





SouthEastern Pennsylvania Synod (SEPA) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) locks congregation out of God's House on Sunday morning, September 27, 2009.

This site has been created in support of Redeemer members who have been locked out of God's House.
It is a private initiative in support of the Redeemer congregation.

This web site is about Redeemer Lutheran Church in East Falls, Philadelphia, Pa. It presents facts about SEPA Synod's relationship with Redeemer congregation never presented to Synod Assembly in the wholly inadequate time allowed by the Synod to hear the significant issues its actions created.
This case has the potential to affect EVERY congregation in the Synod and the ELCA. What is happening here could very well happen again.

Synod has the building but it doesn't have Redeemer Church. The church is the people.

If you would like to contribute to Redeemer's Defense Fund, please [click here](#).

1980s

In the Beginning . . .

Redeemer Lutheran Church is a neighborhood church founded in 1891. It's members have always been primarily small business owners and professional workers. It has always had an entrepreneurial and forward-thinking personality.

Redeemer's first service in 1891 was in German. That was also the last service in German. The congregation immediately determined that English was the language of their future.

The congregation has always been self-sufficient. When their building which was built with their money burned to the ground in the 1920s, they rallied and rebuilt the church themselves. Throughout the course of their history, they borrowed money about once every ten years to advance a mission objective, always paying back the debt early. In the 1960s and the era of the post-war population boom, Redeemer borrowed money to build an educational building and paid the note off early.

Although the faces have changed over the decades, Redeemer continues to stand on its own feet to forge interesting and creative ministry. It's membership is still comprised of business entrepreneurs and professional people.

At the time of the ELCA merger in the late 1980s, Redeemer had a pastor who served the congregation until about 1996. This coming years would be the first time Redeemer would turn to SEPA Synod and the ELCA to find new professional leadership. SEPA Synod failed this congregation from its first need.

In 1998 and again in 2008, the Synod has attempted to force the congregation into closure rather than serve and nurture the congregation as its constitutions call for.

As of this writing, the Synod has locked the congregation out of its house of worship in a protracted court case centering on ownership of the land, which has been fueled by gossip and misinformation. Since 2006, the congregation's numerous attempts to seek a forum for reconciliation have been ignored. Numerous calls were made to the Synod and to the region's Dean. Only one phone call was returned -- a message left by Rev. Davenport in February 2007, stating that there was no progress to report. Days later, the Bishop sent two letters declaring the church to be closed. No letters written by Redeemer to Synod were answered. A supply pastor even visited Synod offices, leaving his calling card and again no answer.

Redeemer was being shunned.

VIEW the HISTORY OF CORRESPONDENCE linked from the bottom of the Home Page.

Have You Heard the One About ?

Ecclesial Gossip Fuels Conflict

The Redeemer Story

If you are active in SEPA synod, either as rostered leader or as a diligent, hard-working, faithful volunteer, otherwise known as a lay person, you have likely heard of Redeemer, a small congregation in the neighborhood of East Falls in Philadelphia. You have probably heard that Redeemer is a "problem church," That Redeemer has "squandered" assets, or even that Redeemer has tried to have Bishop Burkat arrested.

These charges are untrue but they have circulated so long throughout this synod they they have taken on a life of their own.

Many of the rumors are based on selected facts, total inaccuracies, and even out-and-out untruths. Favorable statistics and actions of Redeemer have been totally left out of Synod accounts, although the information was available -- some of it even published by Synod.

It's a long story. It's a complicated story. Why should any other church care? Other congregations should care because churches are supposed to care. We are Christians. SEPA Synod exists to serve. Targeting congregations for no service and eventual takeover is not part of the covenant congregations entered into in 1988.

During the recent court proceedings (9/09), synod revealed that they have targeted five more congregations for the "Redeemer" treatment. And if they succeed at Redeemer, your congregation may be next.

Bishop Clare Burkat stated that "churches must be allowed to die." (11/1/07). Neglecting the needs of a congregation, whatever its size, disregarding its members, however many, robbing Christians of their heritage and displacing them from their communities is not an acceptable

"mission tactic." The danger in following this philosophy is exactly what has happened at Redeemer. Synod leaders worked to justify a philosophy and became blind to ministry and the Redeemer members were soon cast as "adversaries" because they could not in Christian conscious follow the Synod's death wish. As "adversaries" they could easily be dismissed. Tragically, this course allows Synod to abandon its mission which is to nurture congregations. Redeemer has been without a pastor for most of the last 12 years. Ask yourself what would become of your congregation, if so neglected. Redeemer actually grew!

All sides of this story must be heard -- which did not happen in the 16 minutes allowed prior to the Synod Assembly vote in May 2009.

This is a story which should not be buried in synodical archives. This is an attempt to air the truth. Feel free to jump around. The true story will start to come together. There is nothing in these vignettes that cannot be documented. Up to now, Synod has been careful to control every forum and discourage reconciliation and open dialog. The clear objective has always been to gain control of congregational property.

SEPA Lutherans, this is happening on your watch! Only you can make things right and it is never too late to right a wrong. Our church is only as good as the integrity of its leaders and members. We sing of justice, standing up for right, fighting the good fight. It is time to put faith into action.

Redeemer was told prior to the Synod Assembly vote by some in attendance (an actual letter exists from one pastor) "We elected the bishop; we have to support her." If this is prevailing sentiment for Synod Assembly, then Synod Assembly is not capable of undertaking its constitutional role of arbitrating disputes between congregations and the bishop. The ELCA should address this. Justice demands impartiality.

RUMOR 1

“They Are Squandering Their Endowment!”

Money Changes Everything Redeemer Receives an Endowment

SEPA paid little attention to 90-year-old Redeemer at the time of the church mergers in the late 1980s. Redeemer had a pastor and though far from rich, managed to pay its way. Shortly after the merger, Redeemer became the beneficiary of an estate worth some \$300,000. The money was designated for ministry in East Falls.

Suddenly, Redeemer had Synod’s attention.

There were many ideas for how to spend the money but Redeemer saved most of it.

The money was a sweet nectar and the congregation had to be vigilant to safeguard it. The pastor at the time recommended hiring a second pastor to serve as a paid treasurer. The propriety of this arrangement was questioned by members and brought to Bishop Michael Merkel’s attention. Some wrists were slapped which strained relationships in the congregation. In 1996 an embezzlement by a church officer was discovered and dealt with promptly. Charges were filed and restitution was made. This 12-year old incident, long since rectified, was raised by the Bishop Burkat at her first meeting with Redeemer leadership in December 2006. To Redeemer’s credit, both of these incidents were caught by Redeemer members early and things were corrected before damage was done. The congregation had been vigilant.

The Endowment is still the topic of the Synodical Rumor Mill. “They are squandering their endowment” is one of the rumors we have heard during this last episode with the Synod.

No report has ever detailed how Redeemer has squandered money except by unsubstantiated innuendo. In fact, our congregation has rarely used the endowment for its own routine operating expenses. Tragically, most of this money was spent protecting our endowment from synodical greed.

Shortly after receiving the endowment Redeemer spent \$60,000 restoring stained glass windows which were sagging from 80 years of the force of gravity.

\$30,000 was spent defending our right to have an endowment when Bishop Almquist attempted to seize our assets in 1998. The Synod took \$90,000 from our bank account and held it for two years, calling it “synodical administration.” They released us from “synodical administration” after one year, but held on to our money for another year. No interest was paid on this money. Redeemer in effect gave the Synod a two-year, interest-free loan.

Redeemer paid pastoral salaries to pastors who didn’t live up to their commitments to the tune of another \$30,000.

Redeemer hosted Epiphany congregation with no compensation for six winter months. Heating bills alone for their daily use of the building were \$7000 more than when Redeemer was the sole occupant. No offer of compensation for this hospitality was made when Epiphany was permitted to vote on how their assets were dispersed -- a right Redeemer was never afforded.

Synod interfered with Redeemer’s 25-year tenant, the Lutheran Agency, Ken Crest. They chose to leave and shut down their program rather than be involved in questions of who their landlord was. They had been on a month to month tenancy while they made up their mind whether or not to sign the lease. They did sign the lease, but after Synod interfered, they whited out their names. The existing lease called for double rent payments for month to month status, but these payments were never made. Redeemer was left with no income for a year and \$4000 in unpaid summer air conditioning utility bills.

It took a year to find a new tenant and the endowment paid expenses during this time. At this writing SEPA Synod (10/09) has locked Redeemer’s current tenant out of the space they are leasing. Cost to Redeemer: about \$50,000.

Finally, over the last two years Redeemer used \$100,000 to fight Synod’s attempts to seize our property and bank accounts at a time when it had been demonstrated that the congregation was growing and ready for new ministry. It hurt deeply to use the money which was given for ministry in East Falls to fight legal battles.

RUMOR 2

Redeemer Has Not Worked with the Synod

This RUMOR is found in the Trustees Report.

Truth: Synod has not worked with Redeemer. For years Redeemer's various leaders, including our part-time pastor (Rev. Harvey Davis) tried to work with the SEPA synod to find pastoral leadership. From 2001 to present, not a single name was offered to us by SEPA Synod.

Meanwhile, Redeemer was always able to find pastors. Many strong relationships were formed. With their help, Redeemer grew to the point that finding a pastor was imperative. Redeemer leadership spent three months preparing a detailed plan on how the congregation intended to do this. This plan called for the use of its own resources. Redeemer asked for no monetary assistance from SEPA or the ELCA. This plan was presented to Bishop Burkat in person on November 1, 2007. She promised to review it. Four months passed before Redeemer heard from her again . . . and she has never commented on the plan in Redeemer's presence, at least.

In 2006, after Epiphany left, Redeemer made a concentrated effort to reach the family and friends of Swahili members. Having no pastor, Redeemer leadership made a conscious decision to use skills of members who usually supported the English service for this new effort even though it would affect the numbers at English worship short term. The project met with early success. The congregation was excited and sent good news to Synod's Mission Developer. He did not respond to written letters and photos, but Redeemer heard another rumor: it didn't matter what Redeemer did, the bishop was digging in her heels and intended to close that church. This was in June, one month after Bishop Burkat was elected and before she ever visited Redeemer.

During this time Redeemer leadership called our regional dean often. No response. We contacted the Synod Mission Developer. No response. Our supply pastor attempted to call, write and visit with Synod Leadership. No response.

Redeemer forged ahead alone.

Hearing nothing from Synod, Redeemer continued its Swahili ministry and in the fall conducted a membership drive which brought in 49 new members.

Pastor Mutashobya met with new members and read Redeemer's constitution to them. Redeemer had three vacant seats on church council and this group of new members (who now outnumbered the older members) to choose three representatives to fill the empty seats. These members were then approved by council with the understanding that their terms would end with the next congregational meeting five months later. Redeemer's constitution allows council to approve candidates to fill seats until the next congregational meeting.

Although ignored by SEPA, the National Church asked for a report on Redeemer's successful ministry and with Pastor Mutashobya's help Redeemer sent a report to Chicago. (See documents at bottom of home page).

The fact of the matter is SEPA has neglected Redeemer for the 20 or so years Redeemer has been in association. SEPA Synod has never fulfilled its constitutional obligations toward this congregation.

RUMOR 3

We Tried to Have the Bishop Arrested

This pervasive rumor is not true and serves to obscure the fact that on February 24, 2008, Bishop Burkat and a band of supporters numbering about ten came to Redeemer for the announced intention of discussing "its final service." Redeemer had expressed no interest in closing, there had been no vote of the congregation or even prior discussion on this subject with the congregational leaders, and therefore Redeemer had no interest in such a meeting and informed the bishop accordingly. This would have been Bishop Burkat's first meeting with the congregation. Under this circumstance, discussing closure was certainly premature.

Never told in Synod's version of this story is the fact that the Bishop arranged to have a locksmith waiting in a van behind the property to seize the property even as the congregation was to be meeting for the FIRST time with the bishop.

Also left out of the story is the fact that the congregation had informed the bishop that the date she had chosen without consultation with the congregation was also the date of the congregation's already noticed Annual Meeting and the congregation did not want to return in the afternoon after worship and the annual meeting for a third church event on the same day, especially since the congregation's largest family had a private celebration scheduled for the same time. This had been communicated directly to Patricia Davenport two weeks earlier when she visited the congregation.

At that well-attended Annual Meeting with an ample quorum (triple the required number), the president, Stanley Meena, and a member of the church, Judith Gotwald, were authorized to be present just in case the bishop came. She had not responded to any of Redeemer's correspondence (as was the norm).

At 3 pm, the bishop and her party arrived. The group included Pastor Davenport, the four trustees--Tracey Beasley, Rev. Lee Miller, Rev. Ray Miller (check it out--he runs a web site, Lutherans for Peace!), Larry House--and several other unidentified pastors. The synod's attorney

was also present. The Redeemer representatives reminded them that we had informed the bishop that Redeemer could not meet on this date. This was acknowledged.

The bishop pressured Redeemer to open the door. Redeemer repeated that there was to be no meeting that day.

As the group moved towards the door, it was stated "if you try to enter our church without our permission, we are prepared to call the police." The Rev. Lee Miller said, "You would have the bishop arrested." Redeemer made clear that they did not want anyone to be arrested but that they wanted the legal issues involving property to be settled through legal channels.

The bishop told the Redeemer members that they could return to their respective cars. They stayed put. Eventually, the bishop's party dispersed. The Redeemer members stayed for a while afterwards. In leaving the president circled the block and noticed the locksmith van. The Synod's Lawyer was sitting in the front seat of the locksmith van. A confrontation followed. Redeemer's lawyer was called. He demanded a court order for the changing of any locks. Although no police were ever called, two police cars happened by and at the sight of police, the synod lawyer hopped in his car and sped away, followed by the locksmith van.

Redeemer filed a court case the next week for one reason only -- to protect its property rights which were clearly in jeopardy.

Synod would later file multiple law suits against the congregation and named the two Redeemer members who stood with them on the sidewalk on that snowy February day personally. (How fast would your congregation grow if the bishop went after your members in court?)

Interestingly, in court where the truth is sworn, Synod's lawyer told the story correctly. The congregation threatened to call the police. Redeemer NEVER threatened anyone with arrest.

RUMOR 4

They Are Diminished.

SEPA Synod needs this rumor to be true. They need a constitutionally acceptable reason to take the actions they have taken.

The problem is that Redeemer has grown about seven-fold from the time Bishop Almquist released them from Synodical Administration in 1999 and had tripled during the months BEFORE Bishop Burkat took action. Her response when we presented our membership list was "It remains to be seen whether we recognize your members."

Synod's own 2005 published statistics list Redeemer as the only growing church in the small church category.

The Trustees Report states that the Trustees worshipped with Redeemer before making their decision. This is a falsehood. No Trustee visited Redeemer for worship BEFORE they imposed Synodical Administration but only after two intimidating letters had been sent to the congregation and just three weeks before they read their report to Synod Assembly. Only then, did Larry House come to worship to take a head count and he attended only one of the congregation's three weekly worship services. There were 14 that Sunday morning. The week before there had been 22. No Trustee ever visited Swahili

worship which was growing at an astonishing pace.

Synod's actions, especially suing individual members, scared many. Many of our members, including one of those Synod sued, are not American citizens. This was truly intimidating and most tragically it tested the faith of a faithful people. How could their church treat them this way? They didn't officially leave the church but attended only special events such as Praise and Worship and told the congregation that they would return when the conflict was over.

There is no doubt that the court case has taken a toll on our congregation. Being without a pastor for most of the last ten years has taken a toll on the congregation. But it is not acceptable for a Synod to systematically create diminished numbers in order to justify a land/asset grab. That cannot possibly have been the intent of the drafters of the constitutions.

Redeemer still has many more members than in 1999. It still has an operating full council. It still has families, men, women and children. Redeemer is still a church.

Redeemer Is A "Problem" Church

It takes two to tango!

Redeemer has not been treated well by SEPA Synod and in the Synod's 20-year history, it imposed administrative will on the congregation twice in 11 years without the consent of the congregation -- a violation of its Articles of Incorporation and its stated mission. In between these attempts very little assistance was offered and requests for participation in the normal synod/congregation matters were routinely ignored.

How would any congregation fare if it had been left without pastoral help for 12 years? Redeemer responded to the challenge by developing extraordinary Lay Leadership skills. Redeemer not only existed without a pastor, Redeemer grew several fold.

SEPA Synod has never cooperated with or recognized Redeemer's lay leadership and from the beginning of the confrontation took the position that its lay leaders had to "step down" if it was to work with Synod. The strategy seems to be to discourage the most knowledgeable so that Synod can more easily have its way. But Lutherans believe in congregational polity, do we not?

How would any congregation respond to a demand that its members hide their talents "under a bushel"? How should they respond to a Synodical demand to disqualify their elected leaders with no cause stated?

Synod alleges that no pastors want to serve this congregation but do not recognize the stigma that their relationship has created affects professional leadership. It was synod's job to advocate for this congregation and if it had

not had designs on our assets, it might have been more willing to do its job.

Redeemer has independently formed strong working relationships with several pastors in the last decade, including Pastors Harvey Davis, Michael Shreve, the late John Parkinson, Russell Jenkins, Ipyana Mwakabonga and Festo Mutashobya.

Redeemer requested a formal call to Pastor Mutashobya and he had already agreed to its ministry plan and payment terms. Synod ignored the congregation's resolution.

There are problems here to be sure. All congregations have problems. In Redeemer's case many of the problems have been created and fostered by Synod leadership. Synod has been part of Redeemer's problems.

Synod's bad-mouthing of our congregation has created an entrenched prejudice against this good and talented group of people.

As evidenced by a letter presented to the congregation drafted by Synod's lawyer (9/09), Synod would follow the same pattern of leadership the early church in America imposed on native Americans. Take their land. Silence their leadership. Weaken the congregation with periodic shows of strength. Permit its return only when total submission has been demonstrated. This style of leadership was disastrous in the past and will be disastrous moving forward. It is shameful, unLutheran and unbiblical.

From the beginning of this confrontation to present, the focus has been on Redeemer's financial and property assets. The people have been totally forgotten.

The Synod Is Supporting Redeemer They Have a Right to Protect Their Investment

Redeemer has NEVER accepted support money from the Synod. Redeemer has NEVER sought support money from the Synod.

Support money was not even discussed with Synod until Bishop Burkat told the judge that she had a plan to provide ministry to our church if title to the property was turned over to them. No such offer was ever made to our congregation before this.

During the September 2009 Court Proceedings, Synod Lawyer wrote a letter to Redeemer offering several hundred thousand dollars in support under condition that land title would be transferred to them. Under this plan they would close the congregation for a year and reopen under their control with congregational leadership subject to their approval. There was no mention of what our members should do for a year with no church. This is unacceptable. This is imposing mission status on a congregation that has not requested it.

Redeemer is not seeking "mission" status.

Redeemer is aware that the acceptance of significant mission money means accepting Synod or ELCA control of its ministry.

Redeemer has always been self-supporting and is confident that even under the significant challenges Synod has placed in the way that they can continue to fund a ministry with their own resources. A significant resource is the equity in the land they have owned and treasured for 100 years.

Redeemer has assets it can use to fund its own ministry and is prepared to use the talent and creativity of its people to fund its own mission initiatives.

Redeemer has sought only one thing from Synod: approval of a qualified minister of the congregation's choice. Redeemer found a minister meeting both Synod qualifications and Redeemer's needs. Synod ignored the resolution to call Pastor Mutashobya and encouraged him to go to another church.

SEPA Synod's sudden interest in "helping" serves only to camouflage its real motive--to obtain title of Redeemer's land.

Also part of Bishop Burkat's offer to the judge was the information that Redeemer is the first of six churches they intend to put through this treatment. Are you one of the other five?

1996-Easter 1997

Bishop Almquist Breaks Contract with Redeemer

The congregation had every reason to believe that things were off to a good start when it agreed to join the ELCA in the late 1980s. The congregation had a new pastor who was to serve until about 1996. When his pastorate ended, Bishop Almquist proposed an 18-month interim ministry with Rev. Robert Matthias. The congregation was happy with the arrangement. Three months later, Bishop Almquist visited with the Congregation Council and asked to break the contract. He told Redeemer that he had work for Pastor Matthias in Bucks County. Pastor Matthias gave 30-day notice ending on Easter Sunday, 1997.

Bishop Almquist offers no compensation for the broken contract and the only replacement found was the limited services of the church organist who was also an ordained pastor.

Our 18-month ministry was curtailed in four months; the money the congregation had invested in the contract was gone.

This was the congregations first need for Synod's services under the ELCA and SEPA Synod failed the congregation.

January 1998

Synod's First Attempt to Seize Redeemer's Property

SEPA Bishop Roy Almquist attempts to close Redeemer congregation, sending three Synod Council representatives to the congregation's annual meeting. Seeds for distrust sown.

AN HISTORIC OVERVIEW

SEPA Staff worked with Redeemer's Congregational Council behind the backs of the congregation to orchestrate a takeover. The congregation's Annual Meeting was announced for January even though it is constitutionally scheduled for the last Sunday in February.

WHY? To call a special congregational meeting to discuss Synod's desire to close our congregation would have required two weeks notice and the purpose for the congregational meeting in writing. Using the regularly scheduled Annual Meeting and just moving it up a month was a tactic the Synod used to approach the congregation without notifying them of their intent -- blindsiding them.

This meeting took the form of a usual annual meeting but when it came time for the presentation of the budget, the Council presented a resolution to close the Church. This resolution which was drafted by Synod was detailed to the point of naming a date for a closing service (March 4, 1998). The congregation, hearing this for the first time, wisely voted to table the motion for congregational study.

Seven Congregation Council members, on cue, tendered their resignations, again drafted by Synod staff, onto the table. These were quickly collected by

the Synod Council representatives and were not shared with the congregation for many months after numerous requests by the congregation.

The three Synod Council members rose and declared themselves to be in charge of the meeting which they announced was ended. No vote to end the meeting was taken. Chaos erupted. While two Synod representatives talked to the angry members, the third went to the church office with one of the resigned council members and took the church financial records. They left the meeting to attend a Synod Council meeting. It was at this Synod Council meeting, after the fact, that the congregation was declared under Synodical Administration.

That week (it may even have been the next day), a Synod representative visited Redeemer's bank with the former treasurer and withdrew \$90,000. It was never disclosed how the \$90,000, which had been in a high interest savings account, had been transferred without proper signatures to the church's checking account.

At the time, the Synod Council members seemed to presume that the entire council had resigned. Perhaps their embarrassment that this was not the case was why they refused to share the resignation letters. Three council members refused to be part of the ruse. These three council members convened with the help of a friendly pastor and restored the council to constitutional levels. This full, 10-member council, immediately notified Bishop Almquist of the congregation's intent to oppose this action.

PLAYERS: Synod Council Representatives were Rev. Rodney Kopp, Rev. Gordon Simmons and Rev. Robert Matthias, who had been our interim pastor for four months a year before. Rev. Sue Ericsson was the Assistant to Bishop Almquist who met privately with our council.

1998

The Year of Synodical Administration

AN ABANDONED CONGREGATION

Rev Robert Matthias took charge but did little to operate the church other than to collect bills. He held one meeting with the congregation which he prefaced by stating that he would not listen to any discontent.

Synod did nothing to provide pastoral leadership. The leaders of the congregation begin to plan their own worship. This was a new experience for all. The congregation president lined up supply pastors, an arrangement that lasted more than one year.

The congregation vice president began to plan worship on a weekly basis. Fortunately, our church organist stuck with us throughout the crisis. Also, fortunately, Redeemer had talented lay people many of whom had sung in church choirs all their lives and understood the structure of Lutheran worship.

There was significant fallout as the seven council members who had cooperated with Synod without the knowledge of the congregation were disgraced within the congregation and although they were never asked to leave, their standing in the congregation was so compromised that they, their families and closest friends left. This accounted for some 30 members. Redeemer was left with about 20 members.

Without professional leadership, Redeemer ran an all-day, all-summer day camp, a two-week music camp, and worshiped weekly.

Three trustees were appointed although they had little or no interaction with the congregation. They included Attorney Robert Blank, a pastor of a neighboring church (Bethany, Roxborough) and an accountant from Chester County. None of the trustees ever attended council meetings or worship. The congregation immediately requested to meet with Bishop Almquist in hopes of resolving issues. This request went unanswered for 90 days.

At this point, Redeemer engaged an attorney, J Stephen Woodside, who at the time lived in our neighborhood and came recommended from friends of the congregation in our community.

It was only after Redeemer consulted an attorney, that Synod showed any interest in meeting. Bishop Almquist expressed anger that an attorney had been consulted. The congregation pointed out that one of the trustees was an attorney and that the congregation's requests to meet before hiring an attorney were ignored for 90 days.

After a year, Bishop Almquist released Redeemer from synodical administration. However, cash assets confiscated by the Synod were not returned for yet another year. No interest was ever paid on the money taken from our accounts.

1999-2000

Ending Synodical Administration

ONE-YEAR TERM CALL

Bishop Almquist presented the name of Rev. Jesse Brown to the congregation and suggested a one-year term call. Redeemer agrees to accept his service for 12 hours per week for one year. The congregation viewed this as a step toward a more comprehensive ministry.

Interestingly, Pastor Brown's first comment following his installation was, "The first thing we do is suspend the constitution." The congregation insisted on following the constitution.

At the end of the term call, Pastor Brown requested that his call be regularized but indicated that he wanted to cut back his hours to 10 per week. The congregation was willing to extend the term call on this basis but declined to regularize a call for such minimal service. The congregation was looking for more ministry not less ministry.

The Congregational Council voted to not extend a regularized call. Bishop Almquist asked the Council to vote again. In a meeting with congregational leaders, he said, regularize this call or there won't be any pastor for a very long time. A second vote was taken and the vote failed again.

Bishop Almquist then asked for a congregational vote, although he did not explain the wisdom of asking the congregation to approve a candidate the church leaders could not recommend even when it was pointed out that the entire church added only a few more to the voting pool.

Dr. Addie Butler attended the congregational meeting to oversee the vote. Pastor Brown attempted to personally preside over his own vote but our congregation president invoked the constitution that states that the congregation president should preside over the meeting. This process was intimidating to our members who had so recently experienced the heavy-handed synod takeover. Each vote gained a vote or two for Pastor Brown, but even the third vote failed to provide the 2/3 majority required.

Shortly after, a letter went to the congregation asking for still another vote suggesting that a majority vote should be adequate. Bishop Almquist stopped the process there, but the requests for multiple revotes was both intimidating and demoralizing to the congregation.

From that point on, Synod offered no assistance in finding our congregation a pastor. Our leaders requested the service of one of the supplies Redeemer had used during our year without a pastor. The Rev. Harvey Davis served us part time for three years and succeeded in attracting several new families from the neighborhood. The families attracted were ethnically diverse. One Tanzanian family was to become a cornerstone to new ministry within a few years. Redeemer was growing.

Negative Impact of “Synodical Administration”

It must be trusted that “involuntary synodical administration” as vaguely outlined in the church constitutions was a provision intended to help struggling congregations. In Redeemer’s extensive experience, help for the congregation was never the objective as is richly evidenced.

For Redeemer, Involuntary Synodical Administration, has cost the congregation more than \$100,000, money intended for ministry. Other costs are even greater.

Working behind the backs of the congregation with our elected leaders created huge mistrust and damaged the reputations of the volunteer leaders who followed Synodical lead. Some 30 members left. It is not the constitutional charge of the Synod to CREATE diminished numbers in order to enact synodical administration. There were also questionable expenditures by the church council working with Synod. The prevailing attitude seemed to be, we might as well spend it before the synod takes it.

It sorely affected stewardship and our ability to ask members to consider bequests. No one wants to give offerings with the Synod standing in the wings to take. One long-time member of Redeemer who stayed through the first attempt at takeover in 1998 when pastoral leadership was non-existent, left Redeemer telling us that her health was poor and she just wanted to have the comfort of a church with a pastor. At her death two years ago, she left her sizeable estate to her new church.

Since 1998, the Redeemer has received estate gifts of only \$3000 (2008).

The atmosphere created by the broken relationship with the Synod has made finding professional leadership a challenge. Synod has been unable

to do this job which is their charge. Redeemer members on their own have been more successful. All Redeemer asked of Synod was to approve their choice of pastor. To this day, Synod has never responded to our request but met with our chosen pastor with whom Redeemer had worked for seven months and who had agreed to our compensation terms. After this meeting, Redeemer never again saw this pastor in our church.

Last year, Redeemer lined up a pastor for Christmas Eve. On December 23rd, this pastor backed out by email, saying he couldn’t “go against the bishop.”

Most egregious is the impact on members. Faith has been tried not nurtured. Never in the course of either episode of synodical administration has synod showed any compassion or care for Redeemer’s faithful. No programs were put in place to nurture the youth except by lay efforts. The sick were not called upon except by lay people. Any allowance for the Sacraments was undertaken by lay people. Worship was entirely lay managed. There was no visitation to members or in the community.

Synodical Administration is touted as saving ministry from waste. It is nothing but a land grab to benefit a cash-strapped Synod. In 2005, according to Synod Council minutes, the Synod was within \$75,000 of depleting every resource available. The actions against us were first rumored in June of 2006.

Positive Impact of “Synodical Administration”

None for the congregation!

2001-2004

Redeemer's Quest for a Pastor

REDEEMER WORKS ALONE TO FIND PASTORAL HELP

Pastor Davis was loved by Redeemer and was an effective pastor but he was in his 70s and after three years he wanted to spend more time enjoying retirement.

He and our council president met with Synod Assistant to the Bishop Sue Ericsson and told her of Redeemer's need to find help for Pastor Davis or a replacement. No names were ever presented by Synod. With their knowledge, Redeemer advertised and Pastor Davis soon found a number of seminarians or assistants. At one time Redeemer had four pastors working under Pastor Davis's direction. Pastor Davis insisted on paying them from the salary he received. They were in effect working for Pastor Davis. After some time, Pastor Davis chose to mentor a Church of God pastor, who agreed to work with us under Pastor Davis's guidance. But Pastor Davis was out of the country much of the time. This young non-Lutheran Pastor was a fish out of water without Pastor Davis's supervision. He served for one year but was not comfortable with Synod's requirements to attend some Seminary classes and he resigned.

Redeemer, ever resourceful, then approached a neighboring church, Epiphany in Roxborough, and suggested sharing the services of their Pastor, Timothy Muse.

2004-2005

The Attempted Merger with Epiphany

Redeemer congregation president approached a neighboring congregation whose building had been condemned due to termite damage. They were meeting on Saturday evenings in an Episcopal church.

Redeemer suggested sharing its building with them and they share their pastor. All agreed. A committee was formed and a covenant was written that would combine leadership, worship and finances over a period of time.

Both councils were to meet jointly with interim meetings of the individual church leadership as needed. It was anticipated that the two councils would unite within two years.

Part of the agreement was to share the services of Epiphany's financial team including its bookkeeper and office staff.

This seemed to be going very well. Redeemer took every step called for by the covenant, separating a portion of its money to form a joint ministry fund and welcoming Epiphany to use its property as if it were its own.

Epiphany continued to meet on Saturdays and Redeemer continued to meet on Sunday mornings. There was some mixing of the two groups and Redeemer sponsored a social mixer which was well received.

After a year, Epiphany requested a Sunday morning worship time and a joint meeting of the two worship committees met to discuss this. The only request coming out of this meeting was for a Sunday morning worship time which Redeemer leaders thought was entirely possible and desirable. Redeemer's leaders drafted a proposal designed to bring the two congregations together over a period of a year or two, calling for leadership input from both groups and alternating worship times on Sunday mornings with

combined worship once a month, alternating leadership of the combined worship events.

Pastor Muse circulated the proposal for discussion but Epiphany rejected the proposal and discussions broke off. It was never clear to Redeemer why. Rumors were heard that Redeemer had refused Epiphany the right to have communion. Bishop Burkat verified that she had heard this too and expressed surprise that this was an issue "in this day and age." Redeemer informed her that it hadn't been an issue and produced the proposal, which did not dictate worship style to Epiphany in any way. The discussions had been about worship time. There was very little discussion of communion at all.

The next two joint council meetings were abruptly canceled with no explanation.

In mid-October, Redeemer leaders received an email from Pastor Muse informing Redeemer of Epiphany's decision to close and his intention to resign with only ten days notice. (Thirty days notice is required by the constitution.) Epiphany broke the covenant with no conversation with Redeemer. Redeemer leadership requested a meeting with the bishop but was told she could not meet with Redeemer until she "finished" with Epiphany.

Epiphany continued to occupy Redeemer's building for the next six months. Since the arrangement was that they pay the pastor and Redeemer pay the building costs, and there was now no pastor, Epiphany stayed rent and utility free. Synod was of no assistance to Redeemer throughout this process, although Redeemer learned that Synod had met privately with Epiphany's president and Pastor Muse.

2004-2005

The Attempted Merger with Epiphany • Part 2

Why is this important today?

The report of the synod trustees goes back to our church records from this period of time and claims Redeemer council did not meet with a quorum for 14 months, exactly the amount of time it was meeting with Epiphany's council. The report cites this as grounds for imposing "involuntary synodical administration."

The trustees' report, which was never discussed with our congregation before publication, does not mention Epiphany's involvement at this time. This report was widely circulated without any attempt to verify its claims. It paints an entirely inaccurate portrait, one which Redeemer attempted to correct by letter to the trustees and to Synod Council. But this communication was ignored. (This letter can be viewed from the bottom of the the home page.) The truth is that Redeemer council was meeting with Epiphany's council. Epiphany's secretary was recording the meetings and these records were not reviewed by the trustees.

The trustees further cite that our officers were making decisions alone. They refer to minutes of these meetings but fail to mention that Pastor Muse was also present at these meetings, thus creating the impression that our officers were acting alone and inappropriately.

These meetings were interim meetings between larger joint council meetings. There were no reports, no treasurer's reports, etc. because they were not full council meetings. No major business was discussed or expenditures authorized. Redeemer was just getting to know Pastor Muse and these meetings facilitated our leadership learning to work with Epiphany. They were foundational to the making the covenant work. Responsibly, minutes were kept. Nothing was being hidden.

The trustees report grossly misrepresents this chapter in our history. Redeemer was not permitted to respond to this at the Synod Assembly Appeal.

2005-2006

A New Ministry Emerges

While Redeemer was working with Epiphany, Redeemer's council began exploring the development of a ministry to East African immigrants. Redeemer had about five Tanzanian members who had been active for five or six years and were growing into leadership positions. A year or so earlier Redeemer had hosted Swahili worship with the assistance of Pastor Butiku from Queens, New York. This early success ran into problems with distance and with the new people needing more voice in their worship. Redeemer identified the problems and was determined to overcome them.

Redeemer talked frequently to Pastor Muse about this and he pledged to look into finding a pastor but reported talking to Synod leadership and coming up dry.

When Epiphany announced they were closing and Pastor Muse left, Redeemer's council stepped up this program. Two council members spearheaded the effort and met with immediate success. Two pastors were identified and the weekly services began to attract a dedicated following.

It was well discussed at council meetings that in order to grow the Swahili ministry Redeemer would have to rely on the support of members who traditionally attended English worship for an undetermined period of time. It was anticipated that attendance at English worship would suffer in the short term but that long-term benefits might result. Redeemer's eyes were wide open to this but thought it was worth the ministry investment.

In the summer of 2006, Redeemer hosted a Praise service followed by a Gala Goat Roast which was a huge success. Redeemer wrote to Synod's Mission Director about our growing ministry. Rev. Bubba did not respond to our letters but Redeemer heard for the first time the rumor: it doesn't

matter what that congregation does, the Bishop intends to close it. This was in June one month after Bishop Burkat had been elected and before any of Redeemer had met the new bishop.

By fall Redeemer felt confident and conducted a membership drive. One of the Swahili-speaking supply pastors, the Rev. Festo Mutashobya, personally oversaw the acceptance of 49 new members. The congregation council realized that new members now outnumbered old. In an attempt to give the large new membership a voice, Redeemer offered them the opportunity to fill three council seats from their number. It was made clear that these seats would be filled only until the next annual meeting when the entire congregation would take part in the election. Pastor Mutashobya met with new members and read the constitution. Three members were chosen to fill the empty seats and were approved at the following council meeting.

The Trustees Report sites this as a serious constitutional infraction.

Redeemer constitution allows vacant seats to be filled by vote of council and this is exactly what was done. Providing the large number of new members a voice was a wise way to handle a situation which the constitution did not foresee -- a large number of new members in a short time.

This resulted in a remarkably balanced council. There were three "white" council members, three "black" council members who had been members for several years and three new Swahili-speaking members.

The challenge to the congregation was to continue to unite the two groups. Swahili worship continued for a few months, but soon asked for united worship. Pastor Mutashobya was instrumental in making this happen. Redeemer was soon worshipping as one, using two languages. New and Old members were excited by the unique ministry and community which was bonding.

December 2006-2008

Synodical Administration • Episode 2

In December 2006, Bishop Burkat agreed to meet with our leaders. We had several delicate concerns stemming from the Epiphany alliance that we thought would be best discussed in a small group format. Only our president and vice president were present to represent Redeemer. Bishop Burkat and Dean Seraka represented the Synod. This was the first time Redeemer had met either Synod representative. The bishop began the meeting with the sad news that her father was dying. Redeemer leaders declined to discuss problems under these circumstances and asked for the meeting to be rescheduled. Bishop Burkat promised to get back within three-five months. Redeemer did not hear from her again for nine months. (This was the one and only meeting any Synodical staff had with just Redeemer President and Vice President although it has been represented that meetings were routinely with just the two top officers. Grist for the rumor mill.)

The failure of the covenant with Epiphany was a disappointment but Redeemer leadership lost no time in turning attention to its mission. Epiphany finally left our property in April, six months after they announced their closure. Redeemer immediately took the lay of the land and its council focussed on building the Swahili ministry. In July 2006, Redeemer president, Stanly Meena, received a call from Rev. Lee Miller II, a stranger to the congregation. Rev. Miller demanded a meeting just a few days later with Redeemer's council. Mr. Meena told him that it being the middle of the summer, very few people

were available. Miller was insistent. Three members of the council met with four people who introduced themselves as "fact finders" who wanted to help. Redeemer spoke candidly with them, reporting that they Redeemer was working on a ministry plan which was to be completed in early fall. The four strangers left and nothing was heard from them again until October.

In September, Bishop Burkat wrote a letter demanding another short notice meeting with council. Back to School events were in full swing. Key members of council had conflicts on the date she chose and Redeemer responded that the dates would not work.

Redeemer was also suspicious. Keeping in mind that this congregation had been bamboozled by actions of Synod Council before. The memory of 1998 was still strong.

In October Bishop Burkat wrote another letter informing Redeemer that it had been placed under involuntary synodical administration FOUR MONTHS earlier with no notification to the congregation. Redeemer learned for the first time that the "fact finders" had lied. They were actually trustees taking notes to justify actions already taken.

With the events of 1998 in mind, Redeemer agreed to a meeting with council off site. Redeemer wanted to make sure that the Synod Council members did not declare themselves in charge and raid our offices for financial records as they had ten years before.

Redeemer Votes to Withdraw from the ELCA

Weary of suffering, Redeemer held a properly noticed meeting of the congregation and voted unanimously to withdraw from the ELCA. This resolution, allowed by the constitution, was presented in writing to the bishop prior to the May 2009 Assembly. Synod's attorney responded that Redeemer cannot withdraw because it is an officially terminated church in the ELCA with no rights. He adds that Redeemer will have no standing at the Synod Assembly except to present our appeal. In other words, Redeemer could not have witnesses lined up at the microphones even if it had known that this was allowed.

This is the first Redeemer had heard of its status as an officially terminated congregation. In fact, Redeemer had paid for and registered two delegates to the Synod Assembly who were not challenged. Synod did not offer to return the registration money while it stripped us of our rights, making the Appeal process an even greater travesty.

QUESTION: Can Synods terminate a congregation's rights before they are allowed to appeal a dispute? ELCA take note and fix this mess.

May 9, 2009

The Constitutional Right to Appeal

This is clearly something the drafters of the ELCA, Synod and Congregational Constitutions did not think through. From the beginning of SEPA Synod's actions against Redeemer congregation only lip service was given to this congregational right and every attempt to manipulate the process was made by SEPA Synod leadership.

Redeemer exercised this right immediately. Congregational Council put it in writing to the bishop. Synod claimed the appeal request had to come from the congregation. The congregation voted unanimously in favor of appealing. Synod questioned the quorum while it aggressively tried to enforce its actions BEFORE we could appeal. Locking the congregation out of the building was an early objective.

Synod held this view from February 2008 to a few days before the May 2008 Synod Assembly. During this time, Redeemer requested information as to the format and process. Of course, all attempts to communicate were ignored. Days before the Assembly, Redeemer received a letter scheduling the appeal. Still no word on the process. Redeemer's law suit against the Synod was still in the courts and Redeemer took the position that the appeal could not be made with a law suit in place.

In June 2008, just after Synod Assembly, Synod filed its own lawsuit against Redeemer BEFORE Redeemer could exercise its right to appeal creating the absurd situation that WHEN Redeemer could appeal it would be appealing to the very people who were suing them. In July, Redeemer's law suit was dismissed because the appeal process within the church had not been exhausted. Again Redeemer requested information as to the format of an appeal. Redeemer hoped for an adequate format to clearly present issues. Again, for the entire year, there was silence from the Bishop and SEPA Synod leaders. A week before the Synod Assembly, Redeemer was informed that the Appeal was scheduled and would be limited to 15 minutes. Then Synod would have 15 minutes and there would be ten minutes of discussion. Redeemer did the best within the ridiculous limitations of presenting all of the information on this web site in 15

minutes. [See presentation. You can link from home page.](#) That the congregation was not allowed to rebut statements of SEPA Synod is a travesty of SEPA's interpretation of the word justice.

Another travesty was the discussion which was extended to 20 minutes with only hours notice to Redeemer. Our questions as to format had never been addressed. Redeemer assumed that discussion meant discussion--questions about the presentations. We were fine with more time for "discussion." Redeemer did not know that this was an opportunity to produce witnesses. Synod monopolized the discussion portion of the appeal with "witnesses" lined up at the Assembly Floor microphones. Most of these witnesses were unknown to the current members of Redeemer. The testimony, which could not be rebutted, dated back to Almquist's attempt to close Redeemer. Little or nothing addressed the appeal. There was no give and take. The entire process was totally controlled and manipulated. It was a kangaroo court indeed. In effect, Redeemer had 16 minutes (the presentation ran over one minute) and Synod took 35. The issues, which fill a filing cabinet drawer with legal documents and correspondence, could not be equitably addressed. The ELCA must address this shortcoming in its constitution.

The appeal Question was changed from what Redeemer was told prior to the Assembly. It was reworded so that the question was reversed. Redeemer's appeal was urging people to vote YES to their appeal, corresponding with the wording Synod had provided prior to the Assembly. The changed Question had YES meaning the Synod had a right to seize Redeemer property. The appeal was not mentioned in the Synod Assembly Question, only the property issue (evidence that property, not ministry, has been the issue). Therefore, Redeemer's view is that the Appeal was never voted on at all.

The vote of Synod Assembly was overwhelmingly in favor of Synod seizing Redeemer property. A vote which goes against the Synod's Articles of Incorporation, which clearly state that Synod must have the "express consent of the congregation," can be considered null and void. This question will continue to be addressed through the civil courts.

May 10, 2009

Happy Mother's Day • Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.

The morning after Synod Assembly was Mother's Day.

Tracey Beasley and Larry House, Synod "trustees," arrived as worship was beginning. Tracey Beasley said she was there to tell Redeemer what had happened at Synod Assembly and how it was "going to be from now on." Another woman had accompanied her. She climbed the steps into the sanctuary, saw African members and exclaimed, You have Africans here! Nobody told me you have Africans. As service was about to begin she said loudly, What this church needs is someone who can run them, not them run him.

There were visitors present at this service, so Redeemer leadership tried to end the service in a way which would not leave them witnessing unpleasantness. But Beasley and House rushed to the front of the church before the service ended.

To use worship format this way was of course inappropriate under any reasonable standard of conduct and in addition was constitutionally inappropriate because any meeting with the congregation requires two weeks notice.

Redeemer members pointed out to them that Synod Assembly had failed to vote on the Appeal and voted on a Question that didn't even mention the appeal.

They said that a pastor would conduct worship services from that Sunday on with Rev. Davenport already committed to the next two weeks.

While this was going on in the front of the church, the visitor accompanying them went to another visitor and said, "You know what they tell me

about this church? They won't baptize no niggers in this church." This was a ridiculous and offensive comment since all but five of the people at worship that morning were African and two of them had been baptized at Redeemer. It is evidence of the power of ecclesial gossip. (Rev. Matthias had told the congregation in 1998 that their racism must stop. He referred to no incident. The congregation asked in writing for proof of his accusation or to stop making such a damaging statement. Ten years later, the rumor mill still churns.)

Congregational leaders asked by email to meet with Rev. Davenport before the next service. Again, characteristically . . . no response.

Rev. Davenport showed up the next week along with Rev. Lee Miller. Davenport preached on "They'll know we are Christians by our love" and quoted St. Francis Prayer . . . "make me an instrument of thy peace" showing a total lack of recognition and understanding of their behavior in Redeemer's church life.

Redeemer prepared worship for the next two weeks with the promise of a guest pastor in mind. There was no mid-week communication from Synod leaders reporting a change in plans but no pastor showed up again.

Interestingly, the visitor who was bombarded with misinformation from the trustee's guest has returned. He is new to the community, a Lutheran preacher's son from Minnesota.

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.