

Open letter to Solid Ground Members:

On August 24, 2008, Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church in Shaunavon, Saskatchewan held its second vote to 'sever ties with the ELCIC immediately'. The vote passed with a majority and we now will be looking to align ourselves with another Lutheran organization. A part of this process will be an examination of our own core values and goals, and a re-examination of our mission as we prayerfully determine where the Lord will lead us.

This decision to leave was not one that was taken lightly and had evolved over the course of several years. To remain a part of the ELCIC, would have required our congregation to compromise to a point that would see us concentrate less upon scripture and would have us yield to a leadership that we believe has lost touch with many congregations.

Over the past few years, there have been numerous emails and letters written by concerned individuals across Canada regarding the move away from the complete authority of scripture, toward a more liberal approach in how that scripture should be interpreted. Attendance at national and provincial conventions did little to reassure us, and hearing those in leadership question the authority of scripture was disturbing. In addition to this, was the growing recognition that more conservative Lutheran congregations were being viewed as narrow minded and intolerant because of their opposition to some of the directions of the ELCIC. Issues such as same sex blessings and the ordination of homosexuals, have been two recent examples where the authority of scripture has been challenged.....but they are not the only issues. The feeling that the larger church body spends so much time at conventional gatherings doing the 'business' of the church and less on spiritual renewal left us feeling anything but uplifted by attending these gatherings. An emphasis upon social justice issues at the expense of other concerns left us wondering if the church was responding more to political than spiritual agendas.

Locally, we experienced many challenges, particularly when ministering to the needs of our congregation and our community. This resulted in a more grassroots, relationship building solution to doing ministry in our part of the world, but placed us in conflict with our synod. Our frustrations grew as our concerns were not heard or dealt with over a variety of issues including rural ministry, the call process, and the treatment of pastors and others who do not share the ELCIC's vision. We felt the repercussions first hand of standing against the current direction of the ELCIC. Rather than attempting to listen, or to attempt to find viable solutions, the synod chose to deal with us in a very oppressive, authoritarian manner. Our concerns were not welcomed and ultimately, we began to feel ignored. Through much prayer and consultation with the congregation, we concluded that in order to follow where the Lord was leading, we had to leave. The Lord has much more important work for us to do that does not involve battling the hierarchy of the ELCIC.

Despite our experiences, our congregation is excited about our future and even in the midst of trials there has been incredible growth. This growth has come in our relationship with Jesus Christ and with one another. We have also felt very connected with local outreach groups, other churches and other Lutheran organizations. We look forward to seeking out new opportunities for ministry. We praise the Lord for this and we will also continue to pray for congregations within the ELCIC as they seek to serve the Lord.

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