

# What are the differences between the NALC proposal and LCMC?

The declaration by Lutheran CORE that they will create a new denomination has caused some confusion. What is NALC and how is it different from LCMC? Why do they need another new denomination?

This piece, compiled by an LCMC member, is an attempt to explore the differences, comparing LCMC’s documents and practices, and the NALC proposal released in February 2010. It is possible that NALC will, ultimately, look or function differently, but this is based on the proposal that they have published. If it serves as constructive criticism for NALC, so be it. Otherwise, it is a simply a comparison of LCMC and the NALC proposal.

Comparison	LCMC	NALC
<b>Self Described Key Attributes</b>	Free in Christ; accountable to one another; rooted in the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions; working together to fulfill Christ's Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations. <sup>1</sup>	“Christ-Centered; Mission-Driven; Traditionally-Grounded and Congregation-focused.” <sup>2</sup>
<p>As an Association of Congregations, LCMC is congregationally based. NALC says it will be “congregation focused.” There is a difference. They also emphasize “tradition” in describing themselves. These play out in the proposed structure.</p> <p>One of the criticisms of LCMC has been that it is “too congregationalist.” LCMC does not practice a <i>doctrinaire</i> congregationalism. LCMC has a ministry board and ministry standards. That board has assisted congregations in situations of pastoral misconduct. It has a Board of Trustees that has acted to discipline a district. This is not a congregationalism based on doctrine; it is the experience of LCMC that, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, with high levels of education available to many people and instantaneous communication, traditional denominational bureaucratic structures are unnecessary.</p>		
<b>What kind of organization?</b>	An Association of congregations. Calls itself “this association”	“A classical Lutheran denomination.” <sup>3</sup> Calls itself “the church.” <sup>4</sup>
<p>Many folks who think about the church say that we live in a “post-denominational era.” While we should not be paranoid about the use the word denomination, choosing to use it says something significant. “Classical Lutheran denominations,” and there have been perhaps 100 in this country, are characterized by strict control over membership and clergy rosters. It is worth noting that, except to describe what CORE was previously called, the words “free” and “freedom” never appear in the proposal.</p>		
<b>Who are members?</b>	Congregations are members.	Congregations <i>and</i> ordained ministers are members. <sup>5</sup>
<b>Definition of Church</b>	Affirms the Augsburg Confession: “The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administer-ed.” LCMC is Confessional.	“The Church is expressed primarily in the congregation <i>but is also manifested in wider structures...</i> ” <sup>6</sup>

<b>What authority does the board to have?</b>	Subject to the constitution, by-laws “and such other restrictions as may be imposed by the national convention” the Board of Trustees shall manage “the business and affairs of LCMC.” The board also sets the date of the national convention.	“Between convocations, an elected board will have authority to act on behalf of NALC.” <sup>7</sup>
This difference is important. The NALC proposal gives broad authority to the board. In practice, the LCMC Board has sought convention permission to even hold talks with other organizations.		
<b>Women pastors?</b>	LCMC affirms the call of women to ministry.	NALC “will recognize both women and men in the office of ordained clergy, while <i>acknowledging the diversity of opinion ... on this subject.</i> ” <sup>8</sup>
LCMC has an institutional (and constitutional) commitment to ordaining women. Based on this wording, it would seem that some of the NALC folks object to women pastors.		
<b>Role of Bishops?</b>	LCMC does not have bishops. Oversight in LCMC takes various forms. LCMC has standards for ministry and processes for review of pastoral candidates. Through districts and other contacts pastors and congregations help each other find calls and fill needs.	Several doors are left open. The proposal speaks of one bishop, but also speaks of plural “missionary bishops.” <sup>9</sup> Only the bishop will install the new bishop. Bishops will “ordain, or make provision for ordination.” <sup>10</sup> NALC also claims the authority to call pastors. <sup>11</sup>
One of the sources of trouble in the ELCA was that, in 1988, the “Ministry Question” was left open. In a similar manner, the notion that the bishop shall install the new bishop and will be responsible for ordination is an open door that invites the introduction of the historic episcopate. Lutherans have understood that the “call” of a pastor was from a congregation, not a church body or a bishop.		
<b>Other layers of structure?</b>	<p>LCMC has “areas” which exist solely for the purpose of electing trustees who are geographically diverse.</p> <p>Districts are non-legislative entities within the association that congregations are free to join - or not. Districts are free to work cooperatively on questions-of-the-day. This structure encourages intellectual ferment and minimizes bureaucratic infighting over theology.</p>	<p>Deans, or regional pastors, will “embody [the] oversight” of the bishop on a local level, and will be accountable to the bishop. They <i>may</i> continue to be congregational pastors.<sup>12</sup></p> <p>There are also references to “an elected board” and an “executive council”<sup>13</sup></p>
<b>Can congregations be dual rostered?</b>	LCMC does not restrict congregations from being affiliated with any organization or body that it determines enhances its mission, as long as it does not conflict with the LCMC statement of faith.	“Congregations affiliated with other Lutheran bodies may also be affiliated with this association.” <sup>14</sup>
NALC specifies that a congregation can be part of a <i>Lutheran body</i> . Would this preclude membership in the ACR or NAE? Also, while you can be a part of any Lutheran body, your pastor must be approved by, and a member of, NALC.		

<b>Who attends the annual business meeting?</b>	Each congregation is entitled to at least two delegates (more for larger congregations). A congregation may choose delegates of its choice.	All pastors and bishops on the roster are delegates, and “approximately an equal number of lay delegates, including at least one from every congregation.”
<p>The NALC proposal raises a couple of questions. Are retired clergy also entitled to be delegates? If a congregation has multiple pastors will they also have multiple lay delegates? Will some congregations have additional delegates based on size?</p> <p>At the least, it is clear that, in a sort of old-fashioned Lutheran synod way, dictating that half the delegates will be pastors places a much greater emphasis on the role of clergy and downplays the priesthood of all believers.</p>		
<b>What kinds of decisions are submitted for ratification by congregations?</b>	<i>All</i> changes to by-laws are subject to rejection by congregations. <i>All</i> changes to the constitution and ministry standards are subject to positive ratification.	All actions that “bind congregations in non-essentials” are subject to positive ratification. <sup>15</sup>
<p>This small point could be very important: who decides if an action is “binding” on congregations or not? For instance, one could argue that, based on the right of congregations to not call a pastor they find unacceptable and the “bound conscience” clause, the ELCA’ 2009 sexuality decisions were “non-binding.”</p>		
<b>Terms of Office?</b>	Board members are limited to two successive 3 years terms	Bishop, Secretary and Treasurer are eligible for re-election, <sup>16</sup> apparently without limit.
<b>How are benevolence dollars handled?</b>	Congregations are encouraged to give some money for the administration of LCMC. <i>All other benevolence money is distributed by local congregations directly to the ministries of their choice: local, regional and/or international.</i> LCMC also partners with a variety of ministries. <sup>17</sup>	Congregations will decide the level of financial support to the NALC budget. The budget will include NALC expenses <i>and support for partner ministries.</i> Congregations will also be encouraged to support other ministries directly. <sup>18</sup>
<b>Is there a difference regarding ordination?</b>	As a confirmation of call, ordination is a matter of congregational authority. Many congregations have another pastor ordain, but it is the congregation’s authority being exercised.	Bishops will “ordain, or make provision for ordination.” <sup>19</sup> Ordination is, apparently, by the authority of the bishop.
<b>How is ministry structured?</b>	Congregations call pastors according to LCMC’s and their own standards. Congregations can also choose to hire or call such other pastors or lay staff as fits the needs of their ministry.	NALC will “welcome Associates in Ministry, Deaconesses and Diaconal Ministers, and will explore the possible creation of a single structure of commissioned lay ministry.”
<b>Ecumenical Relationships?</b>	LCMC congregations engage in a variety of cooperative ministries in their local settings.	“NALC will engage in ecumenical dialogue,” including “new forms.” It will apply for membership in the LWF. <sup>20</sup>

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Endnotes

1. All information regarding LCMC is per the website, LCMC.net, including the Constitution, By-Laws, Board of Trustees minutes and Convention minutes.
2. Lutheran CORE / NALC Talking Points, February 18, 2010
3. Ibid.
4. A Vision and Plan for the North American Lutheran Church, page 5
5. Vision & Plan. Page 4. This and all subsequent *emphases* added.
6. Vision & Plan. Page 12. The author of this piece can find no Confessional rationale for this claim.
7. Vision & Plan. Page 5
8. Vision & Plan. Page 5
9. Vision & Plan. Page 9
10. Vision & Plan. Page 12
11. Vision & Plan. Page 5.
12. Vision & Plan. Page 12
13. Vision & Plan. Page 5 & page 13 respectively.
14. Vision & Plan. Page 6
15. Vision & Plan. Page 11-12
16. Vision & Plan. Page 12
17. While the partnerships are not exclusive, and we welcome additional support for their ministries, LCMC is already working with all the partner ministries that NALC proposes to work with.
18. Vision & Plan. Page 13.
19. Vision and Plan. Page 12
20. Vision & Plan. Page 14