

ELCA Versus LCMC: Myths and Facts

Myth:

Bethel will lose its property if we leave the ELCA.

Fact:

Bethel is not at risk of losing its property if it remains a Lutheran denomination.

Myth:

Bethel will have to repay the ELCA for all the support received while it was a mission church.

Fact:

Bethel was not a mission church under the ELCA. Further, there were no 'strings attached' to any mission support provided during Bethel's early days.

Myth:

The LCMC does not welcome Gay, Lesbian, Transgender, or Bi-sexual (GLTB) members to worship in its congregations.

Fact:

GLTB members and guests are always welcome to worship in LCMC congregations.

Myth:

The LCMC has no Lutheran seminaries from which it can call pastors.

Fact:

LCMC congregations are free to call pastors from the same sources as ELCA congregations.

Myth:

LCMC pastors are not as qualified as ELCA pastors.

Fact:

Most LCMC pastors are in fact former ELCA pastors and were educated at the very same Lutheran seminaries.

Myth:

The LCMC provides no oversight of its pastors and has no process for discipline or dismissal of pastors.

Fact:

The LCMC provides oversight of its pastors through a Board of Trustees elected by its member churches. The individual LCMC congregation may also terminate the call of its pastor with cause.

Myth:

The LCMC does not have Bishops.

Fact:

This is true. The hierarchical structure of the LCMC is "flat," affording more autonomy to individual congregations to govern themselves as opposed to a Synod Bishop.

Myth:

A pastor leaving the ELCA to join LCMC is 'defrocked' and no longer allowed to serve in a pastoral capacity.

Fact:

The ELCA will remove the pastor from its roster of serving clergy. But this does not affect the ordained status of the pastor and they are free to serve in all ordained roles.

Myth:

A pastor who leaves the ELCA will not be able to officiate at an ELCA congregation. Conversely, an ELCA pastor will not be able to officiate at Bethel.

Fact:

The local congregation defines who may officiate at the local congregation. (Ex.: while serving at Bethel Pastor Nita Mathews was not a rostered ELCA pastor, but she held all the rights and privileges of an ordained Lutheran pastor).

Myth:

A pastor who leaves the ELCA will lose their retirement benefits.

Fact:

A pastor who leaves the ELCA may retain all their retirement accounts with the ELCA Board of Pensions (BOP), transfer them to the LCMC-provided investment opportunities, or transfer them to any private retirement programs of their choice. Likewise, the served congregation can continue to contribute to the pastor's retirement plan regardless of where that plan is held.

Myth:

A pastor who leaves the ELCA will lose their health benefits.

Fact:

A pastor who leaves the ELCA may retain their health plan arrangements with the ELCA Board of Pensions (BOP), transfer them to the LCMC-provided Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Minnesota plan, or transfer them to any private health plan of their choice. Likewise, the served congregation can continue to contribute to the pastor's health plan expense regardless of where that plan is held.

Myth:

A church that leaves the ELCA will no longer be able to send their children to ELCA youth camps.

Fact:

Rainbow Trails Lutheran Camp has confirmed that they will continue to enroll Bethel youth and have them attend their camp; RTLC does not anticipate any change in this policy. Likewise, there are numerous alternative Christian camps available to us.

Myth:

Bethel will no longer be able to use the services of Augsburg/Fortress Publishing house, from which we have obtained our Sunday School and other printed material.

Fact:

There will be no limitations on Bethel's use of Augsburg/Fortress. We will continue to seek the best materials regardless of source. Indeed, today much of Bethel's printed and educational material comes from non-Augsburg/Fortress sources.

Myth:

Bethel will not be able to continue benevolence contributions to ELCA-related activities.

Fact:

All activities that are directly controlled by the ELCA will still remain open to Bethel contributions. Most recipients are directly accessible without going through the ELCA; Bethel can send benevolence contributions to them directly, thereby enhancing our donation by avoiding ELCA administrative overhead.

Myth:

Bethel will lose its tax-exempt status.

Fact:

The ELCA and LCMC are both approved by the IRS as tax-exempt 501(c)3 organizations.

Myth:

Bethel will need to revise its constitution.

Fact:

This is correct. Should Bethel move to LCMC we will need to revise our constitution.

Myth:

Bethel may never return to the ELCA once it leaves.

Fact:

A simple majority of Bethel's voting members may choose at any time to disassociate from the LCMC and vote to return to the ELCA, or as members approve in an amended Bethel constitution.

Myth:

The ELCA is the Lutheran church.

Fact:

The ELCA is *not* the Lutheran church. It is the organization that resulted from the merger of the ALC and LCA twenty-one years ago.
