

# Redeemer Lutheran Church

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January 24, 2008

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Dear Bishop Burkat and Trustees:

Redeemer's council met on Saturday, January 12, 2008 and, among other business, considered two important issues and reached a resolution: (1) the call of Pastor Festo must be concluded, with the concurrence of Synod, without delay; and (2) Redeemer must be fully released from synodical administration, without contingencies.

## **A. The close of synodical administration**

The synodical administration appears to have been put in place on misinformation leading to unjustified conclusions about our church, as Redeemer has demonstrated over the past three months. The continuation of this administration is hindering our ministry efforts on every front, most notably in our efforts to develop enduring and meaningful stewardship, and in our efforts to secure permanent pastoral leadership for our growing church. In addition, it is distracting from our positive ministry efforts which we initiated long before we were ever informed of the synodical administration in October, 2007.

As we have pointed out in the past, the constitutional provisions authorizing the imposition of synodical administration have not been met, and the conditions extant to those provisions do not exist: (1) there is no desire among Redeemer's membership to close; (2) Redeemer's membership is not scattered and its numbers are not diminished but are in fact stronger than they have been in many years; (3) Redeemer is fulfilling all of the functions of a Lutheran parish, as it has been consistently throughout our 100-year history.

To clarify one important point, when Redeemer initiated the Swahili ministry in March, it knew the English-speaking service would receive less attention short term, as Redeemer relied on members who normally attended the English service to provide leadership for the Swahili effort. Reports and attendance did not show up in the parish reports, and the visiting supply pastor who reported this situation to Synod was not fully informed of Redeemer's total ministry.

Also, parish reports are particularly inaccurate since Redeemer has not had a pastor to make such reports in many years. All of this was discussed with Synod representatives both in July and November, 2007. Redeemer has worked overtime, on a repetitive basis, on this and other issues. In return, Synod has shown no interest in this parish other than to place us under synodical administration and then avoid interaction, while this growing, enlightened parish continues to fulfill the very mission Synod claims we have not met.

Pastor Festo Mutashobya, who has been supplying the Swahili service since July, 2007, began supplying the English service as of January 6, 2008. This was under a resolution of council. His first service was spiritually moving and very reassuring to our English-speaking members who left the sanctuary that Sunday with a visibly renewed spirit. Our congregation can now see that the sacrifices the English-speaking members made short term, have resulted in a stronger, more spiritually unified congregation.

Respectfully, if Synod intends to hold Redeemer under synodical administration, it must have good cause under its constitution to do so. If circumstances do not warrant such an imposition, as here, the administration must immediately be lifted. Both under our constitution as an operating Lutheran parish, and Synod's constitution governing its operations in the Southeastern Synod, there is mutuality of obligation, where each of us must respect and oblige the responsibilities and mission of the other.

Without mutual obligation, the expectations and conduct of Redeemer and Synod would be erratic and unpredictable, leading to unwarranted decisions and a breakdown of our Christ-centered missions and the worshipping body — quite the opposite of what these constitutions were designed to protect. In fact, we believe Redeemer Lutheran Church presents as a model church under Synod's constitution and all points considered, synodical administration simply is not justified.

For the above reasons, and for the additional reasons relating to the need to call Pastor Festo, Redeemer insists that the synodical administration be immediately lifted without contingencies.

## **B. Completion of the call of Pastor Festo Mutashobya**

Redeemer's congregational council approached the Bishop on November 1, 2007 with a resolution to call Pastor Mutashobya. Its desire to do so is even stronger today, as more people have had the opportunity to come to know and worship with him. Redeemer has had several spiritually significant events under his leadership including the Christmas concert, prayer services and a weekly Bible study. Pastor Festo is sensitive to his position as "supply pastor" but is restrained from full ministry only by the lack of the Bishop's endorsement.

The failure of Synod to address Redeemer's resolution on Pastor Festo in any way in the past three months is bewildering, as is the almost nonexistent response to Redeemer's numerous communications with the Bishop's office over the past two years. We have fully complied with every request of the Bishop in November and, in fact, Redeemer came to the November 1, 2007 meeting with most of the information already in place before it was requested. Redeemer has a spiritually driven and capable leadership team in place, which includes the volunteer services of a certified public accountant.

In spite of all of this, Redeemer has been without a pastor for more than a year. For the *past ten years*, Redeemer has been without a pastor most of the time, its ministry sustaining only from the limited services of various supply pastors who simply were not equipped to expand our ministry. We have been in continual communication with the Bishop's office for most of the past ten years, with little attention paid to this situation. Redeemer needs a pastor now.

Redeemer has seen no action from the trustees or the Bishop's office since our November 1, 2007 meeting. That meeting was our one and only meeting with the bishop in 2007. During this time, we made regular attempts to communicate with the Dean and Synod representatives, with little response. Redeemer's own ministry efforts, guided by God's hand, have led us to seek pastoral leadership that is compatible with the current situation and shows great promise. Hence, our resolution to call Pastor Festo Mutashobya.

Synod has had ample opportunity to evaluate and approve Redeemer's resolution to call Pastor Festo Mutashobya. Redeemer's council is committed to continue to provide leadership as it has been elected to do by the congregation, and as it has done without interruption in spite of the imposition of synodical administration.

As of January 1, 2008, Redeemer considers Pastor Mutashobya its pastor. He is qualified, and a respected member of the congregation. He has attended council meetings for the past six months, and is fully aware of Redeemer's situation. He was part of the process for developing Redeemer's ministry plan (again, no response from Synod on this plan). He has accepted our proposed compensation terms and is excited that he can work both within Redeemer and in our larger community to advance and build our congregation and ministry.

Most impressive in the past several months has been the desire of both services to interact in fellowship and worship. Redeemer presents with one congregation, despite its diversity. We are planning united worship for the upcoming Lent and Easter seasons, as proposed by the worshipers at the Swahili service. It has been a joy to watch people grow in Christian fellowship at a self-designed pace. Pastor Mutashobya's spiritual leadership has been pivotal in providing a strong foundation upon which to continue to build our parish and to thrive as a unique, and united, parish community.

Both Redeemer and Synod must be responsible to the Christ-centered mission of fulfilling Redeemer's mission, growing its congregation and evangelizing both within its congregation and in the larger community. Redeemer is dedicated to moving forward with its specific plans, as outlined above and in its ministry plan. This must begin with concurrence and support from Synod for immediate and unconditional release from the synodical administration, and the consummation of the call of Pastor Festo Mutashobya.

Yours in Christ,

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