

Important Questions

The conflict with SEPA Synod raises a number of serious questions which leaders in our church must address.

1. Who do church council members answer to -- the people who elect them or the bishop? In Redeemer's situation, church council members acted with the full support of the congregation. Synod chose individual members (not necessarily even council members) to sue personally for council actions which followed the wishes of the congregation. This is nothing but an intimidation tactic which should not be encouraged.
2. Does the bishop have the right to call congregational meetings without consultation of congregational leaders? Redeemer's constitution says the president of the congregation or its pastor may call a congregational meeting. It also allows for meetings to be called by petition of the congregation. There is no mention that the bishop may call meetings without consultation of the congregation's leadership.

In 1997 and 1998, Redeemer's Council worked with the Synod behind the backs of the congregation. In that confrontation, the congregation prevailed but the council members' reputations within the congregation were seriously damaged. All council members who went along with the Synod had little choice but to withdraw their membership.

3. The ELCA Articles of Incorporation state clearly that the Synod may not convey property or assets of a congregation without the express consent of the congregation. This was a promise made to congregations before they joined the new body in the 1980s. The constitution, written after the Articles, allows for such action only under certain conditions -- conditions which were not met in Redeemer's case and which Redeemer demonstrated repeatedly.

This is the foundation of Redeemer congregation's appeal of Judge Murray-Lynn's September 2009 ruling. As of this writing, more than two months after the court ruling, Judge Lynn has not written an opinion explaining his decision.

4. Does Synod Council represent the congregations or is Synod Council an arm of the bishop's office? Synod council acted on the basis of a vindictive letter from an angry supply pastor who the congregation had just informed they would no longer be using. No Synod Council members looked into his allegations against Redeemer independently. When a congregation is without a pastor, how do they have dialog with a Synod which doesn't answer correspondence or answer the telephone? When one Redeemer member approached a member of Synod Council, he was told flatly, "We have no intention of negotiating." This goes against Bishop Hanson's recommendation (not to mention the Bible). The problems between Synod and Redeemer should have been settled with respectful consultation. There was no need for this conflict to escalate to locksmiths, lawyers, land grabs and court cases before there was ANY attempt to work with the congregation. Good leaders should have found respectful ways to work with, not bully, congregations. Their constitutional charge is "to nurture." Read the correspondence between our congregation and Synod linked from the bottom of the home page. Redeemer made suggestion after suggestion for respectful road to peace -- all ignored.
5. What is the procedure for appeal? Synod made the rules regarding the appeal process as they went along, changed them at will and with little or no notice, and did not respond to our congregation's requests for information until just a few days before the appeal was scheduled. There was nothing fair or impartial about the process. It was controlled every step of the way by Synod, who, since it was actively suing the congregation before its appeal was heard, had a huge bias. This sole remedy for grievances is a disgrace.
6. Ask Synod Council and Synod officials how many dollars which could have been spent on helping congregations were spent on legal fees.