United Lutheran Mission Association

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Is the ULMA a synod or church body?

No, we are a mission association. Membership of the Association consists of Lutheran congregations who are in agreement with our ULMA Constitution. Our goal is the establishment of churches modeled after our Mission Constitution. Both of these documents are on our website.

Does ULMA plan on starting a seminary at some point to train doctrinally faithful preachers, teachers, etc.?

As we mentioned in the preceding question and answer, the ULMA is not a synod or church body. While the association has no plans to start any educational facilities, this does not prevent individual member congregations from doing so. In 2010 Pilgrim Lutheran Church of Decatur, Illinois established Walther Theological Seminary. Please refer to the question which deals with our source of pastors.

Where do the pastors come from who will serve your mission churches?

Regarding the mission congregations, the ULMA Constitution says, in part, "The pastor must be a graduate from an LCMS, ELS, or WELS seminary, from the Walther Theological Seminary or from a church body in fellowship with the LCMS, ELS, or WELS (foreign or domestic), with at least a Master of Divinity Degree or the equivalent thereof." We realize there are several other conservative, confessional Lutheran bodies with trained pastors from either their own Seminaries or those listed above. Walther Theological Seminary in Decatur, Illinois is one such example. The pastoral candidate would need to subscribe to the ULMA Constitution, leave the membership of his current church body, and pass an interview with representatives (both clergy and lay) of the Commission.

Why are your pastors and missionaries interviewed before receiving a divine call?

Members of a synod, conference, or similar structure that train their own clergy and teachers can assure other members that their staff meets certain requirements in belief and practice. With such a process a divine call can be issued without question as to their qualifications, beliefs, and practice.

The ULMA is not a synod, does not have a seminary or teaching college, or a certification board. We rely on calling men who were trained in conservative, confessional Lutheran bodies with which we have no formal relationship. The divergent practices and beliefs that have sadly been witnessed to some degree in these synods have necessitated the use of an interview process with potential candidates for a call. This practice is similar to the same certification process used by the seminaries of most synods. Once this process is successfully completed, the pastor may be considered a candidate for a divine call to an ULMA member congregation or mission.

Since Walther Theological Seminary is established by a member congregation of ULMA and her professors are also connected to ULMA, we accept their certification process without an interview.

How are finances handled?

Member congregations and contributors indicate (pledge) to the Association what amount of funding they can provide for the support of missions. The Association determines which mission requests to support. The Association then requests the Member congregations and contributors to disburse support from their pledges to the missions. All donations will flow from Member congregations and contributors directly to the missions. The ULMA has no treasury, funding, or method of handling financial transactions. The Recording Treasurer will issue reports of the above-mentioned activity amongst the contributors and missions at the ULMA Commission Meetings.

How can a pastor transfer to the ULMA?

Since we are not a synodical body, you cannot "transfer" to the ULMA. A pastor who takes a call to one of our mission congregations would effectively be leaving whatever prior synodical affiliation he was part of (if any) since the mission congregations sponsored by the ULMA are Independent.

If a pastor who has not been called to a mission congregation or member congregation but desires to become an ex officio member of ULMA (such as a Missionary at Large) he would end his membership/affiliation with any other organization or synod and:

- Must accept without reservation the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the verbally inspired, inerrant, written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and practice.
- Must accept without reservation all the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, contained in the "Book of Concord of 1580," as true and unadulterated statements and expositions of the Word of God.
- Must accept without reservation the "Constitutional Guidelines for Mission congregations" and the constitution which governs the United Lutheran Mission Association.

What about the ELS and WELS hymnals, i.e., Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary and Christian Worship?

The list in the Constitution is not exclusive but subject to the rule of Scripture and the Confessions. TLH and LW are merely listed as common examples, since most LCMS, ELS, and WELS congregations are familiar with at least TLH. Some of our churches use the new Lutheran Service Book (LSB).

How does ULMA decide on a mission and how can I help?

It's guided the old fashioned way, by the Church and the Holy Spirit. Lutherans who are in an area where there are no solid, confessional, Lutheran congregations may be hungering for the Word

and Sacraments. They contact us, we talk with them, and see if there is an interested core of people who wish to start a congregation. A representative from the ULMA will be in touch to assess your needs. It's brought before the Commission to decide upon and if approved, we proceed from there. But we can't do anything unless we hear from you! Please contact us using any of the methods listed on our website (phone, mail, email).

When does an ULMA-sponsored mission cease being a mission congregation?

If the Lord blesses the seed-planting with fruitful growth, the mission will grow to a point where it no longer requires outside donations. The mission and ULMA will work together to determine when that point will be. Once reached, the mission will no longer be considered such by the ULMA. An ULMA member congregation (or anyone else, for that matter) may decide to continue assisting the mission congregation, even though the ULMA considers it to no longer be in mission status.

Are the mission congregations members of the ULMA?

By definition they are missions of the ULMA, not members. A mission congregation will eventually reach a state where they are self-sufficient and no longer considered a mission. At that time their own Voters Assembly may vote to join the ULMA in order to help start other missions.

Is there any mission congregation oversight?

Not being a church body, the ULMA has no equivalent of circuit counselors, district presidents, bishops, or overseers. Nor does the ULMA have any authority, legal or otherwise, over a mission congregation. The whole arrangement is one of recognized sponsorship and aid by the ULMA congregations as spelled out in the ULMA Constitution Articles IV, VIII and IX. The ULMA may send visitors to the missions to evaluate and report back on its status, needs, etc., on a regular or occasional basis.

What if a mission congregation starts practicing false doctrine?

The ULMA Constitution spells out the requirements for a mission congregation, one of which is the adoption of the Constitutional Guidelines for Mission Congregations. If the ULMA becomes aware of an active mission that is violating its constitution (which contains an article on the doctrinal standard), the ULMA will follow Biblical principles and seek to correct the erring brothers. If not successful, the ULMA Commission may move to no longer recognize the mission and recommend that Association members no longer contribute to the former mission. We pray such a situation never occur.

How many churches does ULMA intend to start?

That's up to the Lord. We know the fields are ripe for harvest. We know there are plenty of orthodox, confessional Lutheran pastors who wish to serve a congregation built on God's Word and Sacraments. We know there are plenty of Lutheran laymen aching for the True Word and its saving peace. We just need to hear from you!

Our congregation wishes to leave the synodical body to which we belong. Can ULMA help us?

The ULMA's purpose is to establish Lutheran mission congregations. We offer support to start new and existing missions with the goal of proclaiming the Gospel. Congregations who wish to leave a synodical body may feel free to contact other congregations who have done so. Our member congregations left their respective affiliations for slightly different reasons. Those congregations can be contacted directly for those wishing to learn what happened and how they proceeded.

What is the difference between a ULMA Member and a Mission?

The distinction is pretty straightforward if you think about the purpose of the ULMA, i.e., to start Mission congregations. Members of the ULMA are defined in Article II of the Constitution of the United Lutheran Mission Association.
In general, the Members of the ULMA are those congregations and pastors who help run the organization in terms of starting Mission congregations. The Mission congregations are sponsored by the Members of the ULMA. However, the Mission congregations are not Members. They may vote to become Members once they have left Mission status.

Our congregation is not a member of ULMA, but I would like to help. How can I contribute to ULMA's work?

The ULMA does not handle any funds and has no manner to accept or disburse donations. Member congregations of ULMA make a commitment to earmark mission funds to ULMA recognized missions. If an individual or a congregation wishes to help, they may do so in one of two ways. They can send a donation to one of ULMA's member congregations, clearly indicating it's for ULMA Missions (indicating a specific Mission if they wish). Or, if the Mission is already established with its own bank account, they can send their donation directly to it.

Are the member congregations of ULMA in altar and pulpit fellowship with one another and with mission congregations established by ULMA?

If member congregations of the ULMA adhere to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions in Commission work, and if there is nothing to manifestly indicate that they do otherwise in their respective congregations, then nothing should prohibit them from entering into altar and pulpit fellowship with one another and with mission congregations that have been established by the association.

More information may be found in our document, The Issue of Fellowship.

We have been asked whether ULMA's member congregations commune members of congregations belonging to heterodox Lutheran bodies. If so, under what circumstances? We have amended the above-mentioned fellowship document to answer this question along with background material.

I would like to promote ULMA/ULMA mission(s) at our church or neighborhood. Do you have any bulletin inserts or other promotional material?

Our website and News Releases have been our primary method of official promotion since we began. Our copyright statement grants free license to reproduce and distribute material from our website as long as it is done free of charge.

If you would like something for your own congregation to distribute within a bulletin, door-to-door, etc., please contact us. We would be happy to talk to you about ULMA and fashion the appropriate material to your own area and needs. No charge! If an ULMA Mission is in your area, please contact them for current information since locations and service times may be subject to change.

Your missions are in areas that already have Lutheran congregations. Aren't you engaging in sheep stealing?

Missions are established like any venture, in areas where there is a need. It could be due to something practical like a population change. Or it could be something doctrinal like the need for confessional, liturgical churches where none currently practice what they confess. (You could push the point that sin is everywhere, thus there are no limits to where a mission may be started.)

ULMA starts missions where concerned laymen have contacted us with a need in their area. The reasons may vary but the goal is the same — to preach Christ and Him crucified. The outreach of the mission is to anyone, regardless of their spiritual or denominational background.

Do the missions/churches established or supported by ULMA own their own property?

Yes. The ULMA has no financial interest in any buildings, parsonages, property, leases, rental agreements, etc. While the ULMA may choose to fund such expenditures for a mission or church that we are supporting, that is the extent of our involvement.

A Commission, composed of lay representatives (voting authority) and pastors (ex officio) from member congregations, operates the ULMA. As stated in item (G) of "Article VIII Power and Limitation", from the Constitution of the United Lutheran Mission Association:

"The Commission shall not own equity in any mission congregation it establishes or maintains."

Is the ULMA a cult* or sect**?

The ULMA is certainly not a cult or a sect, since it does not stand for doctrines of its own, nor does it follow anyone but Christ, but simply confesses and teaches what the Lutheran Church has always done. Our focus is starting/supporting traditional Lutheran congregations in line with that historic foundation, standing firmly on the Holy Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions.

* Hubert F. Beck in his booklet How to Respond to . . . The Cults says on page 6, "A cult, then, cannot be considered merely a peripheral statement of an original faith pattern compared to a sect which at least marginally participates in the basic faith within which it has its roots. A cult takes its point of departure from the religious thought of a major religion, but twists and warps that pattern of faith until it has something essentially new and different from what it was originally."

** Francis Pieper is more exacting when he defines the Lutheran Church, giving mention to the definition of a sect. In Christian Dogmatics, Vol. I, p. 32, he says the following (emphasis added): "By 'Lutheran Church' we do not mean all church bodies that call themselves Lutheran, but only those that actually teach and confess the Lutheran doctrine as it is taught and confessed in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church. And by 'sects' we mean church bodies which have established themselves as separate organizations on the basis of unscriptural doctrines. The terms being thus understood, the Lutheran Church is certainly not a sect, since it does not stand for doctrines of its own, but simply confesses and teaches that which according to God's will and order all Christians should confess and teach."

Is everything you do, including your doctrinal stance, based on tradition?

Some see our mention of "tradition" in reference to our style of worship or church setting and get the idea that everything we approach is merely because it's "always been done that way". This is not so. The worship style and church setting for "traditional" Lutherans is indeed quite old. It was developed over the centuries based on the Old Testament practices under Judaism and the New Testament practices of the early Christian church. In other words, it's derived from Holy Scripture.

Our doctrine, likewise, is stated in the Book of Concord, aka the Lutheran Confessions. These documents were drawn up during the Reformation of the 16th century in order to explain what we teach, from Scripture, as opposed to the teachings and practices of Rome and other churches at that time.

We accept the Lutheran Confessions as a true representation of Christian doctrine because (Latin: quia) they agree with the Bible. Several churches who use the name Lutheran claim the confessions in so far as (Latin: quantenus) they agree with the Bible. In other words, they pick and choose what parts they agree with. The result is at best a watered-down Christianity and in the worst case something that's not Christian at all! Our congregations accept the whole, complete Book of Concord because all of its doctrinal teachings are a truthful and accurate exposition of the Bible. This is known as having a quia subscription to the confessions.

Today there are groups who say they are "Confessional Lutherans". It used to be a given that this referred to those who had a quia subscription to the Book of Concord. Sadly, today it's necessary to ask, "What does this mean?" when using the word "confessional"!

Does ULMA have a position on the practice of virtual or on-line communion?

Yes, please see our statement on Virtual Communion

Does the United Lutheran Mission Association work to establish online (virtual) churches?

We do not question the efficacy of the Bible online and its ability to create and sustain faith. We have no issue with utilizing the internet during times of crisis. However, an online service of the Word is not the preferred way, nor shall it replace public preaching and the administration of the sacraments in the presence of a physically assembled congregation (the communal assembly), as clearly established by Hebrews 1,0:24-25 and supported by 2 Thessalonians 2:1. We do not establish online (virtual) churches.

Please also see our statement on Virtual Communion