supports <i>their</i> church body, rather than sending evangelists. Many of our missionaries today serve in the area of education, health care, agriculture, etc.; the relationship between our synod and the Lutheran Church in Malawi is a good example. In addition, our ecumenical agreements make it less likely that we would send missionaries into an area that was already Christian, but not Lutheran, and the flourishing growth of Christianity in traditional mission fields means that North America is more likely to be a recipient of missionaries, not the sender.
The ELCA does not pray in the name of Jesus	False.
The ELCA endorses "mother goddess" descriptions for God	False. There have been instances where local faith communities have portrayed feminine imagery for God, but the ELCA's official worship material contains no such descriptions. Some congregations choose to use the feminine imagery of God contained in the Scriptures in their worship services as a way to expand descriptions of the breadth for which God acts toward creation.
The ELCA is being abandoned by many global communions	False. Although there is concern among some Lutheran bodies which are in relationship with the ELCA, the ELCA remains in fellowship with companions around the world and continues the deep, historic relationships that contribute to unity and mission.
The ELCA will produce Sunday School material promoting homosexuality	False. Augsburg Fortress is the publishing arm of the ELCA. There are no plans to publish any Sunday School or Confirmation material related to homosexuality. From AF CEO: " <i>Augsburg Fortress has no plans for the foreseeable future to change the content of our resources related to any of the actions of the recent ELCA Churchwide Assembly. Our focus continues to be on creating excellent group use faith formation & worship resources for congregations and excellent text & reference materials for higher education. We seek to provide resources that encourage thoughtful dialogue on all matters of importance to the church. We will continue to provide outstanding resources to serve a broad spectrum of congregations and educational institutions.</i> " Augsburg Fortress publishes material that is used widely by other denominations, and thus does not focus on social statements.

The ELCA constitution does not trump local congregational constitutions	False. All local constitutions, regardless of date of adoption or update, must conform with the most current ELCA Constitution. (See provisions 9.21., 9.25., 9.52)
The ELCA endorses sources of salvation other than Jesus	False. *C2.02. This congregation confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. a. Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, through whom everything was made and through whose life, death, and resurrection God fashions a new creation.
Congregations of the ELCA may interpret constitutional or policy matters in the manner they see fit.	False. The Secretary of the ELCA is the final interpreter of the governing documents of the ELCA as empowered by ELCA bylaw 13.41.04. There <i>is no</i> other valid interpretation.
An ELCA congregation can hold membership in another church body.	False. Neither clergy nor congregations can be “dual rostered.” ELCA Constitution provision 9.91.01 provides a dual roster relationship <i>only</i> for ELCA congregations who are in a federated relationship with a congregation of a full-Communion denomination. All other “dual” relationships are precluded.
Two congregational votes with a 2/3 majority are required to disaffiliation with the ELCA	Correct. ELCA Constitution provision 9.62 provides the constitutional process for disaffiliation. How a 2/3 vote is counted at a congregational meeting should be noted. Votes as prescribed by ELCA Constitution 9.62 must be approved by two-thirds of the voting members <i>present</i> . Note that it is <i>not</i> just those present and voting who are counted to determine the two-thirds; <i>all</i> voting members present must be counted in order to determine the denominator of the fraction. <i>This means that those voting members who do not vote or who abstain are the same as negative votes when calculating the two-thirds majority.</i> It also is important to point out the vote requirement in both 9.62.a. and 9.62.c. There must be a quorum present to transact business at a special meeting, and two-thirds of those present must vote in favor of the resolution for termination for the action to be adopted. (This is not the same as present and voting; two-thirds of all the voting members present must vote in the affirmative for passage.)
The bishop determines what constitutes the “consultation” during the minimum 90 day period between first and second disaffiliation votes.	Correct. ELCA constitutional provision 9.62.c. states, “The bishop of the synod shall consult with the congregation during a period of at least 90 days.” The bishop leads and is responsible for <i>all</i> aspects of the consultation as per the official interpretation of the ELCA Secretary. The content of the consultation reflects the unique context of each congregation in consultation. The bishop determines how the consultation will be conducted, who participates, how many meetings or forums are necessary, whether or not mailings are sent, etc. The consultation may be minimal and involve few or extensive with wide participation. 90 days is the <i>minimum</i> length of the consultation time. The bishop may request various congregational documents for review by the bishop, the ELCA Office of Secretary, and the legal counsel of the ELCA to ensure legality and good order.