

Convention Workbook

REPORTS AND OVERTURES 2026

Alleluia

CHRIST
IS RISEN

..... INDEED

69TH REGULAR CONVENTION

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
July 18–23, 2026 | Phoenix, Ariz.

Convention Workbook

REPORTS AND OVERTURES 2026

Alleluia

CHRIST
IS RISEN

..... INDEED

69TH REGULAR CONVENTION

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
July 18–23, 2026 | Phoenix, Ariz.

Name of delegate _____
Home address _____
Convention address _____

Please report any errors in registration listings; see the last page of this *Convention Workbook*.

For ongoing convention information, see lcms.org/convention

Delegates must bring copies of all convention publications to all sessions of the convention.

Preface

To the church of God gathered in the congregations of our Synod, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:1–3)! These pages contain reports and overtures, as well as the elected voting and advisory representation of the congregations and advisory members of the Synod, for the 69th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, to be held in Phoenix, Ariz., July 18–23, 2026. Please give them your careful attention. The delegate convention of the Synod is the member congregations’ chief means of governing *their Synod*—to keep everything tuned to *their confession* (Synod Constitution Article II) and aimed at achieving *their objectives* (Const. Art. III). It “legislates policy, program, and financial direction to carry on the Synod’s work on behalf of and in support of the member congregations” (Bylaw 1.4.1). Thorough digestion of these materials is central to the delegates doing that well.

The theme for the convention—something of a traveling companion of last convention’s *We Preach Christ Crucified*, drawn from 1 Cor. 1:18–25—is *Christ Is Risen Indeed*, drawn from 1 Cor. 15:20–22. Paul addresses a doctrinal dissension in Corinth, some saying “there is no resurrection of the dead” (FC Preface 7). Paul traces the implications of this error to Christology, to the heart of the Gospel, to the vicarious satisfaction—if the crucified Christ is not raised, he tells them, “your faith is futile and you are still in your sins, . . . and if in Christ we have hope for this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Cor. 15:11–18). “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead” (v. 20) and “gives us the victory” (v. 56). He preaches—sternest Law and sweetest and most direct Gospel—that the Corinthians and we should have *that precise faith* that justifies (Ap XIIB 49, 60). Let us come together in this spirit, putting off what is perishable and taking up what is imperishable, seeing diligently and lovingly to one another’s doctrine and the practices that treasure and teach it, knowing that this doctrine is *our life*. For Christ is risen, indeed, and our faith is not futile, and the death of Jesus was enough for all sin—His resurrection proves both this and that all things are put in subjection under His feet. As we await at the last, therefore, we ask also for our church body as she gathers in convention: that our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, would “transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” (Phil. 3:21; cf. Ephesians 4).

Delegates will note a diversity of impressions and even contested facts among some of the overtures. The President has again, out of respect for submitters who have taken care to participate even if not with full knowledge or information, taken a light hand in his assigned task of culling overtures that might be “materially in error” or containing “apparent misrepresentations” (Bylaw 3.1.6.2). No timely overtures were rejected for these reasons, and their submitters have been so informed. Publication does not attest the President’s verification of every detail; the committees and delegates must “weigh all things and hold fast to the good” (1 Thess. 5:21). The convention is the place for elected delegates to address forthrightly concerns and disagreements in the Synod. Let us only do that in the fear of God and the love of one another, “following the example of the apostolic church. Acts 15:1–31” and in keeping with “our Lord’s will that the diversities of gifts should be for the common profit. 1 Cor 12:4–31” (LCMS Const. Preface).

We received significantly more on-time submissions (464 vs. 322 in 2023), resulting in 374 unique overtures for the *Workbook* (279 in 2023), many of them clearly carefully labored over. Sadly, some showed the handiwork of artificial intelligence (AI), which mangled or manufactured facts and references, laying a significant and unnecessary burden on editors. We have worked with submitters to rectify the worst issues. To make an on-time *Workbook* possible for future conventions, the Secretary may have to require submission of clear references and advise the President to take a sharp knife to material error, rejecting overtures with “facts” that cannot be substantiated. The process cannot be expected to bear the burden of AI’s spaghetti thrown at the ceiling to see if it will stick. Respect for the convention, moreover, demands that submitters be certain of what they submit as rationale for their proposed actions. Involvement of AI in overture production without complete human verification renders this impossible. Better not to use it at all and to enjoy researching the material and perhaps learning a thing or two. Why leave all the learning to a machine that can’t and won’t?

Convention floor committees, listed in the prefatory material of this volume, will be meeting in St. Louis May 29–June 1, 2026. Any member of the Synod (congregation, commissioned or ordained minister) or any lay delegate may offer comment to a floor committee regarding the content of reports and overtures by sending a memo to me by email, noting in the subject that it is “ATTN Floor Committee N,” at lcmssecretary@lcms.org. Responses may also be sent by mail to this address: Office of the Secretary, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod; 1333 S. Kirkwood Rd.; St. Louis, MO 63122. Such letters must be sent at least nine weeks prior to the convention (by May 16, 2026) to allow time for forwarding to the appropriate committee.

Another book, the *Biographical Synopses and Statements of Nominees*, contains information delegates will need to prepare for the elections to take place at the convention.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. (1 Cor. 15:20–22)

John W. Sias, *Secretary and Editor*

Contents

	PAGE		PAGE
Preface	ii	R13.2	Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana..... 66
Registered Delegates and Representatives		R13.3	Report on Unapproved Programs Preparing for the Office of the Holy Ministry (Pastoral Formation Committee, 2023 Res. 6-03A)..... 68
A. Voting and Advisory Delegates	xv	R13.4	Report on Approaches to and Outcomes of Residential and Non-Residential Routes to Ordination (Pastoral Formation Committee, 2023 Res. 6-03A)..... 71
B. Advisory Representatives.....	xx	R13.5	Policy Requirements for the Specific Ministry Pastor Program (Pastoral Formation Committee, 2023 Res. 6-03A)..... 75
C. Staff and Guests.....	xxii	R13.6	Report on the Development of a Comprehensive, Uniform, Synodwide Specific Ministry Supervision Plan (Pastoral Formation Committee, 2023 Res. 6-03A)..... 77
Convention Floor Committees	xxv	R14	Concordia University System
Directory—Officers, Boards, and Commissions of the Synod	xxvi	R14.1	Concordia University Chicago..... 86
Entered into Rest	xxx	R14.2	Concordia University, Irvine..... 89
		R14.3	Concordia University, Nebraska
		R14.4	Concordia University, St. Paul..... 91
		R14.5	Concordia University Wisconsin and Ann Arbor
Officer, Board, and Commission Reports		R15	Concordia Historical Institute
R1	President..... 1	R16	Concordia Publishing House..... 97
R1.1	Church Relations..... 5	R17	Lutheran Church Extension Fund
R1.2	Chief Mission Officer	R18	LCMS Foundation..... 100
R1.2.1	Office of National Mission	R19	Board of Trustees—Concordia Plans; Board of Directors—Concordia Plan Services
R1.2.2	Office of International Mission..... 19	R20	Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty..... 102
R1.2.3	Office of Pastoral Education	R21	Atlantic District..... 105
R1.2.4	Mission Advancement..... 31	R22	California-Nevada-Hawaii District
R1.2.5	Communications	R23	Central Illinois District..... 107
R1.3	KFUO Radio	R24	Eastern District..... 108
R2	First Vice-President..... 37	R25	English District
R2.1	Colloquy Committee for Pastoral Ministry..... 38	R26	Florida-Georgia District..... 110
R2.2	Colloquy Committee for Commissioned Ministry (CCCM)..... 40	R27	Indiana District..... 111
R3	Praesidium..... 43	R28	Iowa District East..... 112
R4	Secretary..... 44	R29	Iowa District West
R4.1	Rosters, Statistics, and Research Services	R30	Kansas District
R5	Board of Directors..... 46	R31	Michigan District
R5.1	Chief Administrative Officer	R32	Mid-South District
R5.1.1	Event Planning and Procurement..... 49	R33	Minnesota North District
R5.1.2	Human Resources	R34	Minnesota South District
R5.1.3	Operations Support Services..... 50	R35	Missouri District
R5.2	Chief Financial Officer	R36	Montana District
R6	Board for National Mission..... 53	R37	Nebraska District..... 121
R7	Board for International Mission	R38	New England District..... 122
R8	Report of the Joint Mission Assessment Committee of the Boards for National and International Mission	R39	New Jersey District
R9	Commission on Constitutional Matters..... 56	R40	North Dakota District..... 124
R10	Commission on Doctrinal Review		
R11	Commission on Handbook..... 57		
R12	Commission on Theology and Church Relations		
R13	Pastoral Formation Committee		
R13.1	Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri		

	PAGE
R41 North Wisconsin District	125
R42 Northern Illinois District	126
R43 Northwest District	127
R44 Ohio District	128
R45 Oklahoma District	129
R46 Pacific Southwest District	130
R47 Rocky Mountain District	132
R48 SELC District	132
R49 South Dakota District	133
R50 South Wisconsin District	134
R51 Southeastern District	134
R52 Southern District	135
R53 Southern Illinois District	136
R54 Texas District	137
R55 Wyoming District	138
R56 International Lutheran Laymen's League (Lutheran Hour Ministries)	139
R57 Lutheran Women's Missionary League	141
R58 Task Force on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (2023 Res. 1-04A)	141
R59 Task Force on Electoral Circuit Parameters (2023 Res. 9-06A)	143
R59.1 2023 Res. 9-06A Task Force To Evaluate Electoral Circuit Parameters, Whitepaper I	147
R59.2 2023 Res. 9-06A Task Force To Evaluate Electoral Circuit Parameters, Whitepaper II	155
R60 Report on Efforts to Address Mental Health and Mental Illness (2023 Res. 3-03A)	161

Appendices to Reports

R61 Opinions of the Commission on Constitutional Matters	161
R62 Theological Documents—Commission on Theology and Church Relations	193

CTCR Reports

R62.1 <i>Christian Decision-Making and the End of Life: An Update and Supplement to 1993's Christian Care at Life's End</i> (2023)	194
R62.2 Response to Wyoming District Request Regarding Immortality of the Soul (2024)	209
R62.3 <i>Mission and Ministry Principles and Practical Observations and Suggestions</i> (2024)	210
R62.4 Response to the 2021 Final Report of the Theological Conversations between the ILC and the Roman Catholic Church (2024)	212
R62.5 Response to the Lutheran Church of Australia's "Way Forward" Proposal (2024)	215
R62.6 <i>Online Technology in the Church: Study Materials</i> (2024)	232

	PAGE
R62.7 <i>A Theology and Philosophy of Lutheran Education</i> (2025)	235
R62.8 <i>Unity in Doctrine, Uniformity and Variety in Practice: A Study Document</i> (2025)	241
R62.9 <i>Proper Administration of the Lord's Supper: Applying Scripture and the Confessions to Contemporary Issues</i> (2025)	250
R62.10 <i>Deacons, Evangelists and the Office of the Holy Ministry in the New Testament</i> (2025)	263
<i>CTCR Opinions and Other Documents</i>	
R62.11 President of Synod Request for Opinion on Lay Reading of Sermons and Conduct of Worship in the Absence of a Pastor (2023)	269
R62.12 President of Synod Request for Opinion on Lawsuits between Christians or Members and Institutions of Synod (2025)	271
R62.13 Joint Seminary Boards of Regents Request for Opinion on Admission to Seminary for Divorced Men (2025)	273

Floor Committees with Reports and Overtures Assigned

1. National Witness

Reports

**R1, R1.2–R1.2.1, R1.2.4–R1.3, R5.2–R6, R8,
R16–R19, R21–R58, R60, R62.6–R62.7**

Overtures

1-01 To Celebrate Chinese, Black, Hispanic, Hmong Mission Anniversaries in the United States and Encourage New Mission and Ministry	277
1-02 To Support 150th Anniversary of Synod Black Ministry and Promote Renewed Emphasis	277
1-03 To Give Thanks to God for 150 Years of Black Ministry	278
1-04 To Encourage Outreach and Ministry on College and University Campuses	278
1-05 To Encourage and Support Campus Ministry in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod	279
1-06 To Increase Church Planting at the Parish Level	280
1-07 To Study, and To Make Recommendations to Stop and Reverse, Long Decline in Synod Membership	281
1-08 To Expand Work of Revitalization and Encourage Use of <i>re:Vitality</i> Resources	281
1-09 To Encourage Congregations and Agencies to Work Together to Share Resources	281

	PAGE
1-10 To Support Lutheran Congregations and Schools in Urban Contexts	282
1-11 To Inspire Training for Witness.....	282
1-12 To Confront Increased Idolatry of Our Culture with Clear Confession of Love of Christ and Lutheran Resources in Christian Apologetics.....	283
1-13 To Faithfully Respond to the Resurgence of Young Men and Women in the Church	284
1-14 To Encourage Armed Security at All Synod Schools.....	284
1-15 To Appeal to Lutheran Schools to Use Only Biblically Sound Curricula and Books.....	285
1-16 To Proactively Put in Place National Standards for Our Schools to Protect Students.....	286
1-17 To Commend and Give Thanks for Lutheran Schools.....	286
1-18 To Give Thanks for Lutheran Educators and Administrators.....	287
1-19 To Increase and Support Establishing New and Strengthening Current Schools.....	287
1-20 To Include Homeschool Enrollment in Statistical Reports of the Synod.....	288
1-21 To Encourage Faithful Youth Ministry and to Initiate Synodwide Study of Generation Alpha ...	288
1-22 To Affirm Atlantic District Commitment to Education and Formation	289
1-23 To Affirm and Encourage Parents as Primary Teachers of the Faith.....	289
1-24 To State Religious Objection to Government Interference with Parents' Duty	289
1-25 To State Religious Objection to Government Interference with Parents' Duty	290
1-26 To Strengthen Christ-Centered Homes through Family Discipleship Work.....	291
1-27 To Propose LCMS Men's Ministry	291
1-28 To Study and Recommend Strategies to Advance Congregation-based Older Adult Ministries	291
1-29 To Celebrate 500th Anniversary of Luther's Small Catechism and To Encourage Heads of Households to Teach It in Home	291
1-30 To Proclaim 2029 <i>500th Anniversary Year of the Catechism</i>	292
1-31 To Give Thanks for and Offer Renewed Commitment to Work of Atlantic District	292
1-32 To Engage Work of Concordia Center for the Family	293
1-33 To Commend Family Discipleship Work of Concordia Center for the Family	293

2. International Witness

Reports

R1–R1.2, R1.2.2, R1.2.4–R1.2.5, R5.2, R7–R8, R12, R56–R57, R62.5

Overtures

2-01 To Encourage Prayer, Partnership, and Participation in International Mission	295
2-02 To Encourage Every Congregation to Adopt a Missionary	295
2-03 To Direct Board for International Mission to Study Ecclesiastical Supervision, Pastoral Care, and Synod Membership in International Mission Contexts.....	295
2-04 To Promote Divine Call Opportunities for Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology Pastors	296
2-05 To Amend Bylaws to Protect Divine Calls of Missionaries	296
2-06 To Give Thanks for LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces	296
2-07 To Thank God on the 60th Anniversary of the Inception of LCMS International Schools in Asia and Pray for God's Guidance in Advancing Their Ministry and Mission.....	297

3. Mercy

Reports

R1, R1.2–R1.2.2, R1.2.4, R5.2–R7, R60, R62.1

Overtures

3-01 To Promote Awareness of Christian Adoption and Fostering Needs.....	299
3-02 To Commend and Encourage Life Ministry Efforts of Congregations, Schools, Districts, and Recognized Service Organizations.....	299
3-03 To Thank God for Work of LCMS Disaster Response and Training.....	299
3-04 To Give Thanks For and Support Human Care Efforts.....	300
3-05 To Establish District Commission on Immigration and Immigration Resources	300
3-06 To Commend and Encourage LCMS Worker Wellness Efforts	301
3-07 To Encourage Use of Telehealth Counseling Services for Care and Retention of Church Workers.....	301
3-08 To Define <i>Leadership</i> and Its Priority for Worker Wellness.....	302

	PAGE		PAGE
4. Life Together			
Reports			
R1, R1.2–R1.2.2, R1.2.5, R5.2–R8, R10, R12, R20–R58, R60			
Overtures			
4-01 To Commend and Sunset Synod Mission Priorities	303	4-18 To Uphold Scriptural Teaching of <i>Generations/ Lineages</i> and Reject Modernistic Teaching of <i>Races</i>	311
4-02 To Establish <i>Tell the Next Generation</i> as Synod Mission and Ministry Emphasis	303	4-19 To Uphold Scriptural Teaching of the Church as One Chosen Generation in Spite of Existence of Various Earthly Races	312
4-03 To Establish <i>Tell the Next Generation</i> as Synod Mission and Ministry Emphasis	303	4-20 To Condemn False Teachings of “Stone Choir” ..	312
4-04 To Encourage Acceptance of Triennial Mission and Ministry Emphases	303	4-21 To Condemn Anti-Semitism	313
4-05 To Prioritize <i>Abiding in the Word</i> as Mission and Ministry Focus.....	304	4-22 To Reject Racial Quotas and Idolatry of Human Characteristics.....	314
4-06 To Adopt Triennial Mission and Ministry Emphasis on Clear Gospel Proclamation, Unity in Christ, and Multicultural Ministry	305	4-23 To Amend Bylaws to Reinstate Commission on Worship.....	314
4-07 To Offer Triennial Mission and Ministry Emphases	306	4-24 To Begin Preparations for New Hymnal.....	316
4-08 To More Narrowly Focus the Synod’s Mission Priorities	306	4-25 To Give Thanks for Lutheran Hymnals and Call for Production of Supplement	316
4-09 To Adopt Congregational Sustainability as Mission Goal of the Synod	307	4-26 To Require Use of Synod Approved Agendas and Hymnbooks at LCMS Youth Gathering.....	316
4-10 To Affirm and Retain the Seven Mission Priorities	307	4-27 To Require Use of Synod-Approved Agendas and Hymnbooks at Concordia University System Chapels, Lutheran Summer Camps, and Youth Gathering	317
4-11 To Address Synod Mission Emphasis of <i>Making Disciples for Life</i> and To Eliminate Mission Priorities	307	4-28 To Recommend Review of Worship Practices	317
4-12 To Amend Bylaws to Refine Process for Creating Triennial Mission and Ministry Emphases	307	4-29 To Properly Examine New Worship Practices within the Synod	317
4-13 To Task Commission on Theology and Church Relations to Write Report and Accompanying Study addressing Christian Nationalism in American Context	309	4-30 To Condemn Delivery of Children’s Sermons in Divine Service by Laity	318
4-14 To Direct Commission on Theology and Church Relations to Address Christian Nationalism in American Context.....	309	4-31 To Honor and Guard Chief Divine Service of Local Congregation	318
4-15 To Direct Commission on Theology and Church Relations to Examine, and Provide Guidance on Public Teaching and Engagement of, Lutherans for Racial Justice and to Clarify Lutheran Teaching on Justice	309	4-32 To Amend Bylaw 6.2.2 (a) to Revise Recognized Service Organization Requirement of 100 Percent Synod Board Membership	319
4-16 To Task Commission on Theology and Church Relations to Write Report and Accompanying Study addressing Positive Christianity (aka German Christianity) and Its Deviation from Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy	310	4-33 To Promote Transparency and Accountability for Recognized Service Organizations and To Allow Certain Educational Institutions to Be Recognized	319
4-17 To Request Commission on Theology and Church Relations Produce New Document on Race	311	4-34 To Direct Offices of National and International Mission to Deny or Revoke Recognized Service Organization Status for Organizations Supporting, Advocating, or Otherwise Promoting LGBTQIA+ Agenda and Lifestyle, and To Amend Bylaws 6.2.3–4.....	320
		4-35 To Request Action and Closer Examination of Recognized Service Organization Status regarding Matters of Human Sexuality, and To Amend Bylaws 6.2.3–4.....	321
		4-36 To Offer Care and Support for Families Affected by Homosexuality, Transgenderism, and Sexual Libertinism	322
		4-37 To Continue to Oppose Practice of Couples Living Together outside Marriage and To Support Pastors and Congregations Who Lovingly Call to Repentance, Give Absolution, and Help to Live in Harmony with God’s Word	323

	PAGE
4-38 To Amend Bylaws to Provide Clarity and Address Practical Considerations for Specialized Spiritual Care Ministry	323
4-39 To Use Title <i>Chaplain</i> within the Synod Exclusively for Ordained Clergy	324
4-40 To Encourage Use of Chalice	324
4-41 To Celebrate Progress and To Encourage Increasing Faithfulness in Offering Every Sunday Communion.....	325
4-42 To Encourage Unequivocal Affirmation of First Communion Prior to Confirmation as God-Pleasing Practice and To Encourage Congregations to Commune Visiting Communicant Children	325
4-43 To Call All in Synod to Love, Peace, and Brotherly Care	326
4-44 To Exhort Members to Earnestly and Regularly Pray for and Pursue Synodical Unity, and To Appoint a Task Force.....	326
4-45 To Address Persecution in the Church.....	327
4-46 To Judge Practice by Word Alone	327
4-47 To Encourage Raising Up Public Servants	327
4-48 To Oppose Federal Immigration Raids and Call for Pastoral Advocacy	328
4-49 To Provide Direction concerning Disputes Appearing on Social Media.....	328
4-50 To Encourage Production of Sunday School Material for Very Small Congregations.....	328
4-51 To Address Uses of Artificial Intelligence	329
4-52 To Reject Use of Sermons Created by Artificial Intelligence	330
4-53 To Acknowledge the Witness of Charlie Kirk and Establish September 10 as Day of Prayer for Faithful Witnesses in Our Time	330
4-54 To Recognize Charles James Kirk as Christian Martyr.....	331
4-55 To Commend Confession That Charles James Kirk Died a Christian Martyr.....	331
4-56 To Celebrate Concordia Historical Institute Centenary and Renew the Synod's Commitment to Treasure and Trumpet Its Redeemed History ..	332

5. Theology and Church Relations

Reports

R1–R1.1, R10, R12, R62–R62.13

Overtures

5-01 To Recognize Altar and Pulpit Fellowship with Evangelical Lutheran Christian Church of Bolivia.....	335

	PAGE
5-02 To Support and Encourage Recognition of Altar and Pulpit Fellowship with Lutheran Mission—Australia	336
5-03 To Address Concerns with Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church	337
5-04 To Admonish and Review Fellowship with Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church	338
5-05 To Admonish and Converse with Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church.....	339
5-06 To Address Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya Membership in Lutheran World Federation.....	339
5-07 To Declare State of “Fellowship in Protest” with Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia	339
5-08 To Recognize That the Synod Is Not in Altar and Pulpit Fellowship with <i>Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche</i>	340
5-09 To Reconsider Altar and Pulpit Fellowship with The American Association of Lutheran Churches.....	341
5-10 To Encourage and Promote Biblical Teaching of Creation.....	342
5-11 To Restore Apostles’ Creed to Historical Form regarding Christ’s “Descent into Hell”	342
5-12 To Review Practice of Divine Call in Synod Constitution and Bylaws	343
5-13 To Request Comprehensive Review When Call Is Terminated or Self-Terminated	344
5-14 To Study How to Amend Practice of Issuing “Divine Calls” to Positions Not in Direct Service of Proclamation of Gospel and Administration of Sacraments.....	344
5-15 To Encourage and Promote Sound Teaching on Eschatology or <i>Last Things</i>	345
5-16 To Reaffirm and Encourage Teaching and Practice of Closed Communion	345
5-17 To Reaffirm, Enforce, and Restore Faithful Eucharistic Practice and Synodical Discipline concerning Unionism and Open Communion.....	346
5-18 To Request Commission on Theology and Church Relations to Produce Study Document to Further Understanding and Conversations on Pastoral Exceptions to Closed Communion.....	347
5-19 To Reaffirm Sanctity of Human Life in Regard to Practice of In Vitro Fertilization	347
5-20 To Oppose Practice of In Vitro Fertilization	348
5-21 To Address the Practice of In Vitro Fertilization.....	348
5-22 To Believe, Teach, and Confess <i>Missio Dei</i>	349
5-23 To Rescind 1981 Resolution 8-05 and Request Commission on Theology and Church Relations Report on Human Organ Donation and Transplantation.....	350

	PAGE
5-24 To Urge Church of Christ to Stay and Do Her Duty	350
5-25 To Publicly Acknowledge Theological and Ecclesial Errors in Church's Response to COVID-19 Pandemic.....	351
5-26 To Rejoice in Proclamation of God's Word by His Called and Ordained Servants	352
5-27 To Condemn Use of Women as Lectors	352
5-28 To Affirm That God Does Indeed Prohibit Females from Public Reading of Scriptures, for Reading Is Preaching/Heralding the Word.....	353
5-29 To Correct Erroneous Practice of Women Lectors.....	354
5-30 To Reaffirm Doctrine of Men Serving in Office of Holy Ministry	354
5-31 To Reconsider Issue of Woman Suffrage in the Church.....	355
5-32 To Reconsider Issue of Woman Suffrage in the Church.....	355
5-33 To Reconsider Issue of Woman Suffrage in the Church.....	356
5-34 To Direct that the Synod and Its Commission on Theology and Church Relations Study and Reexamine Woman Suffrage in Light of Synod's Historic Practice and Holy Scripture, so as to Address and Resolve Confusion and Disunity.....	356
5-35 To Affirm Role of Women in the Church.....	357
5-36 To Affirm Inspiration and Authority of Mark 16:9–20.....	357
5-37 To Clarify Doctrine of Holy Trinity over against Eternal Functional Subordination of the Son	358
5-38 To Declare Center for Missional and Pastoral Leadership to be Heterodox Tract and Mission Society.....	359
5-39 To Declare Center for Missional and Pastoral Leadership to be Heterodox Tract and Mission Society.....	359
5-40 To Address Release and Use of <i>Luther's Large Catechism with Annotations and Contemporary Applications</i>	360
5-41 To Conclude <i>Created Male and Female</i> Task Force and Receive Its Recommendations	360
5-42 To Amend Bylaw 3.3.1.1.2 (c) to Designate President's Director of Church Relations as His Primary Representative for Ecclesiastical Relations with Other Church Bodies	361
5-43 To Refer Some Assignments from Commission on Theology and Church Relations to Seminaries....	362
5-44 To Give Thanks to God for 1700th Anniversary of First Council of Nicaea.....	362

6. Pastoral Ministry and Seminaries

Reports

**R1, R1.2, R1.2.2–R1.2.3, R2.1, R5, R5.2,
R13–R13.6, R62.3, R62.10, R62.13**

Overtures

6-01 To Uphold Seminary Formation That Faithfully Teaches All Doctrines of Scripture and Lutheran Confessions and Practices That Accord with Them	363
6-02 To Uphold Deep and Broad Study of Holy Scripture in Synod Seminaries	363
6-03 To Uphold Deep and Broad Study of Holy Scripture in Synod Seminaries	363
6-04 To Uphold Deep and Broad Study of Holy Scripture in Synod Seminaries	363
6-05 To Uphold Deep and Broad Study of <i>Book of Concord</i> in Synod Seminaries	364
6-06 To Uphold Deep and Broad Study of <i>Book of Concord</i> in Synod Seminaries	364
6-07 To Uphold Deep and Broad Study of <i>Book of Concord</i> in Synod Seminaries	365
6-08 To Require Theological Competency Standards for Eligibility to Exercise Ecclesiastical Oversight <i>De Iure Humano</i>	365
6-09 To Amend Bylaw 2.13.1 to Clarify Terminology for Specific Ministry Pastor Mentorship and Oversight.....	366
6-10 To Amend Bylaw 3.10.5.7 to Address Seminary Adjunct Faculty	367
6-11 To Amend Bylaws to Reinsert 2007 Pastoral Colloquy Bylaws from Policy Manual.....	367
6-12 To Encourage Transparency and Clarity in Pastoral Colloquy Process.....	369
6-13 To Encourage Transparency and Clarity in Pastoral Colloquy Process.....	369
6-14 To Affirm Exclusive Seminary Path and In-Person Formation for Pastoral Ministry	370
6-15 To Reaffirm the Synod's Routes to Ministry.....	370
6-16 To Affirm Exclusive Use of Synod Seminaries to Prepare Men for Office of Holy Ministry	371
6-17 To Affirm Exclusive Use of Synod Seminaries to Prepare Men for Office of Holy Ministry	372
6-18 To Affirm Exclusive Use of Synod Seminaries to Prepare Men for Office of Holy Ministry	373
6-19 To Affirm Exclusive Use of Synod Seminaries to Prepare Men for Office of Holy Ministry	374
6-20 To Affirm Exclusive Use of Synod Seminaries to Prepare Men for Office of Holy Ministry	375
6-21 To Strengthen Pastoral Formation in the Synod	376

	PAGE		PAGE
6-22	To Comply with and Apply Constitution Article VI 3 regarding Regular Call..... 377	6-47	To Review and Streamline Specific Ministry Pastor to General Pastor Pathways..... 393
6-23	To Affirm That Pastoral Formation in the Synod Is Done by Synod-Approved Seminaries..... 377	6-48	To Amend Bylaw 2.13.1 to Provide Pathway for Specific Ministry Pastors to Receive Full Pastoral Certification..... 393
6-24	To Affirm Exclusive Use of Synod Seminaries to Prepare Men for Office of Holy Ministry 378	6-49	To Require Completion of Academic Requirements prior to Specific Ministry Pastor Ordination 394
6-25	To Seek <i>Koinonia</i> on Pastoral Formation and Routes to Ministry 379	6-50	To Encourage Further Consideration of Requiring Successful Completion of Specific Ministry Pastor Coursework before Ordination and Placement on Ordained Roster..... 395
6-26	To Seek <i>Koinonia</i> on Pastoral Formation and Routes to Ministry 380	6-51	To Clarify Appropriate Uses of Specific Ministry Pastor Program in Accord with Synodical Intent 395
6-27	To Encourage Brotherly Speech about All Approved Pastoral Formation Routes and To Review Specific Ministry Pastor Pathways.... 380	6-52	To Affirm and Support Established Parameters of Specific Ministry Pastor Program..... 396
6-28	To Discuss Online Theological Education..... 381	6-53	To Suspend New Specific Ministry Pastor Admissions pending Conformity with the Synod in Convention..... 396
6-29	To Encourage Synod Seminaries to Develop Online Master of Divinity Program 381	6-54	To Strengthen Post-Ordination Supervision for Specific Ministry Pastors..... 397
6-30	To Encourage Pilot Online-Only Master of Divinity with Synod Seminaries..... 381	6-55	To Nullify Restrictive Policies Imposed on Specific Ministry Pastor Program and Restore Its Original Scope..... 397
6-31	To Encourage Pilot Non-Residential Master of Divinity with Synod Seminaries 382	6-56	To Remove Age Requirement from Specific Ministry Pastor Admission, Administration, and Supervision Policy..... 398
6-32	To Encourage Pilot Hybrid Master of Divinity with Synod Seminaries..... 383	6-57	To Support the Specific Ministry Pastor Program and Remove Its Age Requirement 398
6-33	To Address Pastoral Formation and Routes to Ministry 385	6-58	To Add Specific Ministry Pastor Church Planter Designation including Applicants Under 40 399
6-34	To Direct Pastoral Formation Committee to Bring Recommendation to 2029 Convention to Establish New Route(s) to Ordination, Utilizing and Making More Accessible Treasure of Synod Seminaries . 385	6-59	To Broaden and Reopen Specific Ministry Pastor Program for Wider Pastoral Formation and Service..... 399
6-35	To Ensure Pastoral Ministry in the Synod during Times of Shortage..... 387	6-60	To Broaden and Reopen Specific Ministry Pastor Program for Wider Pastoral Formation and Service..... 400
6-36	To Expand and Strengthen Distance Learning Routes to Ordination 387	6-61	To Clarify and Strengthen the Specific Ministry Pastor Program 402
6-37	To Encourage Innovative Training of Pastors 387	6-62	To Reduce Restrictions on Specific Ministry Pastors 402
6-38	To Give Thanks to God for Many Existing Routes to Office of Holy Ministry 388	6-63	To Implore Council of Presidents to Fulfill 2019 Resolution 6-03A re Supervision of Specific Ministry Pastors 403
6-39	To Celebrate and Encourage Variety of Routes to Pastoral Formation in the Synod..... 388	6-64	To Give Thanks for the Work of, and To Amend Bylaws to Conclude, the Pastoral Formation Committee 403
6-40	To Celebrate and Encourage Variety of Routes to Pastoral Formation in the Synod..... 389	6-65	To Amend Bylaw 3.10.4.6 to Expand Pastoral Formation Committee for Broader Representation..... 404
6-41	To Commend Residential Seminary Education and Voice Support for Synod Seminaries 390	6-66	To Amend Bylaw 3.10.4.6 to Revise Composition of Pastoral Formation Committee 405
6-42	To Affirm Residential Pastoral Education at Our Seminaries..... 390		
6-43	To Reaffirm Residential Seminary Formation as Preferred Route for Pastoral Preparation..... 391		
6-44	To Reaffirm Residential Seminary Formation as Preferred Route for Pastoral Preparation..... 391		
6-45	To Amend Bylaw 2.13.1 to Regularize Non-residential Routes under Specific Ministry Pastor Classification..... 391		
6-46	To Encourage Equal Outcomes in Routes to Pastoral Formation in the Synod..... 392		

	PAGE
6-67 To Amend Bylaw 3.10.4.6 to Expand Pastoral Formation Committee	405
6-68 To Amend Bylaw 3.10.4.6 to Revise Composition of Pastoral Formation Committee	406
6-69 To Amend Bylaw 3.10.4.6 to Expand Pastoral Formation Committee	406
6-70 To Retain Current Structure of Pastoral Formation Committee	407
6-71 To Amend Bylaw 3.10.4.6 to Reform Membership of Pastoral Formation Committee...	407
6-72 To Study the Feasibility of Intentional Seminary Professor Turnover and Parish Sabbatical	408
6-73 To Amend Bylaw 3.10.5.7.2 to Provide Flexibility to Seminary Boards of Regents in Faculty Matters in Their Contexts	408
6-74 To Direct Seminaries to Publish Annual Enrollment Numbers Every Fall	408
6-75 To Encourage the Council of Presidents to Prioritize Assignment of Seminary Candidates to Sole Vacancies over Associate Positions.....	409
6-76 To Participate in Building Culture of Church Work Formation and Recruitment	409
6-77 To Encourage Recruitment of Commissioned Workers	410
6-78 To Encourage Young People to Enter Church Worker Vocations	411
6-79 To Support Bi- and Co-vocational Pastors and Their Congregations.....	411
6-80 To Encourage Secular Vocational Training for Current and Potential Ordained and Commissioned Ministers.....	411
6-81 To Mandate Continuing Education for Parish Pastors	412
6-82 To Encourage Congregations to Establish Sabbatical Policy for Church Workers.....	412
6-83 To Encourage Ministry Sabbaticals for Church Workers	413
6-84 To Establish Commissioned Male Diaconate	413
6-85 To Standardize Vacancy Pastor Remuneration Guidelines	413
6-86 To Celebrate and Encourage Lay Service.....	414
6-87 To Celebrate and Encourage Lay Service.....	414
6-88 To Affirm That Functions of Pastoral Office Belong to That Office	415

7. University Education

Reports

R1, R2.2, R5, R5.2, R14–R14.5, R55, R62.7

Overtures

7-01 To Amend Bylaws to Convert Concordia University	

	PAGE
System, the Synodwide Corporate Entity, into Commission for University Education	417
7-02 To Affirm and Sustain Concordia University System as Synodwide Corporate Entity	421
7-03 To Affirm and Sustain Concordia University System as Synodwide Corporate Entity	421
7-04 To Define and Affirm <i>Lutheran Identity</i>	422
7-05 To Define and Affirm <i>Lutheran Identity</i>	422
7-06 To Encourage University Worship Practices Faithful to Scriptures and Confessions and Reflecting Breadth of Worship in the Synod	423
7-07 To Pause and Correct Deficiencies in Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcomes Standards.....	424
7-08 To Encourage Congregations to Include in Annual Mission Budgets Support for Regional University of Concordia University System	424
7-09 To Amend Bylaw 3.6.6.1	425
7-10 To Amend Bylaw 3.10.6.2.2	425
7-11 To Strengthen Our Process for Supporting Our Concordias	426
7-12 To Encourage Licensed Counselors Serving Recognized Service Organizations to Complete Director of Family Life Ministry Colloquy Program.....	427
7-13 To Ask That Concordia University Nebraska Local Regents Be Appointed	427
7-14 To Support and Clarify Prior Approval Process ..	428
7-15 To Clarify Prior Approval Process and Provide Appropriate Transparency.....	428
7-16 To Support and Clarify Prior Approval Process ..	429
7-17 To Amend Bylaws to Support and Clarify Prior Approval Process	429
7-18 To Reexamine Prior Approval Process	430
7-19 To Review and Clarify Prior Approval	431
7-20 To Support and Clarify Prior Approval Process for Theological Faculty and Presidential Candidates for Concordia University System	431
7-21 To Support and Clarify Prior Approval Process ..	432
7-22 To Clarify Prior Approval Process for Theological Faculties and Concordia University Presidents and Selection Process for Seminary Presidents ...	433
7-23 To Support and Clarify Prior Approval Process Rationale	433
7-24 To Encourage Greater Transparency in Prior Approval Process	433
7-25 To Appeal for Recognized Ecclesiastical Relationship with Luther Classical College.....	434
7-26 To Give Thanks for Board of Regents of Concordia College—New York	435
7-27 To Give Thanks for Leaders Who Developed Concordia University Wisconsin / Ann Arbor Partnership	435

	PAGE
7-28 To Conduct a Project Postmortem Examination of Concordia University Ann Arbor	435
7-29 To Request Transparency from Concordia University Wisconsin—Ann Arbor	436

8. Finance

Reports

R1, R1.2–R1.2.2, R1.2.4–R1.3, R5–R8, R15–R57

Overtures

8-01 To Amend Bylaw Section 3.7 to Clarify Additional Assigned Responsibilities and Provisions on the Board of Trustees—Concordia Plans / Board of Directors—Concordia Plan Services	437
8-02 To Amend Bylaw Section 3.7 to Include Management of Concordia Risk Solutions in Assigned Activity of Concordia Plan Services	438
8-03 To Affirm Concordia Plans and To Amend Bylaws to Require Annual ERISA-Comparable Transparency to Participants	438
8-04 To Amend Bylaws to Ensure Sustainability of Concordia Plan Services by Its Working with Other Church Bodies.....	439
8-05 To Stabilize the Cost of Benefits Offered by Concordia Plan Services	439
8-06 To Direct Concordia Publishing House to Eliminate Shipping Charges	440
8-07 To Use Only Sustainable Bible Translations	440
8-08 To Request Additional Resources using New King James Version	441
8-09 To Open Access to Lutheran Confessions	441
8-10 To Open Access to Lutheran Confessions	441
8-11 To Open Access to Lutheran Confessions	442
8-12 To Study Granting of <i>Book of Concord</i> Copyright Permissions by Concordia Publishing House	442
8-13 To Direct Concordia Publishing House to Prioritize Mission and Distribution.....	443
8-14 To Direct Concordia Publishing House to Prioritize Mission and Distribution.....	444
8-15 To Commit the Synod to Fully Funding Her Seminaries as a Primary Responsibility of Corporate Synod	444
8-16 To Encourage Synod Transparency and Unity regarding Concluded <i>HotChalk</i> Litigation.....	445
8-17 To Encourage Transparency and Accountability in Legal Judgments and Settlements	445
8-18 To Direct Board of Directors to Review and Publish Comprehensive Accounting of LCMS Monies Spent on <i>HotChalk</i> , <i>Concordia University Texas</i> , and <i>Hong Kong International School Association Limited</i> Litigation	446

9. Structure and Administration

Reports

R1, R1.2, R1.2.2, R1.2.4–R1.2.5, R2, R3–R11, R14, R15–R19, R21–R55, R59, R61

Overtures

9-01 To Amend Bylaws 1.5.3.2–4 and Add Bylaw 4.7.6 regarding Regulations for Committees	449
9-02 To Amend Bylaws 1.5.1.2–1.5.2 to Clarify Service Expectations and Handling of Conflicts of Interest	450
9-03 To Amend Constitution Article XII 15 as to Call of Special District Conventions	451
9-04 To Amend Bylaws regarding Doctrinal Review	452
9-05 To Amend Various Bylaws for Purposes of Clarification or Improvement	454
9-06 To Amend Bylaw Section 1.5, etc., to Unify in the Bylaws and Revise Corporate Formation Requirements for Instrumental Entities of Corporate Synod and Agencies of the Synod	458
9-07 To Focus on Things of God	466
9-08 To Amend Bylaws Exclusive to Lutheran Church Extension Fund to Clarify That It May Provide Real Estate Evaluation and Redevelopment Services in Support of Synod Mission and Ministry	467
9-09 To Amend the Bylaws to Clarify and Streamline Responsibilities of Appointed Synod Officers.....	468
9-10 To Amend Bylaws to Coordinate Responsibilities of Chief Mission Officer with Other Synod Officers	470
9-11 To Amend Bylaws to Enhance Responsibilities of Synod Mission Boards	471
9-12 To Restructure Mission Boards.....	473
9-13 To Revisit 2010 Restructuring	473
9-14 To Revisit 2010 Restructuring	474
9-15 To Amend Bylaw 3.6.4.3 to Increase the Number of Lutheran Church Extension Fund Directors Elected by the Synod in Convention from Three to Four.....	474
9-16 To Amend Bylaws 3.6.1.8 (c) and 3.6.4 (a) to Clarify that Two-Thirds Approval Requirements for Synodwide Corporate Entity and Lutheran Church Extension Fund Governing Document Amendments are Based on Members Actually Present at Meeting	475
9-17 To Initiate Proposal to Realign Districts.....	475
9-18 To Reclaim Beneficial Understanding of Our Synodical Union	476
9-19 To Amend Constitution and Bylaws to Alter Selection of Voting Delegates to National Convention.....	476

	PAGE
9-20 To Amend Bylaw 3.1.2 (a) to Change Size Requirements for Electoral Circuits.....	477
9-21 To Amend Bylaw Subsection 3.12.2 to Restore Presidential Election to Convention.....	477
9-22 To Amend Bylaw Subsection 3.12.2 to Restore Presidential Election to Convention.....	479
9-23 To Affirm Regional Selection of Board Members	480
9-24 To Create Task Force to Develop Overture for Change in Regional Vice-President Selection	480
9-25 To Amend Bylaws to Allow Regional Delegates to Select Regional Vice-Presidents	481
9-26 To Develop Overture for Change in Regional Vice-President Selection	481
9-27 To Appoint Task Force to Improve District Representation on Synod Boards, Boards of Regents, and Commissions	482
9-28 To Amend Bylaw 3.2.4.1 to Limit Terms of Office for President, First Vice-President, Regional Vice-Presidents, and Secretary	483
9-29 To Amend Bylaw 3.2.4.1 to Establish Term Limits for Elected Synod Officers	483
9-30 To Amend Bylaw 3.2.4 to Establish Term Limits for Synod President and Vice-Presidents.....	484
9-31 To Give Commissioned Ministers the Franchise and To Study Equal Lay and Clergy Representation on Boards and Other Bodies	484
9-32 To Amend Constitution Article XII 10 a to Provide Option of Appointing Ordained or Commissioned Minister as District Convention Rostered Voting Delegate	484
9-33 To Amend Bylaw 3.1.2 to Expand the Number of Circuit Delegates to Synod Conventions and to Include Ministers of Religion—Commissioned.....	485
9-34 To Strengthen Convention Participation of Ministers of Religion—Commissioned	485
9-35 To Strengthen Nonvoting Advisory Role of Commissioned Ministers at Synod Conventions	486
9-36 To Amend Bylaws to Eliminate Ability of Circuit Forum to Submit Overtures	486
9-37 To Amend Bylaw 3.1.6.2 to Allow Pastoral Circuit Meetings and Teacher Groups to Submit Overtures	487
9-38 To Amend the Bylaws to Require Sixty-Percent Affirmative Vote for All Non-Election Matters	487
9-39 To Bring Resolutions with Strong District Support to Convention Floor.....	488
9-40 To Create Process for Initiatives and Referenda	488

	PAGE
9-41 To Provide Clarity about Amendments to Resolutions.....	488
9-42 To Change to Four-Year Convention Cycle	488
9-43 To Amend Const. Art. VIII A 1 to Change to Four-Year Convention Cycle	489
9-44 To Amend Bylaw 4.2.2 to Grant Lay Vote to Every Congregation at District Conventions ...	489
9-45 To Permit Majority Voting in Electronic Decisions for Synod Boards and Agencies	489
9-46 To Amend Bylaw 3.6.1.8 (c) to Clarify That Two-Thirds Synod Member Approval Requirement for Synodwide Corporate Entity Governing Document Amendments Is Based on Members Actually Present at Meeting.....	490
9-47 To Amend Bylaw 3.6.4.3 to Clarify That All Lutheran Church Extension Fund Voting Directors are <i>Elected</i> and To Add That No More Than Two Such Directors Can Be from the Same District	490
9-48 To Affirm and Use Biblical Terminology concerning Ministry	491
9-49 To Clarify <i>Multipoint</i> and <i>Multicampus Parish</i>	494
9-50 To Adopt Dual Title of <i>Bishop and President</i> for District Presidents.....	494
9-51 To Authorize Title <i>Bishop</i> for Synod President and District Presidents	495
9-52 To Declare Commission on Constitutional Matters Unconstitutional and Void All Its Opinions	495

10. Ecclesiastical Supervision and Dispute Resolution

Reports

R1, R2, R3–R4.1, R9, R21–R55, R61, R62.12

Overtures

10-01 To Encourage Visitation by Synod and District.....	497
10-02 To Develop Guidelines for Ecclesiastical Supervision of Internet Accusations	499
10-03 To Address Use of Named or Anonymous Social Media Accounts to Create Strife and Division within the Church	501
10-04 To Request Theological and Pastoral Statement and Bylaw Review regarding Social Media, Partisan Media, and Eighth Commandment in Ecclesiastical Proceedings	502
10-05 To Uphold Eighth Commandment in Digital Communication and Ecclesiastical Proceedings	502

	PAGE		PAGE		
10-06	To Safeguard Evangelical Ecclesiastical Supervision and District Judgments.....	503	10-24	To Request Council of Presidents to Clarify Circumstances of Called Worker Removal or Resignation	513
10-07	To Establish an Independent Appeals Panel in Cases involving the President’s Decisions	504	10-25	To Request Council of Presidents to Clarify Circumstances of Called Worker Removal or Resignation from Roster	514
10-08	To Require Greater Transparency When Disciplinary Judgments Are Reversed.....	504	10-26	To Amend Bylaw 2.13.3.2 to Make Restriction Appeals Public Record and to Allow Further Review	514
10-09	To Provide Pastoral Care for Congregations Affected by Major Disciplinary Actions.....	505	10-27	To Standardize and Strengthen Response to Rostered Worker Sexual Abuse	515
10-10	To Study Ecclesiastical Supervision in Light of Lutheran Confessions	505	10-28	To Require Completion of Ecclesiastical Investigations and Strengthen Response to Clergy Sexual Misconduct/Abuse.....	515
10-11	To Amend Bylaw 4.4.6 (c) to Require Reporting All Complaints to Subjects	506	10-29	To Require Completion of Ecclesiastical Investigations and Strengthen Response to Clergy Sexual Misconduct/Abuse.....	516
10-12	To Amend Bylaw Section 2.14 to Address How Public Sin Is Handled by Dispute Resolution Process	506	10-30	To Require Completion of Ecclesiastical Investigations and Strengthen Response to Sexual Misconduct/Abuse by Rostered Church Workers	517
10-13	To Replace Dispute Resolution Process with Biblical, Workable, and Effective System for Ecclesiastical Supervision	507	10-31	To Certify Accuracy and Trustworthiness of Call Documents	518
10-14	To Replace Dispute Resolution Process with Biblical, Workable, and Effective System for Ecclesiastical Supervision	508	10-32	To Allow Pastors to Opt Out of Pre-Call Interviews and/or Contact	519
10-15	To Provide Scriptural Reforms to Dispute Resolution Process	509	10-33	To Amend Bylaw 2.10.3 to Allow District Presidents to Share Issues prior to Installation	519
10-16	To Provide Scriptural Reforms to Dispute Resolution Process	510	10-34	To More Directly Oversee Service of Ordained Ministers to Congregations to Which They Have No Formal Call	520
10-17	To Amend Bylaw 1.10.2 to Render Dispute Resolution Non-Exclusive Remedy	510	10-35	To Encourage Pastors to Honor Their Own Call	520
10-18	To Require No One to Participate in the Dispute Resolution Process.....	511	10-36	To Call for Publication of Council of Presidents Manual	520
10-19	To Allow Parties to Delay Hearing to Await Commission Opinion	511	10-37	To Provide Compensation for Circuit Visitors	520
10-20	To Amend Bylaw 1.10.18.1 (g) to Allow Parties to Record Proceedings.....	511	10-38	To Amend Bylaw 2.11.2.2 (c) regarding Candidate Reporting	520
10-21	To Direct Revisions to Bylaw Section 1.10 <i>Standard Operating Procedures Manual</i> re Witnesses and Evidence.....	512	10-39	To Amend Bylaw 2.11.2.2 (c) regarding Candidate Reporting	521
10-22	To Amend Bylaw 1.10.7.4 to Allow Advisors to Represent Parties in Dispute Resolution Process	513		Correction in Registration Listing	523
10-23	To Amend Bylaw 1.10.10.1 to Provide for Reconciler Reviews.....	513			

Under Separate Cover

2026 Biographical Synopses and Statements of Nominees

REGISTERED DELEGATES AND REPRESENTATIVES

Due to 2019 Res. 9-04A and 2019 Bylaw 3.1.8, delegate home congregations are listed rather than mailing addresses.

A. Voting and Advisory Delegates

Atlantic District

Voting Ordained

ALBRECHTSEN, Henry III; Good Shepherd LC, Warwick, NY
ALLSTAEDT, Jacob Charles (Jake); St John's LC, Williston Park, NY
DORNER, James Edward II (Jim); Unity LC, Albany, NY
ELSEROAD, David A; Trinity LC, Hawthorne, NY
FORBES, Conner Edward; St James LC, Saint James, NY
MARQUE, Edward Alexander (Alex); Christ LC, Woodside, NY
RIGOBERT, Francis Samba Balangarr (Francis); Zion LC, Schenectady, NY
WILLIAMSON-LINK, Steven Jeffery; Emanuel LC, Patchogue, NY

Voting Lay

CONSIGLIO, Frank; Holy Trinity LC, Middle Island, NY
CURRY, Kate; SonRise LC, Pottersville, NY
FARBER, Ellen; LC of the Resurrection, Garden City, NY
GILES, Zachary; True Light LC, New York, NY
IRMER, Mikel; Our Savior's LC, Colonie, NY
MATHER, Mark Henry; St Paul's Ev LC, Amityville, NY
NELSON NOVEN, Jaime L; Mount Zion LC, Manhattan, NY
SOMMER, Ronald K; St Paul LC, Monroe, NY

Advisory Ordained

HARTWELL, Robert E; The Village LC, Bronxville, NY

Advisory Commissioned

ROJAS, Raquel A; Redeemer Ev LC, Bronx, NY

California/Nevada/Hawaii District

Voting Ordained

BESTUL, John Christian; LC of Our Savior, Cupertino, CA
CLELAND, James Scott; Shepherd of the Sierra LC, Carson City, NV
DABSU, Temesgen Mengesha; Grace LC, El Cerrito, CA
DEFOREST, Brennan Thomas; Redeemer Ev LC, Chico, CA
GOWEN, Mitchell Wesley; Our Savior LC, Aiea, HI
KLEMSZ, Scott Christopher; Our Savior LC, Salinas, CA
KNEPPER, Grant A; Grace LC, Modesto, CA
MANKIN, Trevor Aaron; Town and Country LC, Sacramento, CA
NG, Christopher Haun Wing; LC of the Holy Spirit, San Francisco, CA
SCHLENSKER, Daniel Alfred; Shepherd of the Hills LC, Lake Isabella, CA
SHAMBURGER, William Marsh III; Holy Cross LC, Rocklin, CA

Voting Lay

DEVITT, Leslie; St John LC, Bakersfield, CA
HARLOW, Robert; Zion LC, San Francisco, CA
JAGOW, Mark; Our Savior LC, Pinole, CA
KRUITHOFF, Cary; Peace LC, Sacramento, CA
MEYER, Bruce; Trinity LC, Gardnerville, NV
MORRIS, Brian; Light of the Hills LC, Cameron Park, CA
NELSON, Gary; St John's LC, Petaluma, CA
NUNES, Mike; St Paul LC, Tracy, CA
SAKO, Deanna; Christ LC, Hilo, HI
XIONG, A Pao; Peace LC, Fresno, CA
YAMABE, Brian; Shepherd of the Valley LC, San Jose, CA

Advisory Ordained

ETTNER, Dann Jon (Danny); Prince of Peace LC, Fremont, CA
HERRMANN, John V; St Matthew LC, Rocklin, CA

Advisory Commissioned

CHRISTOPHER, Steven Lee; St Matthew LC, Sonora, CA
MCGOWAN, Kayla Elizabeth; Our Savior LC, Aiea, HI

Central Illinois District

Voting Ordained

ASTROWSKI, Leonard A Jr; Immanuel LC, Rock Island, IL
DUNLOP, David Matthew; Zion LC, Chestnut, IL
GEARIG, Mark Andrew; St Paul's LC, Decatur, IL
JOHNSTON, Brian Christopher; Trinity LC, Taylorville, IL
MEYER, Ryan W; St Peter LC, Saint Peter, IL
PEISER, Jordan Ryan; Faith LC, Shumway, IL
PIAZZA, Adrian L; Our Redeemer LC, Robinson, IL
RILEY, Matthew Edward; St James LC, Quincy, IL
RONCHETTO, Kyle Christopher; St Paul LC, Chenoa, IL
SCHUERMAN, Michael Paul; University LC, Champaign, IL
SCHULTZ, Jonah Joel Arthur; Salem Ev LC, Jacksonville, IL
SMITH, Daniel Mike; Grace LC, Paris, IL
TRAXEL, Joshua Thomas; Our Savior's LC, Springfield, IL
UPHOFF, Aaron Daniel; Calvary LC, Watseka, IL

WAGNITZ, Michael Gerhard; St Paul LC, Brimfield, IL

Voting Lay

CASEBEER, John Charles; Trinity LC, Decatur, IL
CLARK, John I; St Pauls LC, Havana, IL
DROCKELMAN, Derek; Concordia LC, Geneseo, IL
ENGELBART, Jon; St Paul LC, Wheeler, IL
FRICKE, Michael; Bethlehem LC, Petersburg, IL
HAGEN, John C (JC); Faith LC, Sullivan, IL
HARMS, Jacob; Our Savior LC, Milford, IL
HOMANN, Ed; St Pauls LC, Mattoon, IL
HURLEY, Thomas (Thom); St John LC, Quincy, IL
KIRCHHOFF, Michael; St Paul LC, Altamont, IL
KOTHE, Kevin; Christ LC, Normal, IL
LAEL, Robert E; Trinity LC, Edinburg, IL
LOVELL, John; Bethel LC, Morton, IL
MIHM, Andy; St John LC, Champaign, IL
MYERS, John; St John LC, Beardstown, IL

Advisory Ordained

BRUER, Robert L; Mount Zion LC, Mount Zion, IL

Advisory Commissioned

BECKER, Bryce Emery; St Johns LC, Mattoon, IL
SHOUMAKER, Jeffery T; Redeemer LC, Peoria, IL
SPITZ, Sandra Jean; Immanuel LC, Loda, IL

Eastern District

Voting Ordained

BODE, Christian Daniel; St John LC, Hamlin, NY
KERNS, Douglas Scot II; Faith LC, Easton, PA
KRUEGER, Dennis James; Faith LC, Elma, NY
KUNTZ, Scott Allan; Mount Calvary LC, West View, PA
MARIN, Thompson; St Paul LC, Batavia, NY
MULLINS, Kyle Scott; Trinity Ev LC of Glen Savage, Fairhope, PA
RINGER, William Neal; St Paul's Ev LC, North East, PA
URLAUB, Bradley Paul; St Mark LC, Mendon, NY
WHITE, Denton William; Holy Ghost LC, Bergholtz, NY
ZECH, Rako Ronald; St Paul LC, Clarence Center, NY

Voting Lay

BELL, Susan K; Christ Memorial LC, Malvern, PA
COOPER-BROWNE, Isabelle C; LC of Our Savior, Buffalo, NY
CWWYNAR, Cynthia Lynn (Cindy); Prince of Peace LC, Freedom, PA
GUGINO, Robert; Immanuel LC, Tonawanda, NY
HEIMAN, John; Redeemer LC, Auburn, NY
KANE, Richard (Rich); St Paul LC, Hilton, NY
KRULL, David E; St John LC, Angola, NY
KRULL, Gary R; Grace LC, Niagara Falls, NY
ROBINSON, Whitney; Concordia LC, Brentwood, PA

Advisory Ordained

CWWYNAR, Paul David; Prince of Peace LC, Freedom, PA

Advisory Commissioned

ARMER, Faith Anne; Hope LC, Levittown, PA

English District

Voting Ordained

BACON, Paul E; Bethesda LC, Chicago, IL
BOBBY, Samuel L; Redeemer LC, Lincoln, NE
GAI, Philip Moses Palet; St Mark LC, Mississauga, ON CANADA
HUENINK, James Edward; First LC, El Cajon, CA
KIESELOWSKY, Robert John Jr; St John LC, Springfield, PA
KOONTZ, Adam Clinton; Redeemer LC, Oakmont, PA
LOREE, Larry Kenneth Jr; Ascension of Christ LC, Beverly Hills, MI
MUSOLF, Gregory Scott; Messiah LC, Forest Lake, MN
SCHMELTZ, Rodney L; Faith LC, Overgaard, AZ
SCHULTZ, Aaron Andrew; Advent LC, Zionsville, IN
WELDON, Robert F Sr; Grace LC, Elyria, OH

Voting Lay

BUSAROW, Jonathan; Redeemer LC, Fort Wayne, IN
FARQUHARSON, Ian; St Luke LC, North York, ON CANADA
FUHRMAN, Delmar; St Pauls LC, Long Beach, CA
HABITZ, Thomas A Jr; Zion Ev LC, Detroit, MI
KING, Tim (Tim); Trinity LC, New Lenox, IL
LOESCH, Richard Michael Hubert; LC of the Risen Savior, Green Valley, AZ
MOFFETT, Gray; Trinity LC, Ocala, FL
OLECKI, Thomas; Our Savior Ev LC, North Royalton, OH
PORTER, Charles Jeffrey (Chuck); Greenfield Park LC, West Allis, WI
SCHECK, Andrew; Immanuel LC, Alexandria, VA

THEISS, Sean; St Thomas Ev LC, Magnolia, TX

Advisory Ordained

BENFEY, Matthias Wilhelm Nienstedt; St Mark LC, Mississauga, ON CANADA
LAMAY, Colton James; Redeemer LC, Sarnia, ON CANADA

Florida-Georgia District

Voting Ordained

BARBER, Timothy David; Epiphany LC, Tallahassee, FL
BASS, David Jonathan; St Michael LC, Fort Myers, FL
BRAUN, Steven Michael; Grace LC, Winter Haven, FL
CLAY, Samuel P; St Paul LC, Statesboro, GA
ESCHER, Christopher William (Cris); Grace LC, Port Saint Lucie, FL
GLOVER, Graham Bernhardt; Abiding Savior LC, Gainesville, FL
GREEN, Kenneth D II; Prince of Peace LC, Orlando, FL
HANEL, Michael Harvey; Bethany LC, Leesburg, FL
JORDAN, Jeffrey Wayne (Jeff); Rivercliff LC, Sandy Springs, GA
LOUISSAINT, Elie; Salem Haitian Lutheran Mission, Lake Worth, FL
MANDILE, Anthony Bartholomew III; Martin Luther Chapel, Marathon, FL
POOCK, Patrick Wayne; Faith LC, Parrish, FL
PRUGH, Daniel Russell; Holy Trinity LC, Tampa, FL
SORENSEN, Andrew Jacob; Faith LC, Dunedin, FL
VILSAINT, Josue Josh; Trinity LC, Fort Lauderdale, FL
WARNKE, Joseph Matthew (Joe); Christ Our Savior LC, Griffin, GA

Voting Lay

ALBRIGHT, Jeffrey Allen; Faith LC, Eustis, FL
BRAUCKMAN, Rich; Living Faith LC, Cumming, GA
BROOKS, Ann L; Grace LC, Saint Cloud, FL
COOK, Morrie; St John LC, Ocala, FL
DAVENPORT, Norman Gregory; Grace LC, Naples, FL
DAVIS, R Scott; Christ Our Savior LC, Saint Augustine, FL
HENNING, Richard; Christ LC, Perry, GA
HOWARD, Fredrick J (Rick); First LC, Clearwater, FL
JONES, Steven L (Steve); St Paul LC, Weston, FL
KOCIUBA, Joseph E (Joe); Faith LC, Hialeah, FL
MATHENY, Timothy; Lakeside LC, Venice, FL
MCLEAN, Linda Lee; Christ LC, Avon Park, FL
MOONEY, William Stewart (Will); Christ the King LC, Riverview, FL
PACHECO, Charisse; St Paul LC, Lakeland, FL
ROBERTSON, Richard C; St Paul LC, Peachtree City, GA
THOMAS, Martin; Son Life LC, Boynton Beach, FL

Advisory Ordained

CLARK, John Blair Jr (Blair); Amazing Grace LC, Oxford, FL
HERMANN, Rory Michael; Christ Our Savior LC, Saint Augustine, FL

Advisory Commissioned

SCUDIERI, Robert John; Peace LC, Naples, FL
WESCHE, David Paul; All Saints LC, Blairsville, GA
HEFLIN, Roy William; Faith LC, Parrish, FL
PROHL-KELLER, Ellen Elizabeth; Grace LC, Saint Petersburg, FL

Indiana District

Voting Ordained

BROCK, Peter James; St John LC, Decatur, IN
CAGE, Peter C; St Paul's LC, Fort Wayne, IN
CHRISTIANSEN, Keaton Geoffrey; Zion LC, Garrett, IN
FICKEL, Erich R; St Paul LC, Chesterton, IN
JANSSEN, Nathan L; Prince of Peace LC, Martinsville, IN
JUNG, Matthew P; St Paul LC, Jonesville, IN
MACKEY, Daniel Paul (Danny); Grace LC, Muncie, IN
MANN, Kevin Dennis; Peace LC, Fort Wayne, IN
MEYER, Joel William; St Paul LC, Brownstown, IN
MIEROW, Seth A; St Peters Ev LC, Indianapolis, IN
MUELLER, David R; Trinity LC, Goodland, IN
MURPHY, Max John; Cornerstone LC, Carmel, IN
PETERS, Mark James; Zion LC, Woodburn, IN
REED, Jason Adam; Holy Trinity LC, La Grange, KY
RUSERT, Nathan James; Emmanuel LC, Tell City, IN
SATKOWIAK, Brett Alan; Faith LC, Demotte, IN
STEPHENS, Ronald Allen; Emmaus LC, South Bend, IN
STUCKWISCH, Jeffrey L; Zion LC, Seymour, IN
TERKULA, Michael Dennis; St Johns Ev LC, Lanesville, IN
WEST, Aaron M; Holy Trinity LC, Greensburg, IN
ZIPAY, Joel S; St John LC, Wanatah, IN

Voting Lay

BERNING, Lyle David; Faith Ev LC, Roanoke, IN
 BROCK, James (Jim); St Paul LC, Columbus, IN
 DICKHAUT, Chad Alan; Prince of Peace LC, Goshen, IN
 ELIZONDO, Nic; Zion LC, New Palestine, IN
 EMKES, Michael (Mike); Concordia LC, Greenwood, IN
 FEOLE, John; Holy Cross LC, Shelbyville, KY
 HESSONG, Brian; St John LC, Seymour, IN
 HILDEBRANDT, Erik Elden; Trinity LC, Crown Point, IN
 KOENEMAN, Michael (Mike); St Paul LC, New Haven, IN
 KOTTLAWSKI, Brian; Emanuel LC, Tipton, IN
 KYLER, Patrick R (Pat); St John LC, Columbia City, IN
 LAITZKE, Kathie M; Living Christ LC, Plainfield, IN
 MUELLER, Ken; University LC, West Lafayette, IN
 ROYER, Joseph B (JB); Redeemer LC, Seymour, IN
 SILLETTTO, Aaron J; Concordia LC, Louisville, KY
 SNYDER, Rick; Grace LC, Columbus, IN
 TURPEN, Lee; St Paul LC, Evansville, IN
 VANDERCAR, Luke; Immanuel LC, Michigan City, IN
 VEIT, Stan; Emmaus LC, Fort Wayne, IN
 WICKERT, Margie; St Peter LC, North Judson, IN
 WIEHE, John; Suburban Bethlehem LC, Fort Wayne, IN

Advisory Ordained

DAHLING, Daniel Fred; Emmanuel LC, Fort Wayne, IN
 GARD, Daniel L; Ascension LC, Fort Wayne, IN
 VOORMAN, James Leonard; Zion LC, Decatur, IN

Advisory Commissioned

BAUMAN, Michelle A; St Paul LC, Columbus, IN
 BREDEHOEFFT, Gloria Jean; Advent LC, Zionsville, IN
 BRUNE, Christopher Richard; St Peter's LC, Fort Wayne, IN
 COLLINS, Laura Genevieve; Our Redeemer LC, Kokomo, IN
 DAVIS, Brandon James; St John Ev LC, Indianapolis, IN
 DENHOLM, George III; St Peters LC, Columbus, IN
 DOWNEY, Patrick James Jr; Immanuel LC, Seymour, IN
 EGGER, Caleb Thomas; St Johns Ev LC, Lanesville, IN
 KETCHER, Karol R; Trinity LC, Crown Point, IN
 KOENEMANN, Darin D; St Paul Ev LC, Decatur, IN
 MEYER, Peter John; Bethlehem LC, Ossian, IN
 MUEHLER, Jesse Craig; Emmanuel LC, Fort Wayne, IN
 RITTNER, Katherine E; St Pauls LC, Centerville, MI
 SCHALLHORN, Vicki Lynn; St John LC, Decatur, IN

Iowa East District**Voting Ordained**

ARMBRECHT, Isaiah Albert; Our Savior LC, Manchester, IA
 BURNS, Jesse Allen; Redeemer LC, Ventura, IA
 HAMBLETON, Aaron Michael; St Paul LC, Eldora, IA
 HARTWIG, Brent M; Our Redeemer LC, Iowa City, IA
 MANZ, Michael Joseph; Our Savior LC, Newton, IA
 NAVURSKIS, Christopher A; King of Kings LC, Cedar Rapids, IA
 SCHLIE, Jesse Samuel; St John LC, Denver, IA
 SCHULTZ, Josiah Joel Arthur; St John LC, Keystone, IA
 TIMM, Gary Michael; Our Savior LC, Bettendorf, IA
 VAN HEMERT, Thomas Carter; St Johns LC, Marengo, IA
 WEIDEMAN, Jay R; Our Redeemer LC, Independence, IA
 WILLE, Nathan Jeffrey; Trinity LC, Clinton, IA

Voting Lay

ADAMS, Ritch; Redeemer LC, Marshalltown, IA
 DULING, Casey; Trinity LC, Davenport, IA
 ELBERT, Jeffrey E (Jeff); Faith LC, Waterloo, IA
 GLOE, Carl Walter; Trinity LC, Cedar Rapids, IA
 HARTKEMEYER, Keith H; St Andrew LC, Van Horne, IA
 MAHMENS, Mark R; Immanuel LC, Charlotte, IA
 MORTIMER, George W; Bethlehem Ev Luth Cong, Mason City, IA
 PIEHL, Jesse; St John LC, Waverly, IA
 SWALES, James A; St John LC, Center Point, IA
 WESENER, David K; St Paul LC, McGregor, IA
 WETTERICH, Greg; Trinity LC, Ottumwa, IA
 WINTER, Dennis D; St John LC, Hubbard, IA

Iowa West District**Voting Ordained**

BATCHELDER, Thomas Charles (Tom); Faith LC, Orange City, IA
 BOOHER, Lucas Wayne; Zion LC, Storm Lake, IA
 CLARK, William Robert (Bill); Timothy LC, Council Bluffs, IA
 DURAND, Edward E III; Trinity LC, Van Meter, IA
 KALDAHL, Alex John; Trinity LC, Marcus, IA
 KEUNING, Jeffrey Michael; Zion LC, Dexter, IA
 KUHFAL, David Paul; Our Savior LC, Des Moines, IA
 MILBRANDT, Richard William; St Peter LC, Occheydan, IA
 PERKINS, Benjamin Dennis; Shepherd Of Peace LC, Sergeant Bluff, IA

SCHULZ, Paul Augustine Luther; Trinity LC, Mallard, IA
 STAEHR, Zachary Andrew; Trinity LC, Manilla, IA
 STANDFEST, Michael Robert; St Paul LC, Boone, IA
 WADE, Jeffrey Erin; Zion LC, Denison, IA
 WEHMAS, Neil Elmer; St Paul LC, Ida Grove, IA
 WENNDT, David Lawrence; Peace LC, Wall Lake, IA
 ZIMMERMAN, Aaron Arthur; Holy Trinity LC, Farnhamville, IA

Voting Lay

ARENDS, James (Jim); Redeemer LC, Sioux City, IA
 BOCKELMANN, Phyllis; St John Ev LC, Charter Oak, IA
 BURT, Jon; Trinity LC, Hawarden, IA
 DOWNING, Charles M (Chuck); Our Savior LC, Denison, IA
 FRITZ, Fred; St Paul LC, Oakland, IA
 HIBBING, Adam Lee; Zion LC, Paullina, IA
 JOHNSON, Jerry L; St John LC, Storm Lake, IA
 LAVRENZ, Samuel Mark; Zion LC, Ogden, IA
 NATH, Lance; Holy Cross LC, Carlisle, IA
 RIECK, Richard; St Paul's Ev LC, Webster City, IA
 SCHUTTER, Thomas; St Paul LC, Garner, IA
 SEAMAN, Daryl; Trinity LC, Des Moines, IA
 VON QUALEN, Ralph H; St Paul LC, Carroll, IA
 WEDEKING, Neil Douglas; St Paul's LC, Sac City, IA
 WINKELMANN, Clay R; Immanuel LC, Greenfield, IA

Advisory Ordained

SIEGEL, Jeffrey Allen; Holy Cross LC, Carlisle, IA

Advisory Commissioned

WALLACE, Lydia Fay; First English LC, Spencer, IA

Kansas District**Voting Ordained**

BAKER, Sean Michael; Bethany LC, Overland Park, KS
 BINGENHEIMER, Michael R; Ascension LC, Wichita, KS
 DANDY, Jacob Walker; Trinity LC, Atchison, KS
 GASCHLER, Mark; Immanuel LC, Linn, KS
 GRIMM, Robert W (Bob); St John LC, Alma, KS
 HARDERS, Daniel Ervin; St Peter LC, Holyrood, KS
 JENNINGS, Matthew Hamilton (Matt); St Peter LC, Humboldt, KS
 KILGO, Sean Riley; Redeemer LC, Lawrence, KS
 NUTTMANN, Quentin T; Our Redeemer LC, Hutchinson, KS
 PALMER, Stanley Edward; Zion LC, Offerle, KS
 SCHMIDT, Michael John; First LC, Plainville, KS
 SCHULTZ, Joel S A; Beautiful Savior LC, Olathe, KS
 STAHLCKER, Alan Roy; St John LC, Lincolnville, KS
 WARNEKE, Christopher Wallace; Redeemer LC, Arkansas City, KS
 WEINKAUF, Robert Carl (Bob); Risen Savior LC, Basehor, KS

Voting Lay

ADAMS, Jason; Christ LC, Topeka, KS
 BAUCK, James Kevin (Jim); Zion Ev LC, Vassar, KS
 BROCKOFF, Jeffrey (Jeff); St Paul LC, Fairview, KS
 CRAWSHAW, Christopher (Chris); Risen Savior LC, Wichita, KS
 FIENEN, Phillip Dean; Zion Ev LC, Independence, KS
 GIER, Tyler; Bethlehem LC, Sylvan Grove, KS
 GOEDEKEN, Frank; Holy Cross LC, Dodge City, KS
 GRAME, Clint W; St Paul LC, Junction City, KS
 HERBSTER, Jeff; Trinity Family of Faith LC, Basehor, KS
 MYERS, Matthew (Matt); Zion LC, Linn, KS
 PATTERSON, Kendall; Trinity LC, Wichita, KS
 PERSINGER, Brad; Immanuel LC, Norton, KS
 SCHKADE, Jonathan; Hope LC, Shawnee, KS
 SEBITS, Travis A; Immanuel LC, Canton, KS
 SINCLAIR, Richard II (Richie); First LC, Paola, KS

Advisory Ordained

BOYE, Lawrence C (Larry); St Lukes LC, Manhattan, KS

Advisory Commissioned

BIRNBAUM, David C; Trinity LC, Atchison, KS

Michigan District**Voting Ordained**

ADAMS, Douglas M; St Peters Ev LC, Eastpointe, MI
 BAERWOLF, Phillip Andrew; Zion LC, Bay City, MI
 BAYER, Timothy Andrew; St Peter LC, Saint Johns, MI
 BURCH, Peter James; Emmanuel LC, Britton, MI
 DENT, Matthew Todd; Bethlehem LC, Standish, MI
 DOEDE, Mark Richard; Huntington Woods LC, Huntington Woods, MI
 DUEKER, Jonathan Arthur; Peace LC, Rogers City, MI
 DURANCE, Matthew Hudson; Zion LC, Harbor Beach, MI
 FIENEN, Daniel Henry; Grace LC, Baldwin, MI
 GROTELUESCHEN, Joshua; Immanuel LC, Kalamazoo, MI
 GUNIA, Matthew Joseph; Faith LC, Whitehall, MI
 HALLER, Joshua Timothy; Grace LC, Fairgrove, MI

HEMME, Seth R; Zion LC, Auburn, MI
 HOFFMEYER, Alex William; Salem LC, Coloma, MI
 HUGHES, Michael William (Mike); St Matthew LC, Spring Lake, MI
 JAMES, Asaph A; East Bethlehem LC, Detroit, MI
 JOHNSON, Andrew Martin; Christ LC, Milford, MI
 JONES, Kyle Edward; St Johns Ev LC, Waltz, MI
 KLINGBEIL, Kurt C; Mount Hope LC, Grayling, MI
 KOSBERG, Adam Peder; New Hope LC, Hudsonville, MI
 LATHAM, Mark E; St Michael LC, Traverse City, MI
 LOEST, Mark A; Immanuel LC Of Frankentrost, Saginaw, MI
 MAJESKI, Eric W; Grace Lutheran Fellowship, Romeo, MI
 MARTIN, Gabriel Joseph; Zion LC, Tawas City, MI
 MUNDORF, Christian Quincy; The LC of the Messiah, Saginaw, MI
 OGDEN, Alexander Raymond (Alex); St Stephen LC, Detroit, MI
 PETERSON, Jason P; St Peters LC, Rockford, MI
 POELLET, Dean R; St Matthew LC, Holt, MI
 RITTNER, Philip Reid II (Phil); St Pauls LC, Centerville, MI
 ROBERTS, Benjamin Arthur (Ben); St Paul LC, Trenton, MI
 SCHINDEL, Bryan K; St Mark's LC of the Irish Hills, Brooklyn, MI
 SCHRADER, Alexander A; Our Saviour LC, Armada, MI
 SCHWICHTENBERG, Marc N; St John LC, Rochester, MI
 STORCK, Timothy Daniel (Tim); Good Shepherd LC, Chesterfield, MI
 TODD, Kelly D; Christ LC, Goodrich, MI
 VEEN, Evan Charles; Holy Redeemer LC, Dryden, MI
 WEEKS, Kyle Thomas; St Luke LC, Ann Arbor, MI
 WERNER, Joel A; Christ Our Savior LC, Livonia, MI
 WOELL, Brennan Andrew; Emmanuel LC, Cadillac, MI
 ZUCKER, Tyge C; Holy Cross LC, Flushing, MI

Voting Lay

ALMASSY, Mike; Our Savior LC, Gladwin, MI
 BARCEY, Scott G; Trinity LC, Traverse City, MI
 BARKOW, Russell Paul; Trinity LC, Conklin, MI
 BOYER, Peter; Immanuel LC, Sebewaing, MI
 BRAUN, Matthew P; Our Savior LC, Grand Rapids, MI
 CARDINAL, Daniel (Dan); St Trinity Ev LC, Clarkston, MI
 CRAWFORD, Kortni; Holy Cross LC, Onaway, MI
 DRZEWIECKI, David; St Michael LC, Portage, MI
 FARINA, Allan; St Matthew LC, Walled Lake, MI
 FRIEBE, David; Trinity LC, Bay City, MI
 HERMAN, Jeff; Our Savior LC, Chelsea, MI
 HOYER, Jonathan Walter; Grace LC, Coopersville, MI
 JAHN, Rebecca; Zion LC, Petoskey, MI
 KEINATH, Michael; Peace LC, Sandusky, MI
 KERN, Steven H (Steve); St Paul LC, Millington, MI
 KOKE, Carol; Faith LC, Grand Blanc, MI
 KRIEGER, Timothy Alan (Tim); Trinity LC, Berrien Springs, MI
 LUPESCU, Linda; St Michael LC, Wayne, MI
 MEYER, Diane L; Faith LC, Prescott, MI
 NELSON, Grant; Trinity LC, Utica, MI
 NEWTON, Jim Christopher; St Peter's LC, Big Rapids, MI
 NICHOLSON, Daniel Edward; Cross of Christ LC, Bloomfield Hills, MI
 NUTZMANN, John; Messiah LC, Clio, MI
 PETERSON, Dale; St Timothy LC, Otisville, MI
 ROOF, Christopher (Chris); St Andrew LC, Portland, MI
 SCHAIDT, Brian; St Paul LC, Caledonia, MI
 SHASKO, Ellen; St Paul LC, Ann Arbor, MI
 SMALLCOMBE, Edward Harold; St Peter LC, Three Rivers, MI
 SOHN, Dennis; Our Savior LC, Lansing, MI
 THOMPSON, Ethan S; St Peter LC, Hemlock, MI
 VAALER, Kurt L; Prince of Peace LC, Farmington Hills, MI
 WAECHTER, Tristian P; Bethany LC, Detroit, MI
 WAGNER, Lloyd Alan Sr; Trinity LC, Jackson, MI
 WARSINSKI, Mark C; Faith LC, Port Huron, MI
 WATTS, Tyler; Emmanuel LC, Cadillac, MI
 WHITE, Samuel; St John's LC, Midland, MI
 WILLIAMS, James C II; Immanuel LC, Macomb, MI
 WOELMER, Tom; Immanuel LC, Monroe, MI
 WULFF, Deborah (Deb); Hope LC of Warren, Warren, MI

Advisory Ordained

BRANDT, Mark D; St Lorenz LC, Frankenmuth, MI
 NEUENDORF, Donald Owen (Don); St Paul LC Hamburg, Whitmore Lake, MI

PHILP, Paul Allen; Trinity LC, Traverse City, MI

Advisory Commissioned

ALLEN, Ronald M; St Paul LC, Ann Arbor, MI
 COOMER, Hannah E; St Johns LC, Grand Haven, MI
 HOOPER, Susan L (Sue); Faith LC, Grand Blanc, MI
 JONES, Amanda Ruth; St Paul LC, Flint, MI

KUSCH, David S; St John LC, Rochester, MI
 MEYER, David J; St John LC, Fraser, MI
 PEARSON, Kathryn Kraai; Peace LC, Saginaw, MI
 PHILP, Sharon Denise; Trinity LC, Traverse City, MI
 SCHULTZ, Patricia A; Shadow of the Cross Ev LC, Farmington Hills, MI
 SPIEHS, Shawna Lynae; Trinity LC, Utica, MI
 WESTON, Amy J; St Matthew LC, Walled Lake, MI
 WITTO, Gregory Paul; Christ Our King LC, Saline, MI

Mid-South District Voting Ordained

BAUCH, Gregory D; Ascension LC, Madison, TN
 COX, Patrick Miles II; Cross of Christ LC, Chattanooga, TN
 HEINECKE, Gerald Daniel; Hope LC, Batesville, AR
 HOLMES, Jonathan Eugene; St Luke LC, DeWitt, AR
 MEYERS, Sawyer Andrew; Beautiful Savior LC, Olive Branch, MS
 PHILLIPS, Eric Gregory; Concordia LC, Nashville, TN
 SMITH, Sean Rory; Grace LC, Clarksville, TN
 WOERNER, Emil Leonard; Faith in Christ LC, Bryant, AR
 WOLDT, Adam Timothy; The Point LC, Knoxville, TN
 ZISCHKE, John David Karl; Restoration LC, Fayetteville, AR

Voting Lay

ALLEN, Robert (Bob); Prince of Peace LC, White House, TN
 BATHE, Thomas Jay (Tom); Faith LC, Thompsons Station, TN
 JACKSON, Richard A Jr (Rick); St John's LC, Russellville, AR
 LIVELY, Nathan Robert; St Paul LC, Wartburg, TN
 MORRIS, Robert Owen; Peace LC, Conway, AR
 NUTTER, David; Bethlehem LC, Johnson City, TN
 STOBAUGH, Leona; Holy Spirit LC, Oakland, TN
 STROH, Craig; St Paul LC, Paducah, KY
 STUEWE, Scott Frederick; Redeemer LC, Mountain Home, AR
 THOMAS, Gary A; Holy Trinity LC, Rogers, AR

Advisory Ordained

KOBS, Darrell C; St John's LC, Russellville, AR

Advisory Commissioned

TOPP, David Wayne; First LC, Chattanooga, TN

Minnesota North District Voting Ordained

GIMBEL, James R; St John's LC, Kimball, MN
 GRZYBOWSKI, Terry Lee; Emmanuel LC, Elk River, MN
 HARTWIG, Brett David; Trinity LC, Sabin, MN
 JAHNKE, Jonathan Carl; Good Shepherd LC, Alexandria, MN
 JOHNSON, Brandon Raymond; Zion LC, Little Falls, MN
 KLEPPE, Glen A; Zion LC, Pine City, MN
 LOVEJOY, Patrick Scott; First Ev LC, Grand Rapids, MN
 MOMMENS, David Rae; St Pauls LC, Melrose, MN
 NEUBAUER, James Howard; St John LC, Park Rapids, MN
 THOMPSON, Stafford Lee; Hope LC, Cloquet, MN
 TILNEY, David M; St Luke LC, Wood Lake, MN
 TRAPHAGAN, William Joseph; Mission of the Cross LC, Crosslake, MN
 VARNIS, Jonathan J; Zion LC, Browns Valley, MN
 WEBER, Karl Alfons; St John LC, Ottertail, MN
 WHITMORE, Justin David; St John LC, Perham, MN
 WORRAL, Caleb James; Zion LC, Ada, MN

Voting Lay

BERGSTROM, Donna; Mount Olive LC, Duluth, MN
 BUCHHOLZ, Scott Denis; Trinity LC, Evansville, MN
 CARLSON, Shaun; Zion LC, Detroit Lakes, MN
 CHRISTENSON, Kyle DuWayne; St Paul LC, Bertha, MN
 FASSETT, Brent; Prince of Peace LC, Baxter, MN
 GIESE, Bonnie; St Paul's LC, Milaca, MN
 GORNOWICZ, Brandon C; Immanuel LC, Warren, MN
 GREGORY, James; Zion LC, Sauk Centre, MN
 HAUSER, David J; Trinity LC, Fergus Falls, MN
 KIVELA, Wayne; Redeemer LC, Aurora, MN
 KLEFSAAS, Glen; Grace LC, Correll, MN
 LEE, Eric Lars; Trinity LC, Bemidji, MN
 PLAUTZ, Bruce R; Faith LC, Saint Cloud, MN
 PUFFE, Karen; St John LC, Madison, MN
 RESCH, Bruce F; Shepherd of the Pines LC, Rice, MN
 SCHMIDT, Brandon; St John LC, Hinckley, MN

Advisory Commissioned

WHEELER, Taylor Jane; Peace in Christ LC, Hermantown, MN

Minnesota South District Voting Ordained

BAKER, Jesse Cory Steven; Family of Christ LC, Houlton, WI
 BARRY, Matthew Allen; St Johns LC, Chaska, MN
 FINNEY, Adam Christopher; St Peter LC, Vernon Center, MN
 FRENTZ, Steven Norman; St Peter LC, Goodhue, MN

GEHLBACH, Daryl David; Prince of Peace Deaf LC, Spring Lake Park, MN
 GOODWIN, Alexander Aaron; Immanuel LC, Fairmont, MN
 HARMAN, Michael Douglas; St John LC, Gaylord, MN
 HENGST, Adam Michael; Our Savior LC, Excelsior, MN
 HORTON, Christopher Paul; St Johns LC of Rich Valley, Rosemount, MN
 HUGO, William Dempsey; St Matthew LC, Columbia Heights, MN
 JACOBSEN, Adam Edward; Trinity LC, Sioux Valley Twp, MN
 JONES, Steven Mayo; Peace LC of Robbinsdale, Robbinsdale, MN
 LEWIS, Kyle Aubrey; St Martin LC, Winona, MN
 LODER, Mark S; St James LC, Howard Lake, MN
 MARKWORTH, David John; St John LC, Hutchinson, MN
 MISSLING, Scot Dustin; Bethlehem LC, Saint Paul, MN
 MORRIS, George W II; St Pauls LC, Watertown, MN
 PALM, Juan Dean; Trinity LC, Morristown, MN
 PARRISH, Joshua Leonard; Redemption LC, Bloomington, MN
 SCHLICKER, Gregory Alan; Good Shepherd LC, Owatonna, MN
 SCHUETZ, John Allen; Our Redeemer LC, Jackson, MN
 SMITH, Timothy David; Trinity LC, Rochester, MN
 WESSEL, Loel A; First English LC, Spring Valley, MN
 WILLIAMS, Jeffrey Baxter; Trinity LC, Slayton, MN

Voting Lay

BAKER, Ryan; St John LC, Sherburn, MN
 BAKER, Steven Hugh; Good Shepherd LC, Circle Pines, MN
 BERKLEY, Garrett James; St Peter LC, Watertown, MN
 BIERBAUM, Troy; Eternal Hope LC, Brooklyn Park, MN
 BITTNER, Andrew Joseph; Our Savior LC, Mankato, MN
 BONILLA, Natasha Elizabeth; Faith LC, Minneapolis, MN
 BUCKENTIN, Alan; Immanuel LC, Brownston, MN
 BUNTJER-LITTLE, Rosamaria; Trinity LC, Farmington, MN
 DICKERSON, Darrin; Family of Christ LC, Ham Lake, MN
 GROTHEER, Timothy; King of Kings LC, Roseville, MN
 HENTGES, Michael (Mike); Holy Cross LC, Prior Lake, MN
 KOOSMAN, David Rolin (Dave); Bethlehem LC, Annandale, MN
 LEMKE, Tammy E; Trinity LC, Medford, MN
 LIEDER, Joshua Thomas (Josh); Messiah LC, La Crescent, MN
 PESCH, Rodney W; Trinity Ev LC, Waltham, MN
 RANK, Timothy Stephen (Tim); Concordia LC, Red Wing, MN
 REINITZ, Joel; Mount Olive LC, Mound, MN
 SCHILLER, Dean R; Redeemer LC, New Ulm, MN
 SWIFT, Kevin; Christ Victorious LC, Chaska, MN
 UTTECH, Daniel D (Dan); St Pauls LC, Fulda, MN
 WAGNER, Micah Stephen; Trinity LC, Waterville, MN
 WIEDERHOEFT, Corey L; St John LC, Truman, MN
 WILKE, Luke; Redeemer LC, Rochester, MN
 WITT, Wayne; The LC of Our Savior, Windom, MN

Advisory Ordained

BYNUM, Gordon William; University Lutheran Chapel, Minneapolis, MN

DAVIS, Douglas Lynn; St Peter LC, Watertown, MN
 JOHNSON, Kyle Lucas; Samaritans Hill LC, Albertville, MN

Advisory Commissioned

ANDERSON, Aislinn Rhea; Shepherd of the Grove LC, Maple Grove, MN
 BOEHLKE, Jeffrey K; St Pauls LC, Watertown, MN
 LANDSKROENER, Joel P; St Johns LC, Chaska, MN
 POLZIN, Megan Louise; First Ev LC, Glencoe, MN
 SCHEELE, Dean M; First Ev LC, Glencoe, MN
 ZUELSORFF, Billy J; Immanuel LC, Plainview, MN

Missouri District Voting Ordained

AURINGER, Jason P; Immanuel LC, Wentzville, MO
 BIBB, Tysen Lee; Trinity LC, Norborne, MO
 BROADDUS, Daniel Scott; Holy Trinity LC, Mound City, MO
 CASTENS, Kyle David; Immanuel LC, Crystal City, MO
 COWELL, Thomas J; Christ LC, Platte Woods, MO
 DICKERSON, Paul Norman; Christ Memorial LC, Saint Louis, MO
 EMSHOFF, Keith Everett; Holy Trinity LC, Grandview, MO
 GROH, Ryan M; St John LC, Jefferson City, MO
 HAYTER, Mathew Allan (Mat); St Paul LC, Union, MO
 HOCHGREBE, Ryan William; Timothy LC, Blue Springs, MO
 KETELSEN, Joshua C; Immanuel LC, Boonville, MO
 KING, Idonis Martin; St Trinity LC, Saint Louis, MO
 KURZ, Joel Rudolph; Bethlehem LC, Warrensburg, MO
 MAY, Jacob Thomas; Christ LC, Gordonville, MO
 MCGINLEY, David Michael; LC of Webster Gardens, Webster Groves, MO

OBERDIECK, David Lee; Trinity LC, Lebanon, MO
 ODDI, David Michael; Shepherd of the Lakes LC, Forsyth, MO
 ORR, William Joseph; Hope LC, Saint Ann, MO
 RAMSTAD, Christopher Michael; Immanuel LC, Joplin, MO
 ROSS, Bernard Melburn III; Trinity LC, Alma, MO
 SCHULTZ, Jeremy John Arthur; St Johns LC, Arnold, MO
 SELL, Mark Edward; Our Savior LC, Fenton, MO
 TAYLOR, Ryan Spencer; Immanuel LC, Saint Charles, MO
 TRUWE, Gregory Ruben; Trinity LC, Cole Camp, MO
 WILDAUER, Weston John; Good Shepherd LC, Cape Girardeau, MO
 WINCKLER, Michael Thomas; Trinity LC, Friedheim, MO

Voting Lay

ANDREW, Brian Lee; Lord of Life LC, Chesterfield, MO
 BAAN, Eric; LC of the Resurrection, Sunset Hills, MO
 BACHMANN, Michael Brandon; Salem LC, Farrar, MO
 DAWSON, Matthew; Immanuel LC, Washington, MO
 DECKER, Nathan; Ascension LC, Saint Louis, MO
 DIECKMAN, Dallas Joel; Mount Hulda Ev LC, Cole Camp, MO
 GARFIELD, Jeffrey Douglas; Immanuel LC, Hannibal, MO
 GOLDEN, Greg T; Good Shepherd LC, Carthage, MO
 HAESEMEIER, Harold W; Messiah LC, Independence, MO
 HALL, Jeremy R; St John LC, Chillicothe, MO
 HARRIS, Allen D; Trinity LC, Kearney, MO
 HEINS, Christopher (Chris); St Matthew LC, Ernestville, MO
 JERNIGAN, Floyd Levi Jr; St John LC, Saint James, MO
 JOHNSON, Mike; St John LC, Warrenton, MO
 KRUEGER, Raymond Matthew; Bethlehem LC, Raymore, MO
 LEIMKUEHLER, Elmer; Grace Ev LC, Lexington, MO
 LIEB, David Andrew; Faith LC, Jefferson City, MO
 MCCOIG, Larry Irvin; Trinity LC, Columbia, MO
 MOTZ, Keith; Village LC, Ladue, MO
 NORDSTROM, Daniel O; St Peter LC, Saint Joseph, MO
 SCHILLING, Harry Edward; Hanover LC, Cape Girardeau, MO
 SCHREMP, Wayne; Holy Cross LC, Sainte Genevieve, MO
 SHACKELFORD, Jeff; Zion LC, Poplar Bluff, MO
 SNYDER, Paul Martin; Immanuel LC, Olivette, MO
 WEGNER, Brian; Messiah LC, Weldon Spring, MO
 WESTERN, Joseph (Joe); Trinity LC, Springfield, MO

Advisory Ordained

BURGE, David Mark; Shepherd of the Lakes LC, Forsyth, MO
 KAMPRATH, Stephen P (Steve); Immanuel LC, Rolla, MO
 KNAPP, Robert Craig (Bert); Immanuel LC, Washington, MO
 NEBEL, Mark Alan; St Paul LC, Concordia, MO
 WILKEY, Mickey Dale; Faith LC, Branson, MO

Advisory Commissioned

ASHER, Jennie J; Trinity LC, Saint Charles, MO
 BURKEE, Jeffrey R; Salem LC, Black Jack, MO
 COLWELL, Clinton C; St Paul LC, Concordia, MO
 FIALA, David Aaron; Immanuel LC, Crystal City, MO
 GIFFORD, Charles J Sr; Trinity LC, Alma, MO
 HANKEMEIER, Amanda Sue (Worsham); Peace LC, Saint Louis, MO
 LITTLE, Rebecca A; Grace Lutheran Chapel, Bellefontaine Neighbors, MO
 MAAS, John H; King of Kings LC, Kansas City, MO
 MAAS, Nancy L; King of Kings LC, Kansas City, MO
 MEYER, Dana C; St Pauls LC, Des Peres, MO
 NUMMELA, Thomas A; St Pauls LC, Des Peres, MO
 PERKOWSKI, Karla Rae; Trinity LC, Leavenworth, KS
 PETREE, Andrea Kay; Trinity LC, Jefferson City, MO
 RICE, Denise L; St Pauls LC, Des Peres, MO
 WIENTGE, Jennifer Lee; LC of the Resurrection, Sunset Hills, MO
 ZICKFIELD, James Gabriel; St Paul LC, Jackson, MO

Montana District Voting Ordained

GRAYL, Samuel J; First LC, Bozeman, MT
 SHUPE, Paul R; St Paul LC, Bridger, MT
 WINTER, Kyle Christopher; The Church at Creston-Lutheran, Kalispell, MT

Voting Lay

HALVORSON, Thomas R (Tom); Trinity LC, Sidney, MT
 KEMPF, Joel Herbert; Our Redeemer LC, Columbia Falls, MT
 ZIER, Christopher (Chris); Holy Trinity LC, Belgrade, MT

Advisory Ordained

ZAGEL, Bruce Robert; Trinity LC, Billings, MT

Advisory Commissioned

SCHAUER, Gideon M; Trinity LC, Kalispell, MT

Nebraska District Voting Ordained

BELINSKY, Michael Gregory Sr; St John LC, Beemer, NE
BIRTELL, Kenton Jay; Mount Calvary LC, Holdrege, NE
BLANKEN, Alexander J; St Paul LC, Winside, NE
COURIE, Zachary A; Our Redeemer LC, Wahoo, NE
EMERY, Glen Anderson; Grace LC, Fairbury, NE
FRANCISCO, Benjamin Joel (Ben); Faith LC, York, NE
HART, Erik Jeremiah; St Pauls LC, Central City, NE
HUMPHREY, Kenneth Lawrence; Christ LC, Falls City, NE
KITZING, Shawn L; Our Redeemer LC, Staplehurst, NE
KRUSE, Caleb John; Lord of Life LC, Elkhorn, NE
KUEFNER, Robert Charles Jr; Trinity LC, Lexington, NE
MAKELIN, Terry James; Trinity LC, Foster, NE
MASER, Ryan Daniel; First LC, Plattsmouth, NE
MOLINE, Adam Saunders; Good Shepherd LC, Lincoln, NE
OLSON, Darren Roger; Christ LC, Juniata, NE
PORATH, Scott Timothy; Immanuel LC, Eagle, NE
RAMSEY, Daniel John; The Ev LC of Our Redeemer, North Platte, NE
SCHUT, Jordan Bruce; Christ LC, O'Neill, NE
SPARLING, Patrick R; Immanuel LC, Columbus, NE
WEANDER, Kenneth Lee Jr; Our Savior LC, Norfolk, NE

Voting Lay

BOLTE, William Patrick (Bill); Emmanuel LC, York, NE
BRASHEAR, Kurth; St John LC, Seward, NE
BUMAN, Daniel E (Dan); St Mark LC, Omaha, NE
BURGER, Michael; St Peters LC, Davenport, NE
CLARK, Bryan; First LC, Papillion, NE
DIEDIKER, Kenneth; Trinity LC, Martinsburg, NE
EHRISMAN, Reid; St John LC, Battle Creek, NE
FLICK, Todd; Trinity LC, Auburn, NE
FRICKEL, Garold; Immanuel LC, Atkinson, NE
HANSEN, Zach; Messiah LC, Lincoln, NE
HESTERMAN, Phillip K (Phil); Peace LC, Hastings, NE
LUND, Ellen Virginia; Trinity LC, Fremont, NE
MCGOWAN, Nora; St Paul LC, Cambridge, NE
PRATER, Wesley R (Wes); Trinity LC, Elgin, NE
ROSENTHAL, Eric; Zion LC, Kearney, NE
SCHEMLING, Brian A; Trinity LC, Lincoln, NE
SPIEHS, Stephen; Peace LC, Grand Island, NE
STADLER, Andrew P; Peace LC, Columbus, NE
VAN VELSON, Glenn; Beautiful Savior LC, North Platte, NE
WAGEMAN, Steve; St John LC, Pender, NE

Advisory Ordained

BARTELT, Stephen R (Steve); Zion LC, Omaha, NE
PIERCE, Earl J; St John LC, Seward, NE

Advisory Commissioned

GREIN, Sara Nicole; Trinity LC, Fremont, NE
MEYER, Donna M; St Peters LC, Davenport, NE
SCHOTTE, Susan Rae; St Paul's LC, Beatrice, NE
WHITNEY, Steven Bryan; St John LC, Battle Creek, NE

New England District Voting Ordained

CLOW, Mark R; Grace Ev LC, Middletown, CT
OAKES, Ryan Joseph; Immanuel LC, Danbury, CT
SKARDA, Michael Anthony; Redeemer LC, Lebanon, CT
STINNETT, Aaron Allan; Our Redeemer LC, Smithfield, RI
STRAWN, Gabriel; Redeemer LC, Gorham, ME

Voting Lay

BALANCIA, Robert (Rob); Christ the King LC, Newtown, CT
DAHL, Brian; Christ LC, Niantic, CT
MARTIN, Paul; Trinity LC, Clinton, MA
SKARDA, Chuck; Grace LC, Nashua, NH
STONE, Norman; Immanuel LC, Bristol, CT

Advisory Commissioned

GIERKE, Jennifer Denise; The LC of the Savior, Bedford, MA

New Jersey District Voting Ordained

ELOWSKY, Luke D; Christ Memorial LC, East Brunswick, NJ
GIORDANO, Anthony John; Calvary LC, Verona, NJ
HODGES, Jonathan E; Christ the King LC, Ringwood, NJ
SMALL, David Christian; Calvary LC, Medford, NJ

Voting Lay

BERGMANN, Boyd M; Redeemer LC, Westfield, NJ
EVANKO, Ryan Christian; Trinity LC, Morris Plains, NJ
SEWNARINE, Bibi; St John LC, Bloomfield, NJ
STEIMLE, James (Jim); St Peter LC, Hopewell Township, NJ

Advisory Commissioned

SMALL, Laura R; Calvary LC, Medford, NJ

North Dakota District Voting Ordained

CLARK, Thomas J; St John LC, Hankinson, ND
HEIDE, Zelwyn Clark; St Peter LC, Hannover, ND
JAHNKE, Clark Harland; St Andrew LC, West Fargo, ND
NEUENDORF, Christopher James; Our Savior's LC, Bottineau, ND
PREUS, Paul O S; Zion LC, Ellendale, ND
VOTH, Daniel Christian (Dan); Immanuel LC, Grand Forks, ND

Voting Lay

GREENMYER, Ronald (Ron); Zion LC, Gwinner, ND
MECKLE, Noelyn; Holy Cross LC, Bismarck, ND
PARADIS, Jason A; St Johns LC, Oakes, ND
PFENNIG, Scott; St Pauls LC, Minot, ND
REYNOLDS, Donald; Redeemer LC, Langdon, ND
SHARBONO, Douglas Brian (Doug); Grace LC, Fargo, ND

North Wisconsin District Voting Ordained

BAUMANN, Joshua John; St Paul LC, Stevens Point, WI
BERKESCH, Brent G; Faith LC, Spooner, WI
CHRISTIANS, Matthew James; St Paul LC, Birnamwood, WI
ENGBRETSON, Donald V (Don); St Peter LC, Antigo, WI
FOX, Michael Patrick; Christ the King LC, Ishpeming, MI
GROLEAU, James H; Zion LC, Colby, WI
HANSON, Michael Brian; Pilgrim LC, Green Bay, WI
HAUAN, Eric Raymond; St Mark LC, Wausau, WI
HOPKINS, Robert David; St John LC, Cadott, WI
KLEINSCHMIDT, Travis Ryan; St Jakobi LC, Shawano, WI
KNEFELKAMP, David John; St Peter LC, Osseo, WI
KRUEGER, Rod Matthew; Bethany LC, Kaukauna, WI
LAHNERS, Kenneth Wolfgang; Trinity LC, Glidden, WI
MARKWORTH, Gary Lee; St John LC, Pittsville, WI
STOLL, Steven Emil (Steve); Tabor LC, Mountain, WI
SUTTON, David John; Faith LC, Harshaw, WI

Voting Lay

BALLERSTEIN, Roger; St John LC, Edgar, WI
BREDE, Michael R; Shepherd of the Valley LC, Saint Croix Falls, WI
EHLERT, Larry J; Peace LC, Antigo, WI
FISCHER, Scott D; St Paul LC, Bowler, WI
HANSON, Brian Michael; Immanuel LC, Wisconsin Rapids, WI
HINKLE, Jordan; Zion LC, Oconto, WI
HULL, Charles Gates Jr (Chuck); Zion LC, Chippewa Falls, WI
KELM, Jeffrey S; Trinity LC, Wausau, WI
KUCKSDORF, Richard; St Paul LC, Bonduel, WI
MATZ, Michele; Shepherd of the Hills LC, Greenville, WI
NOELDNER, Randy; Zion LC, Eleva, WI
SCHOESSOW, Courtney J; Zion LC, Granton, WI
TIMM, Tom; Our Savior LC, Eagle River, WI
VANDRE, Wayne; Immanuel LC, Merrill, WI
YOUNG, Aaron J; Our Savior LC, Escanaba, MI
ZITTLOW, Bruce Allan; Faith LC, Green Bay, WI

Advisory Ordained

LUECK, Dwayne M; Trinity LC, Wausau, WI

Advisory Commissioned

CHRISTIANSEN, Deirdre; Faith LC, Green Bay, WI
STEINHAUS, Paul R; St James LC, Shawano, WI
VOGT, Naomi Meredith; Immanuel LC, Wisconsin Rapids, WI

Northern Illinois District Voting Ordained

ANDERSON, Steven J; Hope LC, Countryside, IL
ANTONETTI, Christopher Omero; St Pauls LC, Lockport, IL
AUSRA, Valdas; Zion Ev LC, Oak Lawn, IL
BAUMAN, James George; Immanuel LC, Bartlett, IL
BROWN, Michael Alan; St Matthew LC, Barrington, IL
DOUGLAS, Matthew Gene; Immanuel Ev LC, Glenview, IL
HOLT, James Anthony (Jamie); St Mark LC, Saint Charles, IL
KOEPPEN, Karl James; St Pauls LC, Bourbonnais, IL
LUFT, Ethan William; St Andrews LC, Park Ridge, IL
MOELLER, Eric J; Trinity LC, West Chicago, IL
PATTERSON, Zachary Jeff; Holy Cross LC, Cary, IL
RUSCHE, Jonathon H; Zion LC, Marengo, IL
SCHAUER, Richard Vincent (Rick); Trinity LC, Tinley Park, IL
SCHWICHTENBERG, Willis R (Pastor Switz); Our Redeemer LC, Freeport, IL

STEIN, Donald Carl; St Andrew Ev-LC, Rockton, IL
TAUSZ, Ralph Gerhard; Apostles LC, Melrose Park, IL
VOIGT, Eli Benjamin; St John LC, Darien, IL

Voting Lay

BROWN, David H; Resurrection LC, Chicago, IL
FRANZ, Richard Carl Jr; Immanuel LC, Lindenwood, IL

HOYER, Sean; Prince of Peace LC, Palatine, IL
JOHNSON, Todd; St Matthew LC, Hawthorn Woods, IL
JONES, James Matthew; Our Savior LC, Joliet, IL
KELLER, Erich M; Bethany LC, Naperville, IL
KRODEL, Allen; St Lukes LC, Montgomery, IL
LYKE, Robert Sean; St Paul LC, Matteson, IL
MITTELBRUN, John; Trinity LC, Roselle, IL
MOTISI, Carol-Joy M; Immanuel LC, DeKalb, IL
RADTKE, James; Peace LC, Beecher, IL
RAYHORN, Jeremy; Good Shepherd LC, Rock Falls, IL
ROBINSON, Ron; Immanuel LC, Crystal Lake, IL
SPORLEDER, Steven; St Peter LC, Dundee, IL
STERN, Mark O; St Paul LC, Brookfield, IL
WITTE, Drew; Ascension LC, Niles, IL
ZOLA, Joseph A; St John LC, Wheaton, IL

Advisory Ordained

IMLAH, Peter Reed; St Johns LC, Lombard, IL
OTTEN, Walter D; St Paul LC, Brookfield, IL

Advisory Commissioned

HASSELD AHL, David C; Zion LC, Marengo, IL
LAABS, Jonathan Charles; Trinity LC, Roselle, IL
LAABS, June Marie; Trinity LC, Roselle, IL
OTTEN, Ruth A; Apostles LC, Melrose Park, IL
PECE, Katie Joy; St Johns LC, La Grange, IL
PIEL, Laura M; Trinity LC, Roselle, IL
PIEL, Lianne Melissa; St John's LC, Elgin, IL
PIEL, Paul F; St Peter LC, Arlington Heights, IL
RUNGE, Alan Paul; St Andrew Ev-LC, Rockton, IL

Northwest District Voting Ordained

BOHLMANN, Eric Christopher; Shepherd of the Valley LC, Corvallis, OR
BRANDT, Phillip Luther; St Michael's LC, Portland, OR
CHESTER, Justin Matthew; Beautiful Savior LC, Spokane, WA
CHRISTENSEN, Erik Michael; Beautiful Savior LC, Anchorage, AK
GULLIDGE, Jason Ellsworth; Grace LC, Caldwell, ID
HEIMBUCK, Joshua John; Grace LC, Ashland, OR
LANGE, Eric T; Redeemer LC, Gresham, OR
PAY, Garen Robert; Hope LC, Idaho Falls, ID
RIES, Jeffrey Earl; Zion Ev LC, Tacoma, WA
ROONEY, Patrick Michael; Our Redeemer LC, Tigard, OR
STULTS, Don Alan; Zion LC, Snohomish, WA
ULLEDALEN, Benjamin Joseph Sr; Shepherd of the Hills LC, Rathdrum, ID
WEBER, Dillon Michael; Trinity LC, Seattle, WA
WISEMAN, Samuel C; Faith LC, La Grande, OR
ZIMMERMAN, David Paul; Amazing Grace LC, Renton, WA

Voting Lay

BALES, Guy; Beautiful Savior LC, Portland, OR
CARTER, Brandon Michael; Good Shepherd LC, Boise, ID
CHRISTMAN, Robert; Faith LC, La Pine, OR
COX, Terry; Peace LC, Bremerton, WA
DEMMER, Ronald L (Ron); Crown of Life LC, Rigby, ID
DEMPSEY, Sarah Elizabeth; Faith LC, East Wenatchee, WA
DIEKMANN, Scott L; Beautiful Savior LC, Milton, WA
MAHAFFY, James; St Paul LC, Roseburg, OR
MCBRIDE, Brian S; Holy Cross LC, Spokane, WA
MCKINLEY, Larry; Calvary LC, Stayton, OR
POULSON, David; Triumphant King LC, Lake Oswego, OR
RASMUSSEN, Jon K; St John LC, Vancouver, WA
ROWLAN, Jim; Shepherd of the Hills LC, Snohomish, WA
SINCLAIR, Julia M; All Saints LC, Bellevue, WA
STRONG, David Eugene; Star of the North LC, Kenai, AK

Advisory Ordained

ADAMS, Shaun Paul; Holy Cross LC, Spokane, WA
MARKUS, James L; Trinity LC, Cottage Grove, OR
RUMSCH, Bruce A; Trinity LC, Hillsboro, OR

Advisory Commissioned

BOPP, Anne E; Grace LC, Pocatello, ID
DOHRING, Margaret Charlotte; Mount Olive LC, Shelton, WA
KRANICH, Jeffrey D (Jeff); Prince of Peace LC, Portland, OR
NELSON, Eric Michael; Christ the King LC, Coeur D'Alene, ID
SCHULDHEISZ, Mary; Good Shepherd LC, Tacoma, WA
VANDE VOORT-SCHWEIM, Amy L; Our Savior LC, Tacoma, WA

Ohio District Voting Ordained

ALBERTS, Andrew William (Andy); Tallmadge LC, Tallmadge, OH
BETTCHER, Brandon Michael; St Paul LC, Napoleon, OH
FOLKS, Hayden Mayfield; Zion Ev LC, Willshire, OH

HACKMANN, Steven Mark (Steve); Shore Haven LC, Euclid, OH
 HERB, Daniel John (Dan); Messiah LC, Middletown, OH
 JORDING, Jeremiah Nathaniel; St Thomas LC, Rocky River, OH
 MAPUS, Michael A II; Concordia LC, Toledo, OH
 SCHNEIDER, Christopher Warren; Beautiful Savior LC, Powell, OH
 SOVITZKY, Richard IV; Trinity LC, Sugar Grove, OH
 STEINBRENNER, Adam Jeremiah; St John LC, Dublin, OH
 VON DER LAGE, Jason D; Christ LC, Cincinnati, OH
 ZIELINSKI, Philip Edward; St Paul LC, Valley City, OH

Voting Lay

CAUSTRITA, Melanie Ann; St John LC, Sherwood, OH
 DILLAHUNT, Mark D; St Paul LC, Milford Center, OH
 DIXON, Nicholas; Zion Ev LC, Columbus, OH
 ELSEA, Charles M; Redeemer LC, Lancaster, OH
 HOLSTE, Tim; Zion LC, Painesville, OH
 KEIRSEY, Josh; Bethany LC, Parma, OH
 KNIGHT, Matthew; St Paul LC, Cincinnati, OH
 LANG, John Frederick; Trinity LC, Elmore, OH
 ROHRS, Randall F (Randy); Zion LC, Ridgeville Corners, OH
 STEINBERG, Ellen; Faith LC, Avon, OH
 STRELOW, David C; Redeemer LC, Sidney, OH
 TOEPKE, Jeffrey; Hope LC, Coventry Township, OH

Advisory Ordained

WORST, Terry Jon; New Hope LC, Newark, OH

Oklahoma District

Voting Ordained

HALL, Christopher Dee (Chris); Grace LC, Tulsa, OK
 ROGGOV, Timothy Carl; Zion LC, Alva, OK
 ROHWER, Gary Edwin; LC of Our Savior, Bethany, OK
 TASSEY, Matthew W; Redeemer LC, Shawnee, OK
 WACKLER, John Edmond; Zion LC, Stillwater, OK

Voting Lay

DUNN, Ryan Allen; St John LC, Pryor, OK
 ELLIS, Stephan; Holy Cross LC, Lawton, OK
 PLUNKETT, Randy; Immanuel LC, Garber, OK
 STEITZ, Paul A; Trinity LC, Broken Arrow, OK
 WAGONER, Gordon Bruce; Holy Trinity LC, Edmond, OK

Advisory Ordained

SCHROEDER, Dwayne John; Redeemer LC, Enid, OK

Advisory Commissioned

STEVENS, Todd Corey; Immanuel LC, Broken Arrow, OK

Pacific Southwest District

Voting Ordained

AHLMAN, Timothy Paul (Tim); Christ Greenfield LC, Gilbert, AZ
 BERUS, Jean-Enock; St Paul LC, Los Angeles, CA
 BURKEE, Jonathan R; Trinity LC, Casa Grande, AZ
 BYARS, Andrew Kurt; Apostles LC, Peoria, AZ
 HART, Leigh Garrett; Zion LC, Glendale, CA
 HAUSCH, Nathan Andrew; St Pauls LC, San Diego, CA
 HELD, Joel J; Edgewater LC, Eastvale, CA
 HORN, Jeffrey Paul; Gloria Dei LC, Escondido, CA
 JEONG, Ernest Chul (Ernie); Redeemer LC, Huntington Beach, CA
 KANGAS, Aaron Gene; Good Shepherd LC, Yucaipa, CA
 KESSLER, Michael Evan; Calvary LC, Yuma, AZ
 KOCZMAN, John R; Trinity LC, Fountain Hills, AZ
 MUELLER, Steven P; St Paul's LC of Irvine, Irvine, CA
 NOLTE, Matthew T; Redeemer LC, Thousand Oaks, CA
 PARKS, Steven Robert John (Steve); Hope LC, Glendora, CA
 PICA, Sean Gregory; Good Shepherd LC, Downey, CA
 STETSON, Adam; Christ LC, Boulder City, NV
 TOWNLEY, Jared Christopher; Lamb of God LC, Las Vegas, NV
 VAN BLARCOM, Trevor Eugene; St Johns LC, Orange, CA
 WEISS, William Martin Jr (Bill); Peace LC, Flagstaff, AZ

Voting Lay

BAIN, Casey; Good Shepherd LC, Tehachapi, CA
 BARTO, Andrew (Andy); Saving Grace LC, Queen Creek, AZ
 DECK, Mike; Searchlight Lutheran Ministries, Fullerton, CA
 DUEPPEN, Jean; Saving Grace LC, Chino Valley, AZ
 HOLK, Richard P (Dick); Shepherd of the Hills LC, Rancho Cucamonga, CA
 KRANAWETTER, Greg A; Abiding Savior LC, Lake Forest, CA
 LAND, Bryan; Faith Community LC, Las Vegas, NV
 OLSEN, Russell; St Johns LC, Hemet, CA
 PACHECO, Fernando; Redeemer LC, South Gate, CA
 PELETTI, Tui Sevier; Grace LC, Henderson, NV
 PIKE, Dennis; Our Savior LC, Arcadia, CA
 POWERS, Tony; Victory LC, Chula Vista, CA
 RAUSCHER, Robert (Bob); Desert Foothills LC, Scottsdale, AZ
 SALZBERG, Joshua; First LC of Culver City and Palms, Los Angeles, CA

SMITH, Mercedes E; Grace LC, Ventura, CA
 SPARKS, Keri; Summit Community LC, Buckeye, AZ
 STALLMAN, Scott Everett; Faith LC, Vista, CA
 STEINBART, Paul J; Hosanna LC, Mesa, AZ
 TALMAGE, David; St Pauls LC, Orange, CA
 WHITE, Frank; Christ LC, Yuma, AZ

Advisory Ordained

CROSSAN, Robert D II; Zion LC, Fallbrook, CA
 ELMORE, James Arthur; Trinity LC, Anaheim, CA
 GOLDEN, Ryan Nicholas; Saving Grace LC, Queen Creek, AZ

Advisory Commissioned

BLESSING, Derek Gene; Lamb of God LC, Las Vegas, NV
 DUPORT, Rebecca Hirsch; St Johns LC, Orange, CA
 MAXWELL, Deryl R; St Pauls LC, Orange, CA
 MCKINNEY, Robert D (Bob); Trinity LC, Simi Valley, CA
 PAVASARS, Michelle Carol; Christ LC, Brea, CA
 SCHULTEIS, Donald Henry; St Luke LC, Claremont, CA
 STEVENS, Nathan Andrew; Christ Greenfield LC, Gilbert, AZ
 TAYLOR, Emma; Christ Greenfield LC, Gilbert, AZ

Rocky Mountain District

Voting Ordained

BARTON, Thomas M; Grace LC, Lamar, CO
 CHRIST, Mark Edward; St Paul LC, Ogden, UT
 FITZPATRICK, Dennis G Jr; St Johns LC, Yuma, CO
 LANGEWISCH, David John; Bethlehem LC, Lakewood, CO
 MELIUS, Jared Keith; Mount Zion LC, Denver, CO
 MURPHY, Joseph Gabriel; Grace LC, Parker, CO
 RICHERT, Aaron Michael; Grace LC, Albuquerque, NM
 ROSS, Brandon W; Faith LC, Johnstown, CO
 STOLTENOW, Bradley R (Brad); Shepherd of the Hills LC, Centennial, CO
 TRIPLETT, Kirk Eugene; Zion LC, El Paso, TX
 VANFOSSAN, Kurt Allen; Immanuel LC, Paonia, CO
 ZILLINGER, Gregory Austin; Holy Cross LC, Colorado Springs, CO

Voting Lay

BRUUN, Kristeen; Trinity LC, Pueblo, CO
 FRUENDT, Karl; Immanuel LC, Colorado Springs, CO
 GUNN, Geoff; Immanuel LC, Roswell, NM
 HAHN, Alyssa; Immanuel LC, Haxtun, CO
 HOLDEN, Jace; Redeemer LC, Delta, CO
 KAPP, Steve; Epiphany Ev LC, Castle Rock, CO
 KLEIN, Dennis; Trinity LC, Saint George, UT
 KOESTER, Andre; Immanuel Ev LC, Englewood, CO
 MARRS, Nancy J; Shepherd of the Rockies LC, Bailey, CO
 SCHOENECK, Chris; Zion LC, Brighton, CO
 SHINE, Scott; St Paul's Ev LC, Durango, CO
 WEINSTOCK, Daniel (Danny); University Lutheran Chapel, Boulder, CO

Advisory Commissioned

BOWER, Kristine; Beautiful Savior LC, Broomfield, CO
 BUSACKER, William P (Bill); Immanuel LC, Loveland, CO
 DEGROOT, Melissa Ann; Calvary LC, Rio Rancho, NM

SELC District

Voting Ordained

CARPENTER, Jon C; St Matthew LC, Norton, OH
 DASS, Allen Samuel; Zion LC, Clark, NJ
 HAARA, David Melvin; Family of Christ LC, Tampa, FL
 RETZLAFF, Brady Neil; Pentecost LC, Racine, WI

Voting Lay

BERENT, Matthew K; SS Peter and Paul LC, Sharon, PA
 FANA, Joe; New City LC, Orlando, FL
 HERTEL, Laura; St Lucas LC, Saint Louis, MO
 TILLINGHAST, Jennifer; Concordia LC, Macungie, PA

South Dakota District

Voting Ordained

AKER, Corey William; Faith LC, Sioux Falls, SD
 BLESS, Matthew Allen; Concordia LC, Vermillion, SD
 DREVLOW, Ryan Andrew; St Paul LC, Aberdeen, SD
 GRIMMER, Daniel Philip; Zion LC, Mitchell, SD
 HARR, Wade M; Christ LC, Winner, SD
 HINCKLEY, Robert Malcolm Jr; Grace LC, Deadwood, SD
 LASKOWSKY, Kurt G; Zion LC, Hurley, SD
 THOLE, Samuel R; Peace LC, Brookings, SD

Voting Lay

EDEN, Tim; Our Redeemer LC, Sioux Falls, SD
 FUERNISS, Sherman; Immanuel LC, Dimock, SD
 RECK, Terry; St Peter's LC, Wentworth, SD
 REIPRICH, Michael G; Divine Shepherd LC, Black Hawk, SD
 SCHLUETER, Kevin; St John LC, Britton, SD
 SIEKMANN, Jeff; Mount Calvary LC, Brookings, SD

SOULEK, William Joe (Bill); St John LC, Tyndall, SD
 STIER, Mary Jo; Holy Cross LC, Onida, SD

Advisory Ordained

MERCER, Dennis D; Divine Shepherd LC, Black Hawk, SD

Advisory Commissioned

OCKANDER, Marli M; Faith LC, Sioux Falls, SD

South Wisconsin District

Voting Ordained

ANDERSON, Dustin Lee; St Johns LC, Port Washington, WI
 BENDER, Peter C; Peace LC, Sussex, WI
 BERGELIN, David Arthur Darrel; Mount Calvary LC, Janesville, WI
 BERGELIN, Douglas James Darrel; St Peter LC, Lebanon, WI
 BILLINGS, Steven Stewart; Trinity LC, Menasha, WI
 BRANDMAHL, Joshua John; St Bartholomew LC, Brillion, WI
 COTA, Shane Robert; Trinity LC, Sheboygan, WI
 DEYOUNG, Joshua Kevin; St Johns LC, Racine, WI
 ERDMAN, Michael John; Immanuel LC, Madison, WI
 FICKEN, Paul D; The Lutheran Chapel of the Cross, Racine, WI
 HASSELBROOK, Silas Martin; Trinity LC, West Allis, WI
 KNUTH, David Francis; Pella LC, Waupun, WI
 KREITLER, Zachary Alan; St Johns Ev LC, Beloit, WI
 KRETSCHMAR, Alan Ray; St Paul's Ev LC, Sheboygan, WI
 REYNOLDS, Stephen Patrick; St Johns LC, West Bend, WI
 ROGNESS, Noah Jacob; Good Shepherd LC, Tomah, WI
 SCHLEIDER, Michael James (Mike); Mount Olive LC, Milwaukee, WI
 SCHOBBER, John Henry II; Risen Savior LC, Franklin, WI
 SCHOCKMAN, Jason Alex; St Paul LC, Oconomowoc, WI
 STRAWN, Allen Kenneth; Calvary Lutheran Chapel, Madison, WI
 THOMPSON, Andrew Scott; St John LC, Plymouth, WI
 WEBER, Brian Gary Scott; Emmaus LC, Poy Sippi, WI
 WILKIE, Dana Mark; St Peters LC, Muscoda, WI

Voting Lay

BAGENSKI, Eric; St Peter LC, Reedsburg, WI
 BELTER, Connie Lee; Grace LC, Omro, WI
 BRONDOS, Andrew; Mount Zion LC, Greenfield, WI
 COOK, Garrett R; Messiah LC, Beloit, WI
 DENKERT, Robert A; Immanuel LC, Brookfield, WI
 EATON, David Ashley; Grace LC, Racine, WI
 EGGERT, Trevor David; Immanuel LC, Random Lake, WI
 ERTL, Rob; Peace LC, Neenah, WI
 JOHNSON, Corinne Lyn; Immanuel LC, Sheboygan, WI
 KACZMAREK, Carrie; St John LC, Sullivan, WI
 LEGANCHUK, Nicole Shalon; Our Redeemer LC, Sheboygan, WI
 LISCH, Philip A; Grace LC, Elkhart Lake, WI
 MEANS, Jonathan; First Immanuel LC, Cedarburg, WI
 NIGRO, Jerry; St Paul LC, Union Grove, WI
 PITKUS, Andrea R; St Peters LC, Arlington, WI
 RAETHER, Tim; Good Shepherd LC, Watertown, WI
 SCOTT, Adam J; Luther Memorial Chapel, Shorewood, WI
 SMITH, James; Zion LC, Burnett, WI
 TREECE, Zachary R; Mount Olive LC, Madison, WI
 VOIGT, Richard; Trinity LC, Wautoma, WI
 WEIMER, Pam; Zion LC, New Holstein, WI

Advisory Ordained

JOHNSON, Robert E; Peace LC, Sussex, WI
 SCHUBERT, Jeffery Scott (Jeff); Divine Redeemer LC, Hartland, WI

Advisory Commissioned

BIERLEIN, Beth Nicole; St Peter LC, Reedsburg, WI
 BULT, Derek Wayne; Our Redeemer LC, Sheboygan, WI
 HASSELDAHL, Cynthia Lou (Cindy); Trinity LC, Racine, WI
 HASSELDAHL, Gregory C (Greg); Trinity LC, Racine, WI
 JOHNSON, Stephen P; Our Father's LC, Greenfield, WI
 PESCH, Janet Marie; St Johns LC, Racine, WI
 SCHEUER, James Andrew; Our Savior LC, Whitefish Bay, WI
 VIETS, Aaron Daniel; St John LC, Fredonia, WI
 WOLFF, Jennifer; Beautiful Savior LC, Waukesha, WI

Southeastern District

Voting Ordained

AGNE, Paul Christian (Chris); Ascension LC, Landover Hills, MD
 BORRASSO, Matthew Earl; Trinity LC, Lexington Park, MD
 BROOKS, David Holcombe; Grace Ev LC, Durham, NC
 COATS, Roy Axel; LC of the Redeemer, Baltimore, MD
 DANIELS, David Michael; Redeemer LC, Catawba, NC
 DART, Jason Stuart; Calvary LC, Jacksonville, NC
 DEDDEH, Suah S; Crosswalk LC, Columbia, MD
 FRANK, Peter Alan; St Peter's LC, Conover, NC
 KATISO, Aleumu Ermias; Bethany LC, Salisbury, MD
 KLOHA, Jeffrey J; Our Savior LC, Arlington, VA

MARTIN, Lannon Robert; King of Glory LC, Williamsburg, VA
 MCDANIELS, James A; St Luke LC, High Point, NC
 NEWBERG, Steven Edward; Ascension LC, Charlotte, NC
 SCOTT, John Winfield; Our Savior's Way LC, Ashburn, VA
 SINGER, Bradley J; Peace in Christ LC, Walkersville, MD
 SMITH, Brian Keith; Good Shepherd LC, York, PA
 VANOSDOL, Jeffrey Max; Immanuel LC, Simpsonville, SC
 WILLSEA, Wendell Richard III; Grace LC, Summerville, SC
 YAEGER, Aaron Emil; Our Savior LC, Lynchburg, VA

Voting Lay

AMBRO, Darrell; Ebenezer LC, Greensboro, NC
 AMY, David; St Johns LC of Blenheim, Glen Arm, MD
 FOSTER, Lawrence (Larry); Christ LC, Seaford, DE
 FOWLER, Paul R; The LC of the Good Shepherd, Olney, MD
 GEORGE, Christopher; Mount Olivet LC, Washington, DC
 HAIG, Steven Michael; St Pauls LC, Mechanicsville, MD
 JEFFORDS, Cara; Incarnate Word LC, Florence, SC
 JONES, Dave Eldon; Resurrection LC, Franklin, NC
 KLANDERMAN, Eric John; Vine and Branches LC, Aldie, VA
 MAERTEN, Eric Henry; St Paul LC, Whispering Pines, NC
 MESICK, Melanie; Resurrection LC, Newport News, VA
 METZ, Nia; Mount Calvary LC, Kannapolis, NC
 MEYER, Kerry; Martini LC, Baltimore, MD
 RISSER, Scott; Bethany-Trinity LC, Fishersville, VA
 SCHULZE, Angela; St John's LC, Alexandria, VA
 SPLEET, Ryan K; St Johns LC, Conover, NC
 STIVERS, Justine Danielle; Galilee LC, Pasadena, MD
 WESTBY, Cory Michael; St Stephens LC, Hickory, NC
 WHITE, Margaret; St Pauls LC, Ridgeway, NC

Advisory Ordained

DIEFENTHALER, Jon T; Our Savior LC, Laurel, MD
 SEAMAN, William D (Bill); Hope LC, Wake Forest, NC
 WINSLETT, Timothy Eugene (Tim); Holy Trinity LC, Bristol, TN

Advisory Commissioned

BERGT, Grace; Island LC, Hilton Head Island, SC
 BUTCHER, Nicholas Alexander (Nick); King of Glory LC, Williamsburg, VA
 HILLS, Jennifer Ann; St John's LC, Alexandria, VA
 STEARNS, Grace Estelle; Our Savior LC, Arlington, VA

Southern District

Voting Ordained

DROSENDAHL, John Charles; Redeemer LC, Mandeville, LA
 LEHMANN, Charles Ray (Charlie); St John LC, Lake Charles, LA
 MAZZAFERRO, Steven Daniel; Trinity LC, Meridian, MS
 MILLER, Wayne John; Grace LC, Mobile, AL
 PARENT, Raymond Duncan II; Our Savior Ev LC, Crestview, FL
 PRESLEY, Thomas T; First LC, Birmingham, AL
 REYNOLDS, John D; Trinity LC, Gadsden, AL
 RUDNIK, Richard D; Grace LC, Houma, LA

Voting Lay

CAMPBELL JONES, Cyndi; Trinity LC, Selma, AL
 CROWLEY, Patrick; Bethel LC, New Orleans, LA
 DART, Scott; Christ the King LC, Enterprise, AL
 GRIBNAU, Jeff; Trinity LC, Baton Rouge, LA
 HARLOW, David; Prince of Peace LC, Pineville, LA
 KEYL, Mark; St John LC, Hattiesburg, MS
 LANGEFELD, Andrew; Ascension LC, Huntsville, AL
 SCHULZ, Michael; Ascension LC, Daphne, AL

Southern Illinois District

Voting Ordained

BUETTNER, Lyle E; St Paul LC, New Athens, IL
 CAMPBELL, Gunnar Gregory; Christ LC, Jacob, IL
 CASTILLERO, Rene Gonzalo; St Paul LC, Worden, IL
 D'ENTREMONT, James Arthur III; St Salvator LC, Venedy, IL
 GRAY, Andrew W; Good Shepherd LC, Collinsville, IL
 HARRISS, Mark Edward; St Mark LC, Steeleville, IL
 HILES, Adam Robert Lawrence; Christ Our Savior LC, Freeburg, IL
 JACOBSEN, Steven J; St John LC, Kampsville, IL
 STRONG, Micheal M; Zion Ev LC, Farmersville, IL

Voting Lay

ALBERS, John; Trinity LC, Harvel, IL
 BARRINGER, Larry L; Trinity Lutheran Ministries, Edwardsville, IL
 DUNKER, Ron; St John LC, Chester, IL
 ERDMANN, Larry L; Trinity LC, Red Bud, IL
 GLAUB, Francis Joseph Jr (Frank); Good Shepherd LC, Marion, IL
 GRIFFITH, Scott; Zion LC, Bethalto, IL
 KOENIGSTEIN, Kevin William; St Paul's LC, Columbia, IL
 KRUEGER, John Larry; Immanuel LC, Okawville, IL
 ROBINSON, Jon; Zion LC, Mascoutah, IL

Advisory Ordained

GUDE, George J; Emmaus LC, Dorsey, IL

Advisory Commissioned

BECKER, William Festus; St Johns LC, Red Bud, IL
 KOESTER, Elizabeth Adeline; St Paul LC, Worden, IL
 KRAUSE, Jay A; Good Shepherd LC, Collinsville, IL
 SCHNARE, Zachariah D (Zach); St Paul LC, Worden, IL

Texas District

Voting Ordained

BRYNESTAD, Christopher Paul; King of Kings LC, Round Rock, TX
 DANNER, Martin Dean; Bethany LC, Austin, TX
 EBERSOLE, James Harold; Zion LC, Dallas, TX
 EDEN, Timothy Paul (Tim); Bethel LC, Bryan, TX
 GURRALA, Vijay; The Telugu Church of Houston-Our Redeemer LC, Houston, TX
 HEATH, Timmothy Warren Jr; Faith LC, Plano, TX
 HECKMANN, John M; St Paul LC, The Grove, TX
 HEITSHUSEN, Scott Eric; Lifebridge Community LC, Sealy, TX
 HESSE, Brian J; St Paul LC, Bellmead, TX
 HINER, Eric Daniel; Hope LC, Lubbock, TX
 HINTZE, Kevin John; Zion LC, Georgetown, TX
 JENNINGS, Kevin Michael; Mount Olive LC, Corpus Christi, TX
 KACHELMEIER, Brian Lee; Crown of Life LC, San Antonio, TX
 KASPAR, Jason M; Mount Calvary LC, La Grange, TX
 KNIPPA, Joshua A; Holy Cross LC, Nederland, TX
 KOBAC, Anthony Francis; Lamb of God LC, Humble, TX
 LAHUE, Alexander Dailey (Alex); St Timothy LC, Houston, TX
 LYTTLE, Aaron Leray; Oikos LC, Houston, TX
 MENKE, Noah Thomas; Holy Cross LC, Dallas, TX
 MOERBE, Ned Allen; Memorial LC, Houston, TX
 MORENO, Jason Abelardo; Christ Memorial LC, Houston, TX
 PASE, Robert J (Bob); Our Savior LC, Abilene, TX
 PULLIAM, Mark Thomas; Lazarus LC, Spring, TX
 REEVES, Sean D; St Luke LC, Olney, TX
 RICHARDSON, James Martin Jr (Martin); Crown of Life LC, Colleyville, TX
 ROTH, Carl David; Grace LC, Elgin, TX
 SCHEPMANN, Daniel Wayne (Dan); Gloria Dei LC, Houston, TX
 SHANE, Brian Todd; St Paul LC, Canyon, TX
 SMITH, Harry Reed; Our Redeemer LC, Irving, TX
 STENNELDF, John Christian; Christ LC, Austin, TX
 STEPHENS, Richard Craig; Redeemer LC, Fort Worth, TX
 SUNDBY, Scott Alan; First LC, Texarkana, TX
 TERRAL, Paul Quicy; Faith LC, Gainesville, TX
 TUCKER, Jeffrey David; Concordia LC, San Antonio, TX
 WEBER, Edmund J; Immanuel LC, Mercedes, TX

Voting Lay

AALUND, Niels; Hope LC, Friendswood, TX
 ARMSTRONG, Christine Michelle; Resurrection LC, Spring, TX
 BACON, Dan W Jr; Faith LC, Mexia, TX
 BOSTICK, Nathan; Cross LC, New Braunfels, TX
 BREWSTER, Timothy M (Tim); Trinity LC, Eden, TX
 ERICKSON, Ernie; St John LC, Beaumont, TX
 HARNED, Wayne Stewart; Beautiful Savior LC, Austin, TX
 HART, Kim Frank; NewChurch LC, Katy, TX
 HERNANDEZ, Stephen Michael; Immanuel LC, Houston, TX
 HONEYCUTT, John; Faith LC, Lampasas, TX
 HUGHES, John; Mount Olive LC, San Antonio, TX
 HUNT, Chris; Mission Liberty Hill Lutheran, Liberty Hill, TX
 KABELL, Kathy D; Faith LC, Graham, TX
 KIIHNE, Gregg; Epiphany LC, Pearland, TX
 KISSLING, John; Water of Life LC, Forney, TX
 KUNKEL, Robert William; Messiah LC, Corpus Christi, TX
 LAYLAND, David; Epiphany LC, Bastrop, TX
 MARX, Rodney; Trinity LC, Taylor, TX
 MCDANIEL, Charles; St Mark LC, Houston, TX
 MCKENNA, Louis; Peace LC, Hurst, TX
 MENSING, Kevin; Our Redeemer LC, Dallas, TX
 NELSON, Matthew; Redeemer LC, Atlanta, TX
 PATSCHKE, Dennis R; St John LC, Lincoln, TX
 PLATTER, Jeff; Zion LC, Pampa, TX
 RAY, William; St Paul LC, Austin, TX
 REGETZ, Nancy; Christ LC, Brookshire, TX
 ROHLOFF, Doug; Victory in Christ LC, Newark, TX
 RUNZHEIMER, James D (Jim); Grace LC, Arlington, TX
 SPENCE, Ralph; The Dwelling LC, Porter, TX
 STEIN, Dale Jr; Shepherd of the Hills LC, San Antonio, TX
 STEPHENS, Dennis; Grace LC, Midland, TX
 STUBBLEFIELD, Christofer; Immanuel LC, Fairview, TX
 THEISS, Doris; St John LC, Cypress, TX
 VELTEN, Josh; Grace LC, Denison, TX

YOUNG, John; Grace LC, Brenham, TX

Advisory Ordained

HOBRATSKCH, Ralph Wayne; Hope LC, Friendswood, TX
 KNIPPA, William B; Bethany LC, Austin, TX
 MENGSTEAB, Yohannes Andemicale; St John LC, Mansfield, TX
 MISCH, Steven Jon; Good Shepherd LC, Borger, TX
 SOHNS, Stephen J; Resurrection LC, Spring, TX

Advisory Commissioned

BLAKE, Patrick K; St Timothy LC, Houston, TX
 CAREY, Grant E; ACTS LC Leander, Leander, TX
 DAVIS, John H; St Paul LC, Fort Worth, TX
 DUENSING-WERNER, Audrey Mae; Gloria Dei LC, Houston, TX
 MCCLAIN, Leann E; Immanuel LC, Giddings, TX
 MCCLAIN, Mark A; Immanuel LC, Giddings, TX
 MEISSNER, Laurence L; Zion LC, Georgetown, TX
 MIESNER, Timothy G (Tim); St Paul LC, Fort Worth, TX
 NOACK, Dalton J; Bethel LC, Bryan, TX
 VANDERCOOK, Ardith J; Trinity LC, Amarillo, TX
 VANDERCOOK, James L; Trinity LC, Amarillo, TX

Wyoming District

Voting Ordained

BALDWIN, Patrick Michael; Christ LC, Rawlins, WY
 PREUS, Peter Daniel; St Paul LC, Bridgeport, NE
 VIGGERS, Zachary Thomas; Trinity LC, Gillette, WY

Voting Lay

CARLSON, Justin Quint; Immanuel LC, Sheridan, WY
 FINK, Ralph W; St John LC, Lovell, WY
 NEUGEBAUER, Jesse Mark; Faith LC, Gering, NE

Advisory Ordained

BEYER, Paul J; Mount Hope LC, Casper, WY

Advisory Commissioned

SOLLBERGER, Lukas Jon (Luke); Trinity LC, Cheyenne, WY

B. Advisory Representatives ELECTED OFFICERS

President

HARRISON, Matthew Carl; Saint Louis, MO

First Vice-President

LANGE, Peter Kristoff; Saint Louis, MO

Second Vice-President

BALL, Benjamin Thomas (Ben); Worden, IL

Third Vice-President

MURRAY, Scott R; Houston, TX

Fourth Vice-President

NOUR, Nabil Subhi; Sioux Falls, SD

Fifth Vice-President

ESGET, Christopher S; Alexandria, VA

Sixth Vice-President

SKOVGAARD, Eric C; Elm Grove, WI

Secretary

SIAS, John Wollenburg; Saint Louis, MO

APPOINTED OFFICERS

Interim Chief Mission Officer

GALCHUTT, Daniel M (Dan); Saint Louis, MO

Interim Chief Administrative Officer

HAAK, Nathan M; Saint Louis, MO

Chief Financial Officer

HAAK, Nathan M; Saint Louis, MO

DISTRICT PRESIDENTS

BEINKE, Robert D—New England
 BRAUNERSREUTHER, Jon M—Texas
 BUSS, Allan R—Northern Illinois
 CHEPULIS, Mark Andrew—North Dakota
 CURTIS, Heath Ryan—Southern Illinois
 DAVIS, David A—Michigan
 EDDY, Mark Roland—Central Illinois
 EGGER, Paul D—Iowa West
 FINNERN, Brady Lee—Minnesota North
 GEWECKE, Stephen—New Jersey
 GIBSON, Michael Edward (Mike)—Pacific Southwest
 HAGAN, Robert Lee IV (Lee)—Missouri
 HARMON, William A (Bill)—Southeastern
 HILL, John E—Wyoming
 JOHNSON, Eric Craig—Southern
 LANGE, Michael Robert (Mike)—California/Nevada/Hawaii
 MAXWELL, James Barret—Rocky Mountain
 MEADOR, Nathan Michael—South Wisconsin
 MISKUS, Jeffrey Gordon—English

NEHRENZ, David R—Oklahoma
 PAAVOLA, Roger C—Mid-South
 PANZER, Justin A—Kansas
 PINGEL, John L—Eastern
 ROCKEY, James H—Florida-Georgia
 SAUNDERS, Brian S—Iowa East
 SHOUP, Timothy J—North Wisconsin
 SNOW, Richard L—Nebraska
 STUCKWISCH, Don Richard Jr (Richard)—Indiana
 STURZENBECHER, Randy R—South Dakota
 TAYLOR, Dien Ashley—Atlantic
 VINOVSIS, Waldemar Raymond (Wally)—SELC
 VON BEHREN, Michael T (Mike)—Northwest
 WENDT, Ryan David—Montana
 WILSON, Kevin Alan—Ohio
 WOODFORD, Lucas V—Minnesota South

BOARDS

Synod Board of Directors

GALLUP, Roger Bruce; River Grove, IL
 GRAMS, Andrew N; Franklin, TN
 HARRINGTON, Larry; Casper, WY
 HARRISON, Matthew Carl; Saint Louis, MO
 HOEM, Josemon Thomas (Joe); Fort Wayne, IN
 LANGE, Peter Kristoff; Saint Louis, MO
 LOHMEYER, Jan Walter; Waveland, MS
 MACKAY, Leo Jr; Alexandria, VA
 PREUS, Christian A, *Chairman*; Grand Marais, MN
 SIAS, John Wollenburg; Saint Louis, MO
 STATHAKIS, Rick H; Shelby Township, MI
 VOSS, K Allan; Sheboygan, WI
 YOW, Jesse Jr; Livermore, CA

Board for National Mission

BENDER, Peter C; Colgate, WI
 ESPINOSA, Alfonso O, *Chairman*; Lake Forest, CA

Executive Staff

GALCHUTT, Daniel M (Dan); Saint Louis, MO

Board for International Mission

EDSON, John W, *Chairman*; Minneapolis, MN

Executive Staff

RAJEK, Cory J; Pacific, MO

COMMISSIONS

Commission on Constitutional Matters

DEADRICK, Thomas J (Tom); Pierre, SD
 KARNER, Kevin Allan; Green Valley, AZ
 KILLIAN, Scott; Great Falls, VA
 PETERS, Larry A, *Chairman*; Clarksville, TN
 SIAS, John Wollenburg; Saint Louis, MO
 VANDERCOOK, David Dominic Sr; Crawford, NE

Commission on Doctrinal Review

STEINMANN, Andrew Erwin, *Chairman*; Westlake, OH

Commission on Handbook

ABEGG, Heidi K; Alexandria, VA
 CARLISLE, Roger Paul; Sac City, IA
 HAWK, David K; Fort Wayne, IN
 SCHURB, Ken Ray, *Chairman*; Springfield, IL
 SIAS, John Wollenburg; Saint Louis, MO
 TOTSKY, David W (Dave); Joliet, IL

Commission on Theology and Church Relations

EGGER, Thomas J; Saint Louis, MO
 FRERKING, Bill; Houston, TX
 PITKUS, Andrea R; Waunakee, WI
 PLESS, John T; Fort Wayne, IN
 SAUNDERS, Brian S, *Chairman*; Cedar Rapids, IA
 ZIEGLER, Roland Frank; Fort Wayne, IN

Staff

LEHENBAUER, Joel David; Saint Louis, MO
 SERINA, Richard James Jr (Rick); Saint Louis, MO

EDUCATION INSTITUTION REPRESENTATIVES COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Concordia University Chicago River Forest, IL

President

DAWN, Russell Paul; River Forest, IL

Board of Regents

ZICKLER, Matthew Leonard Gilbert; Western Springs, IL

District President

BUSS, Allan R; River Forest, IL

Faculty

SCHULZ, Charles R; Westchester, IL

Concordia University, Irvine Irvine, CA

President

THOMAS, Michael Allen; Irvine, CA

Board of Regents

ERMELING, Ryan P; Gilbert, AZ

District President

GIBSON, Michael Edward (Mike); Irvine, CA

Faculty

LOY, David Wayne; Irvine, CA

Concordia University, Nebraska Seward, NE

President

BULL, Bernard Dean; Seward, NE

Board of Regents

MEYER, Dennis L (Denny); Las Vegas, NV

District President

SNOW, Richard L; Seward, NE

Faculty

WARREN, Thaddeus P (Thad); Seward, NE

Concordia University, St. Paul Saint Paul, MN

President

FRIEDRICH, Brian L; Saint Paul, MN

Board of Regents

BRAUN, Andrew; Tempe, AZ

District President

WOODFORD, Lucas V; Farmington, MN

Faculty

HOLLMANN, Joshua David; Saint Paul, MN

Concordia University Wisconsin Mequon, WI, and Ann Arbor, MI

President

ANKERBERG, Erik P; Grafton, WI

Board of Regents

BURAKOWSKI, Jonah Peter; Delavan, WI

District President

MEADOR, Nathan Michael; Saukville, WI

Faculty

YOUNG, Michael Edward; Mequon, WI

SEMINARIES Concordia Seminary Saint Louis, MO

President

EGGER, Thomas J; Saint Louis, MO

Board of Regents

MONS, William Maximilian (Max); Iowa City, IA

District President

HAGAN, Robert Lee IV (Lee); Saint Louis, MO

Faculty

THOMPSON, William Mart I (Mart); Saint Louis, MO

Concordia Theological Seminary Fort Wayne, IN

President

BRUSS, Jon Steffen; Fort Wayne, IN

Board of Regents

RUEGER, Matthew W; Hubbard, IA

District President

STUCKWISCH, Don Richard Jr (Richard); Fort Wayne, IN

Faculty

PEPERKORN, Todd A; Fort Wayne, IN

SYNOD ENTITY REPRESENTATIVES Concordia Plan Services

President / Chief Executive Officer

SANFT, James F (Jim); Saint Louis, MO

Board Member

SEEFELD, Scott A, *Chairman*; Oconomowoc, WI

Concordia University System

President

HARDY, Jamison John; Lake Orion, MI

Board Member

BRADEN, Mark P, *Chairman*; Grosse Ile, MI

Concordia Historical Institute

President

HARMELINK, Daniel Nathan; Saint Louis, MO

Board Member

SIAS, John Wollenburg; Saint Louis, MO

WOHLRABE, John Clarence Jr, *Chairman*; Fountain, FL

Concordia Publishing House

President / Chief Executive Officer

SCHULTZ, Jonathan D; Saint Louis, MO

Board Member

OLSON, Joseph L, *Chairman*; Whitefish Bay, WI

Lutheran Church Extension Fund

President / Chief Executive Officer

DAY, J Bart (Bart); Saint Louis, MO

Board Member

SOYKE, Christopher P (Chris), *Chairman*; River Hills, WI

LCMS Foundation

President

FIEDLER, David W; Saint Louis, MO

Board Member

BLOMENBERG, Ralph, *Chairman*; Seymour, IN

FOREIGN MISSION AREA REPRESENTATIVES

KREY, Theodore M R (Ted)—Latin America and Caribbean

Region

PREUS, David Rolf—Eurasia Region

TRUMP, Shauen Thomas—Africa Region

WOOD, Matthew Jason—Asia Region

MILITARY CHAPLAIN REPRESENTATIVES

GIESE, Joel M—United States Army

POTTS, Chadwick Luke (Chad)—United States Air Force

ROCKROHR, Paul Edwin—United States Coast Guard

DISTRICT BOARD OF DIRECTORS REPRESENTATIVES Atlantic District

District Board of Directors

WIEGAND, Adam Charles; Saratoga Springs, NY

District Executive Staff

STANECK, Matthew O'Neill; Glendale, NY

California/Nevada/Hawaii District

District Board of Directors

WELLER, Robert Dennis; San Jose, CA

District Executive Staff

FERGUSON, Louis Paul Jr (Paul); Discovery Bay, CA

Central Illinois District

District Executive Staff

GUMZ, Patrick Michael; Springfield, IL

Eastern District

District Board of Directors

ALLEN, Jon; Penfield, NY

District Executive Staff

SUTHERLAND, D Bruce (Bruce); North Tonawanda, NY

English District

District Board of Directors

HONEBRINK, Thomas D; Oro Valley, AZ

District Executive Staff

MATHERS, John Derek; Kitchener, ON CANADA

Florida-Georgia District

District Board of Directors

MICHAEL, Gregory Carl (Greg); Athens, GA

District Executive Staff

SAHLBERG, Eric S Jr; Orlando, FL

Indiana District

District Board of Directors

BAUMAN, Douglas Dale; Columbus, IN

District Executive Staff

WINGFIELD, Nathan Michael; Fort Wayne, IN

Iowa East District

District Executive Staff

SANCHEZ, Daniel; Lisbon, IA

Iowa West District

District Board of Directors

WARNKE, Kirk Raymond; Manson, IA

District Executive Staff

MOHR, Rhonda J; Fort Dodge, IA

Kansas District

District Board of Directors

SCHULTZ, Bruce D; Wamego, KS

District Executive Staff

GRAMS, Daniel Ernest; Olathe, KS

Michigan District**District Board of Directors**

MATYAS, Dennis Wesley; Bay City, MI

District Executive Staff

YAKIMOW, Scott Edward; Brighton, MI

Mid-South District**District Board of Directors**

FICKEN, Jack P; Fairview, TN

District Executive Staff

FOWLER, Angela L; Cordova, TN

Minnesota North District**District Board of Directors**

MABLY, Martin William; Esko, MN

District Executive Staff

RUOPP, Diana; Baxter, MN

Minnesota South District**District Board of Directors**

PARRISH, Brent L; Prior Lake, MN

District Executive Staff

LEE, Vue; Brooklyn Park, MN

Missouri District**District Board of Directors**

BUCHHOLZ, David Allen; Kansas City, MO

District Executive Staff

HASZ, Martin Andrew (Marty); Cape Girardeau, MO

Montana District**District Board of Directors**

CORNELIUSEN, Eric T; Williston, ND

KOSCHE, Thomas Paul; Billings, MT

Nebraska District**District Board of Directors**

WARNEKE, Kevin; Omaha, NE

District Executive Staff

JACOBSEN, Lonnie R; Lincoln, NE

New England District**District Board of Directors**

GIERKE, Paul C; Billerica, MA

New Jersey District**District Board of Directors**

DUNBAR, Jonathan M (Jon); Lambertville, NJ

JENNINGS, Thomas A (Tom); Middlesex, NJ

North Dakota District**District Executive Staff**

ULLAND, Tamara J (Tami); Minto, ND

North Wisconsin District**District Board of Directors**

FEHRMANN, Ryan Jon; Bonduel, WI

District Executive Staff

SCHULT, Donald C Jr (DJ); Wausau, WI

Northern Illinois District**District Board of Directors**

KELLER, Erich M; Plainfield, IL

District Executive Staff

WHITBY, Kristopher R (Kris); Palatine, IL

Northwest District**District Board of Directors**

DINGER, Jonathan Mark; Pocatello, ID

District Executive Staff

KUNKEL, Dustin (Dust); Portland, OR

Ohio District**District Board of Directors**

FRY, Jim R; Middletown, OH

District Executive Staff

GREIG, John Edward; Painesville, OH

Oklahoma District**District Board of Directors**

WADE, Kenneth Earl; Enid, OK

District Executive Staff

ROSS, Daniel Clifton; Mustang, OK

Pacific Southwest District**District Board of Directors**

SCHRAMM, Conni Lynn (Bennett); Laguna Hills, CA

District Executive Staff

HENKELL, James David (Jim); Chandler, AZ

Rocky Mountain District**District Board of Directors**

LIETZAU, Eli J S; Wheat Ridge, CO

District Executive Staff

CODY, Jason K; Alamosa, CO

SELK District**District Board of Directors**

COUNTRYMAN, Troy Allen; Rockledge, FL

South Dakota District**District Board of Directors**

ZINNEL, Chad; Sioux Falls, SD

District Executive Staff

KUMM, Michael Lea; Sioux City, IA

South Wisconsin District**District Board of Directors**

STOWE, Douglas John; Hartford, WI

District Executive Staff

HOVLAND, G Gregory (Greg); Portage, WI

Southeastern District**District Board of Directors**

NOLLEY, Nancy; Charlotte, NC

District Executive Staff

SCHULTHEIS, Martin John; Richmond, VA

Southern District**District Board of Directors**

BUSSMAN, John Mark; Cullman, AL

Southern Illinois District**District Executive Staff**

FICK, Jeffrey A (Jeff); Belleville, IL

Texas District**District Board of Directors**

DAVIS, John F Jr; Katy, TX

District Executive Staff

JONES, Becca; Round Rock, TX

Wyoming District**District Board of Directors**

CAIN, Paul J Jr; Sheridan, WY

District Executive Staff

HOFF, Tiffany; Casper, WY

**DISTRICT YOUTH
REPRESENTATIVES****Oklahoma District**

REMINGTON, Hunter; Bristow, OK

WOSMEK, Emma; Perry, OK

Wyoming District

KIESER, Miriam; Riverton, WY

WATERBURY, Noah; Casper, WY

**C. Staff and Guests
CONVENTION STAFF
AND SERVICES****Assistant Secretary**

POWELL, Samuel Michael; Jefferson City, MO

Audio/Visual—Inspirmedia

ABEL, Leah A; Littleton, CO

BEERENSTRAUCH, Lori; Lincoln, NE

GRIMPO, Phil; Lincoln, NE

MACLEOD, Alex; Saint Louis, MO

MURPHY, Aurora; Saint Louis, MO

SPENCER, Ricky; Saint Louis, MO

Communications Contractor

BOMBERGER, Rachel; Saint Louis, MO

EISING, Stacey; Saint Louis, MO

Convention Management

BELOW, Barbara A (Barb); Saint Louis, MO

HAAK, Nathan M; Saint Louis, MO

MARVIN, Lynne C; Ballwin, MO

Convention Support—Padgett Communications

BROWN, Trina; Tampa, FL

Legal Counsel

HUGER, Lucie; Saint Louis, MO

Office of the Secretary

LEIGHTON, Lori; Saint Louis, MO

SPINK, Janice; Saint Louis, MO

Parliamentarian

GAGE, Al; Avondale, AZ

Stage Assistants

DAHLKE, Martha; Saint Louis, MO

FIENE, Katie; Saint Louis, MO

Timekeeper

BERGHOLT, Matthew Tyler (Matt); Saint Louis, MO

Today's Business Staff

ASBURY, Rachel; Saint Louis, MO

BEARY, Carrie; Maryland Heights, MO

BOEHLKE, Christian J; High Ridge, MO

CURTIS, Rebekah M; Worden, IL

GEIS, Sandi; Saint Louis, MO

GRUENWALD, Mark Edward; Fenton, MO

HAYTER, Maryann Marie; Union, MO

HINTON, Alicia; Saint Louis, MO

LONGMIRE, Sarah Anne; Blue Springs, MO

SIAS, Heidi D; Imperial, MO

SMITH, Meredith; Saint Louis, MO

STACKLE, Shannon; Salem, MO

Translators

VOSS, Laerte Tardelli Hellwig; Chula Vista, CA

YANG, Chris Xinhong; Oakton, VA

Worship/Music Leaders

BUSAROW, Jonathan; Fort Wayne, IN

CRANE, Brian Trevor; Mesa, AZ

DAENZER, Sean Colin; Saint Louis, MO

GASCHLER, Olivia; Linn, KS

KROENKE, Marissa E; Arnold, MO

MACHEMER, Matthew Alan; Fort Wayne, IN

PATTON, Cara Marie Lois; Kirkwood, MO

RUDY, Jonathan; Saint Louis, MO

SCHEMPF, Andrew Michael; Saint Louis, MO

SYNOD STAFF**Church Relations**

FRESE, Michael N; Fort Wayne, IN

KRIKAVA, James Alton (Jim); Brewster, MA

ROBISON, Kimberly (Kim); Saint Louis, MO

SHAW, Jonathan Eberhardt; Fort Wayne, IN

Communications

ALBANO, Brett; Saint Louis, MO

ASKINS, Roy Stephen; Saint Louis, MO

BLANK, Rudy; Saint Louis, MO

CHENEY, Veronica; Saint Louis, MO

DAVIDSON, Drew; Saint Louis, MO

DUFFY, Jennifer; Saint Louis, MO

HENRICH, Mary; Saint Louis, MO

KEUP, Paul; Saint Louis, MO

KOH, Frank; Saint Louis, MO

LEWIS, Amanda; Saint Louis, MO

LUNSFORD, Erik; Saint Louis, MO

MAGNESS, Cheryl; Broken Arrow, OK

MERTZ, Megan; Saint Louis, MO

SOLOMON, Prince E; Saint Louis, MO

Human Resources

LAW, Jason T; Saint Louis, MO

OLSEN, Derek; Saint Louis, MO

THOMAS, Nathan; Saint Louis, MO

Information Technologies

KUTILEK, Zach; Saint Louis, MO

REDD, Mike; Saint Louis, MO

Mission Advancement

FIALA, David Aaron; Herculaneum, MO

FISCHER, Mike; Saint Louis, MO

SCHNARE, Zachariah D (Zach); Alhambra, IL

SMITHSON, Shane; St Louis, MO

YOUNG, Krista Lynn; Sylvia, NC

Office of International Mission

ALTER, Erin E; Saint Louis, MO

BAUMGARTNER, James Steven; Saint Louis, MO

GAUTHIER, Brian Andrew; Saint Louis, MO

KRAUSE, Rachel; Saint Louis, MO

KUCZYNSKI, Jay; Saint Louis, MO

RABE, Mark A; Saint Louis, MO

WARREN, Blake A; Saint Louis, MO

WOLFRAM, Mark; Ballwin, MO

Office of National Mission

BECKER, Andrew John (Andy); Arnold, MO

CORTRIGHT, Kendall S; Edwardsville, IL

CUNDIFF, Quintin Michael; Saint Louis, MO

HEIMER, Stephen Erich; Saint Louis, MO

HELLER, Brian Richard; Saint Louis, MO

JOHNSON, Ross Edward; Fenton, MO

KIESSLING, Mark Richard; Valley Park, MO

MANOR, Tiffany Marie; Saint Louis, MO

MEYER, Michael William; Chesterfield, MO

SHULTS, Julianna Catrina; Saint Louis, MO

TRAMPE, Heath A; Saint Louis, MO

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

KEMPEN, Mollie; Saint Louis, MO

Office of the President

ENDICOTT, Georgia; Saint Louis, MO

VARSOGEA, Charles Everett; Portsmouth, RI

VIEKER, Kim; Saint Louis, MO

Operations Support Services

GAMACHE, Meredith; Saint Louis, MO

KAMMEIER, Becky; Saint Louis, MO

KNIGHT, Jennifer; Saint Louis, MO

RAY, Chad; Saint Louis, MO

RIVERS, Joel; Saint Louis, MO

TRUSTY, Cheryl; Saint Louis, MO

Pastoral Education

ARMBRUST, Robyn Lynn; Manchester, MO

BANECK, James A; Saint Louis, MO

MANOR, Jonathan James; Saint Louis, MO

GUESTS**Essayists**

BRUSS, Jon Steffen; Fort Wayne, IN

CLAYTON, Kirk M; Maywood, IL

EGGER, Thomas J; Saint Louis, MO

THOMAS, Michael Allen; Irvine, CA

Musician

BOURASSA, Rob; Wyandotte, MI

Preachers

BALL, Benjamin Thomas (Ben); Worden, IL

CHAN, Terrence C (Terry); San Ramon, CA

ESGET, Christopher S; Alexandria, VA

ESPINOSA, Alfonso O; Lake Forest, CA

FINNERN, Brady Lee; Sartell, MN

GIBSON, Michael Edward (Mike); Irvine, CA

LANGE, Peter Kristoff; Saint Louis, MO

NOUR, Nabil Subhi; Sioux Falls, SD

TAYLOR, Dien Ashley; The Bronx, NY

President Emeritus (and Wife)

KIESCHNICK, Gerald Bryan (Jerry); Georgetown, TX

KIESCHNICK, Terry; Georgetown, TX

CHURCH BODY REPRESENTATIVES**New Sister Churches****Christian Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bolivia**

CORONADO, Limberth Fernández (President)

FIGUEROA, Victor I (Rev.)

Sister Churches**American Association of Lutheran Churches**

LARSON, Cary (Presiding Pastor)

Ceylon Evangelical Lutheran Church (Sri Lanka)

ARULCHELVAN, Arumanayagam (Bishop)

China Evangelical Lutheran Church

KO, Kevin (Vice-President)

Confessional Lutheran Church of Chile

KINAS, Gerardo Omar (President)

Evangelical Lutheran Church—Synod of France

HEINTZ, Garry (Vice-President)

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Almaty

BURTSEV, Aleksander (Bishop)

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya

OMOLO, Joseph Ochola (Archbishop)

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Argentina

TRUENOW, Arturo (President)

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil

SCHULER, Geraldo Walimir (President)

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana

DONKOH, Bayiga (Wife)

DONKOH, John Shadrack (President)

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia

RASKATOV, Evgenii (General Secretary)

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia

GRANTS, Rinalds (Archbishop)

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia

KOLLIE, James (Bishop)

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania

SABUTIS, Mindaugas (Bishop)

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Paraguay

FIGUR, Alceu Alton (President)

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine

GETMANN, Olena (Wife)

MASCHEWSKI, Serge (Bishop)

Evangelical Lutheran Diocese in Norway

WITH, Thor Henrik (Bishop)

Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Denmark

JENSEN, Leif G (President)

Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland

POHJOLA, Juhana (Bishop)

Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa

PAUL, Helmut (Bishop)

Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church

VOIGT, Hans Jörg (Bishop)

India Evangelical Lutheran Church

JESUPATHAM, Ravi Chandranath (LCMS Coordinator)

SELVARAJ, Parameswaran Rajamma (Principal, CTSN)

Lutheran Church—Canada

TEUSCHER, Timothy (President)

Lutheran Church in Korea

KIM, Jun Hyun (Rev. Dr., Translator)

WON, Jong Ho (President)

Lutheran Church in Southern Africa

SITHOLE, Sibongiseni Elliot (Bishop)

Lutheran Church of Guatemala

JASINTO, Luis A (President)

Lutheran Church of Nigeria

EKONG, Christian (Archbishop)

Lutheran Church of Uganda

BAMEKA, Charles I (Bishop)

BAMEKA, Eve (Wife)

Lutheran Church of Uruguay

HOFFMANN, Christian (Rev.)

Lutheran Church of Venezuela

FLORES, Eduardo (President)

Lutheran Synod of Mexico

GARZA MARTINEZ, Omar Marin (President)

Portuguese Evangelical Lutheran Church

HILLER, Adalberto (President)

Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church

LYTKIN, Vsevolod (Bishop)

STRELTSOVA, Elena (Translator)

STRELTSOV, Alexey (Rev.)

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of England

SIMOJOKI, Tapani (Chairman)

The Lutheran Church in Norway and Iceland

MASVIE, Torkild (Bishop)

The Lutheran Church in the Philippines

REYES, Antonio del Rio (President)

The Lutheran Church of Togo

LARE, Kolani Lambon (President)

Associate Churches**Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sierra Leone**

BUNDOR, John (President)

Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus

BEDASO, Awoke Chefa (Rev.)

Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession

DAMASEK, Martin (Interim Bishop)

DAMASEK, Shirley (Wife)

Lutheran Mission—Australia

ANKER, Matthew (President)

Lutheran Mission in Africa—Synod of Thousand Hills

SEBURIKOKO, Selestine Munyentwari (Bishop)

Malagasy Lutheran Church—Madagascar

RAKOTOZAFY, Denis (President)

Mission Province in Sweden

ADAHL, Bengt (Bishop)

South East of Lake Victoria Diocese

NZELU, Yohana (Bishop)

The Indonesian Christian Lutheran Church

PURBA, Junas (Translator)

SARAGIH, Jon Albert (Bishop)

Other Churches**Evangelical Lutheran Synod**

RANK, Thomas (Rev.)

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

SCHROEDER, Mark (President)

CONVENTION FLOOR COMMITTEES

*Floor committees are appointed by the President in consultation with the Council of Presidents and Praesidium (Bylaw 3.1.7).
Appointments are made from among the voting delegates, advisory delegates, and advisory representatives (Bylaw 3.1.7 [a]).*

KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

C = Chairman; **VC** = Vice-Chairman; **S** = Secretary;
SVP = Synod Vice-President; **DP** = District President; **VOM** = Voting Delegate Ordained Minister; **VL** = Voting Delegate Layperson; **AOM** = Advisory Delegate or Representative Ordained Minister; **ACM** = Advisory Delegate or Representative Commissioned Minister; **AL** = Advisory Delegate or Representative Layperson; **O** = Ordained; **C** = Commissioned; **L** = Lay

DISTRICT ABBREVIATIONS

AT = Atlantic; **CI** = Central Illinois; **CNH** = California-Nevada-Hawaii; **EA** = Eastern; **EN** = English; **FG** = Florida-Georgia; **IE** = Iowa East; **IN** = Indiana; **IW** = Iowa West; **KS** = Kansas; **MI** = Michigan; **MDS** = Mid-South; **MNN** = Minnesota North; **MNS** = Minnesota South; **MO** = Missouri; **MT** = Montana; **ND** = North Dakota; **NEB** = Nebraska; **NE** = New England; **NI** = Northern Illinois; **NJ** = New Jersey; **NOW** = Northwest; **NW** = North Wisconsin; **OH** = Ohio; **OK** = Oklahoma; **PSW** = Pacific Southwest; **RM** = Rocky Mountain; **SD** = South Dakota; **SE** = Southeastern; **SELC** = SELC; **SI** = Southern Illinois; **SO** = Southern; **SW** = South Wisconsin; **TX** = Texas; **WY** = Wyoming

Committee 1: National Witness

C: Eric C. Johnson (**DP**, SO)
VC: Dien A. Taylor (**DP**, AT)
VOM: Roy A. Coats (SE); John D. K. Zischke (MDS)
VL: Russell P. Barkow (MI); John I. Clark (CI); Brian Dahl (NE)
AOM: Mark D. Brandt (MI); Alfonso O. Espinosa (PSW); Daniel E. Grams (KS); David R. Nehrenz (**DP**, OK); Michael T. Von Behren (**DP**, NOW)
ACM: Nathan M. Wingfield (IN)

Committee 2: International Witness

C: Robert L. (Lee) Hagan, IV (**DP**, MO)
VC: Nathan M. Meador (**DP**, SW)
VOM: Ernest C. (Ernie) Jeong (PSW); Michael R. Standfest (IW)
VL: R. Scott Davis (FG); Jeffrey S. Kelm (NW); Julia M. Sinclair (NOW)
AOM: Jeffrey G. Miskus (**DP**, EN); Eric C. Skovgaard (SVP, SW); Randy R. Sturzenbecher (**DP**, SD)
ACM: Stephen P. Johnson (SW)
AL: John W. Edson (MNS); Jesse Yow Jr. (CNH)

Committee 3: Mercy

C: John L. Pingel (**DP**, EA)
VC: Kevin A. Wilson (**DP**, OH)
VOM: Peter C. Bender (SW); Jean-Enock Berus (PSW); Adam E. Jacobsen (MNS); Gregory R. Truwe (MO); Kyle C. Winter (MT)
VL: Stephen M. Hernandez (TX); Cara Jeffords (SE); Daniel D. Uttech (MNS)
AOM: Shaun P. Adams (NOW); Waldemar R. (Wally) Vinovskis (**DP**, SELC)

Committee 4: Life Together

C: Christopher S. Esget (**SVP**, EN)
VC: Lucas V. Woodford (**DP**, MNS)
VOM: Graham B. Glover (FG); Scot D. Missling (MNS)

VL: David H. Brown (NI); Jonathan Busarow (EN); Steven (Steve) H. Kern (MI)
AOM: David A. Davis (**DP**, MI); Paul D. Egger (**DP**, IW); Nabil S. Nour (**SVP**, SD); Daniel C. Ross (OK)
ACM: Jeffrey K. Boehlke (MNS); Thaddeus P. (Thad) Warren (NEB)

Committee 5: Theology and Church Relations

C: Brian S. Saunders (**DP**, IE)
VC: Ryan D. Wendt (**DP**, MT)
VOM: Peter J. Brock (IN); Michael B. Hanson (NW); Christopher J. Neuendorf (ND)
VL: Matthew P. Braun (MI); David C. Strelow (OH)
AOM: Jon M. Brauersreuther (**DP**, TX); Roger B. Gallup (NI); William A. (Bill) Harmon (**DP**, SE); John T. Pless (IN); Roland F. Ziegler (IN)
ACM: Melissa A. DeGroot (RM)
AL: Thomas D. Honebrink (EN); Bruce D. Schultz (KS)

Committee 6: Pastoral Ministry and Seminaries

C: Scott R. Murray (**SVP**, TX)
VC: John E. Hill (**DP**, WY)
VOM: William M. Shamburger, III (CNH)
VL: Larry L. Barringer (SI); John F. Lang (OH); Wesley R. (Wes) Prater (NEB)
AOM: Douglas D. Bauman (IN); Jon S. Bruss (IN); John M. Bussman (SO); Heath R. Curtis (**DP**, SI); Thomas J. Egger (MO); Michael E. (Mike) Gibson (**DP**, PSW); William Maximillian (Max) Mons (IE); Timothy J. Shoup (**DP**, NW)
ACM: Raquel A. Rojas (AT)
AL: Leo Mackay Jr. (EN)

Committee 7: University Education

C: Brady L. Finnern (**DP**, MNN)
VC: Don R. (Richard) Stuckwisch Jr. (**DP**, IN)
VOM: Silas M. Hasselbrook (SW); Scott C. Klemisz (CNH); Carl D. Roth (TX); Michael P. Schuermann (CI)
VL: Matthew K. Berent (SELC); Robert A. Denkert (SW); Erich M. Keller (NI); Andrew P. Stadler (NEB)
AOM: Allan R. Buss (**DP**, IN); Richard L. Snow (**DP**, NEB)
ACM: Russell P. Dawn (NI); Mary Schuldheisz (NOW)
AL: Christian A. Preus (MNS)

Committee 8: Finance

C: Roger C. Paavola (**DP**, MDS)
VC: James H. Rockey (**DP**, FG)
VOM: Mark E. Sell (MO); Alan R. Stahlecker (KS)
VL: Cynthia L. (Cindy) Cwynar (EA); Phillip K. Hesterman (NEB); Richard C. Robertson (FG); Tyler Watts (MI)
ACM: David A. Fiala (MO)
AL: Angela L. Fowler (MDS); Nathan M. Haak (MO); Christopher (Chris) P. Soyke (SW)

Committee 9: Structure and Administration

C: Justin A. Panzer (**DP**, KS)
VC: Benjamin Thomas (Ben) Ball (**SVP**, SI)
VOM: Thomas J. Clark (ND); Eric T. Lange (NOW); Karl A. Weber (MNN); Philip E. Zielinski (OH)
VL: Carl W. Gloe (IE); Matthew Nelson (TX)
AOM: Paul J. Beyer (WY)
ACM: David A. Buchholz (MO); Nicholas A. (Nick) Butcher (SE)
AL: Andrew N. Grams (MDS); Thomas A. (Tom)

Jennings (NJ); Joseph L. Olson (SW)

Committee 10: Ecclesiastical Supervision and Dispute Resolution

C: Robert D. Beinke (**DP**, NE)
VC: Mark A. Chepulis (**DP**, ND)
VOM: Peter C. Cage (IN); Brian J. Hesse (TX); Grant A. Knepper (CNH)
VL: George W. Mortimer (IE); Brian A. Schmeling (NEB)
AOM: Michael R. (Mike) Lange (**DP**, CNH); Eli J.S. Lietzau (RM)
ACM: Jennie J. Asher (MO)
AL: Bill Frerking (TX)

Committee 11: Registration, Credentials, and Elections

C: James B. Maxwell (**DP**, RM)
VC: Stephen A. Gewecke (**DP**, NJ)
VOM: Jonathan R. Burkee (PSW); Jason M. Kaspar (TX)
VL: Daniel E. Nicholson (MI); William Ray (TX)
ACM: Rebecca Hirsch Duport (PSW)

Committee for Convention Nominations

*Standing Committee on Nominations (Bylaw 3.2.5)

C: Jamison J. Hardy* (**AOM**, EN)
VC: Daniel Sanchez* (**AL**, IE)
S: Daniel E. Grams* (**AOM**, KS)
O: Terry R. Forke (MT); Gregory D. Jans (NJ); Derek S. Klemm (PSW); Theodore D. McMinn (MDS); David P. Ramirez (SW); Daniel W. Schepmann (**VOM**, TX); Philip E. Zielinski (**VOM**, OH)
L: Stephen R. Boergert (MI); Cynthia L. Cwynar (VL, EA); Paul P. Edmon (NE); Elizabeth H. Elgert (SE); Bill Hansen (MNN); Noreen L. Linke (RM); Scott Pfennig (VL, ND); Jeff Schwarz (SI)

DIRECTORY—OFFICERS, BOARDS, AND COMMISSIONS OF THE SYNOD

OFFICERS OF THE SYNOD

President
Matthew C. Harrison (2026)

First Vice-President
Peter K. Lange (2026)

Regional Vice-Presidents *Region*

Second Vice-President —**Central**
Benjamin T. Ball (2026)

Third Vice-President —**West-Southwest**
Scott R. Murray (2026)

Fourth Vice-President —**Great Plains**
Nabil S. Nour (2026)

Fifth Vice-President —**East-Southeast**
Christopher S. Esget (2026)

Sixth Vice-President —**Great Lakes**
Eric C. Skovgaard (2026)

Secretary
John W. Sias (2026)

Interim Chief Administrative Officer
Nathan M. Haak

Chief Financial Officer
Nathan M. Haak (2028)

Interim Chief Mission Officer
Daniel M. Galchutt

President Emeritus
Gerald B. Kieschnick

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chairman: Christian A. Preus (2026)
Vice-Chairman: Andrew N. Grams (2026)
Secretary: John W. Sias (2026)
Roger B. Gallup (2029)
Larry W. Harrington (2029)
Matthew C. Harrison (2026)
Josemon T. Hoem (2029)
Jan W. Lohmeyer (2026)
Leo S. Mackay Jr. (2029)
Rick H. Stathakis (2029)
K. Allan Voss (2029)
Jesse Yow Jr. (2026)

Non-Voting Ex-officio:
Peter K. Lange (2026)

Advisory:
Interim Chief Mission Officer:
Daniel M. Galchutt
Interim Chief Administrative Officer:
Nathan M. Haak
Chief Financial Officer: Nathan M. Haak
Legal Counsel:
UB Greensfelder LLP, 10 South
Broadway, St. Louis, MO 63102-1747

COUNCIL OF PRESIDENTS

Chairman: Brady L. Finnern (2028)
Vice-Chairman: Allan R. Buss (2028)
Secretary: Justin A. Panzer (2028)
Program Committee: Allan R. Buss (2028)
Brady L. Finnern (2028)
Michael E. Gibson (2028)
Matthew C. Harrison (2026)
John E. Hill (2028)
Peter K. Lange (2026)
Justin A. Panzer (2028)

Staff: John W. Sias (2026)

COMMISSIONS

Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR)

Chairman: Brian S. Saunders (2026)
Paul G. Alms (2026)
Joel D. Biermann (2026)
Gerhard Bode (2026)
Robert A. Dargatz (2026)
Bill Frerking (2026)
Joseph Gerth (2029)
Frederick Guengerich (2026)
Jack Kilcrease (2029)
Naomichi Masaki (2026)
Mark Paterson (2026)
David Petersen (2029)
Andrea R. Pitkus (2026)
John T. Pless (2026)
Ely Prieto (2026)
Roland F. Ziegler (2026)

Advisory Members: Jon S. Bruss
Thomas J. Egger
Matthew C. Harrison
Peter K. Lange

Executive Director: Joel D. Lehenbauer
Associate Executive Director:
Richard J. Serina Jr.
Assistant to the Executive Director:
Larry M. Vogel

Commission on Doctrinal Review (CDR)

Chairman: Andrew E. Steinmann (2026)
Carl L. Beckwith (2026)
Jason D. Lane (2026)
Eric T. Lange (2026)
David I. Lewis (2026)

Commission on Handbook (COH)

Chairman: Ken R. Schurb (2029)
Heidi K. Abegg (2029)
Roger Carlisle (2026)
David K. Hawk (2026)
David W. Totsky (2029)

Advisory, Ex-officio: John W. Sias (2026)
Nathan M. Haak (Interim)

Advisory, CCM Representative:

Larry A. Peters

Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM)

Chairman: Larry A. Peters (2026)
Vice-Chairman: Thomas Deadrick (2026)
Secretary (pro tem): Scott A. Killian (2029)
Kevin A. Karner (2029)
David D. Vandercook (2029)

Ex-officio: John W. Sias (2026)

MISSION BOARDS

Board for National Mission

Central Region
Michael P. Schuermann (Ord, 2026)
Stephen Weller (Lay, 2029)

East-Southeast Region
Timothy J. Droegemueller (Ord, 2029)
Janis McDaniels (Lay, 2026)

Great Lakes Region
Peter C. Bender (Ord, 2026)
Cristen Sanchez (Lay, 2029)

Great Plains Region
Craig K. Niemeier (Ord, 2029)
Carla Claussen (Lay, 2026)

West-Southwest Region
Alfonso O. Espinosa (Chairman, Ord, 2026)
Carla Hack Broome (Lay, 2029)

President's Representative:
Dien Ashley Taylor (2026)

Staff: Daniel M. Galchutt,
Interim Chief Mission Officer

Board for International Mission

Central Region
James D. Gier Jr. (Ord, 2029)
Michael Hawk (Lay, 2029)

East-Southeast Region
James A. Douthwaite (Ord, 2026)
James Wolf (Lay, 2029)

Great Lakes
Thomas W. Dunseth (Ord, 2029)
John Powers (Lay, 2026)

Great Plains
Daniel Preus (Ord, 2029)
John Edson (Chairman, Lay, 2029)

West-Southwest
Terrence C. Chan (Ord, 2029)
Terence Lung (Lay, 2026)

Voting, President's Representative:
Elstner C. Lewis Jr. (Ord, 2026)

Staff: Daniel M. Galchutt,
Interim Chief Mission Officer

COMMITTEES		ADMINISTRATIVE OPERATIONS	
Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry		Director, Short-Term Mission:	Erin E. Alter
Chairman:	Peter K. Lange	Regional Director, Africa:	Shaun T. Trump
Members:	Jon S. Bruss Heath R. Curtis Thomas J. Egger	Interim Regional Director, Asia:	Brian A. Gauthier
Colloquy Committee for Commissioned Ministry		Regional Director, Eurasia:	David R. Preus
Chairman:	Peter K. Lange	Regional Director, Latin America and Caribbean:	Ted M.R. Krey
Members:	Bernard D. Bull Cari Chittick Russell P. Dawn Paul A. Philp James A. Pingel II Lorinda L. Sankey	Communications	
NATIONAL SYNOD STAFFS		Interim Executive Director:	Roy S. Askins
Office of the President		Managing Director, Editorial and Theological Content:	Roy S. Askins
President:	Matthew C. Harrison	Managing Director, Production:	Jennifer L. Duffy
First Vice-President:	Peter K. Lange	Managing Editor, <i>Lutherans Engage the World</i> :	Megan K. Mertz
Assistants to the President:	Barbara A. Below Kim R. Vieker	Managing Editor, <i>Reporter</i> :	Cheryl L. Magness
Assistants to the President—Church Relations:	Jonathan E. Shaw Michael N. Frese James A. Krikava	Managing Editor, <i>The Lutheran Witness</i> :	Stacey E. Eising
Administrative Assistant:	Georgia L. Endicott	Managing Photojournalist:	Erik Lunsford
Project Coordinator:	Rachel C. Asbury	Director, Design Services:	Erica R. Schwan
MISSION UNITS		Director, Video Production:	Drew J. Davidson
Interim Chief Mission Officer:	Daniel M. Galchutt	Director, Web Services:	Rudy A. Blank
Office of National Mission		KFUO AM & FM Radio Stations	
Executive Director:	Daniel M. Galchutt	Executive Director, Broadcast Services:	Gary A. Duncan
Managing Directors:	Tiffany M. Manor Michael W. Meyer	Associate Executive Director:	Andrew B. Bates
Director, Church Planting:	Quintin M. Cundiff	Director of Development:	Mary E. Schmidt
Director, Discipleship:	Heath A. Trampe	Mission Advancement	
Director, Disaster Response:	Ross E. Johnson	Interim Executive Director:	Shane T. Smithson
Director, Youth Ministry:	Mark R. Kiessling	Consulting Director, Strategy & Analytics:	Mark D. Hofman
Office of International Mission		Director, Campaigns and Special Initiatives:	Martha J. Dahlke
Executive Director:	Cory J. Rajek	Director, Missionary Network Care and Support:	Chandra M. Thurman
Managing Director, Global Business Operations:	Blake A. Warren	Director, Managed Contributor Care:	Brianne E. Gerzevske
Managing Director, Global Mission Operation:	Brian A. Gauthier	Pastoral Education	
Director, Missionary Recruitment:	Mark A. Rabe	Executive Director:	James A. Baneck
Director, Missionary Services:	Mark J. Wolfram	Director, Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support (PALS):	Jonathan J. Manor
CHURCH BODY OPERATIONS		International Center Chaplain	
Secretary:	John W. Sias	Chaplain/Director of Worship:	Sean C. Daenzer
Assistant to the Secretary:	Christian Boehlke	FINANCIAL OPERATIONS	
Rosters, Statistics and Research Services		Chief Financial Officer:	Nathan M. Haak
Director:	Scott Kostencki	Accounting	
Non-Voting, President's Representative:		Director of Accounting:	Jim Ehlers
Non-Voting, Ex-officio:		Director of Tax and Compliance:	Pam Palmer
Event Planning & Procurement		Internal Audit	
Human Resources		Executive Director:	Christopher Wood
Operations Support Services		SYNODWIDE TRUST ENTITY	
Executive Director:		Concordia Plan Services	
Associate Executive Director, Operations Support:		President & CEO:	James F. Sanft
Associate Director, Technology Applications:		Vice-President & Chief Administrative Officer / Chief Financial Officer:	Robert A. Bouche
John Stimpson		Vice-President, Chief Operating Officer:	Kevin M. Herweck
Mike Metcalf		Vice-President, Chief Investment Officer:	Brian K. Gardner
Nathan Thomas		Vice-President & General Counsel:	Ann T. Stillman
Joel A. Rivers		<i>Board of Directors—Concordia Plan Services / Board of Trustees—Concordia Plans</i>	
John Stimpson		Chairman:	Scott A. Seefeld (2027)
John Stimpson			Amber D. Bahr (2026)
John Stimpson			Jon D. Boeche (2027)
John Stimpson			Jason Burk (2027)
John Stimpson			Daryl R. Dagit (2026)
John Stimpson			Henry C. Eickelberg (2027)
John Stimpson			David K. Hawk (2028)
John Stimpson			Jesse P. Huber (2028)
John Stimpson			Ronald L. Kuehn (2028)
John Stimpson			Mark A. Miller (2028)
John Stimpson			Roger Offermann (2026)
John Stimpson			M. Douglas Peters (2027)
John Stimpson			Judy K. Stromback (2027)
John Stimpson			Mark O. Swenson (2026)
John Stimpson			Renee C. Varga (2026)

SYNODWIDE CORPORATE ENTITIES

Concordia Historical Institute

Executive Director: Daniel N. Harmelink

Board of Governors

President: John C. Wohlrabe Jr. (2031)

Rodney A. Benkendorf (2026)

Timothy S. Good (2031)

Kathy Graumann (2026)

David G. Millar (2031)

Paul W. Robinson (2026)

Robert V. Roethemeyer (2026)

Ross Stroh (2031)

Voting, Ex-officio: John W. Sias (2026)

Non-Voting, President's Representative:

John C. Wohlrabe Jr. (2026)

Advisor to the Board: Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

Concordia Publishing House

President & Chief Executive Officer:

Jonathan D. Schultz

Vice-President of Publishing:

Jacob A. Corzine

Chief Customer Impact & Growth Officer:

Richard K. Johnson

Chief Financial Officer: Collin L. Bivins

Executive Director of Production Control

and Quality Systems: Karen Capps

Director of Information Technology:

Jeremy Roegner

Director of Facilities and Administrative

Services: Scott Griffith

Director of Marketing: Anna Johnson

Director of Public Relations and Publicity:

Elizabeth Pittman

Director of Operations: Charles Black

Director of Graphic Design: Alex Ha

Executive Director of Human Resources:

Dana Neuhaus

Executive Director of Sales: Loren Pawlitz

Board of Directors

Chairman: Joseph L. Olson (2026)

Heidi K. Abegg (2026)

Kurt Battles (2029)

Mark W. Birkholz (2029)

Stephanie A. Egger (2026)

Elaine M. Graff (2029)

Tom R. Halvorson (2026)

Jill M. Johnson (2029)

Pamela J. Nielsen (2029)

Voting, President's Representative:

Jon D. Vieker

Non-Voting, Ex-officio: Nathan M. Haak

Concordia University System

President: Jamison J. Hardy

Vice-President: Douglas H. Spittel

Board of Directors

Chairman: Mark P. Braden (2029)

Dennis Eickhoff (2026)

Mark Franke (2026)

Stevin Gehrke (2026)

Jon Giordano (2029)

Mark Kalthoff (2026)

Mark Nuckols (2026)

Ellen Lange (2029)

Gary Thompson (2029)

Voting, President's Representative:

M. Alan Taylor (2026)

Non-Voting Advisory Members:

Michael A. Thomas

Don Richard Stuckwisch Jr.

Daniel M. Galchutt

Nathan M. Haak

Richard J. Serina Jr.

Dennis Meyer

Institutional Advisory Council:

Erik P. Ankerberg

Bernard D. Bull

Russell P. Dawn

Brian L. Friedrich

Michael A. Thomas

Concordia University Education Network
(CUEnet): Paul A. Philp

Lutheran Church Extension Fund

President/CEO: Bart Day

Finance

Chief Financial Officer: Kevin Bremer

Accounting

Chief Accounting Officer: Kris Kueker

Legal

Chief Legal Officer: Timothy Ramberger

Growth Solutions

Chief Growth Officer: Joseph Russo

Human Capital and Organizational Effectiveness

Executive Vice President:

Yvonne Schone

Credit and Loan Administration

Senior Vice President: Dennis Klussman

Board of Directors

Chairman: Christopher Soyke (2028)

Kurth A. Brashear (2027)

Steven Buuck (2028)

Gary D. Hemmer (2028)

Julie Johnson (2026)

Jonathan H. Kramer (2026)

Jaime E. Peters (2028)

Mark L. Pieper (2027)

Dale D. Wagner (2027)

Bruce J. Winter (2027)

Non-Voting, President's Representative:

Daniel M. Galchutt

Non-Voting, Ex-officio: Nathan M. Haak

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Foundation

President: David Fiedler

Finance/Administration, Sr. VP:

Mark Cannon

Gift Planning Services, Sr. VP:

Philip Krupski

Marketing/Communications, Sr. VP:

David O'Brien

Client Services:

Legal & Data Management, Sr. VP:

Tina Clasquin

Growth & Constituent Experience, Sr.

VP: Jeff Craig-Meyer

Board of Trustees

Chairman: Ralph Blumenberg (2028)

Melvin Faulkner (2028)

Dennis Fliehm (2026)

Brian Fricke (2027)

Daniel M. Galchutt (2026)

Russell Harms (2026)

Kay Kreklau (2027)

Kirk Mattes (2027)

Gregory Miller (2026)

Todd Riordan (2026)

Tim Sheldon (2026)

Voting, Board for National Mission Rep.:

Carol Hack Broome (2026)

Voting, President's Representative:

Daniel M. Galchutt (2026)

Non-Voting, Ex-officio: Nathan M. Haak

SYNOD EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

SEMINARIES

Concordia Seminary—St. Louis, Missouri

President: Thomas J. Egger

Board of Regents

Chairman: W. Max Mons (2028)

Joel A. Brondos (2026)

Paul P. Edmon (2029)

Peter W.W. Elliott (2032)

Matthew R. Kenitzer (2029)

Bruce E. Keseman (2026)

Adam C. Koontz (2029)

Troy N. Prehar (2032)

Michael S. Staub (2026)

Mark O. Stern (2026)

Timothy J. Wood (2031)

Council of Presidents Appointee:

Ryan D. Wendt

President's Designee: Peter K. Lange

Ex-officio: R. Lee Hagan

Concordia Theological Seminary—Fort Wayne, Indiana

President: Jon S. Bruss

Board of Regents

Chairman: Scott R. Murray (2026)

William M. Cwirla (2026)

David L. Daniels (2026)

Kaibo Feng (2029)

Marcheta Leighton-Beasley (2028)

Korey D. Maas (2026)	Lisa Senkbeil (2026)	Dick L. Helms (2028)
Mark W. Meehl (2026)	Rick Sovitzky (2028)	Timothy Y. Hu (2026)
John L. Powers (2029)	Terrance Wright (2028)	Samuel W. Huebner (2028)
Jeffrey J. Reuer (2029)	Ex-officio: Nathan M. Meador	Trudy J. Meyer (2027)
Matthew W. Rueger (2029)	Concordia University Chicago—River Forest, Illinois	Timothy L. Moll (2026)
Tim Sheldon (2028)	President: Russell P. Dawn	Melanie Standiford (2028)
Beverly K. Yanke (2029)	<i>Board of Regents</i>	Preston O. Sunderman (2028)
Council of Presidents Appointee:	Chairperson:	Douglas P. Tewes (2026)
Roger C. Paavola (2028)	Michelle M. Kazmierczak (2026)	Erik G. Vieselmeyer (2027)
President's Designee:	Vice-Chairman: Matthew Zickler (2028)	Ex-officio:
Scott R. Murray (2026)	Seth M. Clemmer (2026)	Richard L. Snow (2028)
Ex-officio: D. Richard Stuckwisch	Robert M. Doughty III (2028)	
	Kyle Knoepfel (2028)	
UNIVERSITIES	John Krause (2027)	
Concordia University, Irvine—Irvine, California	Aaron Lewis (2028)	
President: Michael A. Thomas	Gerhard Mundinger (2028)	
<i>Board of Regents</i>	Lawrence R. Rast Jr. (2026)	
Chairman: Ryan P. Ermeling (2027)	Larry Richardson (2027)	
Jon Baermann (2027)	Jeff Schwarz (2027)	
Jeffrey S. Beavers (2026)	Frank Simek (2027)	
Jason J. Bredeson (2026)	Jennifer L. Siukola (2026)	
Matthew Flandermeyer (2028)	David Walz (2028)	
Timothy Gast (2028)	Alison Witte (2026)	
Anthony Harnack (2027)	Ex-officio: Allan R. Buss	
David J. Hemker (2026)	Concordia University, St. Paul—St. Paul, Minnesota	
Laura G. Hemminger (2026)	President: Brian L. Friedrich	
Scott Klemsz (2026)	<i>Board of Regents</i>	
Glenn Lucas (2028)	Chairman: Mark L'Heureux (2026)	
Michael McThrow (2026)	Karl Abbot (2026)	
Craig Olson (2026)	Andrew Braun (2027)	
Mary Scott (2026)	Esther Dale (2028)	
Veronica Steele (2028)	Donald Fondow (2026)	
Ex-officio: Michael E. Gibson	Keith Grimm (2028)	
Advisory Members: Michael R. Lange	Andrew Herzberg (2026)	
James B. Maxwell	Paul C. Hinz (2026)	
Christopher Pond	Paul Kieffer (2027)	
Xavria Schwarz	Roger Lindahl (2028)	
Michael T. Von Behren	Jim Linnett (2027)	
Concordia University Wisconsin—Mequon, Wisconsin / Ann Arbor, Michigan	Carrie Meyer (2026)	
President: Erik P. Ankerberg	Marilyn Reineck (2028)	
<i>Board of Regents</i>	Naomi Teske (2026)	
Chairman: David Piehler (2026)	Lori Utech (2028)	
Vice-Chairman:	Pangjua Xiong (2027)	
Jonah P. Burakowski (appointed)	Daniel Zismer (2026)	
Secretary: Jennifer L. Knox (2026)	Ex-officio: Lucas V. Woodford (2028)	
David Bliese (2028)	Concordia University, Nebraska—Seward, Nebraska	
Terry Donovan (2027)	President: Bernard D. Bull	
David C. Fleming (2026)	<i>Board of Regents</i>	
Paula Harris (2026)	Chairman: Dennis L. Meyer (2026)	
Michael W. Henrichs (2028)	Vice-Chairperson: Gail K. Hawkins (2027)	
Jeff Jurss (2028)	Scott T. Adle (2026)	
David Lambert (2026)	Benjamin T. Ball (2026)	
Joe Olson (2026)	Stuart L. Bartruff (2027)	
Brian Peterson (2028)	Craig A. Ernstmeyer (2026)	
Stephen Saunders (2026)	John M. Fraser (2026)	
Jon R. Schumacher (2026)	Douglas A. Gaunt (2028)	

ENTERED INTO REST

Ordained Ministers

Alemu, Zelleke	5/8/24	DeRosa, Rudy Allen	9/19/25	Hofler, Alfred John	12/10/24
Allan, Kenneth Howard (Ken)	7/2/25	Devantier, Paul W	11/30/25	Hofman, Donnie Alan	10/26/24
Allen, Richard Burton	10/22/23	Dissen, David Victor	2/19/26	Holstein, Robert W	10/8/23
Alms, Maurice H	1/23/26	Dorsett, Joseph J (Jody)	7/10/24	Holtorf, Gene Kent	4/2/24
Anacker, Arthur W	7/2/25	Doubek, William Joseph Paul III	5/30/24	Holtz, Alan Edward	11/25/24
Anderson, Mark Asher*	10/24/22	Duddleston, Robert William	11/25/23	Hopkins, John Richard	8/10/24
Anderson, Mark Bishop	7/9/25	Dumer, Lester Herman	7/22/24	Hoppe, Paul Thomas	10/13/25
Anton, Carl John	9/9/23	Dunker, Karl John	6/8/25	Horne, Jan	8/26/24
Ardy, Joseph Michael	9/2/25	Durkovic, John Gerald	8/17/25	Houska, Charles L*	1/27/23
Arndt, Warren Bruce	2/7/25	Dworak, Gary Arthur	3/11/25	Howell, Jeffrey Paul Sr	12/11/25
Atwater, Joseph E Jr	7/1/25	Eckelman, Robert Dean	10/13/25	Huber, John George	11/19/25
Aurich, Leonard Henry	10/22/24	Eggold, Thomas Elmer	8/6/23	Hughes, William John III	7/22/24
Ave-Lallemant, Martin Peter	8/15/23	Egloff, Carl J	7/24/23	Hunsicker, Paul Carl Sr	1/2/25
Avery, Arthur Frederick*	12/4/20	Eiwen, John G	12/31/23	Ilten, James B	1/30/24
Bachman, James Vernon (Jim)	10/25/24	Elsner, Robert C	9/3/23	Ilten, Philip Henry	8/3/23
Bahr, Ferdinand O	3/21/24	Eng, Edward George (Ted)	12/13/25	Ingmire, Richard Lee	11/5/24
Baker, Garth Larry	7/3/25	Etheridge, Daryl Harvey Sr	1/31/25	Isenberg, Gerard E	1/14/26
Baker, Thomas A	10/10/24	Evens, Thomas L	1/22/24	Iverson, Theodore Allan (Ted)	3/14/25
Balfour, Edward Jack (Eddie)	4/2/25	Farah, Ronald Ruda	4/21/25	Jacobsen, Thomas Carl	3/7/24
Balzer, James George	2/1/24	Feller, Robert F	8/2/24	Jansen, Ronald Alden	1/27/24
Barnette, Norman B Jr	10/9/23	Fick, Burneal W A	10/6/23	Jasper, Louis Rudolph	2/3/25
Barnhart, Jerry W	10/25/23	Figuly, Jerome Charles	4/2/25	Jenks, Kenneth Charles (K C)	4/17/25
Bartel, Robert Harold (Bob)	8/26/25	Finke, Norman Roland	7/27/24	Johnson, Daniel Q	11/18/23
Bartz, Robert Otto Jr	7/11/24	Fischer, Donald Gene	9/16/24	Johnson, David P	11/16/24
Beck, Gordon Arthur	3/28/24	Fitzpatrick, Robert Lee	11/21/24	Johnson, Donald William	7/2/25
Becker, Donald Harold	11/29/24	Fleming, James Edward	2/2/25	Johnson, Keith Leonard	7/6/25
Beckmann, William Carl Jr	1/14/24	Fletcher, David G L	8/16/24	Johnson, Scott David	11/20/23
Behnken, Kenneth W	11/14/24	Flory, Mark St Hillier	6/18/24	Kaelberer, John Herbert	9/1/25
Beiderwieden, Theodore W III	4/9/24	Foelber, Paul Frederick	10/1/24	Kallio, John M	9/15/23
Belasic, David Stephen Frank	6/15/25	Fountain, Douglas Elmore	2/6/26	Kass, Robert E	11/29/23
Bertram, Edward Gardus	12/20/24	Franzen, Norman Norris	11/28/24	Kassouf, John F	11/22/23
Besalski, Robert C	11/7/23	Franzmeier, David B	12/11/24	Kayser, Lowell N	9/11/25
Bielenberg, Albert E*	7/3/23	Franzmeier, Wilbur C	1/26/26	Kelly, Kenneth Delwin Sr	4/14/25
Bloom, William W Jr (Bill)	2/14/25	Fridgen, Joel R	9/15/24	Kent, Thomas G	12/11/23
Bode, Edgar William	1/17/26	Friedrich, Henry W	2/6/26	Keuck, Richard L	2/27/25
Bode, Kim Edward	6/9/24	Friedrich, Robert Arthur*	7/8/23	Kietzman, Harvey H	1/24/26
Bodley, Arthur L	8/16/23	Fritz, Jeffrey M	12/24/23	Kipp, David Paul	3/26/24
Boening, Dale David*	7/7/23	Froehlich, Ronald George	1/24/25	Kirst, Donald Robert	4/6/25
Boineau, Edward Livingston	9/5/25	Gade, Dean R	9/23/23	Kitzmann, Merle Philip	5/9/25
Borges, Gary F	1/25/24	Garrels, Dennis Earl (Denny)	3/23/25	Kleinschmidt, Donald William	1/29/25
Boyer, Richard A	4/17/24	Geisler, Jeffrey L	1/27/26	Klemm, Robert C	9/16/24
Brandenburg, Terry L	3/23/24	Gerdas, Christopher Eric	8/5/24	Kloehn, Gordon Alvin	12/28/24
Braun, Alan James	10/12/25	Gerike, Henry Victor	8/6/25	Knappe, Wolf D	1/9/24
Breitwisch, John G	3/19/24	Gieck, William Rudolph	2/2/25	Koch, Robert Alan (Bob)	12/5/25
Brockopp, Elroy David (Roy)	2/1/25	Glander, Dennis E	8/15/25	Koehler, Charles J Jr	9/15/24
Brogaard, John Christ	2/11/24	Glawatz, Dale Fredrick	3/22/25	Kolb, Peter Louis	11/27/24
Brooks, Curtis Wayne	7/11/24	Goebel, Velmer Herman	6/20/25	Kolkman, Allen Patrick	11/30/24
Brunenjes, Irvin H	7/20/24	Golke, Fred W	5/14/24	Koopmann, Gary A	3/27/24
Bruns, Paul Charles	2/18/25	Gray, Barton Carlton	5/3/25	Kramer, Charles F	3/13/24
Buelow, Albert H	4/23/24	Green, Richard Franklin	4/30/25	Kramer, Howard William	2/4/25
Bugtong, Leonardo Robles	9/16/24	Greene, David Lee	11/10/24	Krebs, Roger L	7/11/24
Burce, Willard Lewis	10/4/24	Greenethaner, Edward Richard	3/18/25	Kretzmann, James Paul	1/10/25
Burkey, Richard D*	7/10/23	Grieser, Wilfred John (Willie)	6/3/25	Kretzschmar, Donald Carl	1/9/24
Burow, Erwin Paul (Paul)	3/12/24	Griffin, William Henry Jr	7/20/24	Kretzschmar, Robert James	2/8/24
Campbell, David E	12/2/24	Gross, Gordon Arnos	4/12/25	Kruger, Robert A	4/3/24
Chan, David T	12/14/25	Haas, Mark Wayne	8/13/24	Krueger, George A	1/7/26
Cheney, Robert Earl	1/30/26	Habermas, David John	8/9/25	Krueger, John W	1/7/26
Christiansen, Eric M	1/10/24	Hall, Robert K	2/19/24	Krueger, Willard L	9/12/24
Ciprys, Frank C	9/4/23	Hanan, Norman Arthur	11/28/25	Kruelle, Carl Henry Jr	5/16/24
Clark, Stanley H	11/7/23	Hathaway, Roderick A (Rick)	9/26/24	Krumdieck, Gary Allen	12/3/25
Claycombe, Howard Earl Jr	9/23/23	Haupt, James F	4/10/24	Kruse, David Arthur	6/13/25
Clemons, Daniel F	1/30/24	Hayen, Neil Eugene	8/1/25	Kube, Bernhard Otto	1/25/24
Cole, Christopher L	8/20/24	Heath, Timmothy Warren Sr	8/28/23	Kucenski, William A	1/4/25
Collins, Jerrold Michael	6/28/24	Heimlich, Gerald P	8/29/23	Kuehnert, Philip Rudolph	4/14/25
Conrado, Alfonso	5/13/24	Heinert, Daniel G	12/19/23	Kuhlman, Marvin William	9/24/24
Conradt, Robert James	1/5/26	Heintzen, Erich H III	8/1/24	Kuhn, Robert T	3/1/25
Constien, Victor Albert	8/31/24	Heitner, David D	2/4/26	Lampe, Gary Alan	5/19/25
Cordes, Darowin E	2/4/25	Held, Gary Theodore	10/23/23	Lampitt, Carl Ronald	10/31/24
Coyne, Jonathan Joseph (Jon)	7/25/25	Hendricks, Larry Fred	3/9/24	Langemo, Martin Samuel	12/4/25
Crabtree, Bruce Lee	6/16/24	Henrickson, Charles Michael	4/28/24	Laue, Ronald H	2/9/26
Cramm, Kevin Jay	1/5/25	Henslin, David D	2/9/24	Lebahn, Merle E	8/2/25
Crane, James Jeffrey (Jeff)	11/1/24	Herbolsheimer, James Alan*	9/30/22	Leeman, Karl K*	1/17/23
Davidenas, Eugene David	12/21/23	Hill, Arthur Lee (Art)	10/23/24	Leggett, James E	4/3/25
Davis, Christopher M	10/22/24	Hill, Mark Jerome	2/19/25	Lehenbauer, Victor H*	6/11/23
Davis, Larry F	12/13/25	Hill, Robert W	7/29/25	Lehmann, Carl Alan	10/4/24
De Vantier, Peter A	4/30/24	Hines, Robert Dalbert	11/4/24	Lemmermann, Scott A	11/25/23
Deang, John Changkuoth	3/27/24	Hinkle, Marvin R	12/13/25	Lieber, Kenneth Duane	9/29/24
Dede, John Quintus	1/3/25	Hinman, David Gerald	1/20/25	Lilienkamp, Carl R	1/13/24
Dehnke, Gary Dale	12/27/24	Hinz, Clarence Richard (Clancy)	1/1/26	Lindner, John Thomas	6/7/25
Delgehausen, Loren E	3/15/24	Hinz, Thomas P	10/6/23	Lintvedt, Vernon K	4/11/24
		Hoemann, Gerald L	11/25/24	Little, Donald George	8/30/25

ENTERED INTO REST

xxx1

Lober, John Arnold*	1/27/23	Peterson, Jon David	11/27/24	Skov, Richard Henry	11/5/24
Loeffler, David Glen	8/14/24	Philipp, Earl Dean	4/29/25	Sluberski, Thomas Richard	3/2/24
Lohse, Orville Paul (Paul)	3/15/24	Philipp, Monte Chad*	7/12/23	Smith, Gregory Kent	10/14/24
Look, Lambert Elmer Jr	9/15/25	Piel, Thomas C	11/15/23	Smith, Raymond Allen (Ray)	9/20/24
Loose, Rodney W	5/8/24	Piepenbrink, Kenneth George	4/25/24	Soltis, Thomas	2/13/26
Lopez, Johnny J*	4/15/23	Pierce, Robert J	12/31/23	Song, Kwang Ho Sr*	7/26/20
Lucas, Willie Curtis	2/5/25	Plath, William Henry	7/7/25	Southward, Stephen*	7/4/23
Ludwig, Thomas A Sr	4/4/24	Plvan, George D	9/6/23	Sparks, Steven Earl	1/12/24
Luedemann, Ronald Stuart	10/6/25	Poepfel, Manfred O (Fred)	9/27/23	Sprengeler, Erwin Carl (Mick)	10/8/24
Luinstra, Robert F	8/8/23	Poerschke, James Paul	4/2/24	Sprengler, Donald H	6/13/24
Lunick, Donald William	1/27/25	Pool, John M	9/29/23	Stache, William	7/21/25
Lutz, Carl E Jr	11/17/25	Poovey, David Lester	10/7/24	Steege, Mark W	4/12/24
Lydick, Robert R	2/4/24	Pourchot, Daniel M*	5/30/23	Stein, David Timothy	9/25/23
Lyons, Howard Derr Sr	8/12/24	Praeuner, Daniel Charles	1/7/26	Stelling, John Frederick	1/17/26
MacDonald, Phillip Michael (Mike)	3/11/25	Pragman, James H	7/27/24	Stephens, Jeffrey Bruce	9/23/25
Maier, Paul Luther	2/27/25	Purdy, Edward T*	6/26/23	Stilwell, Samuel James (Samuel)	12/29/23
Malotky, Arden Herbert	9/20/24	Raetz, David W	9/30/24	Stisser, Lee Howard	6/9/25
Mangelsdorf, Kenneth Donald	12/25/24	Ramsey, John Richard	5/3/24	Stohs, Eugene Erich	3/15/25
Mann, Robert H	12/3/23	Ramsey, Thomas G*	12/30/22	Stolz, Nordean A (Dean)	3/18/24
Mashek, John D	12/21/24	Rauschek, Charles August (Chuck)	8/30/24	Streufert, Norbert A	3/29/24
Matasovsky, Daniel Vernon	9/12/25	Reehl, Charles W	2/18/24	Strickert, Robert H	9/27/24
Matthews, Darrell E	5/7/24	Rehmer, Norman James*	7/1/23	Stube, John Carlson	7/15/24
Mayes, James Harold Jr (Jim)	9/9/24	Reich, Arthur William Jr	7/13/25	Stuckmeyer, Charles David	11/22/23
Mc Cormick, Arthur Michael	8/23/24	Reith, Merlin L	7/21/23	Suguitan, John Glenn	7/29/24
Mc Farland, Michael R	8/10/23	Renner, Martin	9/2/23	Sutterer, Paul Robert	12/3/25
McVey, Daniel John	2/3/26	Repp, Arthur Christian Jr	3/27/24	Sutton, Christopher James	10/22/24
Mealwitz, Peter Edward	11/13/23	Reuning, Walter H	2/1/24	Sweney, Richard Elwin Jr (Rick)	2/11/25
Meichsner, James Howard	9/20/24	Rhiver, James William (Jim)	2/13/26	Symmank, Clarence Leo (Leo)	1/1/26
Meinzen, Lawrence Edward*	2/21/23	Richardson, James Martin Sr (Jim)	8/11/24	Szedlak, Erno L	12/30/25
Meissner, Bruce Werner	11/15/25	Richter, Eldor William (Rick)	5/4/25	Taglauer, James R (Jim)	2/14/25
Mertz, Glenn Alvin	12/13/25	Richter, Robert L	6/18/24	Talbot, Morton Peter	11/1/24
Meske, Rodney Myron	4/12/25	Rickus, Robert Lawrence	1/25/25	Teuscher, Michael Lee	5/12/24
Messmann, Warren Edward	10/22/23	Rieck, John Wilbur	1/15/24	Tews, James R	7/15/25
Meyle, Roland Otto	6/3/25	Riemer, Frederick Max	1/8/25	Thiele, Gerald L	11/4/23
Mikulastik, Robert Jackson	11/3/23	Riffel, Elmer Lee	5/16/25	Tiemann, Delbert C	8/16/23
Milbrath, Vance Robert	9/22/24	Robarge, Daryl B	10/25/23	Torgler, Robert H	8/7/23
Miller, Larry A	5/12/24	Roberts, Bradley D*	8/20/22	Tormoehlen, Alger John Theodore	2/7/25
Mock, George W	2/13/24	Roberts, Donald Stephen	9/26/24	Trickey, Gary G*	2/10/23
Moeller, William F Sr	12/30/23	Rodeck, Ronald R	7/26/23	Troxel, Lawrence D (Larry)	11/15/24
Montgomery, John Warwick	9/25/24	Rork, Alan Dea	9/5/24	Turner, James Walter	3/12/25
Moog, Mark Alvin	1/1/26	Rosenblatt, William Rodney	2/2/24	Vanderhyde, Charles Arthur	4/17/25
Moore, William Thomas Jr	1/4/26	Rosnau, Paul O	7/13/24	Vanek, James A	12/5/25
Morales, Christian George	10/1/23	Ross, Grant John	7/21/23	Venzke, Rodger Raland	4/25/25
Morrison, Rodney Leroy Jr	7/24/23	Rotnem, Robert L M	6/18/24	Vieselmeyer, Dean M	10/13/23
Mrochen, George J	11/13/23	Ruble, Eric Ralph	7/30/25	Viggers, David Kenneth	12/4/24
Mueller, James Lee (Jim)	3/31/25	Rudnick, Milton LeRoy	2/21/25	Voigtmann, James Lee	4/18/24
Mueller, Martin Edward	10/20/24	Ruediger, Paul Gerhardt	6/25/25	Volkert, Robert W	9/14/24
Mueller, Paul Gerhardt	11/12/25	Ruthenbeck, Norman J	9/6/23	Volz, Walter David	3/10/25
Mueller, Thomas H	11/29/25	Rynearson, Rodney Richard	7/25/25	Wagner, Richard F	10/31/25
Muench, Paul Edward	6/15/25	Sandberg, Darrill D	8/18/24	Wagner, William W (Bill)	2/16/25
Munoz, Roberto	4/17/25	Sassaman, Roger Lee	9/29/24	Wagstaff, Thomas Leroy	1/5/26
Murawski, Dennis Dean	7/15/25	Sattgast, Dale L	8/1/25	Walsh, Jeffrey Brian	11/21/24
Murdock, Cecil Leon	11/7/25	Scansen, Jerry Paul	11/19/24	Weber, Robert L	10/14/23
Myers, Larry Wayne	5/27/25	Schaefer, Henry Louis	5/6/24	Wederger, Robert B	7/30/24
Naegele, Warren Leroy	9/23/24	Schamehorn, Philip John	11/17/24	Weerts, Milan G	5/27/24
Nagler, Stephen L	9/16/25	Schaser, Rudolf Charles	6/7/24	Wegener, Merlen Fred	2/4/25
Nauss, Allen Henry	9/29/24	Schedler, Marvin Joel	10/22/25	Wegner, Harold G	10/16/24
Nelson, Andrew D*	7/2/23	Scheer, Rodney R	8/4/23	Wegner, Peter Charles	10/22/23
Nelson, David J (Dave)	1/19/26	Scheidt, Paul A	4/5/24	Wehrspann, Dan T	1/24/24
Neumann, Leonard C	4/13/24	Schlecht, Dennis W	7/18/24	Weidner, Arthur P	1/10/24
Nickel, Timothy M	1/4/26	Schleef, Dietrich N	4/29/24	Welsh, Kenneth Woodrow	5/5/25
Niermann, John F (Jack)	9/28/23	Schmick, Victor L	12/5/23	Wendt, Ernest Charles	1/31/26
Novotney, Robert Louis	12/13/24	Schmidt, Warren Walter	2/23/25	Wendt, Harold N	7/13/24
Nuechterlein, Louis G	1/25/25	Schneider, Edward Louis	9/9/25	Werdin, Gregory G	2/10/24
Nuss, David Francis	5/29/24	Schoedel, Walter M	11/9/23	Werth, Luther Arthur (Lu)	9/6/23
Ohlendorf, Ray Rodney	10/10/24	Scholz, Michael P	3/5/24	Westra, John	6/16/24
Okwir, Jacob Paulino	10/26/24	Schoolcraft, Roger P	3/1/25	Whaley, John H	6/25/25
Ollek, Kenneth LeRoy (Ken)	9/22/25	Schroeder, Fredrick F	1/3/24	Wheeler, Jay Roger (J R)	11/3/25
Olson, Roger William	2/2/25	Schuette, Ronald Henry	7/14/24	Wichner, Erwin	9/17/25
Olson, Wayne Franklin*	8/6/21	Schuler, Robert D	9/6/25	Wiechmann, Ralph Edward	10/26/25
Olson, William George (Bill)	7/9/25	Schulz, John Paul (JP)	3/12/25	Wiesner, David E	8/7/24
Orea-Coria, Hiram*	6/15/23	Schumacher, Benjamin Charles	8/30/24	Wieting, Terence James	11/7/23
Orozco, Julio A	11/25/23	Schweim, Fred Arthur (Art)	6/9/25	Wille, John Charles	6/10/24
Oswald, Arthur August David	6/14/24	Secker, Philip James	9/14/24	Williams, Donald Hammond	11/13/24
Otto, Daniel D	10/15/23	Seng, Dan L	1/20/24	Windsor, Thomas J Jr	8/10/25
Otto, Marvin D	1/7/24	Shaw, James E	8/4/23	Wippich, Frederick John Herman Jr (Fred)	6/12/24
Page, James William	5/25/24	Sheldon, Barry Craig	1/7/26	Wobrock, Robert Elmer (Bob)	1/9/25
Parker, Dustin T	1/12/26	Sherouse, Marion Samuel Jr (Sam)	11/14/24	Wolf, Blake G	2/13/24
Parsch, Timothy John	9/6/24	Sherren, Randolph G	2/26/25	Wurm, William C	3/5/24
Patten, Howard Jerome	4/2/25	Sherry, David F	3/8/25	Yaspelkis, Benedict Benjamin Jr	9/30/24
Paul, Robert W	12/21/23	Shoemaker, David T	7/31/23	Yergey, Ronald Carl	1/13/25
Pegorsch, Dennis W	3/6/24	Shuta, Richard Joseph	1/4/25	Young, Paul V	1/30/24
Perez, Claudio Sr	11/20/25	Simon, Arthur R	11/14/23	Yunghans, Charles E*	5/6/23

Zahn, Carleton Edward (Carl)	11/26/25	Gresens, Joan R	12/8/24	Mara, Rodney John	3/29/24
Ziegler, Larry Ellwood	2/1/26	Grimpo, Ronald Dwain	2/12/25	Marino, Quentin	10/12/25
Ziehr, Richard Otto	1/5/24	Groll, David Harold	7/29/24	Marolf, Shirley Ann	4/27/25
Zoebl, George Theodore	12/23/24	Grunst, Nathaniel Mark	8/31/24	Marquardt, Romaine Joy	4/14/24
Zup, Lanny R	5/13/25	Gugel, Ruth E	7/23/24	Marshall, Patricia Lee (Pat)	7/17/25
Zwernemann, James Charles	3/30/25	Haake, Jean Carol	4/25/25	Marxhausen, Benjamin W*	6/29/23
Commissioned Ministers					
Alberda, John	1/31/24	Haertling, Lloyd W	7/17/23	Matern, John H	9/18/23
Andermann, Rosemary Sue	6/16/24	Hart, Leroy John	2/12/24	Melendez, Andrew Alvin Jr (Andy)	8/31/25
Arnold, Barbara Ann*	2/1/23	Hartmann, Della J	2/7/24	Menzel, Eugene W	12/19/23
Baack, Larry Dean	7/20/24	Hauer, Raymond Peter Jr	3/23/25	Meyer, Gerhardt Martin	12/3/23
Bachman, Susan Ortmeier	10/26/24	Hauser, Arlene Joann	9/21/23	Meyer, Judith Ann*	11/26/22
Bachmann, Lori Lynne	12/14/24	Heimsoth, Orlyn A Sr	7/15/23	Meyer, Linda Ann	5/25/24
Barlau, Martin Werner	5/19/25	Held, Michael Philip	3/19/24	Meyer, Wilfred George (Wil)	4/22/25
Bauer, Nancy K*	6/29/23	Heldman, Sandra Joanne	7/3/25	Miessler, Mark L	2/5/24
Baumgart, Edgar R	10/31/23	Hemmann, Oliver R*	7/9/23	Moldenhauer, Herbert C	11/28/23
Baumgartel, Mark William	11/26/24	Hermann, Donald Fred	4/29/24	Moorman, Jill Louise	2/23/24
Becker, Larry D*	11/9/20	Hetz, Ellen M	1/26/24	Morris, Edward William (Eddie)	1/8/26
Behrens, Floyd F*	5/15/23	Hieber, Janice Marie	9/6/24	Morris, Leslie Rollin Winton Jr	10/5/25
Bellin, Willard H	1/4/24	Hoffman, Sandra E*	5/12/23	Morse, Betty Jean	7/29/24
Bierlein, Leon Charles	10/27/23	Hoger, Charles Edward*	12/6/22	Moser, Carl Jerome	5/31/24
Bilich, Andrew Jack (Andy)	10/21/24	Holste, Robert W*	5/6/23	Mueller, Erich P	1/2/25
Blau, Deborah Diane	12/17/23	Holtz, Robert Earl	4/20/24	Mueller, Gene Marie	3/10/24
Boerger, Mark Stephen	10/4/24	Hook, Alta M	8/25/25	Murray, Jami Marie*	12/4/22
Bonitz, William Carl	1/11/25	Hoppmann, Norman G	1/11/24	Natzke, Florence I (Flo)	1/9/25
Braatz, Ruth E	9/15/23	Horst, LeRoy August	10/7/23	Neben, Eldon John (Nobby)	10/18/24
Braeger, Grace Lenore	8/24/23	House, Robert Leonard	3/8/24	Newkirk, Rabel Fred	4/10/24
Brandt, Marvin Jacob Frederick	4/13/25	Hubacek, Carol Lee	9/1/25	Oestmann, Marvin P	11/16/25
Bredehoeft, Kathryn Joanne	8/9/25	Huebschman, Dorothea Elsie	10/29/24	Oettel, Robert Edmund Karl	8/20/24
Brennan, Stephen Michael	3/12/25	Hummel, Ruth Clara*	2/3/23	Olson, Peter Thomas	7/30/25
Bresemann, Linda G	1/24/26	Hurd, James A	7/20/23	Ostermann, Joyce Ann	8/25/24
Brockdorf, Jeanette E I	10/1/23	Husberg, William A	3/24/24	Pagels, James Donald	3/7/25
Brockhoff, Marian Faye	3/15/24	Imes, Kim Rose	9/8/24	Pankow, Marcus George	6/18/25
Brutlag, Marlin John	8/28/24	Jacke, Robert J	4/28/24	Pape, Donald E	8/20/23
Burger, Ronald Gregory	4/8/25	Jacques, Kenneth Leo*	1/29/23	Parker, Krista Jeannine	7/20/24
Butts, LuJuana R*	5/18/23	Jedele, Charles Edward (Chuck)	6/2/25	Petzoldt, Lowell K	9/2/25
Cattau, Rollin Carl	6/30/25	Johnson, James A*	7/23/19	Pfeiffer, Cletus Ralph	10/5/24
Chorley, Carol Ann	8/12/24	Johnston, James C*	5/18/23	Pflieder, Robert W	2/15/24
Christoffersen, Patricia Ann	6/1/24	Jones, Karen Beth*	5/12/23	Pinkepank, Ronald Wayne	3/18/24
Claassen, Walter Bernard	8/12/25	Jones, Lorne E	9/19/23	Plamann, Marvin Henry	9/7/24
Clegg, Robert James	3/8/25	Jopp, Keith Ralph	3/10/25	Polzin, Richard Henry	9/14/23
Cloeter, Hubert Victor (Hub)*	5/5/23	Kammrath, William H	12/23/24	Pralle, Gerhardt Ronald (Gery)	2/11/25
Coffin, Stephanie Lynn	11/9/25	Kampmath, James E	2/22/24	Preuss, Arthur Lee Sr	1/5/25
Cook, Kathryn M	11/26/23	Kaschinske, Kenneth Arthur	11/9/25	Preuss, Elvira Augusta	12/5/24
Crisler, Paul G	10/23/23	Kell, Delmar A	8/1/23	Preuss, William John (Bill)	4/15/25
Crowe, Elizabeth M	1/10/24	Keogh, Kathryn Ann	4/12/25	Raabe, Dean W	1/15/24
Davidsmeyer, Diann Ruth	5/15/24	Kercher, Elaine B*	3/20/22	Rahn, Marlene Delores*	1/20/22
Dembeck, David Earl	12/1/25	Kersten, Jayne E	9/10/23	Rau, Christian W (Chris)	10/1/25
Dickhudt, Robert J*	6/25/23	Kieschnick, Henrietta B	7/15/24	Reinertson, Mickie B	4/20/24
Difatta, David Charles	11/1/24	Kinas, Harold A	3/25/24	Reinke, Ralph L*	4/27/23
Doring, Lois Ruth	12/6/25	Klausmeier, Caroline Lillian	12/1/25	Reisig, Ray David	2/7/25
Duchow, Martin Carl	11/30/23	Klitzing, Gayle L	8/17/23	Reynolds, Earl Lynn*	1/6/23
Duensing, Paul Stephen	3/7/24	Klotz, Verner Halfpap Jr (Vern)	12/26/24	Richert, Ray D	7/16/24
Ebke, Harold Dewayne	8/27/25	Koch, Vernon C	9/9/24	Richter, Agnes Carol*	4/29/20
Eckert, Robert (Bob)	12/29/24	Koerschen, Joel H	4/23/24	Rohe, William James (Jim)*	12/11/20
Eichert, Lawrence R	5/28/24	Korte, Mary H	7/30/23	Roskavich, Eloise Miriam	9/19/24
Elfman, David Henry	9/10/25	Kraft, Glenn O Sr	5/20/24	Ross, Donald Gene*	6/15/23
Engelmann, Annette Susan	10/18/24	Kramer, Roy E	8/19/23	Rowell, Carolyn W	12/14/23
Everts, Carl H	8/7/23	Kramer, Sybil Jean	10/29/25	Rudi, Bruce D	12/24/23
Falkenstern, Eugene	7/21/24	Kratz, Robyn Michelle	7/10/25	Rullman, Jacqueline S (Jacki)	1/2/25
Finley, Margaret Ann	11/26/24	Kromphardt, Wilbur F	1/16/24	Rusch, Wilbert H Jr	7/29/23
Fischer, Jonathan Mark	9/7/25	Kruger, Richard Jon	8/21/25	Sanders, Cheryl Evelyn*	5/26/23
Fisher, Vicki Lee	2/1/24	Kruse, Donna M	4/6/25	Sandersfeld, Lavonne L	11/19/23
Fisk, Alan Clifford (Cliff)	9/3/25	Kufahl, Judith Ann	4/2/25	Schauland, Ernest Peter	2/21/24
Fitzgerald, Lucas Michael	10/24/23	Kunkel, Jesse Herman	9/11/25	Schinnerer, Marilyn*	3/11/23
Florip, Eunice E	9/19/25	Kurth, Elizabeth Frances (Betsey)	4/7/25	Schipper, Stuart P	6/3/25
Footlander, Sara Ellen*	9/9/20	Ladendorf, Gene W*	2/7/23	Schlichting, Albert Carl	2/13/25
Frederking, Dolores Valaria	7/12/24	Ladendorf, Janice F (Jan)*	1/29/23	Schmalz, Paul William*	6/10/23
Frick, Karl George	1/5/25	Ladwig, Barbara-em	3/12/24	Schmidt, Arnold E	11/9/23
Fuchs, Judith Marie	12/16/24	Lambeth, Robert A	7/16/23	Schmidt, Walter Richard	2/20/25
Gasau, William L	12/25/24	Lange, Debra Kay*	5/18/22	Schoervert, Gayle Doris	2/28/25
Gast, Frederick John	6/16/25	Larsen, Strahan M	8/10/25	Schrader, Janice Lynn (Jan)	10/21/24
Gehrs, Pauline A (Polli)	12/1/24	Lemke, Mark A	12/26/24	Schroeder, Arnold Richard	11/2/23
George, Vijayasekaran Daniel (Viji)	2/19/25	List, Patsy L	12/16/24	Schroeder, Linda J	11/12/25
Gerling, Kathleen Jane	6/2/24	List, Vicky L	12/31/25	Schroeder, Lydia Elizabeth*	12/12/22
Geuder, Alan B Jr	3/23/25	Loontjer, Jacqueline Louise	6/12/25	Schroeder, Melvin H	5/5/24
Gleitz, Diane Jean	8/28/23	Lubben, William H	10/21/23	Schultz, Jack Maurice	5/12/24
Goldbeck, Maxine Edith*	6/9/23	Luedtke, Todd Norman	3/15/25	Schultz, Ralph Clarence	9/24/24
Golnick, Merle G	8/31/25	Maas, Richard Edgar Sr (Dick)	8/18/25	Schultz, Ruth Ellen	5/15/24
Golz, Paul Guilbert	1/4/24	Macy, John A	7/8/25	Schwenkhoff, Mary Anita	10/18/23
Gotsch, Marilyn Helen	9/23/24	Mahnke, Glenn Ronald	4/24/25	Seaborn, Jacquelin K	1/25/24
Gottschalk, John Roger	5/25/24	Malzahn, Robert Wayne	10/7/25	Seiler, Christine R*	7/12/23
Gottschalk, Richard Erwin*	1/16/23	Mangels, Hersey Gene	9/26/23	Serck, Leah M	2/19/24
		Manske, Barbara Meinzen	12/6/24	Sikorski, Lois Rosemarie*	11/26/22

ENTERED INTO REST

xxxiii

Simpson, Donald Leon	2/23/25	Van Laningham, Dolores Jeanne Lynne	10/29/24	Wilson, Craig G*	11/7/22
Skvarenina, Joseph Lee	9/16/25	Vanick, Edward W	12/14/25	Woolsey, Judith Ann*	2/3/23
Smith, Burge Carmon	1/9/25	Volk, Susan Marie	12/4/23	Wuertz, Duane W	1/5/25
Snyder, Dorothy Edna*	3/27/23	Von Soosten, Mark Alan	3/15/24	York, JoAnn Marie	2/26/25
Steffen, Lee H	9/10/25	Voss, Ruth M	1/15/24	Zobel, Beth Arlene	3/23/25
Steinmiller, Gary R	2/10/24	Wahner, Laurie J	3/27/24	Zoch, Theodore Fred	1/7/24
Stephens, Marcella Marlene*	2/20/23	Wallace, Shirley Marie	6/8/24	Zwick, Richard Charles	1/7/25
Stresman, Shirley M	11/20/24	Wallis, Diane Dorothy*	6/25/23		
Swanson, David W	7/5/24	Walter, Sandra Kay (Sandy)	7/20/25	<i>This list reflects all deceases reported to the LCMS Department of Rosters, Statistics, and Research Services between July 13, 2023, and March 3, 2026.</i>	
Tagge, Bruce Charles	3/8/25	Walton, Barbara O	8/31/23		
Telschow, Connie Marie	10/1/23	Waterman, Robert C	11/25/23		
Temme, Edwin George	6/11/25	Wegener, Thomas Leonard	6/7/25		
Theisen-Claxton, Hope Renea*	1/5/23	Wegner, Richard T	4/1/24		
Thomas, Jean G	10/29/24	Wehling, Stanley Henry	1/16/25	<i>*Deceased prior to July 13, 2023, with informa- tion received too late to be included in prior list.</i>	
Timken, Gayle LaVerne	5/29/24	Wenthe, Helen Ruby	2/24/25		
Timmer, Doris Irene*	4/5/23	Wenthe, William Dean Sr	9/25/24		
Timmerman, Bernice Irene	10/25/24	Wentzel, Herman Karl	9/28/23		
Trampe, Lois Jeanne*	9/13/18	Whelply, Karen Kay	9/17/24		
Trinklein, Rebecca Marie (Becky)	3/27/25	Wiegand, Jon Matthew	6/3/25		

R1

President

Christ Is Risen Indeed! Alleluia.

The resurrection is the heart of the Christian faith. Christ “was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). The deed is done. Our sins, the sins of the whole world, have been paid for; atonement is made. And even more, there is a general verdict of justification, reconciliation, and forgiveness already rendered 2,000 years ago in Christ. The benefits are delivered in the Word of the Gospel, the Gospel of Baptism, and the Gospel of Christ’s body and blood. There is nothing to do to obtain God’s favor but believe it.

You are baptized. The resurrection is yours now. The new life—resurrection—has hold of you now.

News flash! Here is some GOOD news before you dig into this report. Analysis of congregation reports shows adult confirmations have since 2022 been *significantly* above the long-term (negative) trend—which, at very least, makes up for the significant 2020–21 COVID-19 drop. We are confirming adults at a rate similar to that reported in 2018. While that rate is about a third of that reported in 1998, we are holding and may be gaining ground again. All over the Synod, you’ve been telling me you are seeing people, families, and especially young men “showing up out of the blue.” Thanks be to God!

Phoenix in July? Yes. The President of the Synod chooses the date of the convention, while the Board of Directors (BOD) selects the location. Although St. Louis is the preferred site according to our Bylaws, the BOD often opts for other venues to save a million or two. We’ll be informing delegates about heat precautions, as Phoenix can experience extreme temperatures in July. Despite this, **plan on a great experience.** Our conventions are extremely edifying and informative. The refrain I hear over and over again from delegates is “I can’t believe everything our Church is doing for the sake of Christ and His Gospel.” The vast majority of convention decisions are made by overwhelming majorities—often 90 percent or higher. I’m looking forward to seeing all of you!

Strong Seminaries: Our two seminaries, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW), and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (CSL), are strong and getting stronger. We have a clear public confession of the authority of the inerrant Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions. Without that, we would be lost. I meet regularly with both seminary presidents. In fact, we recently spent a day together with our international mission leaders discussing global work and priorities, and I am pleased to say we’re all on the same page! We have many outstanding new seminary professors. Morale is good, and both schools are blessed financially. Thankfully, the Synod has been able to provide millions of dollars in support to the seminaries each triennium. I’m particularly encouraged by the growing partnership between both seminaries and the Office of International Mission for church planting work and global theological education. The Synod has repeatedly committed itself to residential seminary education. Carefully read the Pastoral Formation Committee reports (R13–13.6) found in the *Convention Workbook*. They explain some modest adjustments to the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program. SMP pastors have been a blessing and will continue to be so, especially where a congregation cannot obtain a regular seminary graduate. However, SMP pastors receive 36.7 percent of the coursework of the residential program. We cannot sustain the

long-term theological and practical health of our ministerium if a larger and larger percentage of our pastors are not residentially trained.

Strong (and Getting Stronger) Concordia Universities: The past decade was a challenging one for our Concordia universities, but the light is dawning. The downsizing of Concordia University Ann Arbor was particularly painful. Ambiguity, tolerance, and even advocacy of views of sex contrary to the Bible had gained a foothold at Concordia University, Portland; Concordia College New York; and Concordia University Texas; and these ideas were creeping in elsewhere. The 2023 convention, in close cooperation with the presidents of the remaining Concordia institutions, established a new governance structure of the schools. And it’s working. I’m proud of all our schools and their leadership. And more important, our universities are proud to adhere to the public confession of the LCMS.

Set Apart to Serve: Our efforts through the Rev. Dr. James A. Baneck and the Office of Pastoral Education with *Set Apart to Serve*, which has been adopted by all districts, are beginning to pay off. We are seeing increased enrollment numbers in church work programs at all our universities and seminaries. Lord, have mercy! See details in the reports below.

Review and Revision of “Reconciliation” Bylaws: After living with the bylaws on “reconciliation” for several decades, it’s time to revisit them. While the current process has reduced the number of “official” conflicts, it is onerous and often yields dissatisfying outcomes for all parties. I’m suggesting we assemble a task force to investigate and suggest bylaw revisions to the 2029 convention.

Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR): You have access to all CTCR reports and opinions from the past triennium in this workbook. The report on the proper administration of the Lord’s Supper is particularly helpful. I’ve noticed the use of grape juice far too often. (The Synod has spoken clearly and biblically on this several times.) The report also strongly discourages pre-packaged elements and odd methods of consecration. I requested an opinion and guidelines for the age-old practice of “lay readers,” or men who lead a non-Communion liturgy and read a pre-prepared sermon.

Council of Presidents (COP): The COP functions like a healthy circuit. At each meeting, members provide regular exegetical, confessional, and casuistry studies. The group is remarkably stronger theologically than it was 16 years ago, and it is getting stronger every triennium. We deal with exceedingly challenging issues, but we always do so with honesty and respect. At my urging, this past triennium, we worked through the Rev. Dr. Hellmut Lieberg’s *Office and Ordination in Luther and Melancthon* (Concordia Publishing House, 2020), which I had commissioned Matthew Carver to translate. It’s a tour de force on Luther’s doctrine of the Office of the Ministry, the spiritual priesthood, and all related issues. It happens to demonstrate that the first Synod President, C.F.W. Walther, got Luther’s doctrine, and that of our Confessions, correct, with both a high view of the spiritual priesthood of all the baptized and a high view of the office of pastor. I enjoy presenting a theological paper or translation at almost every meeting.

More Authority for the Mission Boards: The BOD is submitting an overture to grant the Boards for National and International Mission greater supervisory authority. This is also a reduction in the authority of the Synod President. It is a good move.

Board for National Mission: This board and its office, the Office of National Mission (ONM), are charged with working together with the districts of the Synod to provide assistance and resources for the domestic life and mission of our congregations. Our connections with the 35 districts, district presidents, and mission executives have never been better. Our Church Planting initiative is humming. Discipleship and Family Ministry resources are ramping up. And this is an effort that is unapologetically Lutheran, committed to the “order” of the Divine Service and the use of the hymnal. Free evangelism resources under *Every One His Witness* are available at everyonehiswitness.org, as are free *re:Vitality* church revitalization tools, which are available by contacting ONM. New resources regarding incorporating members into the congregation will be available at no cost later this year. Also, watch for what’s happening in our new *All Nations* effort, which is pulling together and resourcing efforts among many and various nationalities here in the U.S.

LCMS Schools \$1,700 Tax Credit: The federal tax bill passed last year provides a new tax credit (effective January 2027) that allows eligible taxpayers to donate up to \$1,700 to covered scholarship-granting organizations. For this, the taxpayer receives a dollar-for-dollar tax credit. That means up to a \$1,700 reduction of federal income tax for dollars donated to a Lutheran school. Details are still pending, but we’re on it. And increased dollars, along with the faithful efforts of our Lutheran schools, have meant that we’ve seen an increase in LCMS school planting efforts, as more and more we’re asked to do Genesis Project studies to help start Lutheran schools.

Pastor and Church Worker Health and Well-Being: If you’ve attended a DOXOLOGY retreat, it’s more than likely that we’ve funded a portion of it. We are also able to provide dollars for Shepherd’s Canyon Retreat Ministry. Both DOXOLOGY and Shepherd’s Canyon are LCMS recognized service organizations dedicated to the care and well-being of church workers and their spouses. Soldiers of the Cross also provides financial support to pastors and church workers facing particularly difficult circumstances, often by matching funds provided by the district.

LCMS Life Ministry: The Synod is the most recognized non-Catholic pro-life church in America. We are glad to stand for life with others in the public square. Over the past triennium, we have offered several millions in matching dollars to the life efforts of local LCMS congregations and entities. At last count, we have assisted 640,000 mothers and children through this effort. Unbelievable.

Office of International Mission: Despite deep challenges, the Lord continues to bless. Our missionaries have consistently been funded over a year ahead of need. That has dipped slightly as of late, but only because so many new missionaries have been added to our fields. Our Mission Central, located in Iowa and a vital extension of the work and service of LCMS Mission Advancement, does a phenomenal job supporting our missionaries and international efforts, raising millions of dollars. One-third of LCMS congregations support missionaries directly! That happens because missionaries personally visit congregations. Through missionary visits, congregations feel they know “their” missionaries and families. This type of connection ensures support through all economic trends. We’ve had quite a few retiring missionaries. We thank God for each and every one, but we can also thank God for a record year for new international missionary recruitment.

New Churches in Rome and Tel Aviv: Hard to believe, but we’re there—and in many other places across Europe. And finally, there is a start in Israel. Thanks be to God. Since our necessary break with the Japanese church in 2023 over the ordination of women, several faithful house churches have been established in the country.

Books in Many Languages: There has been a renaissance, even a revolution, in the publication and distribution of faithful, biblical, Lutheran books and resources. The Lutheran Heritage Foundation is a key partner here. In addition to a new Spanish hymnal, there are dozens of serious theological resources now translated through our Latin America regional office. And the list continues to grow! The same is true for Europe. Many of these resources are being used to help our All Nations Ministry support congregations as they reach out to our neighbors here in the U.S. who speak other languages. It’s a joy to hear about how we’re reaching out to our neighbors here and around the world.

Church Relations: This past triennium, we continued our recently established International Church Relations Conferences. Last fall in Wittenberg, we hosted 100 individuals from around the globe to study and discuss church fellowship. I presented a paper on admission to the Lord’s Supper in the Lutheran Confessions. Per Synod resolution, we have been urging our LCMS partner churches to leave the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The LWF is an organization driven by ELCA-type priorities and has had a profoundly detrimental theological impact wherever it has exerted influence. Our sister churches recognize the problem and are responding in ways that uphold the true Gospel of Jesus Christ in all its articles. Some churches have left the LWF. Of nine LCMS sister churches still LWF-affiliated, three are in the process of leaving. The issue is compounded by the fact that, years ago, some LCMS leaders and missionaries encouraged membership in the LWF.

Issues Resolved: There have been long-standing issues between the Ontario, Canada, congregations of the LCMS English District and the East Region of Lutheran Church—Canada (LCC). I’m happy to say that, through a *Koinonia* effort, those issues have been resolved, and we are now embarking on a new, hopefully fruitful, relationship among the districts, the LCC, and the LCMS.

Ongoing Conversations: We continue to hold annual conversations with our former partners in the Synodical Conference, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), who broke fellowship with us in 1955 and 1963, respectively. These conversations are a joy and a great blessing. This past triennium, I spoke to both synods at their conventions. I am the first LCMS president welcomed to address these bodies in convention in over 63 years.

We have very broad doctrinal agreement, and previous caricatures have been eliminated. Our separated brothers have a profound love for the sacred Scriptures. We have come to a much better understanding of the Office of the Ministry and, after many hours, have noted that we could probably accept the differences of emphases that were present well before fellowship was broken. The nature of fellowship remains a challenge, but we in the LCMS now recognize greater nuance in the ELS/WELS positions than we previously thought. The role of women also remains a difficult challenge, as we are all wrestling with how to be biblically faithful while honoring women as fellow spiritual priests. Overall, I think it’s fair to say that we have all been encouraged by the progress made.

World Theological Leadership: The LCMS is, by far, the most heavily resourced *Book of Concord* church in the world. By God's grace, the church founded in 1847 by our forebears, through many toils and snares, has remained faithful to its charter. We confess the full authority of the inerrant Scriptures and the full truth of our *Book of Concord*, just as those dozen original congregations did in 1847. That is a miracle. As President of the Synod, I serve on the executive committee of the International Lutheran Council. This body brings together representatives of churches with which we are in fellowship, along with others who desire to be *Book of Concord* Lutherans, many of whom participate as non-voting members. Through our presence, our support, our church planting, our publishing (Concordia Publishing House [CPH]), and our theology and seminaries, we have an enormous global impact for good. Churches around the globe are pressed by radical secularism, liberal theology, and bad theology, such as Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel. They seek our help—and most often, what they seek is not financial aid but theological education and guidance. It is our sacred duty to join this mission of the Gospel, providing Lutheran pastors and faithful teaching to millions.

Lutheran Leadership Development: Some years ago, CPH sought to impact global Lutheranism as well as open new markets for its stellar projects. I suggested an effort to train global leaders in church leadership. The result was a partnership between the LCMS President's Office, CPH, and CTSFW. This has resulted in dozens of men being trained to effectively and theologically lead in their churches. The effort continues apace.

New Partner Churches: Conversations continue. The convention will be asked to ratify fellowship with the Lutheran Church of Bolivia. Following the theological demise of the Lutheran Church of Australia, a new church has emerged and is thriving: Lutheran Mission—Australia. We are providing assistance, and our theological talks have been tremendous. Prospects for fellowship are excellent.

Ann Arbor: Much to our chagrin, the regents of Concordia University Wisconsin (CUW) opted to reduce operations in Ann Arbor, effectively closing the south campus of Concordia University Ann Arbor (CUAA). This was a deep blow to many, especially within the Michigan District. A decade ago, CUAA was threatened with closure. At that time, the entire Concordia University System Board of Directors—except for my appointee—voted to close it. I had been told that the Rev. Dr. Patrick Ferry had been asked whether Concordia University Wisconsin (in Mequon) could assume responsibility for the CUAA school, but he had declined. Because the situation was dire, I phoned Dr. Ferry directly. He told me that he had not been asked, and he agreed to look into it. Eventually, the Church Extension Fund in Michigan provided funds, the Synod added several million dollars, and CUW contributed the bulk of \$10 million to save CUAA. As a result, the school continued to operate for another decade as the Ann Arbor campus owned and operated by CUW. Thanks be to God. More recently, new leadership took the helm at CUWAA, and finances were considerably tighter. In February, prior to the announcement of a downsizing at the Ann Arbor campus, I was informed that something significant was coming. I asked for the financials and requested that the Synod's chief financial officer assemble a small group of financial experts from the other Concordia universities—excluding CUWAA—to evaluate the situation. They did so, and the conclusion was stark: a critical situation. CUW had spent tens of millions to keep CUAA operating. Even record CUAA enrollment, which we all rejoiced over,

was costing more than tuition was generating, particularly because athletic programs were expensive to maintain. The regents had not previously seen the full cost to operate CUAA, as its finances were not clearly separated on the balance sheet. I requested that leadership at Concordia University, St. Paul, explore whether they might assist in some way. There was a conversation, but no workable outcome was found. I also urged the regents at CUWAA to retain as many programs as possible at CUAA, and I urged leadership to preserve options for the CUAA south campus, knowing how important the property was for the Michigan District. I requested a meeting between Michigan District leadership and CUWAA leadership, and for a time there was progress and even a tentative agreement on next steps. Unfortunately, that effort soon fell apart. Ultimately, the regents at CUWAA had the constitutional responsibility to make a decision, and they did so out of concern that, without very significant cost reductions, the entire university would be placed in jeopardy. There were also very significant reductions at CUW in Mequon. We continue to pray for healing for all involved.

Concordia Publishing House: Remarkably, CPH continues to buck the trend of decline among denominational publishing houses and has shown positive revenue for five years in a row. And what remarkable products they continue to produce! The Concordia Commentary series is gold. The President's Office assisted, among several others, in the translation and publication of *A History of the Dissolution of the Ancient Liturgical Forms in the Lutheran Church of Germany* by Paul Graff (1878–1955).

Concordia Plan Services (CPS): The LCMS BOD just approved the creation of an entity that will provide property and casualty liability insurance to corporate Synod, LCMS congregations and their schools, agencies, and other entities. This is very exciting, as costs to our people have exploded in this area. This will help to make insurance more attainable for our congregations and schools, and the savings will mean more resources for our work of witness and mercy as God's Church. There are also great things happening at the LCMS Foundation and LCEF, but I'll have to refer you to their respective reports.

Financial Strength: The LCMS is probably in as strong a financial state as it has been in 40 years. Our cost of funds routinely hovers around 10 cents on the dollar, and our program efficiency ratio is 78 percent; that is, 78 percent of all income goes directly to programs. This reflects the tremendous generosity of the Synod's people. Our expenditures are about \$80 million per year. The BOD has mandated that we should have a significant reserve as insurance against catastrophic financial circumstances. About \$12 million a year comes from your congregational plate to Synod, Inc., in St. Louis, through your districts. Those dollars assist especially in all the nuts-and-bolts items that keep Synod, Inc. functioning smoothly—from legal protection (often for your congregation or district) to ecclesiastical support, accounting and financial work, communications, rosters and statistics, and much more.

Ecclesiastical Supervision: I used to say, "Wow, my job is nothing compared to what Rev. Dr. J.A.O. Preus II went through in the 1970s." That's certainly true. But President Preus never had the internet to deal with. Instant communication. Instant judgment. Dealing with problems of doctrine and practice requires some deliberation and conversation. The online world does not grant that. And it demands all information and all justification now. Some matters are black and white. Many are nuanced. Some are thoroughly confused. But by the nature of the beast, dealing with individuals or a congregation is not something that is done in front of the public,

at least while there's a chance of repentance and correction. Luther said, "Doctrine is heaven. Life is earth." We ought to suffer no false doctrine, but in this life, because sin abounds even among us Christians, there has to be some mercy. Thankfully, doctrine is clear. It's the teaching of Holy Scripture. And biblical moral expectations are also clear. But we remain sinners. When some scandalous issue arises—as they always have—it's asserted that such a matter defines the whole Synod. That would be the case if there were no engagement with the matter and no repentance. About 90 percent of the issues of ecclesiastical supervision that I discuss with district presidents are addressed calmly and corrected before they ever reach the public.

District Visitations: Since becoming president, we began a program of regular, intensified visitation to all 35 districts. These have mostly been in person with district presidents, boards of directors, staff, and/or circuit visitors. We've gotten through most of the districts again this triennium. These are very positive opportunities to raise any and all issues and to have a conversation. We are accountable to each other for what we believe, teach, and confess, and for the sacred mission of the church that we steward. I'd estimate we've completed roughly 100 such visitations. I'm also responsible for new district president orientation, and we've greatly emphasized the benefits and importance of regular visitation by district presidents (and their representatives in very large districts). The Constitution of the LCMS depends heavily upon this visitation, so we as a church body remain united in doctrine and also united in love. It's a never-ending task.

The Lutheran Witness: Founded in 1882 as the official magazine of the English Synod and becoming the English-language popular publication of the LCMS when the English Synod joined in 1911, *The Lutheran Witness* remains our chief publication for teaching the faithful. We conducted a thorough survey of readers last year, and the magazine scored tremendously, with the vast majority responding that the content was just about right, neither too fluffy nor too erudite.

Recognized Service Organizations (RSOs): We've received some public criticism for association with Lutheran organizations that are promoting homosexuality or adoption by same-sex couples or this or that. Often, the organization in question is not associated with—or is no longer associated with—the LCMS. Our RSO staff is small but diligent. In just the past two years, 28 new applications and 53 renewals have been processed, 64 certificates of approval were sent, and 44 terminations/withdrawals/dissolutions/denials were recorded. Organizations granted RSO status agree to respect and not act contrary to the doctrine and practice of the Synod. When I became head of LCMS World Relief and Human Care in 2001, we were working jointly with staff of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to grant status and monitor RSOs. At that time, there continued to be a tremendous push by LCMS and ELCA staff to get as many organizations recognized by the LCMS and affiliated with the ELCA as possible. Over the past three years, some 50 agencies have ceased to be LCMS RSOs. Many of those were organizations whose practice aligned with the ELCA's position on sexuality. It's a tedious process sometimes, especially if an LCMS district is a co-owner or otherwise listed in the organization's bylaws. It takes time ... but we're getting there.

500th Anniversaries: The great third-generation Wittenberg theologian Friedrich Balduin, in his commentary on Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi (1610), wrote that "there is always need of reformation in the Church" (*semper in Ecclesia opus esse Reformatione*).

As we approach two tremendous anniversaries, this phrase comes to mind. In 2029, Luther's Small Catechism will be 500 years old, and in 2030, our wonderful Augsburg Confession will be 500 years old. Renewal in faith, renewal in confession, and renewal in mission always happen in surprising ways in the Church. It's always a result of the cry "Back! Return!" In 8:20, Isaiah called the people back "to the teaching and to the testimony!" Jesus stood in the synagogue and called the people back to the words of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Luke 4:18). Then He said, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). Luther called the Church back to Christ and His apostolic, biblical truth. Our own Dr. Walther called the Church of his time back to the faithful teachings of the true Lutheran Church: Bible, catechism, Augsburg Confession!

It's a rough world. Our world and nation are deeply divided and afflicted by sin. It affects every aspect of our lives, our families, and our church. Confusing messages and situations surround us, envelop us and threaten to drown our loved ones and us. "Lord, to whom shall we go?" Christ is risen! Alleluia! Listen to the risen Shepherd's voice!

Death is overcome in Christ's resurrection. Luther spoke on St. Paul's wonderful words that Christ is "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20). He wrote: "The resurrection is to be viewed and understood as having already begun in Christ, indeed, as being more than half finished, and that this remnant of death is to be regarded as no more than a deep sleep, and that the future resurrection of our body will not differ from suddenly awakening from such sleep. For the main and best part of this has already come to pass, namely, that Christ, our Head, has risen. But now that the Head is seated on high and lives, there is no longer any reason for concern. We who cling to Him must also follow after Him as His body and His members. For where the head goes and abides, there the body with all the members must necessarily follow and abide. As in the birth of a man and of all animals, the head naturally appears first, and after this is born, the whole body follows easily" (*Luther's Works*, American Edition [LW], 28:110).

"Fear not," Luther reminds us. Christ's resurrection is so powerful that it's as though we, too, are half out of the grave already! "A Christian has already been thrust into death by the very fact that he became a Christian. Wherever he may be, he occupies himself with this hourly. He expects death any moment so long as he sojourns here, because devil, world, and his own flesh give him no rest. However, *he enjoys the advantage of already being out of the grave with his right leg*. Moreover, he has a mighty helper who holds out His hand to him, namely, his Lord Christ; He has left the grave entirely a long time ago, and now He takes the Christian by the hand and pulls him more than halfway out of the grave; only the left foot remains in it. For his sin is already remitted and expunged, God's wrath and hell are extinguished, and he already lives fully in and with Christ with regard to his best part, which is the soul, as he partakes of eternal life" (LW 28:133, emphasis added).

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. (Rom. 6:4–6)

You are baptized. The resurrection is yours now. The new life—resurrection—has hold of you now. Christ is risen! Alleluia!

Let's go.

Matthew C. Harrison, *President*

R1.1

Church Relations

Holding to God's Word Alone in Christ!

Holding to God's Word alone in Christ is the basis of our faith, the biblical principle for ecumenism, and the means for recognizing church body fellowship. This is not Gospel reductionism; it is God's powerful Word conveying its own meaning, movement, and purpose. It is how the Holy Trinity works out salvation history and creates church fellowship in the Son.

God the Father Almighty created heaven and earth (Gen. 1:1). The Scriptures testify that as the Spirit hovered over the waters, God spoke and by the power of His Word created light and life, flora and fauna, Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:2–31). With the fall into sin, there came two ways to understand God and His will for His people: to hear God's Word as true and trustworthy, or by human reason and experience to fashion an alternative god and purpose. Clearly, if one believed that God created the world by His Word, it would make sense to take that Word to heart. That did not stop humanity from seeking alternative meaning and purpose by projecting human reason and experience into a garden, later into a pantheon of gods, and today into self-glory and human redefinition. Creation, brought into being by the Word, brings God's meaning and purpose in that Word, but some take stock in their own fabricated foundation.

God the Son—the eternal Word—took on human flesh from the womb of the Virgin Mary to be our Redeemer. He came to keep the Law's requirements and fulfill the Gospel promises recorded in the inspired, inerrant Word of God. This the Old Testament prophets foretold and to this the New Testament apostles testified. As our Redeemer and out of divine love, Christ lived to obey the Law in our place, died to atone for sin, rose to justify sinners, and ascended into heaven to send His Spirit. Into the pastoral office He ordained and installed His apostles to preach the Gospel, forgive sin, administer the Sacraments, and teach the fullness of His Word (Matt. 28:17–20; Mark 16:15–16; Luke 24:46–49; John 20:21–23).

The risen Christ teaches that all Holy Scripture is about the redemption He brings: "Everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. ... Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations" (Luke 24:44, 46–48). Nonetheless, apart from and against the Word, the Scriptures warn that some teachers shape another Christ, denying Gospel (Gal. 3:1–2) or Law (2 Peter 2:12–22) or incarnation (2 John 7) or atonement (Heb. 10:19–26).

God the Holy Spirit works through the Word and Sacraments of Christ to be our Sanctifier. By these means, the Spirit creates and sustains saving faith, forgives sins, empowers the fruits of faith, unites believers to Christ, conforms them through suffering to the Son's image, and seals them unto the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting. This work of sanctification is truly a divine gift to the individual, but not an individualistic deposit—it is the Spirit's

gift as He creates, preserves, and extends the holy Christian Church. The Church lives by the Word of Christ and confesses forgiveness, life, and salvation in Him: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16).

What holds true in the first two articles of the Creed (for creation and redemption) also holds true here in the third (for sanctification and the life of the Church): The Word conveys its own meaning, movement, and purpose. Nowhere is this clearer than in the doctrine and practice of church fellowship. The Word that creates faith is the same Word that unites the faithful. In His High Priestly Prayer, Christ reveals the Word as the divine instrument of love that creates saving faith and binds His Church together through a united confession of His Word: "Holy Father, ... I have given them your word. ... Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth ... that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us ... so that the world may believe that you sent me and loved them" (John 17:11–23).

The New Testament witnesses understand church fellowship as confessional unity in the Word, which includes the Sacraments instituted by Christ's Word. The 3,000 baptized on Pentecost "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). In St. Paul's locus on Communion fellowship, he defines the Sacrament as "the communion of the blood of Christ ... [and] the communion of the body of Christ" (1 Cor. 10:16 NKJV) and concludes, "For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread. ... Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" (1 Cor. 10:17–18 NKJV). Yes, those who partake thereby confess their unity in what that altar stands for. Similarly, St. Paul says that in communing, you are making a proclamation of what you believe: "You proclaim the Lord's death" (1 Cor. 11:26). The reverse also holds: Those not agreed in the divine doctrine are not recognized for fellowship. "Watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them" (Rom. 16:17).

The Lutheran Confessions follow this biblical teaching. Church body fellowship is based on agreement "in the doctrine [of the Gospel] and all its articles" (FC SD X 31), that is, in all doctrine pointing to and flowing from the Gospel. The Solid Declaration's Comprehensive Summary (CS) explains this: "For thorough, permanent unity in the Church, it is necessary, above all things, that we have a comprehensive, unanimously approved summary and form of teaching. The common doctrine must be brought together from God's Word and reduced to a small circle of teaching, which the churches that are of the true Christian religion must confess" (FC CS 1). The Solid Declaration understands that its own articles convey this "small circle of teaching," in accord with the original meaning of the Augsburg Confession and the other confessional documents, and that the Old and New Testaments provide "the only true standard or norm by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged" (FC CS 3).

Church body fellowship based on confessional unity does not undercut the unity that all Christians have with the Triune God in Christ Jesus. Faith unites the baptized with Christ (*unio mystica*) and with each other as His Body, the one holy Christian and apostolic Church (*una sancta*). Church fellowship takes that unity seriously, requiring that the Gospel in all its articles—God's means to create and sustain saving faith—be taught purely by a church before recognizing fellowship and sharing Word and Sacrament ministry, lest the Word of God and salvation in Christ be corrupted.

The Word of God is a powerful and active Word that conveys its own meaning, movement, and purpose. The Word that creates personal faith, and sanctifies and enlivens the whole Christian Church, is the same Word that unites the faithful. Holding to God's Word alone in Christ is the basis of our faith, the biblical principle for ecumenism, and the means for recognizing church body fellowship so that the churches may rightly collaborate in Word and Sacrament ministry. No ambiguities in, additions to, or subtractions from God's Word may be allowed. We hold to God's Word alone in Christ!

Church Relations Overview

LCMS Church Relations (CR) is part of the LCMS Office of the President. The President of Synod is the Synod's Chief Ecumenical Officer and oversees all LCMS global ecclesiastical relations. On his behalf and based on his guidance, the CR staff provide daily strategic-, operational-, and tactical-level leadership, planning, and support for confessional Lutheran "bishop-to-bishop" relations worldwide. Rev. Dr. Jonathan E. Shaw is the CR director, Rev. Michael N. Frese is the CR deputy director, and Rev. James A. Krikava is the CR area representative for Europe and North America.

The Rev. James Krikava will retire from his position as LCMS Church Relations area representative for Europe and North America on July 31, 2026, having served in this position with distinction and faithfulness since April 2024. His service to the LCMS extends back to 2014 when, having been ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1983, he joined the LCMS ministerium through colloquy to serve as regional director for the OIM Eurasia Region (2015–22) and later as associate executive director for the Office of International Mission (OIM). Rev. Krikava's extensive missionary experience in the Czech Republic and Eastern Europe (1990–2006), combined with his pastoral ministry and theological education background, uniquely equipped him for fostering confessional Lutheran relationships across Europe and North America. His remarkable musical gifts—occasionally heard echoing in Wittenberg and LCMS conventions—enriched his service to the church. The LCMS gives thanks to God for his decades of faithful service in advancing church fellowship in Christ worldwide, for his wise counsel in navigating complex ecclesiastical relationships, and for his steadfast commitment to the Gospel and the Lutheran Confessions. As he reminds us, "Always more Lutheran, never less!" We commend him and his wife, Peggy, to the Lord's continued blessing as they celebrate 50 years of marriage in September 2026 and enjoy their family of two daughters and one son, their spouses, and ten grandchildren.

The purpose of CR is to advance church fellowship in Christ worldwide. Toward this end, the CR mission is to collaborate with sister churches (43) in altar and pulpit fellowship, strengthen associate churches (38) toward future fellowship, and work with other church bodies (23) for faithful ecumenism. These 104 church bodies in 73 countries represent 22 million people. For a list of these churches and a practical way to pray for them, with details on the three categories of ecclesiastical relations, see the end of this report.

CR works with vital stakeholders in its mission. First are the leaders of supported sister, associate, and other church bodies, placed by God in their churches to teach the Gospel in all its articles, reflect confessional unity in historic worship, protect against false doctrine and practice, and share the diversity of God's gifts for the common good. The OIM plants Lutheran missions and conducts missions-based theological education. Our two Synod seminaries

send theologians to strengthen sister and associate churches in confessional Lutheran theology and receive students for formation as pastors and church leaders. CR, OIM, and the seminaries are working more closely together than ever: Last December we conducted a global summit to ensure mutually supportive theological education goals in courses, educators, and objectives. The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) conducts critical reviews and recommendations for convention approval for recognizing altar and pulpit fellowship. LCMS members, congregations, and districts provide prayers, offerings, and ministry support coordinated through CR, and work in their own backyard with the global church diaspora. Finally, the International Lutheran Council (ILC) promotes confessional Lutheranism around the world through conferences, leadership programs, and mutual encouragement.

CR prioritizes three ways of ecclesiastical support: the annual International Church Relations Conference (ICRC), regional gatherings, and church body visitation. In each year of the last triennium, CR sponsored about 100 international church body presidents, bishops, and leaders at its ICRC held in Wittenberg, Germany. ICRC themes were "Confessional Lutheran Leadership under the Cross" (ICRC 2023), "Christ—The Lord of History" (ICRC 2024), and "Church Body Fellowship" (ICRC 2025). The purpose of the ICRC is to enhance unity in Christ and His Word in worldwide confessional Lutheranism through theological presentations, thoughtful discussion, edifying worship, invigorated friendship, and mutual support. International speakers, multi-lingual liturgies, and cultural/theological outings round out the ICRC experience. Each ICRC publishes a book of essays and select video presentations as sister and associate church take-home resources.¹ Regional gatherings discuss church body opportunities, challenges, and partner support, and offer well-attended theological education. Church body visitations help build strong relationships, mutual trust, and collaborative plans, with time for theological dialogue and education.

Some CR Highlights by Region

Europe

Lutheran World Federation (LWF) 13th Assembly, Sept. 13–19, 2023, Kraków, Poland

In September 2023, Dr. Shaw attended the every-seven-year LWF Assembly in visitor status. The essays, public statements, and adopted resolutions followed the LWF's 50-year decline—its rejection of the historic Lutheran doctrine of justification and the related practice of church unity, its arc toward secular humanism, its self-definition as a practicing communion based on reconciled diversity, its confusion of the two kingdoms, and its tragic loss of the Gospel of free forgiveness of sins and justification by faith in Christ. Instead, a liberal agenda of political, social, sexual, gender, and environmental justice and reconciliation was propagated.

There were some changes compared to past LWF assemblies: an increased use of Lutheran terms given new meanings, explicit condemnations of those who teach the verbal inspiration of Scripture with an intended sense, and a soft-pedaling of sexual and gender issues problematic to the Global South. Christ became the divine disruptor of the status quo, the theology of the cross became Christ taking on the vulnerabilities of the human body to suffer violence at the hands of the unjust power structures of His day, and the Gospel became the human work of serving "bodies of displaced, marginalized and excluded people around the world."²

At the January 2024 Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort

Wayne (CTSFW) Confessions Symposium, Dr. Shaw delivered the essay “The Lutheran World Federation Today: *Missio Dei*, *Imago Dei* and the Ongoing Reformation.” The essay was subsequently expanded and published by the LCMS, with a preface by President Harrison and an appendix by the CTCR. The volume is currently being used as a study tool to assist the nine LCMS sister churches who have not yet left the LWF.³

Ecclesiology, Fellowship, and the Nordic-Baltic-Russian Churches

In 2023, 2024, and 2025, CR led a number of theological dialogues among the Baltic-Nordic-Russian churches and conducted many personal visits that examined the doctrines of fellowship and ecclesiology. Two views of fellowship emerged: (1) that church fellowship is officially recognized based on agreement in the doctrine of the Gospel in all its articles, i.e., in all doctrine, pointing to and flowing from the Gospel (the LCMS and *Book of Concord* view), and (2) that church fellowship may be assumed and practiced where the Gospel is preached, Sacraments are administered according to Christ’s institution, historic liturgy is in use, and no impediments of scandalous doctrine or practice are known (the view of the Church of Sweden and, in some cases, of certain Baltic, Nordic, and Russian churches).

These two views of fellowship interlock with two views of ecclesiology: (1) that all pastors equally possess the same divine office, call, and ordination *from above* (from God by His Word in Christ) and *from below* (administered according to the will and call of the people), and (2) that the *Book of Concord* preference is for episcopal (bishop) structure and that apostolic succession of both hand and doctrine is to be preferred, where possible. In extreme cases of the second view, bishops can understand their apostolic succession so as to justify (a) fellowship with non-Lutherans, and (b) ordination of non-Lutherans or of different orders of clergy in the backyard of LCMS sister churches without local ecclesiastical consent.

In the last triennium and to their credit, many LCMS sister and associate churches have been involved in these discussions: Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland (ELMDF), Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia (LELB), Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania (LELB), Lutheran Church in Norway and Iceland (LKNI), Evangelical Lutheran Diocese in Norway (DELSiN), Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria (ELCIR), Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC), Mission Province in Sweden (MPS), and the LCMS. These are serious discussions. CR is planning a related International Church Relations Forum (ICRF) for all our European sister and associate church body bishops and presidents in the fall of 2026.

Italy

In May of 2025, Dr. Shaw participated in a Lutheran symposium in Rome. Following the conference, two LCMS-trained Italian students were ordained by Bishop Juhana Pohjola (ELMDF) for the work of growing a confessional Lutheran church in Italy.

The German Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church/Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche (SELK)

Women’s ordination (WO) continues to present a challenge to the SELK. The June 2025 General Pastors’ Conference voted not to implement WO in SELK now, but instead to honor the position of those who advocate for it. Thirty-two pastors signed an open letter in favor of WO. At the September 2025 national church conven-

tion, a synodical commission was appointed to deal with legal and organizational issues and the consequences of possible separation paths. Most SELK congregations cherish ecclesiastical unity over condemning WO as false doctrine and practice.

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia (LELB)

On Aug. 28, 2025, LELB Archbishop Jānis Vanags retired as the longest-serving bishop in Europe. Thanks be to God for his decades of confessional Lutheran service and leadership, from the days of Communism through the turmoil of WO to this day. Dr. Shaw represented President Harrison at the retirement and as Bishop Rinalds Grants was installed as archbishop the following day. Numerous LCMS clergy were present for both events. In October of 2025, Dr. Shaw and Rev. Krikava conducted theological meetings on ecclesiology and fellowship with Archbishop Grants, LELB CR Director Andris Kraulins, and Bishop Hanss Jensons.

Confessional Lutheranism in Poland

Confessional Lutherans in Poland and Europe gathered for a conference, “Lutheran Confessionalism and Unionism,” Oct. 13–15, 2025, in Kraków, to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Lutheranism in Poland. Sponsored by OIM Europe, Regional Director Dr. David Preus chose the location based on the Lutheran Church of Poland’s adoption of WO and an LGBTQ agenda. Polish confessional Lutherans have rejected these changes and are seeking LCMS help to start a new church. At the conference with many scholars, Dr. K. Detlev Schulz spoke on Hermann Sasse’s experience with unionism, and Dr. Shaw spoke on the meaning of church fellowship. Rev. Krikava, who had previously contacted the *Book of Concord* Polish Lutherans during his service as OIM Europe regional director, participated in a roundtable discussion of charting the course from unionism to Luther’s understanding of the faith.

Mission Province in Sweden (MPS)

From Oct. 17–19, 2025, Dr. Preus and Rev. Krikava traveled to Gothenburg, Sweden, for the ordination of OIM-sponsored STM student Sahar Sadlovsky, soon to become a missionary in Tel Aviv, Israel. During the weekend-long event, Dr. Preus and Rev. Krikava met with MPS Bishop Bengt Ådahl and his representatives. The dialogue focused on five theological points that had been raised in CR fellowship dialogues in 2023 and 2024: (1) the MPS’s understanding of the authority and role of Holy Scripture in matters of doctrine, faith, and church life; (2) their understanding of episcopal polity and apostolic succession; (3) their relation to the Church of Sweden; (4) their doctrine and practice of church fellowship; and (5) their doctrine and practice of closed Communion. The discussion will continue at a broader CR fellowship dialogue during the 2026 Symposia Week at CTSFW. The MPS shares altar and pulpit fellowship with the ELMDF in Finland (an LCMS sister church) and DELSiN in Norway (an LCMS associate church).

Old Latin School, Wittenberg, Germany—Tour and Support

From Aug. 23 to Sept. 5, 2024, President Harrison and CR staff led their second Lutherland–Beautiful Germany–Wittenberg–Old Latin School (OLS) tour. Dr. Wilhelm Weber, director of the OLS Latin School, joined President Harrison and Dr. Shaw in providing historical, theological, and cultural insights. The tour ventured from the Alps to Heidelberg, from Worms and the Rhine to Eisenach and Wartburg, to Wittenberg. The tour raised \$45,000 to support the OLS! Another tour is scheduled for June 1–16, 2027: email georgia.endicott@lcms.org for the details!

The OLS grew out of the new approach to education taught by the Wittenberg Reformers. It was built in 1564 as the city school for boys. In 2007, the International Lutheran Society of Wittenberg (ILSW) purchased the building and developed it into the International Lutheran Center at the OLS. In 2019, the ILC joined LCMS, Germany's Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK), and Concordia Publishing House as ILSW members. The OLS provides a place for people to learn, grow, study, meet, retreat, and experience the Gospel in Wittenberg, home of the Reformation. The center is directly adjacent to St. Mary's City Church, where the great reformer of the church, Martin Luther, preached the pure Gospel: All are saved through faith, not according to their works, but by God's grace in Christ. The OLS holds regular Divine Services and Bible classes, and offers a confessional Lutheran interpretation of the Reformation, which otherwise would not exist in Wittenberg, the birthplace of the Reformation.

Czech Republic, Missions, and Fellowship

During an OIM Eurasia educational forum held Oct. 21–26, 2025, in Wittenberg, Germany, Rev. Krikava presented a paper on language acquisition in church planting as a vital step in forming indigenous churches that seek church fellowship with the planting mission church.

From Nov. 1 to 7, 2025, and during travel to Plzeň, Czech Republic, Rev. Krikava served as facilitator/translator for Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) President Glenn Obenberger and Rev. Steve Sparley, a member of the ELS Board for World Outreach. The ELS trip's purpose was to determine the state of an ELS mission begun in 1990 but without missionaries since the early 2000s. Use of a Roman Catholic deacon for church services and support of an attached non-Lutheran school taught a clear lesson: Lutheran missions need Lutheran pastors.

Rev. Krikava then traveled to Prague to meet with Rev. Martin Damašek, acting bishop of Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Czech Republic (ECAVvČR). Under his leadership, the ECAVvČR's interest in pursuing church fellowship with the LCMS is gaining momentum.

Africa

In the triennium since the 2023 convention, CR has witnessed the Lord's rich blessing on confessional Lutheran churches on the African continent. From the historic fellowship recognition with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Sudan and Sudan and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Uganda, to addressing LWF aggression against confessional Lutheran churches, to expanding fellowship dialogues with associate churches, to intensifying theological education initiatives from Madagascar to Ethiopia, the Spirit's work in creating and sustaining unity in Christ's Word is bearing fruit among our African sister and associate churches.

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana (ELCG)

With confessional courage grounded in Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, the ELCG withdrew from membership in the LWF in October 2023. The ELCG's Annual Delegates Conference in March 2023 passed a resolution calling to sever the church's relationship with the LWF and its affiliates. The resolution affirmed the ELCG's commitment to the inspired and infallible Holy Scriptures as the source and norm of all doctrines and practices, and to the Lutheran Confessions contained in the *Book of Concord* as the true exposition of the Holy Scriptures. The ELCG Board of Directors affirmed that action in June 2023, and President/Bishop John

Shadrack Donkoh formally notified the LWF General Secretary of the withdrawal on Oct. 8, 2023. Also in October, Rev. Dr. Joel Lehenbauer, executive director of the CTCR, visited Ghana to make a related presentation to ELCG lay leaders, providing encouragement and theological support. Throughout the process, Bishop Donkoh and the ELCG leadership conducted their correspondence with the LWF with Christian dignity, clarity, and firmness, maintaining both theological integrity and fraternal respect. The LCMS rejoices with our sister church in Ghana for their faithful stand on God's Word and looks forward to continued fellowship in confessing Christ crucified.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK)

In August 2025, CR attended the ELCK's general pastoral and bishops' workshop, delivering theological presentations on unity in Christ's Word and the LWF today. The instruction proved well-received through lively discussion, thoughtful questions, and the ELCK's scheduled reconsideration of LWF membership at their next national convention. During this visit, CR also met privately with bishops from nine other confessional Lutheran church bodies, strengthening fellowship bonds, faithful confession, and mutual encouragement amid contemporary challenges. These leaders included Archbishop Joseph Ochola Omolo (ELCK, Kenya; host); Bishop John Donkoh (ELCG, Ghana); Bishop Christian Ekong (LCN, Nigeria); President Denis Rakotozafy (FLM, Madagascar); Bishop Yohana Nzelu (South East of Lake Victoria Diocese, ELCT, Tanzania); Rev. John Gwandu, representing Bishop Nicolaus Nsangnzelu (Mbulu Diocese, ELCT, Tanzania); Rev. Silvanus Msuya, representing Bishop Daniel Mono (Mwanga Diocese, ELCT, Tanzania); Rev. Jackson Mushendwa (Western Diocese, ELCT, Tanzania); Bishop Selestine Seburikoko (LMA-STH, Rwanda); and Rev. Mussie Alazar (EELC, Ethiopia).

Lutheran Church of Uganda (LCU)

The LCMS recognized altar and pulpit fellowship with the LCU at the 2023 convention. The LCU traces its origins to missionary work from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK), with Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana (ELCG) and LCMS collaboration. Initially established as the Lutheran Church Mission Uganda (LCMU), the church body reorganized as the Lutheran Church of Uganda in 2015, with Rev. Charles Bameka elected as bishop in 2015 and consecrated in 2017. Bishop Bameka's leadership has consistently emphasized strong education and Word and Sacrament ministry as the church's central calling.

In December 2023, following reports requiring clarification, Rev. Frese attended the LCU's regular synodical convention in Jinja, Uganda, to observe firsthand the church body's governance and electoral processes. The convention proceeded with transparency and proper ecclesiastical order. Elections were conducted with integrity and according to the LCU's constitutional procedures, and Bishop Bameka was reelected. Present as fraternal observers were Archbishop Joseph Omolo (ELCK, Kenya), retired Bishop David Tswaedi (LCSA, South Africa), and President John Shadrack Donkoh (ELCG, Ghana), who served as founding pastor of the LCMU. These sister church leaders familiar with the LCU's history witnessed the lawful proceedings.

Regrettably, internal tensions resulted in a division within the LCU in late 2023. Rev. Benson Barhuka, dean of the Southwest Deanery, and his son Enoch Barhuka, both educated in South Africa, departed from the LCU along with several pastors and recent graduates from Lutheran Theological College Uganda. They estab-

lished a separate church body, the Confessional Lutheran Church Synod in Uganda, reportedly registered with the Ugandan government. The division appears rooted in regional tensions, as well as disagreements regarding theological education and seminary governance. In 2022, Enoch Barhuka had established a seminary in the Southwest Deanery without Bishop Bameka's authorization, contributing to the eventual separation.

The LCMS continues its support for the Lutheran Church in Uganda through LCMS missionaries, educators, and LCMS congregations. The LCU is a treasured sister church and remains committed to confessional Lutheran identity grounded in Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, focusing its ministry on proclaiming the Gospel and administering the Sacraments throughout Uganda.

Malagasy Lutheran Church (FLM)

The FLM represents one of CR's most significant engagements in Africa during this triennium. This Lutheran church body, located primarily in southern Madagascar, comprises 8,500 congregations with approximately 5 million baptized members and 1,500 active pastors. FLM history dates to Norwegian missionaries in 1867, with the church officially established in 1950. The LCMS has actively supported the FLM through OIM and CR collaboration.

In April 2025, President Harrison, CR, and CTRC representatives met with FLM President Rev. Dr. Rakotozafy and other FLM leaders at the International Center for theological dialogue. The meeting focused on better understanding the history and practice of the FLM lay office of *mpianondry* (shepherd/exorcist). Building on this productive exchange, CR and OIM are collaborating with FLM leadership to provide successive LCMS theological educators at SALT (FLM's Graduate School of Theology) for fifteen months (2026–27). Instruction will focus on the *Book of Concord*, Lutheran dogmatics, and Lutheran church history, with emphasis on the inspiration, inerrancy, and sufficiency of Holy Scripture. After this intensive period, CR and the FLM will reevaluate theological education needs. The LWF has openly criticized the FLM's confessional Lutheranism although the FLM is currently a member.

Ethiopian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC)

The EELC, though smaller than the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), demonstrates clear confessional Lutheran identity. With 120 congregations, 30 preaching stations, 60 pastors, and 27,000 communicants, the EELC continues strengthening its theological foundation through sustained engagement with the LCMS.

In March 2024, CR visited Ethiopia for theological dialogue with EELC leadership. The leaders expressed their need for enhanced pastoral training, theological resources in Amharic, and support for their seminary and boarding school. Following this dialogue, Rev. Michael Frese presented at the July 2024 general church assembly with 140 pastors, evangelists, and lay leaders present. His presentations on "Lutheran Identity: Scripture, Worship, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper" addressed fundamental confessional commitments and were enthusiastically received.

These engagements have led to theological education plans that include an emeritus EELC church body president currently pursuing doctoral studies at CTSFW, the EELC seminary president participating in CTSFW's Faculty Development Program (scheduled for Spring quarter 2026), and the Amharic *Book of Concord* and Amharic hymnal (produced with LCMS assistance) being distributed to each pastor for thorough study. This church body remains

completely committed to growing as a confessional Lutheran church, and CR fellowship dialogue continues with this promising associate church.

South East of Lake Victoria Diocese (SELVD) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT)

Years of theological support from CTSFW professors and OIM missionaries have moved the SELVD into confessional Lutheranism. SELVD Bishop Yohana Nzulu himself has exercised significant confessional Lutheran influence beyond his diocese and into the ELCT, a very liberal, LWF-affiliated church. Many other ELCT diocesan bishops are turning to confessional Lutheranism in Tanzania and beyond.

In March 2024, CR conducted a theological dialogue with SELVD in Tanzania, exploring the diocese's relationship with the liberal national ELCT. Leaving the ELCT would bring serious financial and political difficulties for SELVD. SELVD's understanding is that the ELCT has no ecclesiastical authority or influence over it in doctrine and practice, but only in kingdom of the left governance regarding legal identity, property, and cooperation in externals. Yet to be discussed is the ELCT perspective in these matters. Potential paths forward include changing the SELVD constitution to safeguard its confessional commitments and to establish it as an autonomous church body with processes for recognizing fellowship with other confessional Lutheran churches.

At the May 2025 SELVD-LCMS dialogue at the International Center, President Harrison, CR, and CTRC discussed with a six-member SELVD delegation their significant strides in confessional Lutheranism under Bishop Nzulu's leadership. SELVD church leadership also met with their LCMS counterparts for church body familiarization, theological understanding, and substantive exchange of perspectives on church body identity and fellowship. These dialogues continue as both church bodies work toward faithful confession of Christ.

South Africa

In August 2025, CR visited all three LCMS sister church bodies in South Africa—the Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa (FELSISA), the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (LCSA), and the Confessional Lutheran Synod of South Africa (CLSSA)—for familiarization and theological education planning. Dr. Shaw brought LCMS greetings to the FELSISA national convention, and Rev. Frese preached at a FELSISA congregation. The visits strengthened fellowship bonds, enabled collaborative planning, and demonstrated the vitality of confessional Lutheran fellowship across national and linguistic boundaries.

Throughout Africa, CR's work during this triennium demonstrates the Spirit's faithfulness in creating and sustaining confessional Lutheran churches united in Christ's Word and gathered at His altar. Challenges remain real—pressures toward WO, the allure of LWF financial support, and critical shortages of confessional theological educators. Yet Word and Sacrament, theological education, fellowship dialogue, and the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren reveal the Lord's patient, persevering, and powerful redemptive love in Christ.

Asia

Lutheran Mission—Australia (LM—A)

CR and OIM have continued support of confessional Lutheranism in Australia from the preceding triennium. In January 2024,

CR hosted a fraternal theological dialogue with an LM—A contingent led by LM—A President Matt Anker. President Harrison led the LCMS contingent; also present were CR, First Vice-President Peter Lange, and leadership from OIM, CTCR, both LCMS seminaries, LCMS Church Planting, and St. Catharines Seminary. President Anker presented on the theological crisis in Australian Lutheranism, sharing LM—A's Confessional Statement and Theses of Agreement. Confessional members within the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) stated their deep concerns about the LCA's theological direction regarding biblical authority, WO, seminary training, and adherence to the LCA's constitution. The dialogue included joint study of the *Book of Concord* on unity in Christ, confession, and the Lord's Supper, brainstorming on LM—A seminary education options, and strategic planning. The LCMS expressed complete support for the LM—A.

The Oct. 4–7, 2024, convention of the General Synod of the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand (LCANZ) made the final decision to pursue WO through a “one church with two different practices of ordination” model. The LCANZ argued that Scripture is insufficient to decide the question of WO, fundamentally undercutting biblical authority while claiming this represented only a change in practice, not doctrine. Following this decision, LM—A held its official launch Nov. 23, 2024, with Dr. Shaw addressing the gathering. The following day, Rev. Antonio Reyes, President of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines, installed Rev. Matt Anker as LM—A president. The LCANZ subsequently ordained two women as pastors on Apr. 13 and 17, 2025—the first such ordinations in LCANZ history.

Since its launch, the LM—A has been blessed by its faithful confession. October 2025 statistics reflect 600 baptized in 15 new church plants, 13 LCA congregations in the process of joining or likely to join, and 17 pastors on the clergy roster, with 11 more in the colloquy process. Plans are proceeding for the LM—A's constituting synodical convention in August 2026. CR has continued to engage with theological education in Australia, and the CTCR's Dr. Lehenbauer has led presentations on confessional unity at the altar in August 2025. CR convened fellowship dialogues in October 2024, October 2025, and January 2026. Significantly, the CTCR voted on Oct. 7, 2025, to recommend recognition of church fellowship between the LCMS and LM—A (see endnote 5). God continues blessing faithful confession of His Word in Australia through this emerging church body.

India Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC)

From Sept. 22 to Oct. 3, 2024, President Harrison, CR, the chief mission officer, and OIM leadership attended the centenary celebration of Concordia Theological Seminary, Nagercoil, India (CTSN). President Harrison became the first LCMS president to visit the IELC since President J.A.O. Preus 60 years prior. After the centenary celebrations, the delegation conducted a productive, three-day planning meeting with IELC President Balasingh, the IELC's three district presidents, and its chief financial and administrative officers. Discussions addressed the IELC's continued membership in the LWF, key theological topics, and the critical need for financial transparency in seminary operations and church governance.

The next year brought unexpected challenges. Internal discord developed within the IELC regarding the exercise of church body authority and leadership at CTSN. Dr. Luther reminds us in his Large Catechism's explanation of the Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer, wherever God's name is hallowed and His kingdom advances through Word and Sacrament, the devil attacks the church

and “strange things” happen. The Office of the President, CR, and OIM continue supporting confessional Lutheran elements within India as they navigate these internal difficulties.

The Indonesian Lutheran Christian Church (Gereja Kristen Luther Indonesia, GKLI)

In November 2023, CR visited Medan, Indonesia, to reinstate fellowship dialogue with the GKLI, discussions that had ceased in 2019 due to concerns in doctrine and practice. The visit revealed significant progress toward confessional Lutheran teaching over the intervening years, though practical challenges remained, including the difficulty of procuring wine for the Lord's Supper due to Indonesia's Muslim-majority context and prohibitive tariffs.

In its November 2024 follow-up visit, CR led theological education for all GKLI pastors and met with GKLI leadership. The GKLI has 48 pastors (15 serving as missionaries with 10–12 church plants each) and a seminary with a seven-year pastoral formation process (four years of seminary, three years of vicarage). GKLI recognizes distinct offices of evangelist, elder, and teacher in their congregations. The church body has abandoned WO and moved steadily toward confessional Lutheranism over 20 years. The GKLI maintains membership in the LWF, though their bishop and church leadership expressed openness to withdrawal in a patient, churchly manner.

In September 2025, CR led a general pastors' conference for all GKLI clergy, addressing the theology and practice of the Lord's Supper, closed Communion, and church fellowship. All pastors affirmed support for the confessional Lutheran understanding of church fellowship based on the authority of Holy Scripture and a *quia* confessional subscription. Three matters require attention: (1) developing general lay understanding of the distinction between personal preparation for, and confessional unity celebrated at, the Lord's Supper, (2) severing ties with the LWF, and (3) addressing the substantial number of women elders serving in congregations. Fellowship dialogue continues as the GKLI demonstrates genuine commitment to faithful Lutheran confession and practice.

Lutheran Church in Korea (LCK)

The November 2023 CR visit to Seoul built on the fraternal theological dialogue on WO conducted in January 2023 at CTSFW. During the November visit, Dr. Shaw met with President Eun Seob Kim, the newly appointed interim seminary president Dr. Jun Hyun Kim, and other church officers. Discussions addressed leadership challenges from a lawsuit filed by a breakaway faction (which the courts dismissed) and worked toward building stronger relationships of trust with Korean leadership. The November discussions also reinforced gains from the January dialogue, in which LCK and LCMS leaders had addressed the rising challenge of WO in the LCK. That forum led to the production of a book of essays there presented, *Women's Ordination through the Lens of the Apostles' Creed: A Fraternal Dialogue of the Lutheran Church in Korea and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*.⁴ The book documents the 2023 Fort Wayne dialogue and provides substantial theological resources for Korean pastors and other church bodies worldwide wrestling with the false doctrine and practice of WO. Plans advanced for translating and publishing the January 2023 essays into Korean.

The November 2024 LCK pastors' conference marked a significant milestone as pastors received for the first time the Korean translation of *Women's Ordination through the Lens of the Apostles' Creed*. At the conference and at LCK's request, CR led presentations on WO, the LWF, and the practice of Confession and

Absolution. Private meetings with President Kim emphasized the LCK's rejection of WO, identified the need for a bilingual lecturer in the Lutheran Confessions at Luther University (which houses their seminary), and discussed aspirations for expanding secondary education and seminary outreach.

In September 2025, CR met with President Kim and the LCK executive board on strategic direction, and with LCK pastors on pastoral leadership regarding fellowship as confessional unity, the Lord's Supper, and the LWF. Shortly thereafter, President Jong-Ho Won was elected as LCK president. He immediately requested continued CR assistance regarding theological and liturgical formation and continuing education for his pastors and the church. Because many LCK pastors do not possess an adequate grasp of the Lutheran Confessions, theological and liturgical education will remain a critical need in the years ahead.

Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod (LCHKS)

At the invitation of President Allan Yung, CR Director Dr. Shaw conducted a familiarization visit to Hong Kong and preached at the annual LCHKS convention, April 23–29, 2024. President Yung was reelected to his tenth consecutive three-year term, marking nearly 30 years of faithful service as president of this sister church of the LCMS. Discussions focused on the extensive state-supported social and educational programs run by the church, but in which the state does not allow Christian expression. Opportunities for Word and Sacrament ministry were explored.

The Lutheran Church in the Philippines (LCP)

At President Antonio del Rio Reyes' invitation, CR Director Dr. Shaw visited the LCP April 29–May 2, 2024. He was honored to tour various congregations and LCP offices and teach and preach at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Baguio. Conversations explored LCP-LCMS church relations and the possibility of developing an English-speaking joint seminary program in Asia that could serve multiple confessional Lutheran church bodies in the region and strengthen theological education across national boundaries.

CR attended the ILC World Conference in September 2025, held in Bohol, Philippines. During the conference, meetings with sister church presidents and bishops addressed ongoing fellowship questions and theological education. Honest discussion within the ILC conference revealed two understandings of church fellowship: the one recognized based on agreement in the doctrine of the Gospel in all its articles, the other assumed based on Lutheran commitments to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments where no known moral or theological impediments exist. (See details above, at "Ecclesiology, Fellowship, and the Nordic-Baltic-Russian Churches.") This distinction requires further attention in ILC gatherings and bilateral dialogues.

Confessional Lutheranism in Japan

Following the 2023 Synod convention resolution that the LCMS could no longer recognize altar and pulpit fellowship with the Japan Lutheran Church (see endnote 6), CR has worked to invigorate confessional Lutheran presence in Japan. In November 2023, Dr. Shaw accompanied OIM missionary Dr. Daniel Jastram and met with confessional Lutheran leaders outside the JLC structure. The goal is to build relationships and a shared resource framework to enhance confessional Lutheran witness in Japan. The LCMS continues supporting this work through missionaries, through partnership with Pastor Manubu Wakabayashi, and through ongoing en-

gagement with faithful Japanese Lutherans committed to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

South America

Iglesia Cristiana Evangélica Luterana Boliviana (ICEL)

The recognition of altar and pulpit fellowship with the Christian Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bolivia marks one of the most significant developments in South American church relations during this triennium. This small but vibrant confessional Lutheran church body represents the fruit of over 12 years of theological education and collaboration involving LCMS CR, OIM, LCMS seminary professors, and the *Centro de Misericordia Seminario Concordia el Reformador* (CMSCR) in the Dominican Republic.

Following initial fellowship dialogue in 2022 and President Limberth Fernández's first presentation to the CTCR in 2023, CR conducted a second fellowship dialogue in April 2024. The LCMS delegation—Dr. Shaw (CR), Dr. Lehenbauer (CTCR), Rev. Frese (CR), Rev. Mark Braden (fellowship committee), and Rev. James Sharp (OIM)—engaged with five ICEL church leaders in substantive theological discussion. The dialogue demonstrated ICEL's solid grounding in confessional Lutheran theology and practice. Of particular significance was ICEL's constitutional revision to reflect a *quia* subscription to the entirety of the Lutheran Confessions as faithful witnesses to the inspired, inerrant Holy Scriptures, which serve as the sole authority for church body doctrine and practice. This represented a maturation in confessional commitment beyond many established Lutheran church bodies.

In February 2025, President Fernández presented to the CTCR for the second time, answering questions about ICEL's constitution, theological education, and pastoral formation. The CTCR unanimously recommended recognition of altar and pulpit fellowship via Bylaw 3.9.5.2.2 (b) (2), which provides for "formal recognition of altar and pulpit fellowship between the Synod and a small, formative, emerging confessional Lutheran church body," subject to endorsement by the subsequent Synod convention. Following consultation with the Praesidium, President Harrison officially recognized fellowship with ICEL on May 4, 2025.

On May 24, 2025, Dr. Shaw presented the letter of fellowship to President Fernández at the OIM symposium in the Dominican Republic. With presidents from LCMS sister churches throughout Central and South America gathered at CMSCR, Dr. Shaw and President Fernández celebrated the Lord's Supper together for the first time—a profoundly moving expression of unity in Christ's body and blood.

ICEL comprises 16 congregations and missions, 11 pastors, and 972 members. The church body is bilingual: 40 percent Spanish-speaking concentrated in Bolivia's cities and 60 percent Quechua-speaking concentrated in the rural highlands. All ICEL pastors are ordained with a *quia* subscription oath. The church recognized church fellowship with the IELB (Brazil) in 2004 and became a full member of the ILC in 2022.

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (IELB)

The IELB continues as the LCMS' oldest and largest sister church, established as a church in 1904. Throughout this triennium, the IELB has provided crucial support for confessional Lutheranism throughout South America. IELB Vice-President Rev. Airton S. Schroeder conducted the historic ICEL (Bolivia) ordinations in 2022, with IELB and ICEL already in church fellowship.

The 1980 LCMS-IELB protocol document received practical application through a working agreement signed in June 2022 for clergy calls between the two church bodies. This agreement puts pulpit fellowship into action, addresses ministry needs of the Portuguese-speaking diaspora in the United States, and honors the calling authorities and processes of both church bodies. It became the model for the LCMS Council of Presidents policy on calling pastors between the LCMS and church bodies in fellowship with the LCMS. President Geraldo Schüler continues to provide indispensable bishop support for church bodies nearby and in the region.

Confessional Lutheran Church of Chile (ILCC)

In April 2024, Rev. Frese visited Chile to extend spiritual care and counsel on behalf of the Office of the President. He ministered to ILCC pastors, offering spiritual care in areas devastated by wildfires. Mercy flows from the Gospel. He also gave a theological presentation at the ILCC's general pastors' conference in Santiago. He focused on the use of Luther's Small Catechism in preaching.

Regional Coordination and Theological Education

CR's collaboration with Rev. Ted Krey, OIM regional director for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), has strengthened throughout the triennium. The May 2023 OIM symposium for Central and South American church leaders, held in the Dominican Republic, included a dedicated church relations day addressing protocol agreements, faithful confession, and emerging needs flowing from church body relationships. This pattern of coordination continues, with CR and OIM working closely to support regional theological education and church development.

The May 2025 symposium at CMSCR in the Dominican Republic provided another opportunity for regional church body presidents and bishops to gather for mutual support, theological instruction, and fellowship. The celebration of newly recognized church fellowship with ICEL powerfully demonstrated the bonds of confessional unity among Lutheran churches in the LAC region.

North America

Lutheran Church—Canada (LCC)

The work begun between the LCC and the LCMS in 2022–23 to empower missions and ethnic ministry in Canada continued in the past triennium. An LCMS-LCC pastors' conference met June 24–26, 2024, at Mount Carmel Retreat Center, Niagara Falls, Ontario, to "Strengthen Fellowship and Mission in Canada." Rev. Dr. Thomas Winger, president and professor at Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catharines, led a biblical and confessional study of God-given unity and the harmony for which we strive. Dr. Shaw then facilitated an assessment of LCC, LCMS, and joint organizational strengths and weaknesses, with a review of environmental opportunities and challenges, to facilitate a unified approach for ethnic ministries and mission starts. To put this unified approach into action, an Annual *Koinonia* Coordination Meeting (AKCM) was then convened, with LCMS and LCC church leaders crafting a list of objectives with points of contact. Progress for working together in missions and ethnic ministry will be reviewed at the next joint pastors' conference and AKCM scheduled for Oct. 19–21, 2026, again at Mount Carmel Retreat Center.

The LCC and LCMS have also collaborated in supporting LM—A (Australia). Each church body has provided theological education support in Australia and seminarian support in their church body seminaries for LM—A students studying for the pastoral ministry.

The American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC)

During the past triennium, the LCMS has tried to address certain fellowship doctrine and practice problems with the AALC. Issues have included the LCMS commitment to its in-residence seminary formation, not accepting the AALC's unaccredited, distance-learning seminary for LCMS seminarians. More difficult have been AALC actions regarding LCMS clergy and an LCMS congregation removed for cause by the LCMS but taken directly into the AALC without ensuring LCMS consultation that would address "all matters at issue," as required by the 2009 operating agreement. Earnest work began at a Jan. 31, 2023, AALC-LCMS meeting, continued with LCMS district president assessments, and led to a comprehensive AALC-LCMS meeting March 18–19, 2025. The joint team adjusted the 2007 AALC-LCMS protocol document to preclude such future fellowship violations and clarify seminary requirements, but nine months later AALC leaders declined that adjusted protocol. The LCMS desires to maintain the bonds of fellowship—unity in the Gospel in all its articles, including the doctrine and practice of church fellowship. CR plans to meet one more time with AALC representatives prior to the 2026 Synod convention to resolve these fellowship issues. Lord, have mercy.

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) and Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS)

Informal discussions between leaders of the LCMS, WELS, and ELS began in 2012 and have been held on an annual basis, with the most recent discussions in December 2025. The meetings have dispelled many caricatures regarding the different churches and helped to identify what currently unites and divides them. All three synods have encouraged future meetings by national convention action. Topics discussed in the recent triennium were the New Testament role of deacon, our respective responses to cultural issues, woman suffrage and responses to WO, and the three perennial issues: the office of the pastoral ministry, church fellowship, and the role of women.

The December 2025 meeting was characterized by friendship and trust, the norm for these conversations. The doctrine of fellowship held center stage as participants examined the cause of the breakup of the Synodical Conference through the lens of the 1961 Report to the Overseas Brethren. Meeting participants also proposed to begin a series of free conferences as a step toward formalizing these joint conversations into the future.

In June 2025, CR representative Rev. Krikava attended the annual synodical convention of the ELS. The LCMS was given a warm reception with many positive comments on the theological direction of the Harrison administration. Support to Bethany Lutheran College was an important topic. The convention also resolved to call a missions director who would send ELS missionaries into international fields (currently, there are none).

In July 2025, Rev. Krikava attended the biannual synodical convention of the WELS, with the LCMS again lauded for its current theological direction. On the last day of very positive sessions, President Harrison was able to visit. The WELS president asked President Harrison to greet and address the convention. After his speech, he received a spontaneous standing ovation.

Anglican Church in North America (ACNA)

Since 2010, various LCMS and LCC theologians have met with ACNA theologians annually, either by Zoom or in person. The goal

has been to examine with clarity and honesty where we agree and disagree theologically (with this disagreement precluding foreseeable fellowship), seek to grow in mutual understanding, and produce occasional statements to confess biblical truths to an increasingly secular world. During the present triennium, these meetings have continued, generally with a Zoom session one year and an in-person meeting the next.

Because Anglicans do not subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions, and because some ACNA bishops ordain women, church fellowship is not realistic. Past discussions have included the history of the churches, understandings of authority and ministry in the church, the doctrine and practice of the Lord's Supper, and issues related to marriage and human sexuality. In 2012, a joint statement on marriage was prepared and published by the church bodies. Recent meetings have produced a paper on "faithful ecumenism," a respectful, honest approach to differences in theology and practice. The in-person meeting scheduled for late April 2026 in Dallas may forward this paper to church body heads for consideration. Other meeting topics for the triennium include a three-fold office of ministry and anthropology/creation.

Anglican Province of America, Anglican Church of America, and Anglican Catholic Church (APA/ACA/ACC)

An initial meeting between theologians and leaders of the LCMS and the APA/ACA/ACC occurred in May 2024 in the LCMS International Center. These Anglo-Catholics hold a high view of Scripture that does not permit the ordination of women. They approached the LCMS as a biblically based, confessional Lutheran church, desiring to understand it better as a first ecumenical step. Anglicans present were the Rt. Rev. Brian Marsh (Ecumenical Officer for the ACA and the Traditional Anglican Church [TAC]), the Rt. Rev. Patrick S. Fodor (St. John's Cathedral, Quincy, IL – ACA), the Rt. Rev. Paul Hewett (Cathedral Church of the Epiphany, Columbia, SC – ACC), and the Most Rev. Mark Haverland (Archbishop of the ACC, St. Stephen's, Athens, GA – ACC). LCMS participants included President Harrison; Dr. Shaw, Rev. Frese, and Rev. Krikava (CR); Dr. Lehenbauer and Dr. Serina (CTCR); and Dr. Harmelink (CHI). Topics included background on the history of the churches and their understandings of theological authority and church fellowship. A follow-up meeting is planned for 2026.

North American Lutheran Church (NALC)

Representatives of the LCMS, LCC, and NALC have continued their dialogue, established in 2011, meeting twice yearly (once via Zoom and once in person) throughout the triennium. LCMS representatives included CR, CTCR, and CTSFW faculty.

During the April 2024 meeting in Ambridge, Pa., the NALC reported establishing a Lutheran faculty at Trinity School for Ministry, an Anglican institution that also trains women for the pastoral ministry. While a spectrum of opinion exists within the NALC regarding WO, they are currently preparing an official document explaining their position. A November 2026 in-person meeting is planned to discuss that document and address the doctrine and practice of WO directly.

Although altar and pulpit fellowship with the NALC is not possible due to fundamental confessional differences, particularly regarding WO and biblical hermeneutics, the conversations advance mutual theological understanding, practice faithful ecumenism, and enable collaboration on joint moral statements addressing religious freedom and the God-given value of human life. These conversa-

tions have also shown value in discussing international church relations challenges, as LCMS sister and associate churches frequently work in similar geographical areas as NALC sister churches.

Ecclesiastical Relations of the LCMS

The LCMS enjoys ecclesiastical relations with 103 church bodies in a total of 73 countries representing 22 million people around the world. The purpose of LCMS Church Relations is to advance church fellowship in Christ worldwide. The LCMS recognizes a single form of church fellowship—altar and pulpit fellowship—but has three categories of church relations or engagements with church bodies.

The LCMS has 43 sister church bodies—those with whom the LCMS is in altar and pulpit fellowship (united in the confession of the Gospel in all its articles). The LCMS collaborates with sister churches, sharing Christ's Word and Sacraments worldwide and building each other up in unity of confession, worship, and works of love. LCMS members are encouraged to attend a sister church's Divine Service when in country, announce themselves to the pastor, and may request to be communed.

The LCMS has 38 associate church bodies with whom it is working toward and praying for altar and pulpit fellowship. The LCMS seeks to strengthen mutual understanding and faithfulness with associate churches through visitation, theological dialogue, theological education, and mercy ministry. LCMS members are encouraged to attend associate church divine services when in country but should not commune.

The LCMS also relates with 23 other church bodies, working toward faithful ecumenism. The goal is to examine with clarity and honesty where we agree and disagree theologically (with this disagreement precluding foreseeable fellowship), seek to grow in mutual understanding, and produce occasional statements to confess biblical truths to an increasingly secular world.

The church bodies below (see "Praying for the Churches") are listed by category and generally in alphabetical order by country. If you would like further background or contact information about a specific church body, please email the LCMS Office of the President, Attention: Church Relations, michael.frese@lcms.org or georgia.endicott@lcms.org.

Praying for the Churches

Dr. Martin Luther urged that prayers be offered for the Church throughout the world, that the Gospel might be purely preached and the Sacraments rightly administered according to Christ's command and institution. Listed below is a schedule for remembering our LCMS sister, associate, and other churches before God's throne of grace. LCMS congregations are encouraged to offer petitions for these churches in the Sunday Prayer of the Church; individuals are also encouraged to pray for them at home. A sample prayer follows:

Almighty God, You have called Your Church to witness that in Christ You have reconciled the world to Yourself. Grant that by Your Holy Spirit we may proclaim the good news of Your salvation throughout the world so that all who hear it may receive the gifts of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. We especially pray for: [select based on church body category: sister, associate, or other]

- *Our LCMS sister churches, [names and countries]. Bless them with Your Word of grace and truth, strengthen the faith of the baptized, bestow peace throughout their congrega-*

tions and ministries, and as we together share Christ's saving Word and Sacraments, build us up in unity of confession, worship, and works of love; through Christ, our Lord.

- *Our LCMS associate churches, [names and countries]. Empower your Word in its truth and purity, and remove all obstacles to fellowship so that, one day, recognizing unity in the Gospel in all its articles, we might with great joy celebrate fellowship at pulpit and altar; through Christ, our Lord.*
- *The churches, [names and countries], with whom we work toward faithful ecumenism. Bring the light of Your pure Word where articles of doctrine divide us, prevent error from taking root, and grant patience for faithful witness; through Christ, our Lord.*

Numbers correspond to weeks in the year, with two church bodies remembered each week in prayer. Prayers may start at the beginning of the calendar year or Church Year, or at any time. The important thing is to pray for God's promised blessings in Christ.

Sister Churches, In Altar and Pulpit Fellowship (43)

1. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Argentina, IELA
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Belgium, ELKB
2. Christian Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bolivia, ICEL⁵
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil, IELB
3. Lutheran Church—Canada, LCC
Confessional Lutheran Church of Chile, ILCC
4. Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Denmark, ELFC
Evangelical Lutheran Church of England, ELCE
5. Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland, ELMDF
Evangelical Lutheran Church—Synod of France, EELSF
6. Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church, SELK (Germany)
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana, EELCG
7. Lutheran Church of Guatemala, ILG
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Haiti, ELCH
8. The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod, LCHKS
India Evangelical Lutheran Church, IELC
9. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Almaty, ELCA (Kazakhstan)
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya, ELCK
10. Lutheran Church in Korea, LCK
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia, LELB
11. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia, ELCL
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania, LELB
12. Lutheran Synod of Mexico, SLM
Lutheran Church of Nigeria, LCN
13. Lutheran Church in Norway and Iceland, LKNI
Lutheran Church, GLC (Papua New Guinea)
14. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Paraguay, IELPA
Lutheran Church in the Philippines, LCP
15. Portuguese Evangelical Lutheran Church, IELP
Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church, SELC (Russia)
16. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia, ELCIR
Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa, FELSI-SA
17. Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, LCSA
- Confessional Lutheran Church of South Africa, CLCSA
18. Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Sudan, Sudan, ELCSS/S
Ceylon Evangelical Lutheran Church, CELC (Sri Lanka)
19. China Evangelical Lutheran Church, CELC (Taiwan)
Lutheran Church of Togo, ELT
20. Lutheran Church of Uganda, LCU
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine, ELCU
21. American Association of Lutheran Churches, AALC (U.S.)
Lutheran Church of Uruguay, ILU
22. Lutheran Church of Venezuela, ILV

Associate Churches, Working toward Church Fellowship (38)

22. Lutheran Mission—Australia, LM—A⁶
23. Lutheran Church in Africa—Synod of Benin, ELA—SBE
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Burkina Faso, EELBF
24. Lutheran Church in Africa—Synod of Burundi, ELA—SBU
Cambodian Lutheran Church, CLC
25. Evangelical Lutheran Church in East Congo, CELCE
Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church in the Congo, EELCC
26. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Congo, EELCCO
Lutheran Church in Africa—Synod Cote D'Ivoire, ELA—SCI (Ivory Coast)
27. Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Czech Republic, ECAV
Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, SCEAV (Czech Republic)
28. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Eritrea, ELCE
Ethiopian Evangelical Lutheran Church, EELC
29. The Lutheran Church of The Gambia, LCG
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Guinea, EELG
30. Bible Faith Lutheran Church, BFLC (India)
Manipur Evangelical Lutheran Church, MELC (India)
31. The Indonesian Lutheran Christian Church, GKLI
West Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church, WJELC
32. Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Kazakhstan, ELCKR
Lutheran Church Concordia, LCC (Kyrgyzstan)
33. Malagasy Lutheran Church, FLM (Madagascar)
Confessional Lutheran Church—Malawi Synod, CLC—MS
34. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia, ELCM
Lutheran Church Synod of Nicaragua, ILSN
35. Evangelical Lutheran Diocese in Norway, DELSIN
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Panama, IELPA
36. Evangelical Lutheran Church—Peru, IEL—P
Lutheran Mission in Africa—Synod of Thousand Hills, LMA—STH (Rwanda)
37. Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church—Sierra Leone, CELC—SL
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Spain, IELE
38. South Sudan Evangelical Lutheran Church, SSELCC

Mission Province in Sweden, MPS

39. Confessional Lutheran Church in Switzerland, CLCS
South East of Lake Victoria Diocese, SELVD-ELCT (Tanzania)
40. Lutheran Church of East Africa, LCEA (Tanzania)
Istanbul Lutheran Church, ILK (Turkey)
41. The Lutheran Ministerium and Synod, LMSUSA (U.S.)

Other Churches, Working toward Faithful Ecumenism (22)

42. Evangelical Lutheran Synod, ELS (U.S.)
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, WELS (U.S.)
43. Bangladesh Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church, BNELC
Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in Belarus, IELCB
44. Hope Evangelical Lutheran Church in Burundi, HELCB
Confessional Lutheran Church of Colombia, ICC
45. Church of Faithful Confessing Lutherans in Congo, CFCL-CO
Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, EECMY
46. Gambella Evangelical Lutheran Church in Ethiopia, GELCE
Evangelical Lutheran Conference and Ministerium of Kenya, ELCMK
47. Himalayan Evangelical Lutheran Fellowship, HELF (Nepal)
Evangelical Lutheran Church Society, DELK (Norway)
48. Norwegian Lutheran Mission, NLM
Lutheran Church of Rwanda, LCR
49. Lutheran Church in Singapore, LCS
Lutheran Church of the Republic of China, LCROC
50. Lutheran Church of Australia, LCA
Japan Lutheran Church, JLC⁷
51. North American Lutheran Church, NALC (U.S.)
Anglican Church in North America, ACNA (U.S.)
52. Anglican Catholic Church, ACC (U.S.)
Anglican Province of America, APA (U.S.)

Jonathan E. Shaw, *Director*

Endnotes

1. ICRC 2023, resources.lcms.org/multimedia/international-church-relations-conference-2023-video-presentations/.

ICRC 2024, resources.lcms.org/multimedia/international-church-relations-conference-2024-video-presentations/.

2. The Lutheran World Federation, “Study Guide,” *LWF Thirteenth Assembly*, Kraków, Poland, September 13–19, 2023, p. 21.

3. Jonathan E. Shaw, “The Lutheran World Federation Today: *Missio Dei*, *Imago Dei* and the Ongoing Reformation” (LCMS, 2024), resources.lcms.org/reading-study/church-relations-the-lutheran-world-federation-today/.

4. Jonathan E. Shaw, ed., *Women’s Ordination through the Lens of the Apostles’ Creed: A Fraternal Dialogue of the Lutheran Church in Korea and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, rev. ed. (LCMS, 2024), resources.lcms.org/reading-study/lcms-church-relations-booklet-womens-ordination-through-the-lens-of-the-apostles-creed/. This book is available in English, Korean, Japanese, Russian, and German.

5. In accordance with Bylaw 3.9.5.2.2 (b) (2), the Synod President recognized LCMS-ICEL altar and pulpit fellowship on May 4, 2025, after consultation with the Praesidium and the CTCR’s vote on Feb. 27, 2025, to recommend recognition of church fellowship between the Synod and ICEL. Fellowship recognition under this bylaw is subject to the endorsement of the subsequent Synod convention, the 69th Regular Convention of the LCMS, scheduled to take place in Phoenix.

6. In accordance with Bylaw 3.9.5.2.2 (b) (2), the CTCR voted on Oct. 7, 2025, to recommend recognition of church fellowship between the LCMS and LM—A. The Synod President deferred action on the CTCR’s fellowship recognition recommendation until the LM—A is formally constituted in convention, scheduled for Aug. 28–30, 2026, and takes up this fellowship issue.

7. At the 68th Regular Convention of the LCMS, in Milwaukee, the Synod passed 2023 Res. 5-07, “To Recognize That the Synod Is Not in Altar and Pulpit Fellowship with the Japan Lutheran Church.” Within the resolution, the Synod committed to JLC discussions, should the JLC so desire, based on reconsidering its practices of WO, open Communion, etc.

R1.2

Chief Mission Officer

Working under Bylaws 3.4.3–3.4.3.8, the Chief Mission Officer (CMO) is responsible to the President for all mission, ministry, programmatic, and coordinative functions, implementing Board for National Mission (BNM) and Board for International Mission (BIM) policies. He supervises the Office of National Mission (ONM), Office of International Mission (OIM), Office of Pastoral Education (PED), and the Synod’s Mission Advancement (MADV) and Communications (COMMS) units, ensuring appropriate resources, planning, and coordination within and across these teams. The CMO serves on the Operations and Administrative Teams, chairs the Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC), represents the Synod and/or its President on several LCMS established or affiliated entity boards (including the Concordia University System and others by appointment) and regularly interacts with various agency and auxiliary heads and church partners of the Synod to further LCMS mission objectives.

For the sake of our common unity and mission in the Gospel, the CMO and units reporting to the CMO strive to serve the Synod’s members in full accord with and fulfillment of the direction provided by our congregations and church workers (i.e., as occurs at the Synod’s national and district conventions), such service and fulfillment often functionally accomplished through district offices and staffs (Bylaw 4.1.1: “The Synod is not merely an advisory body ... but establishes districts in order more effectively to achieve its objectives and carry on its activities”). Over the past triennium, units reporting to the CMO have worked to advance the Synod’s current mission and ministry emphasis, adopted under 2023 Resolution 4-02: *Making Disciples for Life* (Proceedings, 135–36).

For a summary of accomplishments within the ONM, OIM, PED, MADV, and COMMS units, see **Reports R1.2.1–5** immediately following in this convention workbook. Significant items specific to the CMO’s office over the past few years include:

- Rev. Kevin Robson faithfully served as CMO for the first two years of the triennium (through August 2025), just as he had served in this role for the past decade. We give thanks to God for Rev. Robson and his commitment to and diligent work on behalf of the LCMS and in our Lord’s mission.
- Rev. Daniel Galchutt began working as interim CMO in September 2025.
- The office created a new strategic planning process and for-

mat at the beginning of the triennium and annual strategic plans for mission units have since been developed in conjunction with the BIM and BNM.

- The office gathered information and conducted numerous interviews with district presidents, pastors, and laypeople in preparation for PFC reports included in this workbook; see **Reports R13.3–6**.
- The office coordinated efforts to use funding from the 2023–26 National Offering to expand available faithful Lutheran resources for Gospel witness and theological education nationally and internationally.

The most notable CMO objectives for the coming triennium fall under the following categories:

- Expanding the Synod’s mission and ministry to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, especially with the development of 2026–29 National Offering theme: *Tell the Next Generation* (Psalm 78:4), including efforts to give partnership grants to congregations and schools.
- For ONM: Church and school planting in U.S. mission field, expansion of the Synod’s work among ethnic immigrant groups, improved support for Lutheran education and schools, increased efforts toward evangelism by providing additional resources, and enhanced collaboration with districts and other Synod entities and agencies.
- For OIM: Recruitment and deployment of LCMS and alliance missionaries and sustaining the Synod’s premier role in global Lutheran theological education, especially through overseas seminaries in all four of the Synod’s international regions.
- For PED: *Set Apart to Serve* church worker recruitment initiative.
- For MADV: Informing and fully engaging current and new contributors who find fulfillment, gratitude, and joy in their participation in the Synod’s mission and ministry.
- For COMMS: Increased reach and engagement of stakeholder audiences and a major transition into a new and improved digital platform.
- Through PED, PFC, and other Synod agencies, facilitate ongoing study, analysis, and conversations regarding the Synod’s pastoral formation programs and routes to ordination, church worker recruitment, and continuing education.
- Address evolving challenges and opportunities among the Synod’s international schools in Asia pertaining to Lutheran identity and strategic alignment with LCMS mission emphases and priorities.

Daniel M. Galchutt, *Interim Chief Mission Officer*

R1.2.1

Office of National Mission

The Office of National Mission (ONM) coordinates and supports domestic ministries that serve congregations and schools through the districts of the Synod (Bylaw 3.8.2.4). The ONM will enliven, equip, coordinate, and engage congregations, schools, and recognized service organizations (RSOs) through districts in order to enhance their local and regional missions and ministries.

During this triennium, through the districts, the ONM has focused on *God’s Mission Here* in North America by supporting congregations, schools, and circuits to plant new congregations and schools, strengthen existing congregations and schools, evangelize the lost, retain the faithful, and care for workers (2023 Res. 4-02).

A. Worship

LCMS Worship ministry nurtures a culture of confessional faithfulness, artistic excellence, and integrity in the presentation, distribution, and reception of God’s life-giving gifts in Word and Sacrament. Accomplishments over the past triennium:

- Hosted the 2024 Institute on Liturgy, Preaching and Church Music with 540 in attendance. Preparations are underway for July 12–16, 2027, at Concordia University Wisconsin.
- Received a \$750,000 grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. in support of “Sing, Pray and Keep His Ways,” a five-year project devoted to nurturing child faith through Lutheran worship.

Rev. Sean Daenzer, *Director*

B. Mercy Ministry Area

The ONM Mercy Ministry Area takes up the work of LCMS World Relief and Human Care in North America.

Deaconess Dr. Tiffany Manor, *Managing Director*

B.1. Deaconess Ministry

LCMS Deaconess Ministry encourages and supports the formation and professional service of Lutheran women theologically trained to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ through acts of mercy, spiritual care, and teaching the Christian faith under the supervision of a pastor. There are 365 deaconesses on the LCMS roster, which represents an increase of 92 women over the past decade. Accomplishments over the past triennium:

- Coordination and consultation with Synod deaconess training programs and RSO programs.
- Created a Post-certification Applied Learning and Support (PALS) program for deaconesses in the first three years after being commissioned. Twenty-four deaconesses have participated in PALS for deaconesses.

B.2. Disaster Response and Training

LCMS Disaster Response provides training, resources, and financial assistance to districts, congregations, and RSOs affected by disasters. Accomplishments over the past triennium:

- Over 3,200 new Lutheran Early Response Team (LERT) volunteers were trained, and over 72,000 hours were logged by all LERT volunteers.
- The Basic LERT Training underwent significant revision to make it more accessible to interested volunteers.
- Provided 111 grants totaling \$3.43 million nationwide to support disaster relief and response (2023 Res. 3-04A).
- Following Hurricane Helene in North Carolina in 2024, awarded 11 grants totaling \$714,000 to assist affected ministries (2023 Res. 3-04A).
- After Hurricanes Milton and Helene impacted Florida, provided 9 grants totaling \$560,000 to support recovery efforts (2023 Res. 3-04A).

Rev. Dr. Ross Johnson and Rev. Michael Meyer, *Directors*

B.3. Family Ministry

The seventh LCMS mission priority is to strengthen and support the Lutheran family in living out God's design. Accomplishments over the past triennium:

- Created over 100 resources to encourage family devotions (2023 Res. 12-02, Res. 12-05) and other supports to the family.
- Developed Created Male and Female resources to address sexual orientation and gender identity; engaged youth on this topic at the LCMS Youth Gathering (2023 Res. 1-04A).
- Holding a Family Summit on Manhood/Fatherhood in spring 2026 (2023 Res. 12-05).

Plans for the next triennium:

- Encourage congregations, districts, and RSOs through new and existing initiatives targeted to *Tell the Next Generation*.
- Continue to provide Created Male and Female resources.
- Create resources to support the family.

Rev. Andrew Becker, *Manager*

B.4. Grantmaking

ONM offers grants to aid LCMS congregations, RSOs, and districts to vigorously make known the love of Christ by word and deed within our churches and communities. In the past triennium, ONM awarded 74 national development grants totaling \$1,626,251.67 to benefit projects throughout the U.S.

Deaconess Maryann Hayter, *Manager*

B.5. Life Ministry

Through LCMS Life Ministry, the Body of Christ comes together to value all human life—from conception to natural death. LCMS Life Ministry speaks up for life, cares for people in body and soul, and teaches about the sanctity of human life. Accomplishments over the past triennium:

- In 2023–25, the Life Ministry matching grant program gave 61 grant awards to congregations and districts to support education, advocacy, and local pro-life human care efforts with emphasis on beginning of life needs. Estimates are that 38,100 people were served by 2,512 volunteers. LCMS grants totaling \$500,496.75 were disbursed to match congregational contributions of \$618,083.12 for a total of \$1,115,579.87 (2023 Res. 3-01).
- Facilitated LCMS participation in 42 different Marches for Life at the national, state, and local level. The estimated number of participants in 2024–25 is 4,780 Lutherans.
- Published podcast episodes, conference sessions, and resources to respond to human trafficking (2023 Res. 3-02A).
- Held a conference in 2025, conducted webinars, provided training, and published new resources (2023 Res. 3-01).
- Consulted and collaborated with the Commission on Theology and Church Relations to address abortion and use of fetal tissue in vaccines (2023 Res. 11-04).

Deaconess Dr. Tiffany Manor, *Director*

B.6. Health Ministry

LCMS Health Ministry works to support and promote Christ-centered health and wellness of body, mind, and spirit

through congregational health ministries. Accomplishments over the past triennium:

- Collaboration with the LCMS Parish Nurse Council that coordinates the districts' parish nurse leaders and health initiatives; supported the annual meeting of district parish nurse representatives. There are currently 277 parish nurses serving in 33 districts.
- Created mental health resources (see the separate **Report R60** on 2023 Res. 3-03A).

B.7. Recognized Service Organizations

The granting of RSO status by the Synod signifies that a service organization, while independent of the Synod, fosters the mission and ministry of the Church, engages in program activity that extends the mission and ministry of the Synod, is in harmony with the programs of the boards of the Synod, and respects and does not act contrary to the doctrine and practice of the Synod (Bylaw 6.2.1). These organizations serve nationally and internationally as they extend the mission and ministry of the LCMS by providing acts of mercy, witness, and education. There are currently 339 RSOs. Over the past triennium, 95 organizations have received status, of which 30 were new organizations applying for RSO status and 65 were renewing RSO organizations. There were 47 RSOs terminated of RSO status and four applications were denied.

Deaconess Dorothy Krans, *Director*

B.8. Specialized Spiritual Care Ministry

Specialized Pastoral Ministry (SPM) was renamed as Specialized Spiritual Care Ministry in 2023 to reflect the variety of special contexts the ecclesiastically endorsed rostered church workers serve in, such as civilian chaplaincy roles, counselors, and clinical spiritual care educators. These workers bring the love of Christ through compassionate spiritual care to individuals in hospitals and health care facilities; long-term care facilities; senior communities; prisons; law enforcement, fire, and rescue agencies; disaster response; and workplaces. Accomplishments over the past triennium:

- Ecclesiastically endorsed 25 church workers.
- Three calls issued through the Board for National Mission.
- Launched Lutheran Visitation Education, a distinctly LCMS training program for rostered church workers that is recognized as a Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) equivalent course.
- Distributed 34 Prison Ministry kits to inmates and LCMS prison chaplains for visitation, services, and pastoral care.

Plans for the next triennium:

- Continue to train workers through Lutheran Visitation Education annually.
- Provide resources and training for Prison Ministry with the generous support of the LWML (2023 Omnibus Res. A).

Rev. Brian Heller, *Director*

B.9. Worker Well-Being

The Synod's fifth mission priority is to promote and nurture the spiritual, emotional, financial, and physical well-being of pastors and professional church workers. Accomplishments over the past triennium:

- Collaborated with Concordia Plan Services and districts to

create a strategic plan that addresses the wellness of church workers and assisted with the development of a District Wellness Initiative (2023 Res. 1-06A).

- Created new resources and developed a pilot program to assist congregational lay leaders in creating a loving and supportive culture (2023 Res. 1-06A).
- Soldiers of the Cross provided \$241,705 in financial assistance to 98 rostered church workers; Veterans of the Cross provided \$717,751 to 30 recipients.
- \$474,200 in grants were issued for district programs and to RSOs, including DOXOLOGY, Shepherd's Canyon, and GracePoint Relational Health, that provide wellness programs and services to rostered church workers.

Plans for the next triennium:

- Address the wellness needs of young church workers identified in 2024 research.
- Continue the District Wellness Initiative roll-out to all districts.

Deaconess Dr. Tiffany Manor, *Director*

C. Witness Ministry Area

The ONM Witness Ministry Area supports the local mission work that proclaims Christ in congregations and schools including urban areas, on college campuses, in rural areas and small towns, and among people of different ethnicities.

Rev. Michael Meyer, *Managing Director*

C.1. All Nations Ministry

All Nations Ministry equips churches to reach out to people “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev. 7:9). Whether black, Hispanic, Native American, or of another ethnicity, all people need to hear the saving message of Jesus Christ. United in Christ, LCMS members gather together in worship and reach out to more than 60 ethnic and 45 language groups in the U.S. Accomplishments over the past triennium:

- Increased collaboration and wellness among leaders of ethnic ministries through the All Nations Council, through publication of an online directory and dashboard, and by providing grants for conferences and outreach (2023 Res. 1-05A).
- Provided visitation, consultation, encouragement, and support to ethnic ministries throughout the U.S. (2023 Res. 1-05A).
- Developed new multilingual materials for witness and discipleship plus a new catalog of existing materials in order to facilitate utilization.
- Working with CPH for a scholarly book focused on the work of the LCMS in discipling peoples of all ethnicities, languages, and skin colors (2023 Res. 11-03A).

Rev. Stephen Heimer, *Manager*

C.2. Church Planting

LCMS Church Planting comes alongside districts and their new church plants to support church planting teams with resources, training, and tools. Eligible church plants are able to apply for grant funds made possible through the generosity of the Bolick Foundation. Accomplishments over the past triennium:

- As of Nov. 2025, there are 92 church plants either active or building to activity (2023 Res. 1-03A).
- Church Planting Workshops for seminarians at both seminaries (2023 Res. 1-03A).
- Work is being done to launch more education and training for church planting teams (2023 Res. 1-03A).

Rev. Quintin Cundiff, *Director*

C.3. Discipleship Ministry

LCMS Discipleship Ministry is focused on supporting congregations through their districts as they develop lifelong disciples of Jesus. Discipleship Ministry offers resources that address both the “gathering” and the “shepherding” aspects of Jesus’ Great Commission. Accomplishments over the past triennium:

- Promoted witness, outreach, and revitalization through *Every One His Witness* and *re:Vitality* workshops that provide training for church workers and laypeople in strategic planning, meaningful community outreach, and ministry to inactive members (2023 Res. 6-04).
- Gathered and shared resources to aid small congregations and multi-congregation pastors and parishes with Partnership Project resources (2023 Res. 1-02A).
- The process for using the Congregational Assessment of Development/Decline Status (CADDs) self-assessment tool has been reworked to enable more widespread use as districts and congregations have increased use of this tool.

Plans for the next triennium:

- New *re:Vitality* workshops focused on assimilation and incorporation of members, and a workshop on outreach for churches with schools.

Rev. Dr. Heath Trampe, *Director*

C.4. Stewardship Ministry

LCMS Stewardship Ministry continues to provide workshops, conferences, and resources to help pastors and congregations teach and practice faithful stewardship in their own settings. Four pastors have been trained to be circuit and district presenters.

C.5. School Ministry

LCMS School Ministry assists, equips, and uplifts school educators, district staff, and especially education executives, as well as congregational leaders so that through them children may be equipped as disciples of Jesus Christ. There are 1,664 early childhood centers, 722 elementary schools, and 114 high schools in the LCMS. Accomplishments over the past triennium:

- National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA): 674 schools are accredited (early childhood centers, K–8 schools, and high schools).
- Conducting Genesis Project studies as requested to help congregations discern the feasibility and mission effectiveness of starting a school.
- School Leadership Development Program (SLED) has continued to form faithful, mission-driven administrators; expanded support for early childhood directors through the Early Childhood SLED initiative.
- Facilitated a special offering to support grants by Ministry-Focus for student debt of Commissioned Minister—Teachers

(2023 Res. 12-03A).

- Lutheran school curriculum standards for core subject areas have been created and distributed (2023 Res. 12-01A).
- Increased consultation services and resources for classical Lutheran schools, microschools, and Lutheran homeschool cooperatives.

Vacant

C.6. Youth Ministry

LCMS Youth Ministry faithfully leads, serves, resources, and networks youth and adults—working through districts and congregations—with Christ and His gifts at the heart and center of everything. Accomplishments over the past triennium:

- LCMS Youth Ministry hosted the LCMS Youth Gathering July 19–23, 2025. Almost 1,300 LCMS congregation were represented as over 19,000 youth and adults met in New Orleans, La., under the theme “ENDURE,” based on Heb. 12:1–3. Over 1,000 program planners, volunteers, exhibitors, speakers, and special guests provided planning, program elements, and support.
- “YouthLead” (formerly Lutheran Youth Fellowship) held the annual leadership training in 2024, 2025, and 2026 in St. Louis, Mo. Around 350 youth and adults attended these four trainings.
- In November 2023, the LCMS received a \$250,000 grant from the Lilly Endowment to support efforts to help member congregations utilize effective ministry practices with youth.
- LCMS Servant Events hosted by Synod camps and congregations provided opportunities for young people to serve in the name of Jesus and build relationships and skills.

Rev. Dr. Mark Kiessling, *Director*

C.7. Campus Ministry

LCMS Campus Ministry works through LCMS U, an initiative to connect and support Lutheran students as they head off to college and face countless challenges to their biblical worldview, doctrine, ethics, and practices. Accomplishments over the past triennium:

- Held two campus ministry staff gatherings since the last convention, engaging a total of 92 participants.
- Awarded eight grants to eight ministries so far this year, totaling \$15,220.

Daniel M. Galchutt, *Executive Director*

R1.2.2

Office of International Mission

The death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ for sinners is not merely the cornerstone of our faith—it is the very foundation of the Church’s mission. Because Christ lives, we proclaim His triumph over sin, death, and the devil to the ends of the earth. This proclamation is not by human creation, but by divine commission, entrusted to the Church through the Word and Sacraments.

Because Christ lives, the Church lives. And because He reigns, the Church is sent—to baptize, to preach, to teach, to administer the Sacraments, and to plant.

We who confess the one true faith—rooted in the Holy Scriptures and articulated in the *Book of Concord*—go forth not with our own message, but with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This Gospel mission is never abstract. It takes shape in congregations—faithful assemblies gathered around the Means of Grace, where sinners are forgiven, saints are nourished, disciples are made, and the Church is built.

The Office of International Mission (OIM), under the guidance of the Board for International Mission and the leadership of the Synod President, carries out this Christ-given task to the nations. Its work is not driven by trends or strategies, but by the clear teaching of Scripture as it is expressed in the *Book of Concord*. Its goal is not merely to send workers, but to plant and strengthen faithful Lutheran churches that will endure for generations.

The OIM’s threefold mission—*spread the Gospel, plant Lutheran churches, and show mercy*—is deeply incarnational and profoundly ecclesial. This work prepares pastors and deaconesses, equips lay workers, supports theological education, and fosters long-term relationships that lead to lasting, indigenous Lutheran congregations. Our goal is not to export American Christianity, but to plant Lutheran churches faithful to Christ and His Word.

A. Because Christ Is Risen, We Plant

The OIM’s stated overarching task to plant Lutheran churches is simple but not easy. To plant Lutheran churches that boldly confess Christ crucified and risen. Churches that preach justification by grace through faith. Churches where pastors administer the Sacraments rightly and preach the Law and Gospel clearly, where catechesis is deep, and where liturgy shapes and forms the faithful. Planting such churches takes sacrifice. Our OIM missionaries, in sacrificial service to the Lord and the Church, often miss family gatherings, sell all earthly treasures, and forfeit quality time spent with a dying loved one. Our OIM missionaries, both pastoral and lay, deserve our deepest gratitude and support.

Today, over 100 LCMS missionaries serve in 34 countries. About half of OIM’s missionaries serve as pastors—men called and ordained to preach Christ and administer His Sacraments. The other half serve faithfully as educators, deaconesses, and skilled lay workers. These missionaries are joined by 15 alliance missionaries—workers from our sister Lutheran churches around the world who serve with us in unity of confession and fidelity to the Lutheran doctrine we hold dear. Thanks be to God for all OIM missionaries faithfully serving together for the good of Christ’s kingdom.

Additional thanks are given to God as nearly two-thirds of our missionaries have served for more than five years in the field—double the average among other sending organizations. This longevity is not accidental. It is the fruit of careful support, faithful formation,

and the Church's steadfast prayers. Financially, the Lord has also provided—our missionary support reserves now cover nearly 12 months of expenses. This blessing is largely due to the efforts of LCMS Mission Advancement and, especially, Mission Central in Iowa, whose servants donate countless hours engaging donors in support of our missionaries; all of which bears witness to the Lord's faithfulness and the generosity of His people.

The mission of the Church is not a short-term project—it is a generational task. As the Holy Spirit tarries, His Church continues to go, preach, teach, baptize, and administer His gifts, confident that our labor is never in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). We plant today so that others may harvest tomorrow.

Over the last triennium, in an effort to more fully prepare our missionaries, the OIM has given renewed attention to theological education. Through OIM's custom curriculum titled *Unpacking Lutheran Mission*, we've ensured that our missionaries and staff are formed by a distinctly Lutheran missiology—one grounded not in human innovation, but in our Lord's command and promise: "Go therefore and make disciples ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19–20).

In response to 2023 Resolution 2-07A and in order to make disciples, OIM offers the opportunity for LCMS districts, congregations, recognized service organizations (RSOs), short-term teams, and others to participate in the Synod's international mission work through the FORO model. Presently, every OIM region offers a FORO, and more will be rolled out in the coming years.

As we look ahead, the harvest remains plentiful. The need for faithful *Book of Concord* Lutheran churches is urgent. Requests from our sister churches are growing. To meet these needs, OIM is preparing to expand our net missionary corps to 150 over the next three years. This is no small goal. But neither is the task small. The call to plant Lutheran churches must be met with doctrinal integrity, pastoral formation, a faithful and well-catechized laity, and robust support from God's people.

We are deeply grateful for those who walk alongside us—our seminaries, Concordia universities, districts, congregations, the Lutheran Women's Missionary League, the Office of National Mission, Concordia Plans, RSOs, LCMS Foundation, the Lutheran Church Extension Fund, and countless individuals. The boards and officers of the Synod have given sound guidance and accountability to ensure this work is carried out in good order and with transparency.

As we gather in convention, we give thanks—not for numbers or reports, but for Christ's steadfast faithfulness. Every congregation planted, every new believer baptized, every catechism translated, every font, altar, and pulpit established—these are signs of the Lord's living and active Word at work through His Church.

Let us go forward together—pastors and laity, congregations and districts, auxiliaries and units—committed to the faithful planting of Lutheran churches, where the pure Gospel is preached, the Sacraments rightly administered, and our confession of Christ rings clear for all to hear.

Let us continue to *spread the Gospel, plant Lutheran churches, and show mercy*. And let us do so with joy, confidence, and boldness, for *Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia!*

B. Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) Region

The LAC Region is comprised of Central and South America as well as the Caribbean. This year, we celebrated our 125th year since starting mission work in Brazil. Missionary church planting has led to the LCMS having 10 partner churches in our region, which includes Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Chile, Bolivia, Venezuela, Mexico, Haiti, Guatemala, and Uruguay. After 14 years of working closely with the *Iglesia Cristiana Evangelica Luterana Boliviana* (ICEL), altar and pulpit fellowship was declared by Rev. Dr. President Matthew C. Harrison in St. Louis in May 2024.

Our missionaries directly support church planting in 10 countries or are a step removed by preparing pastors for these church plants. While we plant churches, we do not create national churches. Our work is to throw out the seed with reckless abandon, purposely and intentionally gather in those who respond to the Gospel around Word and Sacrament, as that is where Jesus has promised to be and give of His life-giving signs and gifts for the forgiveness of sins.

The Lord of the harvest has continued to provide alliance missionaries, particularly from our partner church of Brazil (IELB), for which we are grateful. An alliance missionary is a pastor from a partner church who is called and sent by our partner church to work alongside LCMS missionaries in the planting of churches under our supervision and support. We are grateful for these dedicated men and their families, who faithfully teach alongside our LCMS missionaries.

B.1. Spread the Gospel

The Gospel always seeks free course, and serious missionary efforts are always intentional and involve the throwing out of the Gospel in a variety of fashions, which include literature, continuing education courses, Luther Academy, and other missionary ventures.

VDMA (*Verbum Domini manet in aeternum*, the Word of the Lord endures forever) is a digital initiative of LCMS Mission LAC to provide solid Lutheran orthodox literature to pastors in 22 countries. To date, there are 420 pastors and seminarians who receive free theological works in Spanish and Portuguese in exegesis, practice, history, and doctrine. More than 54 books have been released to Latino seminarians and pastors, whereas previously, Latino pastors only had an average of three Lutheran books.

A team of 35 translators and editors continue to translate and provide these resources under the capable leadership of Deaconess Cheryl Naumann, who has ably directed this initiative at the behest of the VDMA committee for the past 10 years. Partners include Concordia Publishing House, Lutheran Heritage Foundation, Lutheran Academy, and many others. Though these books are sent digitally, LCMS Mission also sends physical copies to 40 libraries across North America, as well as South America, in the hope that students and the like will find these and be exposed to good Lutheran theology. Many of these VDMA books can be found on Amazon for a minimum price of \$1 to \$3, and more than 2,500 such books have been sold across a dozen countries, making excellent Lutheran literature available to anyone interested. We are thankful to report that all eight volumes of the *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics* series are now in Spanish; two are in Portuguese, with another three in production. We are also thankful for the ebook of our new Spanish hymnal, *Himnario Luterano*, which can be purchased online via Amazon and used on one's tablet or cellphone,

making this hymnal, the use of which the Synod encouraged in the last convention (2023 Res. 4-04), even more versatile, especially in mission settings where it is difficult to make accessible physical books across Latin America.

Luther Academy courses, in coordination with executive Rev. Dr. Bennett and Rev. Carlos Schumann, also continue to be taught yearly across the Americas. In the last triennium, 34 theological conferences have been held involving 19 countries and more than 600 pastors and seminarians across 15 countries.

B.2. Plant Lutheran Churches

The planting of Lutheran churches is the primary focus of LCMS LAC, as we are committed to bringing to the people in the countries that we serve the fullness of the Gospel as confessed in our liturgy, creeds, Law and Gospel preaching, pastoral care, Small Catechism, and instruction in Christian righteousness.

Church planting continues, as in the last triennium, in Belize, the Cayman Islands, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Jamaica, Panama, Peru, and Puerto Rico. Our missionaries also assist in planting Lutheran churches in Mexico and Uruguay. At the time of this writing, 50 LCMS and alliance missionaries are actively planting Lutheran churches. In 2025 alone, we have seen 12 new missionaries join the work in LAC, which is the largest influx of missionaries in one year in the past six years.

Twelve districts, perhaps hundreds of congregations, RSOs, Rev. Dr. Ross Johnson of Disaster Response, and individuals from Synod visit our mission sites twice a year during FORO meetings to receive reports, attend worship, study theology, and review the work that is presented to them.

In Cuba, we have seen our work expand from one pastor to three, with an additional two men currently studying, a deaconess, and five more preparing for diaconal work. We are also glad to report that the *Sinodo Luterano Mexico* has grown from three pastors a decade ago to 10, with another five studying and potentially another six joining the Concordia Seminary (CMSCR) in the Dominican Republic Seminary next year.

In LAC, an average of 30 short-term teams support church planting. A secondary goal is to have 50 percent of our teams focus on mission education, strengthening our laity in their understanding of Lutheran missions both abroad and at home. Our capacity to handle short-term teams in proximity to Lutheran church plants through our FOROs has allowed us to see an average of 50 teams a year with 25 to 30 of those being handled by our LCMS missionary coordinators and the rest through RSO partners such as the Belize Mission Society, Ysleta, and MOST. We are grateful for these partnerships with our RSOs at our FOROs and their collaboration in placing their teams in proximity to our church plants. Special thanks to Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, for sending nearly 100 seminarians and deaconess students to the Dominican Republic for three consecutive years for mission education on short-term teams. Likewise, through an initiative by the Office of the President, 10 new district presidents were in the Dominican Republic in 2025 with Rev. Dr. Cory Rajek to learn of the work of LCMS Mission around the world and how to partner with her in her worldwide work.

New Lutheran church plants in the past three years are found in Choluteca, Honduras; Havana, Cuba; San Juan, Puerto Rico; Tijuana, Mexico; Chetumal, Mexico; San Pedro Peralta, Mexico;

La Chorrera, Panama; Cienfuegos, Santiago, Dominican Republic; Salto, Uruguay; and Canelones, Uruguay.

The planting of Lutheran churches requires that a missionary be prepared and supported in this task. As such, our Language Institute, which teaches missionaries Spanish and English, is in its tenth year. A missionary needs, through the Network Support Mission model, to have an average of 150 donors before deploying to the Dominican Republic for orientation. Once they arrive in the DR for orientation, missionaries engage in four months of intensive language learning, cultural adaptation, and studying of religious currents in Latin America. They also make visits, preach, and the like. Following this, they deploy to their field of service, often still learning Spanish and beginning their church-planting work.

Human Care missionaries, Deaconess nurse Tirzah Krey and Deaconess nurse Jamielynn Tinkey Flores, lead the human care circle. Rev. Dr. Jonathan Naumann and Rev. Dan Conrad, both veteran pastors and missionaries, serve as chaplains to our English- and Spanish-speaking missionaries and serve as professors at CMSCR. This human care circle advocates for our missionaries, helping them obtain visas, housing, and access to medical services, helping them with finances, helping them find education for their children, and the like. Our average tenure of missionary service in LAC is 6.9 years, potentially the highest average achieved in the past 20 years. The human care circle continues to directly contribute to the longevity of missionaries continuing to serve in LAC.

LCMS Mission LAC Human Care also supports a once-a-year missionary conference, which this past year was held in St. Louis in recognition of the LCMS mission work that began in Brazil in 1900 with missionary Mahler. Concordia Historical Institute partnered with the LAC region under the banner “Remember, Repent, Rejoice” and has upheld Brazilian missionary work in its main exhibit for 2025–26. All of our missionaries were made CHI members. *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* dedicated its spring issue to missionary essays. Additionally, Krey and Naumann published a missionary book of eight historical essays of LCMS LAC work in her mission fields. We are grateful to Altenberg and historic Trinity in St. Louis for allowing us to use the two chalices that were brought from Germany with the Saxons for our Divine Service in those churches as we visited our American Lutheran roots and studied with Rev. Dr. Lawrence Rast the early church planting efforts of LCMS and the founding of her seminaries.

B.2.a. Theological Education

CMSCR is in its ninth year of existence. Forty-four men have graduated from our residential and online (*Formación Pastoral para Hispanoamérica*, FPH) programs, and via colloquy since its inception. In May 2026, we anticipate the graduation of 13 pastoral students. Twelve men are currently in the pastoral residential program, which teaches men to be evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. In this four-year program, men study Greek and Hebrew and receive four classes in the Lutheran confessions. Additionally, 16 men are currently in the FPH online program, which is also a joint program with the Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Specific Ministry Pastor Program in Spanish/English. In July 2026, we await with joy the graduation of our first seven men from the FPQ program in Bolivia, which is in the Quechua language. We anticipate 10–12 new men entering in our residential pastoral program this September 2026. Our ninth annual symposia is focused on church planting, in which Rev. Dr. Detlev Schulz’s book *Mission from the Cross* will be presented in Spanish, and church planters from LAC and missionaries alike will participate.

In this past triennium, we graduated 50 deaconess students from our second cohort, bringing our total to 146 graduates from the three-year program. Sixty-nine diaconal students from 11 countries have completed their first year of studies.

This year, we launched our Phoebe Academy in three countries, which focuses on encouraging deaconesses in the Word, fellowship, and diaconal work. The goal is yearly to offer courses, Bible studies, workshops, and special studies as requested in different church bodies and mission fields.

A Lutheran teacher program is being built and, Lord willing, will be launched in this next triennium to bolster Lutheran identity in our schools across the region.

LCMS Mission and the Lutheran Church Extension Fund, in coordination with Rev. Kevin Robson and Rev. Bart Day, have partnered with Concordia Seminary, Argentina, to remodel a portion of their seminary to expand their capacity to receive students and to rent a portion of their property, enabling the seminary to support an additional professor. Currently, the LCMS Mission endorses the salary of one professor at Concordia Seminary, Argentina. These remodels will contribute toward the seminary's goal to pursue accreditation for its pastoral students for the first time.

B.3. Show Mercy

Our Mercy Center in the Dominican Republic (an institute of CMSCR) offers 10 workshops for the laity. New workshops are on Stewardship, Marriage, and the *Himnario Luterano*. These workshops are taught across the region and in 15 countries, as requested by pastors or partner churches, with an average of 15 workshops offered each year. These are meant to help laypeople be a force for mercy in their homes, workplaces, and communities.

Our deaconess graduates work with Lutheran Hour Ministries, Sunday School, Lutheran schools, after-school programs, Vacation Bible School, and youth programs. They also work at hospitals, conduct home visits with elderly people, visit group homes for people with disabilities, and help out at soup kitchens and any other places where the marginalized are found.

Mercy houses in Belize, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela include Lutheran schools, group homes, after-school programs, food kitchens, and disaster-relief centers. In each of these areas, the Gospel is offered alongside bodily care.

Haiti continues to be a challenging situation with a weak government in place. Our Haitian Lutheran Church continues to serve its people in dire circumstances, and LCMS Mission strives financially to support the six districts there twice a year.

The Venezuelan exile now exceeds 8 million people and is the single largest exodus of people from one country in the Western hemisphere since World War II. LCMS Mission continues to support the faithful work of its partner church in Venezuela by forming pastors, preparing deaconesses, and working with the board of directors of the *Iglesia Luterana Venezuela* (ILV) in its ministry and mission needs through the FORO in Venezuela. We strive to connect Lutheran immigrants with our LCMS missions around LAC and assist these refugees as they settle in their new countries. We continue to work with our partner church in Chile to send tens of thousands of dollars in medicine to Venezuela through Lutheran communities and their neighbors throughout the year.

C. Eurasia Region

The Eurasia region of the Office of International Mission remains, geographically, the largest of the four global regions, encompassing all of Europe, the Middle East, the countries of the former Soviet Union, Mongolia, Pakistan, and Israel. In 2025, the region was served by 28 missionary families (up from 25 in 2024), two alliance missionaries, and a growing network of indigenous pastors and deaconesses working with 14 sister church bodies in altar and pulpit fellowship and numerous emerging confessional Lutheran groups. Key long-standing sister churches include the Independent Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Germany, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England (ELCE), the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia (LELB), the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland, the Evangelical Lutheran Church–Synod of France, and several others. The LCMS enjoys a mutually productive partnership with sister churches in theological education, church planting, and mercy.

The strategic plan continues to be shaped by the three pillars that have guided the work for more than a decade: *spread the Gospel*, *plant Lutheran churches*, and *show mercy*. Church planting remains the keystone, for the planted congregation is the place where the Word is preached in its purity and the Sacraments are faithfully administered and from which mercy flows to the neighbor. This approach ensures that efforts are rooted in the Lutheran Confessions, as churches address challenges like sanctions, refugee crises, and restricted access while advancing proclamation.

C.1. Spread the Gospel

The Lord is fulfilling this promise in dramatic ways across Eurasia. Over 2,000 Persian (Iranian and Afghan) converts have been baptized in Germany in recent years, with Trinity Lutheran Church in Berlin-Steglitz now numbering approximately 1,600 members, 80 percent of whom worship in Farsi. Complete Farsi liturgy, catechisms, and hymnody are available online (nurezendegi.org) and are used even inside Iran. Ukrainian refugees (over 1 million in Germany alone since 2022) receive Word and Sacrament care in Wittenberg and other cities, with services and catechesis in Ukrainian and Russian. English-language “expat project” congregations, or “home missions abroad,” serve military communities and internationals while reaching locals, particularly near U.S. bases in Frankfurt, Kaiserslautern, Spangdahlem, and new plants. In restricted access Central Asia and the Middle East, dedicated missionaries proclaim Christ at some personal risk, using relational approaches like English classes and other aids to communicate the Gospel.

C.1.a. Theological Education

Translation of confessional Lutheran resources into Farsi, Hebrew, Italian, Romanian, Russian, Greek, Czech, and other languages continues at an accelerated pace, placing the unique message of Christ crucified and raised for our justification into the hands and hearts of people who have never before had access to it. Missionaries of the Eurasia region are collaborating in the development of a software index system for translations of the *Book of Concord* and other Lutheran resources across 21 languages. The Riga Luther Academy (in partnership with the LELB) serves as the primary engine for pastoral education. Its hybrid English-language Bachelor of Theology (BTh) program—combining online coursework, biannual residential intensives in Riga and Wittenberg, and on-field mentoring by LCMS missionaries—now serves 44 pastoral candidates from more than a dozen countries. This program is

effective in restricted-access nations and diaspora communities, including Kazakhstan and Pakistan. The Old Latin School in Wittenberg functions as the Eurasia Center for Spreading the Gospel, hosting regional conferences and respite. It is being prepared for continuing education events, missionary orientation “boot camps,” and residential intensives. Additional continuing education courses and regional conferences, such as diaconal seminars and pastoral conferences in Palanga (Lithuania), Rome, Braşov (Romania), Oslo, and other cities, are offered annually in partnership with LCMS seminaries and regional theologians.

C.1.b. Literature and Publishing

Through literature and publishing, efforts include the Persian Project’s full Farsi liturgy, Small Catechism, and growing hymnal (nurezendegi.org). The new confessional Lutheran congregation in Tel Aviv is translating the *Book of Concord* and liturgical materials into Hebrew. The seminal work of Romanian pastors has spread to several other countries, including Hungary, where a new church is being planted. In Italy, the first confessional Lutheran hymnal is nearing completion. Many of these local projects are being replicated in dozens of languages across the region to stimulate both new mission activity and underground believers who live in restricted nations.

C.2. Plant Lutheran Churches

Following the apostolic pattern, the region continues to plant and strengthen confessional Lutheran congregations. Active church plants and preaching stations now exist in Spain (12 congregations and growing), Italy (Rome, Padua, and 5 stations), Romania (Bucharest, Braşov, Suceava, and a station on Cluj-Napoca), Bulgaria (Sofia), Greece (Thessaloniki), Turkey (Istanbul), Moldova (Chisenau and Cahul), Hungary (Budapest), Israel (Tel Aviv), Ireland (Cork), Pakistan (three students who will soon be ordained), and several cities in Germany serving Persian, Ukrainian, and English-speaking communities.

Major milestones since the last convention include the February 2024 ordination of a new pastor to serve a church plant in Sofia, Bulgaria; the May 2024 ordination of a new pastor in Moldova; and the ordinations of Luther Academy—Riga students, who serve in Rome. Lutheranism in Spain continues to grow, with two LCMS alliance missionaries and the recent commissioning of eight Spanish deaconesses. Germany is experiencing rapid growth among Persian converts, and missionaries are strategically placed to raise up pastoral candidates to carry mission to Farsi speakers throughout the world. Ukrainian refugee ministry in Wittenberg and other German cities provides spiritual care to established communities in Ukrainian and Russian. English-language “expat project” congregations near U.S. military communities in Frankfurt, Kaiserslautern, and several new plants serve as a base for outreach to internationals and locals. New church plants are sprouting up in Ireland, Poland, Hungary, and Moldova.

C.3. Show Mercy

Mercy is never detached from the Gospel but flows from congregations where Christ is rightly preached and the Sacraments are rightly administered. Persian refugees in Germany receive church asylum, language training, and integration assistance alongside Baptism and catechesis. Three pro-life counseling centers in Russia—Ingria Hope in St. Petersburg and Faith and Hope in Novosibirsk, partnering with local churches—continue to offer alternatives to abortion and care for mothers and children despite sanctions. In

Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia, medical projects and English teaching connect people to local Lutheran congregations. Orphan care in Kazakhstan and support for Ukrainian refugees across Europe point to the crucified and risen Christ, who gave Himself for the life of the world. In Central Europe and Central Asia, short-term volunteer teams from the LCMS assist with Vacation Bible Schools, mercy clinics, clothing drives, and church renovations. In every case, mercy is offered in close proximity to the Gospel so that body and soul are cared for together and new believers are folded into planted Lutheran congregations.

From the British Isles to Central Asia, and from the Arctic Circle to the Holy Land, the Lord continues to open doors no human hand can. The Eurasia region gives heartfelt thanks for the Synod’s faithful partnership that sustains this extraordinary season of Gospel proclamation, church planting, and works of mercy.

D. Africa Region

The OIM Africa region spreads the Gospel, plants Lutheran churches, and shows mercy in more than 25 countries on the African continent. Among those countries, the LCMS has connections to more than 45 *Book of Concord*–confessing and conservative Lutheran church bodies and a very small handful of less conservative Lutheran church bodies seeking a deeper understanding of Lutheran identity. LCMS work in Africa takes place through these Lutheran church bodies and is responsive to their priorities, strategies, goals, and objectives. The most frequent requests presented to the LCMS seek support for the formation of church workers and support for the showing of mercy and compassion. Through these relationships and our mutual work, the LCMS proclaims with the local church, *Christ is risen, indeed!*

The OIM Africa region is served by eight deployed LCMS missionary families, four alliance missionaries from sister churches in Brazil and Finland, and three local workers in the regional field office in Kenya. This may be the smallest regional team the LCMS has assigned to work in Africa since the initial deployments of missionaries to West Africa almost a century ago. The LCMS remains committed to deploying missionaries to Africa to meet the 40-plus requests from the churches with whom we work (teachers, nurses, IT specialists, theological educators, deaconesses, language teachers, etc.); the program openings to oversee and implement region-wide endeavors (volunteer coordinators, conference coordinators, area visitors, etc.); and the needs of the LCMS, serving both the missionary force and the Synod at large (team chaplains, missionary care coordinators, communication specialists, business managers, etc.). Recruiting efforts are underway through various channels, including direct recruitment by the OIM recruiting team, direct mailings, and through the Synod’s publications. Read an appeal letter from Africa’s regional director in *The Lutheran Witness*, November 2025.

Although the LCMS team in Africa is small, the work is expansive. The LCMS has 10 altar and pulpit fellowship sister churches on the continent: The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana (ELCG), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK), the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia, the Lutheran Church of Nigeria (LCN), the Confessional Lutheran Church of South Africa, the Free Evangelical Synod in South Africa (FELSISA), the Lutheran Church of Southern Africa (LCSA), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Sudan/Sudan (ELCSS-S), the Lutheran Church of Togo/*Eglise Luthérienne du Togo* (ELT), and the Lutheran Church of Uganda. Beyond these 10 altar and pulpit fellowship

sister churches, there are an additional 35 church bodies currently identified as theologically compatible with the LCMS, a few new church bodies in the process of forming, conservative districts and dioceses of larger Lutheran churches that have a breadth of theological expression, and even a couple church bodies not theologically compatible with the LCMS but deeply interested in learning about *Book of Concord* Lutheranism. Among all these relationships, the LCMS Africa team seeks to *spread the Gospel, plant Lutheran churches, and show mercy* such that the call *Christ is risen, indeed!* goes out far and wide.

D.1. Spread the Gospel

The OIM Africa region supports spreading the Gospel throughout the many church bodies it works with. The endeavor is multifaceted, broad, and strategic. Collaborations with church bodies, RSOs, districts, congregations, auxiliaries, system schools, and other institutions provide the opportunity and the necessary resources for the Gospel message to reach the unreached.

Church bodies like The Lutheran Mission in Africa—Synod of Thousand Hills (LMA-STH) in Rwanda began radio programming supported by LCMS grants during COVID-19 lockdowns. This *Book of Concord* church body recognized an opportunity to use radio programming to reach not only their members across the country but also the unreached. Since 2020, the clergy of the LMA-STH have hosted a live 30-minute weekly radio program, which includes Scripture, a devotion, and engagement with the audience by taking calls on-air. Through this program, the church spreads the Gospel of Jesus Christ across the radio station's nationwide audience of millions, proclaiming, *Christ is risen, indeed!*

Through the regional translation committee, opportunities to translate evangelistic materials, children's books, and theological resources are prioritized based on the strategic emphases and areas of mission focus. These projects are coordinated with Lutheran Heritage Foundation, an RSO that closely collaborates with the LCMS OIM Africa region on translation projects. Through this partnership over the past triennium, with funding from the 2023 National Offering, the region supported the following translations projects and printing runs: the Small Catechism Enchiridion in Swahili (East Africa) and Kuria (Kenya); the full Small Catechism with questions and answers in Swahili (East Africa), Lulogooli (Kenya), and Moba (Togo); the Large Catechism in Tonga (Zambia); the Smalcald Articles in Tshiluba (DRC), Kinyarwanda (Rwanda), and Rundi (Burundi); the Apology of the Augsburg Confession in Dholuo (Kenya), Luba-Lulua (DRC), Tshiluba (DRC), Kinyarwanda (Rwanda), and Rundi (Burundi); the *Book of Concord* in Malagasy (Madagascar); *A Summary of Christian Doctrine* in Swahili (East Africa); *Pastoral Care Companion* in Swahili (East Africa); *Jesus Never Fails* in Kuria (Kenya); and *A Children's Garden of Bible Stories* in Ateso (Uganda).

D.2. Plant Lutheran Churches

Most of the church bodies collaborating with the LCMS are experiencing rapid growth, with congregations springing up due to migration of Lutherans to new areas, engagement with Lutheran media, or intentional church planting strategies. Those congregations quickly appeal to their church officers for a pastor to be assigned to them, presenting a significant challenge to the churches with whom the LCMS works. This is a good problem to have. There are so many congregations being established so quickly that there aren't enough pastors to care for them all! Most pastors in the Lutheran churches in Africa oversee between five and fifteen

congregations each, visiting their congregations as they are able to, although the challenges of travel and the cost of travel prevent frequent visits in many contexts. Church leaders in the region recognize that where the Word is proclaimed—*Christ is risen, indeed!*—and the Sacraments are rightly administered, a church is planted in the full and beautiful embodiment of Christ.

Lutheran church leaders across Africa recognize the LCMS for its clear Gospel proclamation, sound theology, and commitment to thorough church worker formation. Consequently, for many *Book of Concord* Lutheran church bodies, the LCMS is an important resource when they seek assistance in the formation of church workers. Those church bodies request residential missionary theological educators, short-term professors, textbooks from Concordia Publishing House, assistance in developing curriculum, support in building their seminary campus, and contributions toward their seminary's operating costs or scholarships.

The LCMS OIM Africa region currently supports 14 *Book of Concord* residential seminaries that are owned, operated, and administered by one or more of the church bodies LCMS works with. Collectively, these seminaries have *hundreds of students* in programs of pastoral and deaconess formation at certificate and diploma levels: the ILCA's Concordia Seminary in Cabinda, Angola; the ELCE's Beleza Training Center in Eritrea; the EELC's Asella Lutheran Theological Seminary in Asella, Ethiopia; the EELC's Lutheran Theological Seminary in Sasaabi-Accra, Ghana; the EELC's Lutheran Center for Theological Studies (CLET) in Gueckédou, Guinea; the ELA-SCI's Lutheran Center for Theological Studies (CLEET) in Toulépleu, Ivory Coast; the ELCK's Matongo Lutheran Theological Seminary at Neema Lutheran College in Chabera/Sondu, Kenya; the LCN's Jonathan Ekong Memorial Lutheran Seminary in Obot Idim-Uyo, Nigeria; the EELC's Lutheran Center for Theological Studies (CLET) in Pointe-Noire, Republic of Congo-Brazzaville; the FELSISA-LCSA-Bleckmar's Lutheran Theological Seminary in Tshwane-Pretoria, South Africa; the ELCS-S' Concordia Lutheran Institute on the Holy Ministry in Yambio, South Sudan; the ELCT South East of Lake Victoria Diocese (SELVD)'s Shinyanga Confessional Lutheran College in Shinyanga, Tanzania; the LCEA's St. Peter's Lutheran Theological Seminary in Himo, Tanzania; and the ELT's Lutheran Center for Theological Studies (CLET) in Dapaong, Togo. These are full residential seminaries operating in English, French, Swahili, or Portuguese, many of which are accredited and the majority of which offer three full years of pastoral formation with Greek and Hebrew. The region also supports specialty programs that provide a route to ordination through intensives, including the ICCM's Theological Education Program in Villa de Senna, Mozambique; the CELC-SL's Christ Evangelical Lutheran Theological Seminary in Jembe-Bo, Sierra Leone; and the ELCT-SELVD's Bishop Emmanuel Makala Training Center outside Shinyanga, Tanzania. Finally, the region supports bachelor students studying through Riga Luther Academy in Latvia and graduate programs in the EECMY's *Mekane Yesus* Seminary in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; FLM's Martin Luther University/SALT in Fianarantsoa, Madagascar; Concordia Seminary's online master of arts in theology program; and Concordia Theological Seminary's Gothenburg master of sacred theology program.

Beyond forming pastors for new church plants, the OIM Africa region supports the congregation's building of their church structure through the Africa Tin/Chapel Roofs project. Although congregations are often able to collect sand, make mud bricks, collect firewood, fire their bricks, collect foundation stones, and fundraise

a bag of cement at a time for mortar, they can get stuck at the point of purchasing trusses and tin sheets for roofing. The roof is almost always the most expensive part of the church building. When a congregation has built the walls of their church building up to the point where a roof can be safely and securely attached to the structure, they make a request through their church body for assistance in roofing their new building. In the last triennium, the LCMS has supported roofing projects in Guinea, Rwanda, Tanzania, Nigeria, and Ghana.

In specific contexts where a family is unable to purchase Bibles due to lack of availability, the OIM Africa region supports the purchase and delivery of Bibles. For example, refugees who are living far from their home country in refugee camps and settlements are not able to purchase heart language Bibles in the camps. The LCMS purchases Bibles in those languages and transports them to the camp or settlement for use by the church and its members. OIM Africa has also supported the purchase of Bibles for specific outreach programs, including prison ministry.

The OIM Africa region supports the purchase of motorcycles for pastors and evangelists to reach new mission areas where churches are being planted. In combination with OIM Africa's short-term teams focused on door-to-door visitation, such access and efforts support the work of planting Lutheran churches.

Under the umbrella of Africa Luther Academy, conferences for church workers provide the opportunity for pastors or deaconesses to gather for time in the Word, encouragement, and collaboration with lectures presented by professors from a *Book of Concord* seminary, church officers, missionaries, LCMS seminary professors, or LCMS pastors. This triennium, the Africa Luther Academy program included the following courses: "Worship, Hymnody, and Liturgy" in Rwanda, Togo, Francophone Africa, and the DRC; "Reconciliation Through the Lens of the Small Catechism" in Rwanda; "Law and Gospel" in Zambia and Benin; "The Office of Pastoral Ministry" in Rwanda; "Preaching" in Zambia; and "Hermeneutics and Homiletics" in Kenya. These conferences address theological topics with practical application, intended for participants to be edified, engaged, encouraged, and to have both content and confidence to immediately bring their experience to bear in their communities, proclaiming, *Christ is risen, indeed!*

In support of the planting of churches and formation of church workers for those churches, the OIM Africa region has established four new FOROs around the work of Lutheran Theological Seminary in Pretoria, South Africa; the Confessional Lutheran Church-Malawi Synod; the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Eritrea; and LMA-STH in Rwanda. In each of these countries, the focus is on bringing salvation to every people and nation as we *spread the Gospel, plant Lutheran churches, and show mercy*. Districts, congregations, RSOs, and individuals of the LCMS attend our annual FOROs to receive reports, attend worship if the FORO is gathered around an altar and pulpit fellowship sister church, study theology, visit mission sites, and prayerfully support the efforts of these church bodies and our missionaries through short-term teams, vocational opportunities, and financial contributions. These FOROs join other collaborations in the region in support of specific projects, including the Agricultural Consultancy project, which rotates through countries on a three-to-five-year cycle and an advocacy group supporting the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya's Project24/Christ's Care for Children: Kenya programs. In the next triennium, the region expects to establish FOROs in Tanzania, Liberia, Guinea, Mozambique, Ghana, the Ivory Coast,

Madagascar, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Togo.

D.3. Show Mercy

The OIM Africa region supports church bodies across the region in showing mercy to their communities, just as our missionaries each show mercy in their own contexts. In extreme situations of natural disaster, for example, the region collaborates with our experts in LCMS Disaster Response to support recovery efforts through local congregations. In some cases, support must extend from the initial response to sustain community members to the next harvest season. In the last triennium, the region supported responses to typhoons, floods, fires, and famine. In all of these cases, the response is administered through the local church body and its congregations, with church members and church officers intentionally engaging the community with mercy in close proximity to Word and Sacrament ministry to ensure that temporal needs are not supplied at the cost of eternal salvation but that they give an opening for the proclamation *Christ is risen, indeed!*

The OIM Africa region supports the long-term development of agricultural systems through the long-standing Agricultural Consultancy team, a team of LCMS volunteers who are experts in farming and small business management. Through community engagement and a well-refined technique of bringing the community's own expertise to bear, the volunteers advise the community on long-term, inexpensive, and sustainable techniques to improve crop yields or adapt to environmental changes. Lessons build on Scripture, include opportunities for the pastor to address the participants, and are hosted by the local congregation, bringing this mercy project into close proximity to Word and Sacrament ministry.

The OIM Africa region supports the showing of mercy through long-standing projects directed toward preventing and treating malaria. In the last triennium, projects directed toward malaria were implemented by churches in Madagascar, Tanzania, and Nigeria. In each case, these projects involved congregation members, pastors, and church officers who could point to Christ and to the church in the midst of addressing the suffering, grief, and loss caused by malaria.

The OIM Africa region supports water projects on Lutheran church plots and at Lutheran schools. Projects are proposed by the local church body according to what is most appropriate for their context and include shallow (hand-dug) wells, bore-hole (drilled) wells, rainwater collection systems, and waste/septic systems. Locating these community resources at the congregation or at the local Lutheran school brings community members into engagement with Word and Sacrament ministry at the local congregation.

The OIM Africa region supports the training of deaconesses through seminaries in several countries, including the notable program at Matongo Lutheran Theological College at Neema Lutheran College in Chabera/Sondu, Kenya, the seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya. This program receives deaconess students from neighboring countries and prepares them for mercy service. In the next triennium, deaconess programs are expected to be started in at least two other seminaries on the continent.

Finally, the LCMS invests deeply in the Africa region's flagship mercy project, Project24/Christ's Care for Children: Kenya. As of the end of 2025, the program supports 252 vulnerable young people in primary school at nine Project24 boarding facilities across Kenya. These children receive holistic care and are active members of the local sponsoring Lutheran congregation. The local pastor regularly engages them with catechesis, and their daily routines

include morning and evening devotions recognizable in Lutheran homes around the world. On school breaks, children return home to their families, extended families, or clans and share their faith. As children graduate from primary school, they receive scholarships to attend boarding secondary schools, attend an intensive pre-college Luther academy between secondary school and college, and finally receive scholarships to colleges and vocational schools, retaining their tight connection to the program and the spiritual care provided by the church all the way through to adulthood. The program supports 305 students in secondary schools and colleges. Sponsorships by LCMS members, congregations, and other entities have enabled expansion of the program this year to bring more vulnerable children into close proximity to Word and Sacrament ministry so that they may proclaim with us, *Christ is risen, indeed!*

Beyond these programs, the OIM Africa region supports ministry to persons with disabilities, Word and Sacrament ministry to refugee populations, medical costs for church workers, construction of parsonages and seminary buildings, ministry to prisons and hospitals, and an extension of Christ's Care for Children to a newly expanded site in Mwaui, Tanzania. Through all these projects, the church shows mercy.

E. Asia Region

The preaching of Christ crucified and raised from the dead in the Asia region began in the late 1800s, when missionaries arrived in southern India. Over the last 130 years, hundreds of churches have been planted across southern India, and in September 2024, 100 years of pastoral formation was celebrated at Concordia Theological Seminary in Nagercoil, India. The work that began in the southern tip of India has expanded north, east, and south. The Office of International Mission – Asia Region now serves the subregions of East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania, which inhabits approximately 4.8 billion people, representing roughly 60 percent of the global population.

Presently, 21 OIM missionary families and one alliance missionary serve across 20 countries in Asia, and the LCMS gives thanks to God for the growth, faithfulness, and collaboration of its seven sister churches (IELC in India, LCHKS in Hong Kong, GLC in Papua New Guinea, LCP in the Philippines, LCK in South Korea, CELC in Sri Lanka, and CELC in Taiwan) in the work of spreading the Gospel, planting Lutheran churches, and showing mercy.

E.1. Spread the Gospel

The prophet Isaiah writes that the Word of God never returns empty, always accomplishing the purpose for which it was sent (Isa. 55:11). Across lands where Islamic calls for prayer blare over megaphones, the sound of monks chanting emanates from Buddhist temples, smoke rises from the offerings burned in small cans along the streets, and prayers are offered at family altars in homes, missionaries in Asia trust Isaiah's Word. Through evangelism, translation, continuing theological education, music, and Christian education, missionaries spread the Gospel, knowing that the Lord is faithful to accomplish His purpose(s) through missionary work.

Since the last Synod convention, Asia region missionaries have developed and offered sacred music courses and workshops that strengthened the worship life of local congregations and brought non-Christians in contact with the Gospel in song through special concerts and festivals. Sunday School curriculums with associated crafts have been developed and distributed to sister churches for use in Christian education programs. Annually, six to eight theolog-

ical conferences are held in numerous countries to support pastoral ministry so that pastors and their congregations can faithfully minister in their communities and extend the proclamation of Christ through the planting of churches.

E.2. Plant Lutheran Churches

The LCMS' mission history in Asia is rich with stories of missionaries arriving in and planting Lutheran churches in countries where no Lutheran (and few Christian) churches existed. While most of the current church planting is done by sister church bodies, OIM Asia is still actively planting churches and looks to expand that work.

In the next triennium, OIM Asia plans to plant congregations near where LCMS expats live and work. This includes support for LCMS members and families teaching at international schools in East Asia. This also includes planting churches near active U.S. military bases in Guam and Japan, which not only provides pastoral care and Word and Sacrament ministry to LCMS members in the armed forces but also establishes permanent confessional Lutheran congregations to serve the local community.

Asia region missionaries will continue supporting developing and sister churches as they plant and sustain Lutheran congregations through pastoral mentoring and theological education. The Lutheran Church of the Philippines (LCP), the fruit of LCMS mission work, is actively planting churches on the northern islands of the Philippines while the Tagakaulo Lutheran Church of Christ in the Philippines (TLCCP) continues planting congregations in Mindanao, even as it matures as a church body. Through pastoral mentorship and formal theological education in seminary formation, OIM Asia is actively assisting the LCP and the TLCCP extend the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout this archipelago with 14 church plants.

Elsewhere in the region, missionaries are either planting or supporting the planting of congregations in Japan (four church plants), China (one church plant), Cambodia (27 preaching stations), and Australia (15 church plants).

E.2.a. Pastoral Formation

The planting of Lutheran churches necessitates the formation of pastors to preach the Gospel and rightly administer the Sacraments. OIM Asia supports the pastoral formation in four languages: English, Tamil, Pigeon, and Mandarin.

Concordia Theological Seminary in Nagercoil, India, has 95 seminarians studying English and preparing to serve Tamil-speaking people around southern India. Lutheran Theological Seminary in Baguio City, Philippines, has 18 students studying to serve as pastors, deaconesses, and church planters across the Philippines. In the uplands of Papua New Guinea, several Bible colleges feed students into Timothy Lutheran Seminary. Presently, 37 students are studying to serve as Pigeon-speaking pastors across Papua New Guinea. In September 2025, the China Evangelical Lutheran Church in Taiwan launched their church worker formation program with its first cohort of four students to provide church workers for the Mandarin-speaking world.

In addition to supporting and strengthening these seminary programs, the Asia region will work to expand opportunities for pastoral formation. The Lutheran Theological Seminary – Australia is in development and hopes to have 10 students studying to be confessional Lutheran pastors and church planters to serve across the continent of Australia.

To support pastoral formation and church planting, the Asia region has continued translating materials. Since the 2023 convention, volumes from *Chemnitz's Works*, *The Lutheran Difference*, and Luther's Small Catechism have been translated into Japanese. Volumes from *Luther's Works* as well as works by David Scaer, C.F.W. Walther, and William Weedon have been translated into Mandarin. Several resources, most notably the *Buku Ibadah Luther* (Indonesian hymnal), have been translated into Indonesian.

E.2.b. FOROs

To support the planting of Lutheran churches through the spreading of the Gospel and pastoral formation, the FORO model of mission support is being established in Asia and will expand. The first FORO was held in the Philippines in early March to support and strengthen the work of Lutheran Theological Seminary in Baguio City, which serves the Philippines but also serves as the pastoral formation for several nations in Asia. The groundwork for FOROs in Australia and Japan was also laid in early 2026 to support church planting and the formation of church planting pastors in those respective nations. OIM Asia's goal is to have six developed FOROs in the next triennium.

E.3. Show Mercy

Mercy is always connected with the Gospel and flows from congregations where Christ is rightly preached and His Sacraments are rightly administered. In Taiwan, multiple English Bible camps are offered to connect the Taiwanese to the local Lutheran congregation. In Cambodia, deaconesses were brought together for a continuing education conference to strengthen their service to the community. Across Asia, where typhoons and other natural disasters struck, the church came alongside the suffering with the Gospel of Christ crucified and raised from the dead.

As the Asia region continues to *spread the Gospel, plant Lutheran churches*, and *show mercy* in the most populated area on the planet, the Asia region extends deep gratitude to the Synod's prayers, partnership, and ongoing support as well as our mutual confession of faith that *Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia!*

F. Disaster Training and Response

Since January 1, 2023, LCMS Disaster Response has supported work in 12 countries across three regions (Asia, Latin America, and Africa), providing \$1,082,873 in grants to assist sister churches following natural disasters. These grants primarily supported the rebuilding of Lutheran churches and schools, church worker homes, and community homes and the provision of food, water, and essential relief supplies after natural disasters.

F.1. Disaster Training

Two major projects in Brazil and Chile exemplify the continued implementation of 2023 Res. 3-04A, which directs the Synod to continue producing disaster-response training, resources, and grants. Together with similar work in Asia and Africa, LCMS Disaster Response has strengthened sister churches, provided relief to suffering communities, and expanded the global Lutheran mercy presence during times of crisis.

F.2. Disaster Response

Significant work was carried out in Latin America following two major catastrophes in centers of Lutheranism. In Brazil, historic floods in 2024 severely affected the Rio Grande do Sul region. LCMS Disaster Response funded three major grants totaling

\$405,000 to help *Igreja Evangélica Luterana do Brasil* rebuild eight churches, reprint essential confessional materials destroyed in the disaster, and support a nationwide disaster-response training conference attended by more than 200 pastors and laity. These efforts strengthened the IELB's capacity to serve more than 2,200 affected Lutheran families, many of whom lost homes, church buildings, and livelihoods.

In Chile, catastrophic wildfires devastated Viña del Mar, destroying more than 12,000 homes. LCMS Disaster Response supported the Confessional Lutheran Church of Chile with two grants totaling \$310,000. These funds provided construction materials to rebuild 100 homes, sustained a Lutheran psychologist offering trauma counseling, supported ongoing food distribution (over 30,000 meals given), and funded full-time pastoral care, children's ministries, and volunteer construction teams from across Latin America. The project demonstrated a strong Lutheran mercy witness and served more than 8,000 people through preaching, teaching, and spiritual care.

G. Ministry to the Armed Forces

In a world that often feels shrouded in darkness—where cultural winds howl and threats to religious freedom grow louder—God has not left His people without witnesses. He has raised up faithful LCMS pastors to serve as military chaplains, carrying the unstoppable, life-giving message into the hardest places: *Christ is risen, indeed!*

While many denominations struggle to find qualified pastors willing to wear the uniform, the LCMS has been richly blessed. Dozens have answered the call to go where their flock goes—into training, into danger, into austere and lonely places—to preach in season and out of season that the tomb is empty and Christ lives. Our chaplains eat the same food, endure the same dust and cold, bear the same risks, all to shepherd souls with Word and Sacrament, showing the compassion of the risen Christ, who once said, "Peace be with you," even while bearing His wounds.

Yet the harvest is great, and the workers are still too few. If not us, then who will send shepherds to serve those who selflessly serve our nation (and their families)? We need more voices boldly proclaiming that death has been swallowed up in victory, that sin no longer has the last word, that because Jesus lives, every battlefield grave will one day give up its dead.

Right now, 51 faithful LCMS chaplains serve on active duty, and another 65 ministers serve in the Reserve, National Guard, Civil Air Patrol, Coast Guard Auxiliary, and Veterans Affairs (VA)—plus 2 directors of religious education. They stand protected (for now) by law and Department of War policy to preach the Gospel in its truth and purity, without compromise, treating every soul with dignity while refusing to bend the knee to the spirit of the age. In an environment that daily tests conscience, they keep lifting high the cross and the empty tomb: *Christ is risen, indeed!*

Your Ministry to the Armed Forces surrounds them with prayer, pastoral care, Lutheran continuing education, and fierce advocacy for religious liberty. We fight to keep them endorsed, equipped, and free to be faithful. Our goal: 70 active duty and 120 Reserve/Guard/VA chaplains by 2027—so that no service member or veteran ever lacks a pastor who will look them in the eye and say with unshakable certainty, *Christ is risen, indeed!*

Every quarter we mail over 17,000 pieces of solid Lutheran devotional material—*Portals of Prayer*, *So Help Me God*, and more—

to more than 3,500 warriors, retirees, and VA patients around the globe, because man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God—and that Word made flesh has risen from the dead. *Christ is risen, indeed!*

Our LCMS Operation Barnabas project is the church saying, “We will not forget our veterans.” Over 18 million American veterans walk among us; many sit silently in our pews or live in the shadow of our steeples, wounded in body and soul. Through 637 (and soon, Lord willing, 1,000) Operation Barnabas congregations, we are training the Church to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and to declare that the same Jesus who conquered death is mighty to save every veteran from despair, addiction, and the lingering echo of war.

Adopt-A-Chap links congregations directly to deployed or serving chaplains so that even in the loneliest outpost, a pastor knows his church back home is praying, writing, and standing with him as he proclaims the resurrection hope.

And through the Doctor of Ministry in Military Chaplaincy, we sharpen these shepherds so that they can feed the flock with deeper wisdom while never leaving the battlefield. This is the mission: that every warrior, every veteran, every military family would hear and know the shout that changed the world forever—*Christ is risen, indeed!*

And because He is risen, there is hope beyond the grave, healing beyond the wound, and a peace the world cannot give. Pray for our chaplains. Adopt a chaplain. Join or start an Operation Barnabas congregation. Send us the names of your sons, daughters, grandchildren, and neighbors in uniform. Because the tomb is empty, the mission is urgent, and the victory is already won.

Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Cory J. Rajek, *Executive Director*

R1.2.3

Office of Pastoral Education

The office of Pastoral Education (PED), supervised by the Chief Mission Officer (CMO), assists the President in executing responsibilities related to pastoral formation and care that are assigned to him: “The [CMO] shall, on behalf of the President, provide leadership, coordination, and oversight for pre-seminary education programs, seminary education, and post-seminary continuing education, and by providing advocacy for pastoral education and health within the Synod” (Bylaw 3.4.3.8). The PED executive director is responsible for facilitating the prior-approval process for initial appointments to seminary faculties (Bylaw 3.10.5.7.3 [a]) and is a nonvoting advisory member of the Pastoral Formation Committee (Bylaw 3.10.4.6).

A. Set Apart to Serve

Set Apart to Serve (SAS) is a culture of forming, encouraging, and recruiting our youth and adults—from infancy through adulthood—to consider a full-time church work vocation in every LCMS congregation, home, school, district, and entity. To sustain this culture until the Lord returns, it is vital that every pastor, commissioned church worker, parent, and layperson intentionally forms and encourages our youth and adults to consider full-time church work and walks with them through that journey.

The purpose of the church forming and recruiting boys and

men to preach and teach the Word of Christ as pastors and to form and recruit youth and adults to teach and share the Word of Christ as LCMS commissioned church worker vocations is because it is through the Word of Christ they teach that the Holy Spirit creates, nourishes, and sustains saving faith for their life and salvation.

A.1. Research and Measurables

Having something become part of the culture of the LCMS, with its magnitude and wonderful complexity, takes the commitment and ownership of everyone across the Synod. The same is true for *SAS*. Ongoing research helps us measure our short-term impact and long-term trajectory. In our fourth annual youth survey, *SAS* learned conversations with church workers remains the most important trigger for youth who self-reported they are considering church work. Youth are also stating that the top obstacle for considering church work—real or perceived—is the cost of tuition and expected salary upon graduation. From this research, *SAS* is strengthening its communication with influential adults as they play a most significant role in the increase in church workers. *SAS* is also strengthening its communication about the many ways the church has made church work programs more affordable.

The 2025 annual influencer survey revealed *SAS* awareness has gone from zero to 91 percent in the last six years among ordained and commissioned workers and continues to rise among lay leaders to 58 percent. The survey also revealed a 10 percent increase in respondents reporting they are more prepared to talk about church work than the previous year. Also, ordained and commissioned workers reported that 74 percent of them are having one or more conversations with youth about considering church work, an increase of over 25 percent since *SAS* began. Through pilots, focus groups, presentations, stakeholder engagements, and more, *SAS* is striving to move these increases even higher.

The 2025 annual congregation survey, focusing primarily on laypersons, revealed that the proportion of laypersons having at least one conversation with youth about church work has increased from 19 percent in 2023 to 30 percent in 2025. Yet, 15 percent of laypeople stated they are uncomfortable initiating church-work conversations but would be more comfortable with good resources and instruction. Therefore, *SAS* is working on improving current resources and developing new ones to meet this need.

A.2. Collaboration

Individuals and entities across the Synod are involved in making church work formation and recruitment become a part of our Synod’s culture. Leaders from eight districts are helping develop ways and sharing best practices for *all the districts* to focus on church work recruitment. Circuit visitors from thirteen districts are helping develop turnkey tools for circuit visitors to promote church work formation and recruitment in winkels, circuit gatherings, and interactions with the congregations and schools they serve. Education executives from six districts are partnering with *SAS* for a Facebook advertisement campaign targeted at public school educators, encouraging them to consider teaching at an LCMS school. The first phase, working with the Minnesota South and South Wisconsin Districts, elicited nearly 400 responses from people who requested more information. Also, a theology professor from each of the Concordia universities and seminaries met with the *SAS* team to discuss how professors are forming the next generation of influential adults who will form and recruit church ordained and commissioned church workers. These conversations will help develop a turnkey resource for all our theology faculty.

A.3. Second Career

In the fall of 2024, *SAS* facilitated journey mapping workshops at both Synod seminaries with second-career seminarians, and then also with their wives. Information was gathered to collect information in the stages of awareness, consideration, decision, enrollment, relocation, and seminary years. For each phase, we explored steps taken, key questions and decisions, with whom they interacted, and barriers. Two resources resulted: (1) Next Chapter, New Calling—A Guide for the Wife of a Potential Second-Career Pastor, and (2) Talking Points for Encouraging Second-Career Church Work.

In October 2025, *SAS* partnered with the Colloquy Committee for Commissioned Ministry and Concordia University Education Network (CUENet) to develop a teacher colloquy webinar and “Colloquy 101” resource. Topics included what teacher colloquy is and what it requires; the personal, spiritual, and classroom benefits of colloquy; the colloquy process, including requirements, coursework, formats, timing, and financial aid; and next steps and resources for those who are ready to begin the process. From Oct. to Dec. 2025, there were 29 new teacher colloquy starts. See *resources.lcms.org/multimedia/teacher-colloquy-webinar*.

A.4. Addressing Barriers

To address the need for ordained and commissioned church workers, the LCMS must address the barriers to church work formation and recruitment. One primary barrier is *awareness*. Since its inception, *SAS* is working on helping all constituents of the Synod become more aware of the purpose, need, and action steps of forming and recruiting full-time church workers. Included in this barrier is helping *everyone* and *every entity on every level* in Synod know they play a significant role in forming and recruiting youth and adults for full-time church work. These barriers are being addressed through building a synodwide network of collaborative partnerships, conducting surveys, facilitating pilot and focus groups, and making full use of the LCMS communications channels and periodicals.

A second barrier is the *cost* of church worker education. This barrier has been aggressively addressed throughout the church. Our Concordia universities and seminaries have made significant progress in making church work programs more affordable. Through the hard work of our institutions and generosity of their donors, this barrier has become much more manageable. In addition, Concordia University System has offered significant church work grants, districts and congregations are granting church work scholarships, and families and students are making choices to make church work education manageable. Concordia university and seminary costs can be viewed at *lcms.org/set-apart-to-serve*.

A third barrier is around *worker wellness*. Current ordained and commissioned church workers and parents have consistently shared their reluctance to encourage our youth to consider full-time church work around the worker wellness issue. A significant component to this issue is how we treat one another as the baptized in Christ and how we regard servants of Christ and His Word. *SAS* is collaborating with LCMS Worker Wellness as it engages a year-long pilot project. This pilot is focused on how we help congregations care for their workers in compensation, health care, time off, boundaries, and more. Next steps include messaging to congregations, collaborating with district presidents, and more. However, in recruitment conversations, many people do not realize how congregations care for their church workers in addition to salary. Congregations also provide excellent health care through Concordia Plans. Also, there

is housing allowance (or parsonage), an excellent pension, and time flexibility for the worker and his family.

A.5. Impact

SAS measures impact in several ways. One measurement of impact is the overall awareness of the intentional culture the Synod is developing through *SAS*. The awareness of *SAS* has risen from 54 percent in 2021 to 91 percent in 2025. Among commissioned workers, awareness has risen from 39 to 91 percent. Among lay leaders, awareness has risen from 26 to 53 percent.

Through *SAS*, there is also an increase in the percentage of intentional conversations influential adults are having with youth about considering a full-time church work vocation. The proportion of laypeople having intentional church-work conversations with youth increased from 19 to 30 percent from 2023 to 2025. The proportion of commissioned workers having such conversations increased from 59 to 74 percent in the same period. Among ordained ministers, these conversations increased from 74 to 83 percent.

In the 2025 district conventions, 16 out of the 35 districts adopted specific *SAS* (church work recruitment) resolutions. In these resolutions, six districts adopted having a specific *SAS* district focus group (committee), encouraging congregations to do the same. Eleven districts adopted their schools using the CPH *SAS* curriculum. Seven districts adopted specific measures to increase worker wellness and compensation across the district. In addition, all 35 districts are partnering with *SAS* in various ways including district education executive focus groups, circuit visitor focus groups, focus groups with districts developing an *SAS* committee/focus, and a second-career teacher advertisement pilot. In addition, district personnel provide names and contact information for pilots with school principals, parents, youth, and lay leaders.

The Concordia universities and seminaries are doing excellent recruitment work and making church work programs more affordable. Through their efforts, within a synodwide *SAS* culture, we are realizing an increase in students enrolled in our church work programs. Enrollment in pre-seminary programs in our Concordia universities increased from 136 in 2022 to 174 in 2025. Lutheran teacher enrollment increased from 354 to 402 in the same period. With the addition of the new classical education program in three of our Concordia universities, Lutheran education enrollment is 415. DCE enrollment increased from 85 to 93. Director of parish music decreased from 32 to 28, which we are striving to increase. Deaconess enrollment at CUC and the two seminaries increased from 81 in 2022 to 101 in 2025. Seminary enrollment (in all pastoral routes) increased from 571 to 586 in the same period. With pre-seminary enrollment increasing, and men entering the seminary from other undergraduate institutions, we are expecting seminary enrollments to increase accordingly.

A.6. Resources

Resources have impact only if they are used. Through our pilot projects, surveys, and partnerships across the Synod, *SAS* has developed several excellent, user-friendly resources for pastors, commissioned workers, parents and families, laity, youth, and districts to form and recruit youth and adults for full-time church work. Resources developed over the last year include Forming a Congregation *SAS* Focus Team (committee), Forming a District *SAS* Focus Team (committee), Helping Parents Prepare Youth for Church Work Vocations, Next Chapter: New Calling—A Guide for the Wife of a Potential Second-Career Pastor, Second Career

FAQs, Talking Points for Encouraging Second-Career Church Work, Routes to the Office of the Ministry booklet, Pastor's Guide to Mentoring Future Second-Career Pastors, Encouraging Men to Consider a Second Career as a Pastor, Teacher Colloquy 101, testimonial booklet for Second-Career Pastors, and testimonial booklet for Second-Career Teachers. View all *SAS* resources at lcms.org/set-apart-to-serve.

View the 2025 annual report at files.lcms.org/file/preview/sas-annual-report-2025.

B. Post Seminary Applied Learning and Support

Post Seminary Applied Learning and Support (PALS) was created by the Council of Presidents and the LCMS Commission on Ministerial Growth and Support in 1998, thus going for 28 years. The purpose of PALS is to support and encourage pastors, and their wives and families, as they transition from seminary to parish life for the first three years of the pastor's ministry.

PALS utilizes geographic cohorts. Each cohort is facilitated by an experienced pastor and his wife. The pastor facilitates the men and the pastor's wife facilitate the women. PALS cohorts meet six days per year. Pastors can self-report up to six PALS continuing education units each year on their district Self Evaluation Tool.

PALS also serves the purpose of the pastor's first years of continuing education. Each time a PALS cohort meets, they participate in worship, a study topic, support and casuistry, and fellowship. Cohorts can use either curriculum developed by the PALS office or a study topic of the group's choice.

PALS is a rich partnership between the LCMS, districts, congregations, and pastors. The FY26 PALS budget is \$259,987. This includes PALS administration, facilitator contacts and expenses, seminary presentation dinners to concluding-year seminarians entering PALS, conference expenses, and books and materials. Participating districts contribute \$500 per participating pastor per year. LCMS PALS more than matches that amount. It could be said that the Synod invests more than \$1,000 per year per pastor to facilitate a successful transition into the pastoral ministry.

In the last three years, there has been an average of 22 active PALS groups across the Synod. Approximately 136 pastors and 102 wives have been active in PALS over this past triennium. We encourage congregations calling candidates from the seminary to support and expect their pastors to participate in PALS. Such participation is of great benefit to both the pastor and the congregation for many years to come. Currently, 23 of the 35 LCMS districts participate in the PALS program. The director of PALS, Rev. Jonathan Manor, strongly encourages all 35 districts to participate in PALS for the benefit of the pastor, his wife and family, the congregation he serves, and the district and Synod at large.

In this past triennium, an online PALS (Post-Certification Applied Learning and Support) for deaconesses was developed. PALS for deaconesses was developed to support and encourage deaconesses as they transition from graduation and certification to full-time deaconess service in the church. There are three online cohorts facilitated by an experienced deaconess. Each cohort meets six times per year for one to two hours each time. Seventy-five percent of eligible deaconesses participate in PALS.

To learn more about PALS, including PALS courses, annual report, and Facebook page, go to lcms.org/pals.

C. Theology Professors Conference

The Theology Professors Conference (TPC) is a biennial event. It is directed toward our Synod's valued theology professors serving at the LCMS colleges, universities, and seminaries. The LCMS, the formation of pastors, and the teaching of theology in our Synod's higher education institutions have all been strengthened because of these conferences.

This conference brings together the Synod's theology professors to think carefully about God's Word, the Lutheran Confessions, the Church, and society. This is the only event that gathers all those teaching theology to future church workers and students preparing for various God-given vocations at the Synod's universities and seminaries. This conference is a prized opportunity for our Synod's theology professors to examine Scripture, the ecumenical creeds and Confessions of the LCMS, church history, and worldview to address life in both of God's kingdoms, church and state.

The 2024 TPC was held at Concordia University Ann Arbor, May 20–22. The conference theme each year is focused on a portion of the Lutheran Confessions. The 2024 conference focused on AC XIV and XV, "Order in the Church" and "Church Ceremonies." Four plenary speakers presented on "Pastoral Formation in Lutheran Orthodoxy: New Ideas on How to Better Prepare Future Pastors," "From Boethius to Bladerunner: A Trinitarian Response to Constituting Personhood," "The *rite vocatus* of AC XIV in the Lutheran Church of the Nineteenth Century," and "Don't Freak Out: Disability and the Resurrection Body in Light of the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor." Other features of the conference included 15 sectionals, professors meeting by theological disciplines (exegetical, historical, practical/pastoral, systematics), and fellowship and conversation.

The 2026 conference will be on the campus of Concordia University, St. Paul, May 18–20, under the theme "God's Gift of Order" (AC XV and XVI) and a secondary theme, "The Work of the Holy Spirit: Calls, Gathers, Enlightens, Sanctifies."

D. Preach the Word

Preach the Word (PTW) was developed to help pastors work together to hone the craft of preaching through video modules and accompanying resources. PTW also enables pastors to interact with seminary professors and fellow preachers, the authors of these modules. PTW was designed for pastors to gather with brother pastors to watch and discuss the modules and to learn with and from each other. PTW is an excellent resource for continuing education for pastors.

Since 2017, 10 modules have been completed. After a three-year pause, the PTW steering committee reconvened in fall 2025. The steering committee is working to give PTW a refresh with new modules and a new podcast format to encourage continued growth for pastors in their vocation of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Committee members are Dr. Carl Fickenschner (chair), Dr. David Fleming, Rev. Timothy Mech, Dr. Richard Stuckwisch, Dr. David Schmitt, and Rev. Jonathan Manor. PTW resources are available at resources.lcms.org/preach-the-word/.

E. Support of Our Seminaries through the Synod

The people of the Synod cherish our two seminaries, which supply the LCMS with faithful pastors. Many of these people support the seminaries through their prayers and gifts. Often, this support is

given directly to the seminaries.

Significant support is also given to the seminaries through corporate Synod in St. Louis.

One means of seminary support through the Synod is called “Synod Subsidies.” This is that portion of congregational worship offering passed on by districts to support national-level work, then granted by the budgeting process as unrestricted support for seminary operations. Computed by an agreed-upon formula, based on student graduations, Synod subsidies to the seminary have consistently been a total of \$593,700 each year.

Donations and bequests restricted by contributors to support the operation of both LCMS seminaries are given through the LCMS Joint Seminary Fund (JSF) and divided between the two seminaries.

Donations and bequests restricted to a *specific seminary* are identified by the contributor. These gifts are not included in the JSF.

The Global Seminary Initiative (GSI) provides donations voluntarily restricted for disbursement to both Synod seminaries. It is also used to augment assistance for qualifying international students and to send Synod seminary faculty to teach overseas.

Certain donations were voluntarily given to the Synod that carried a donor-imposed restriction to be given as financial assistance to students enrolled at either of the Synod’s seminaries.

Seminary faculty services are undesignated or designated funds paid to seminaries in return for services provided by the seminary faculty members (e.g., presentations, seminars, and short-term intensive teaching assignments).

	FY23	FY24	FY25
Subsidy	593,700	593,700	593,700
JSF	1,991,175	1,646,255	1,685,435
Specific seminary	128,493	26,094	62,929
GSI	273,532	531,857	577,914
Financial assistance	69,050	239,730	261,288
Faculty services	69,050	79,153	76,384
Total	3,193,804	3,116,816	3,257,677

Total national Synod support of our seminaries.

James A. Baneck, *Executive Director*

R1.2.4

Mission Advancement

Mission Advancement (MADV) exists to do exactly what its name declares—to *advance God’s mission as entrusted to His Church*. Our team of 44 dedicated employees serves as a bridge into the programs and projects approved by the Synod’s boards. Because of this linkage, contributors of the Synod can more fully engage with the work of their church body—whether it’s hearing a mission advocate give a presentation at your church’s Bible study hour, a quick email sent to Mission.Advancement@lcms.org regarding a recent story you read about in *Lutheran’s Engage the World*, or calling the donor care line at 888-930-4438. We are here to connect, inform, and serve you.

In the book of Mark, God calls each of us to love our neighbor, “The second [commandment] is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these”

(Mark 12:31).

MADV is here to walk alongside you in living out this calling—through giving a donation, volunteering for those in crisis at one of our recognized service organizations, or learning about God’s missionaries and ministries around the world. Rest assured, our relationship with you—and with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—reigns supreme above all else.

A. Commitment to Ethics and Transparency

Since MADV’s inception in 2011, our fundraising and organizational standards continue to be scrutinized and validated through the Better Business Bureau and earning the Accredited Charity Status. Additionally, MADV prides itself in being fully transparent and upfront when working with our constituents. Please take the time to peruse through our Fundraising and Contributor Rights page: [lcms.org/giving/transparency#fundraising-and-contributor-rights](https://www.lcms.org/giving/transparency#fundraising-and-contributor-rights).

Included online:

- Advancement Staff Code of Professional Ethics
- Donor Bill of Rights
- Fundraising Policy and Procedural Manual
- Staff Directory
- Financial Reports

Further, all correspondence created and generated through MADV is brought through a strict review process touching all areas of corporate Synod: LCMS Communications, mission offices, Office of the President, and external doctrinal reviewers. We pride ourselves in delivering products which directly align with the Lutheran ethos.

If you cannot find what you are looking for, we encourage you to contact us as indicated above.

B. God’s Abundant Blessings

The mission and operations of corporate Synod are made possible solely through voluntary contributions. Phil. 4:19 states: “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” This pertains to *all* aspects of our life and work—personal to professional, within your local congregation, and across the ministry areas whose responsibilities are defined by the bylaws and resolutions set forth in convention.

Over the course of the triennium, relationships were deepened particularly with family and corporate foundations along with an influx of planned gifts. God continues to bless His Church through saints even after they have been called to their eternal home.

C. Collaboration and Expansion

Within the Office of National Mission, ministry leaders and MADV have worked closely to strengthen relationships not only with Lutheran foundations but also with secular philanthropic partners. These collaborations have resulted in multi-year, multi-million-dollar proposals that significantly advance our shared mission. Our team continues to witness tangible signs of trust and partnership as non-Lutheran entities increasingly engage with the work of the LCMS. Most recently, the Lilly Endowment has begun partnering with various LCMS ministries—a direct outcome of intentional collaboration across units and teams.

Donors are also demonstrating growing trust through an increase in least-restrictive gifts. The former trend of small-

er, highly restricted contributions has begun to shift, making way for larger, more flexible gifts that allow the church to direct resources where they are most needed. Over the past triennium, giving to these least-restrictive designations has remained steady, reinforcing donors' confidence in the mission of the Church (especially toward *Together As Synod*; see below).

Fiscal Yr.	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
(millions)	\$4M	\$3.97M	\$11.79M	\$6.1M

In the spring of 2023, MADV underwent a comprehensive assessment conducted by Langley Innovations. In response, the Board of Directors made significant investments in MADV to expand services to the Church—further strengthening a culture that prioritizes Lutheran identity and theology above dollars raised. Throughout this triennium, MADV has made meaningful improvements, particularly in caring for recurring givers, stewarding those who support the Church through legacy gifts, and adding staff to ensure every donor is valued, regardless of giving level.

MADV also continues to host an annual interorganizational summit, creating a collaborative space for LCMS development teams and congregations. This gathering provides opportunities to share best practices, strengthen professional networks, and highlight corporate Synod's appreciative response model—all with the goal of equipping and uplifting those who support Christ's mission.

We, in MADV, give thanks to God for *you*. You and the Holy Spirit enable us to share the Good News throughout the 2023–26 triennium and beyond. Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Shane Smithson, *Interim Executive Director*

R1.2.5

Communications

Since the days when Martin Luther took advantage of Gutenberg's printing press to fling the message of the Reformation to the four corners of the world, Lutherans have climbed to the forefront of mass communications. KFUD Radio is one of the oldest continuously operating Christian radio stations in the U.S. *The Lutheran Witness* is one of the oldest denominational magazines, older even than *National Geographic*. In the early 1990s, the Communications department was involved in a landmark U.S. Federal Court of Appeals case that protected Christian radio stations all over the country. Mass communications and related topics have been frequently discussed and promoted in Synod conventions since the beginning of the 20th century.

At the same time, the church must also ensure that such technologies do not harm God's people. Recent studies have demonstrated the tragic harm caused by algorithmically curated content platforms such as Facebook. So-called artificial intelligence platforms have wreaked psychological and spiritual harm on many and seem poised to upend some vocational opportunities. These technologies are not neutral. Each new type of media bears inherent biases that will inevitably shape the content and conversation that occur on those platforms, and the church must use them cautiously.

LCMS Communications works within the Synod to ensure that the message of the Gospel is clearly communicated across various channels in such a way that it strengthens the faith of God's people, encourages them in service to the neighbor, and gives all glory to Christ.

A. Editorial

The editorial team serves the ministries, congregations, and church workers of the Synod by establishing and maintaining a common and consistent editorial standard for all materials produced by LCMS ministries. The editorial team, in conjunction with the design team, also publishes four periodicals.

A.1. *The Lutheran Witness*

As one of the oldest denominational magazines, *The Lutheran Witness (LW)* continues into its 144th year of publishing theological content for laity that helps them interpret the world from a Lutheran perspective. Despite challenges (see the end of this report) and declining subscriptions, the overall subscription rate sits around 57,000 copies. *LW* has expanded online offerings this triennium (witness.lcms.org), which has resulted in an overall increase in the online audience:

- Over 500,000 active *LW* website users;
- Over one million page views; and
- Notable increases in search engine optimization value.

Top online articles over the last triennium include:

- "Come, Lord Jesus" by Gene Edward Veith
- "Reclaiming the Marriage Bed" by David Petersen
- "A Lutheran Perspective on the ELCA" by *LW* staff
- "Cohabitation Hurts More Than a Couple" by Joshua Hayes

LW also re-released several issues that were particularly appreciated by readers as standalone pamphlets (witness.lcms.org/resources). One pamphlet, "The Divine Service: A Guide," a reprint of the January 2024 issue of *LW*, has been downloaded over 13,000 times and sold over 3,800 copies.

A.2. *Reporter*

Last year, *Reporter* celebrated 50 years of sharing the news of the church with church workers and congregations. Currently, *Reporter* sends out just under 30,000 copies of each issue. There are 12 issues per year. Last year, *Reporter* surveyed readers and found broad appreciation for the content of the magazine, with particular interest in breaking news that impacts the church (disasters, etc.) and matters related to church and state.

Earlier this year, *Reporter* began the process of moving to an online-first format. This reduces the lag time between events and reporting. While the readership of the print edition remains robust, there are also many readers who only encounter *Reporter* content online. Currently, *Reporter* has:

- An email list of 13,500 subscribers;
- Over 600,000 active online users in the last triennium; and
- 1.4 million page views from those users.

To address some of the desires expressed by survey respondents, *Reporter* has published articles on recent legislation that might affect LCMS congregations and schools. Additionally, in-depth studies on topics such as the Concordia University System are in the works for future editions.

A.3. *Lutherans Engage the World*

Started in 2012, *Lutherans Engage the World (Engage)* is a quarterly magazine that serves the LCMS with the stories of the church's work both in the U.S. and abroad. In addition to high-quality

ity storytelling and photography, *Engage* stories often include video and audio components (engage.lcms.org). Currently, the LCMS mails just under 72,000 copies of each issue to subscribers.

Since the last convention, *Engage* has told over 35 stories of work in more than 30 countries, requiring over 20 international trips for Communications staff. Within the U.S., *Engage* has shared well over 40 stories showing how LCMS ministries have partnered with LCMS districts, congregations, church workers, RSOs, and others in the work of *God's Mission Here*. Staff collected stories, photos, and videos from disasters such as hurricanes Helene and Milton and fire-ravaged Los Angeles County. Multiple stories were told of church-planting efforts in Texas, Kansas, and Wisconsin. Work with youth, whether in relation to the LCMS Youth Gathering, YouthLead, or Servant Events, also received significant attention, among many more stories.

A.4. *Journal of Lutheran Mission*

The last triennium also saw the relaunch of the *Journal of Lutheran Mission (JLM)* with the Office of International Mission (OIM). The updated digital journal now includes a peer-review process handled by the theological educators of the OIM. It stands at the forefront of a *Book of Concord* Lutheran perspective on mission. It includes articles submitted by OIM educators, LCMS scholars, and global partner church leaders. This year, *JLM* plans to publish four issues with topics ranging from justification to the practice of church planting nationally and internationally. See more at lcms.org/journal-of-lutheran-mission.

B. Production

Each year, the production team coordinates the work of several hundreds of projects and pieces of content created, edited, and published by LCMS Communications on behalf of LCMS ministries, districts, and congregations. This means coordinating the work of all these various groups in the common goal of directing all material published by the LCMS to the glory of Christ and for the salvation of souls. Some key projects over the last triennium include:

- The International Church Relations Conference: An extended conference booklet that included materials for theological presentations, worship, and more, as well as a book of the previous years' conference papers and video coverage of presentations and interviews.
- 2024 Institute on Liturgy, Preaching and Church Music: This project included coordinating with LCMS Worship to produce and design a conference booklet, a devotional sheet for every psalm, videos of keynote presentations, and more.
- Digging Deeper resources: A refreshed and updated edition of the Living Planted resources that provide Bible studies, studies on vocation and Christian living, and more.
- Office of International Mission (OIM) resources: Worked with the OIM to create missionary training and recruitment materials.
- Conference booth at the 2025 Youth Gathering and 2025 LWML Convention: Coordinated and staffed the official LCMS booths at these two major conferences, which required significant preparation months in advance as well as organizing multiple staff from multiple departments at the booths.

C. Web

Our small, dedicated web team maintains the LCMS' online presence. The current website has been visited by over 4 million users, garnering over 25 million views in the last triennium. The website consists of many thousands of pages of content offering resources to districts, congregations, and church workers to help LCMS churches and schools remain faithful in proclaiming Christ crucified. The team also manages and updates ministry pages, giving pages, missionary information, and more.

Over the last two years, the web team has begun evaluating the LCMS' current web technology stack to determine the best way forward to provide a revitalized online presence for the LCMS. In the near future, the web team plans a full overhaul of the current website to better serve the mission of the Synod.

D. Design

The department's design team provides "branding from the inside out." This team works closely with production and all LCMS ministries to provide resources that adhere to LCMS brand guidelines while also serving the proclamation of Christ in an engaging manner. The team also designs the publications of the Synod, including *The Lutheran Witness* and *Reporter* on a monthly basis and *Lutherans Engage the World* and the *Journal of Lutheran Mission* on a quarterly basis. In all they do, they seek to point to Christ and Him crucified for the sins of the world.

E. Video

Video remains a key channel for raising awareness of the church's work and teaching God's people His Word. Over the last triennium, the team has faithfully recorded the mission work of the Synod, showing the extent of the LCMS' care for those in need and its proclamation of the Gospel.

Over the next three years, the video team seeks to increase both the quality and quantity of doctrinally sound video content for LCMS Lutherans and those beyond the Synod. New, engaging, and easily digestible videos will educate and strengthen the faith of current and potential members of the Synod's congregations. Offering various types of content will support God's people as they grow in and learn more about God's Word.

F. Social Media

In addition to maintaining the LCMS social media presence, LCMS Communications has spent time over the last triennium evaluating and prioritizing social media activity. Over the last five years, research has demonstrated the deleterious effects of social media on users of all ages, but especially the long-term, harmful effects of social media on children and teenagers. It is incumbent upon the church to use social media in a way that mitigates potential harm, even if that means a temporary reduction in overall reach. Additionally, changes in social media algorithms have increasingly made these platforms less than ideal for marketing and raising awareness.

The LCMS social media strategy is adjusting to focus less on quantity and more on higher quality content tailored to individual platforms. This reduced cadence has already demonstrated higher engagement on posts. The strategy also focuses more on providing content that teaches rather than as a marketing tool, thus building up and encouraging God's people.

G. Challenges

In its work to serve LCMS ministries, districts, and congregations, LCMS Communications faces significant challenges:

- The cost of printing and distributing print publications continues to increase dramatically. These costs affect all print publications, with a special burden on those subsidized directly by the Synod, namely *Lutherans Engage the World and Reporter*.
- Decreasing subscriptions for *The Lutheran Witness*, along with the aforementioned increase in the costs of printing and distribution, will require the LCMS and Concordia Publishing House to work together over the next triennium to review the subscription process and develop creative ways to continue publishing this nearly 150-year-old magazine.
- The psychological and spiritual harm that comes with social media usage has led the Communications department to approach its use with caution. This will require continued and regular evaluation of these platforms over the next triennium.
- Talk of artificial intelligence (AI) has taken the world by storm, for good or ill. AI platforms have dramatically exacerbated many of the issues inflamed by social media. The department remains aware of these problems and concerned about the effects of AI on polite discourse within the church and the public square.
- The cost to expand video production is significant. YouTube is one of the most used platforms and provides a channel for long-form, educational content without as many of the potential harms seen in platforms such as Facebook and X. Expanding content on YouTube is expensive but also beneficial for the witness and work of the church.

H. Looking Forward

LCMS Communications is prepared to face these challenges in ways that will help the church proclaim Christ and Him crucified for the sins of the world. Whether this means creating content for new platforms, evaluating current and new channels to determine their fitness for the church's message and work, or sharing the message of the Gospel in various formats, service to the Church—and God's mission through her—remains the top priority of the department. We stand ready to serve with and for you.

Roy S. Askins, *Interim Executive Director*

R1.3

KFUO Radio

KFUO Radio is the official broadcast ministry of the Synod and shares the Gospel of Christ Jesus with listeners around the world through worship services, Bible studies, sacred music, and Christ-centered practical talk programming. KFUE's mission is expressed in its theme verse: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).

Employing mass communication and multimedia, including broadcast radio, internet streaming, social media, mobile apps, podcasts, video, and so on, KFUE supports the baptismal life of listeners and our life together in Christ whenever and wherever needed: *Christ for You. Anytime. Anywhere.*

As a self-funding ministry, KFUE partners with generous LCMS congregations, pastors, other church workers, recognized services organizations, and laity to serve the LCMS and the neighbor with resources that nourish and strengthen faith in Christ Jesus.

Triennium Update

KFUE began broadcasting in the St. Louis area on Dec. 14, 1924, using the new technology of AM radio. Now, over 100 years later, KFUE continues to employ established and emerging technologies to reach a global audience. On Oct. 12, 2024, KFUE celebrated its centennial anniversary with a service of thanksgiving and open house at the LCMS International Center (IC).

KFUE Radio continues to broadcast from the studios at the IC in Kirkwood, Mo.; however, the radio transmitters have relocated to East Carondelet, Ill. (as necessitated by the 2022 Concordia Seminary Campus Plan). With the move, KFUE acquired an additional signal (now operating two AM signals, 850 and 1380, and three FM signals, 92.7, 104.5, and 105.3, in the St. Louis metropolitan area). This was a three-year multifaceted project consisting of acquiring land, radio towers, and the additional AM radio and FM broadcast signals.

The annual budget of KFUE Radio is only \$1.7 million. This encompasses all broadcasting operations, sacred music royalties, program host stipends, and personnel (nine full-time, one part-time, and the trimester internship program). Funding comes from the generosity of listeners and program sponsors/underwriters and from partnerships with congregations, recognized service organizations, and other LCMS ministries, as well as bequest gifts, the KFUE endowment, and purchased airtime payments for programs not produced by KFUE.

KFUE is led by the executive director of broadcast services, who reports directly to the Office of the President.

KFUE Programs

The Coffee Hour airs weekdays at 9:00 a.m. (central time, as are all following), sharing stories of mercy work, missionary updates, and practical conversations for living boldly Lutheran, and features special series like *Set Apart to Serve* and Lutheran Church History with the Rev. Dr. Cameron MacKenzie from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. It is hosted by KFUE Radio's Andy Bates and Sarah Gulseth. *The Coffee Hour* was the third-most popular KFUE program overall in 2025 with 90,120 total downloads by 18,459 people. It is sponsored in part by the Concordia University System. (kfuo.org/category/the-coffee-hour/)

Concord Matters airs Saturdays at 10:00 a.m., studying the Lutheran Confessions found in the *Book of Concord* with lively discussions led by host the Rev. Brady Finner, president of the LCMS Minnesota North District, and a guest LCMS pastor. To view this program, visit: kfuo.org/category/concord-matters/.

Daily Chapel airs weekdays at 10:00 a.m., broadcasting live the IC chapel service. It is sponsored in part by the LCMS International Mission and the LCMS Ministry to Armed Forces. (See the schedule: kfuo.org/daily-chapel-schedule/)

The Lutheran Ladies' Lounge Podcast is released weekly and engages Lutheran women with inviting conversations, laughter, and fellowship and is hosted by KFUE's Sarah Gulseth, the Office of International Mission's Erin Alter, and Rachel Bomberger. *The Lutheran Ladies' Lounge* holds eight of the top ten most downloaded KFUE podcasts in 2025. The affiliated Facebook group has over

23,000 members. (kfuo.org/category/lutheran-ladies-lounge/)

Morning and Evening Prayer airs Monday through Saturday at 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., providing prayer and a sermonette by LCMS pastors based on the daily lectionary New Testament text. (kfuo.org/category/morning-prayer-sermonette/)

Oratio airs weekdays at 7:15 a.m. with Scripture reading, prayers, hymns, and a short meditation recorded by the Rev. Kenneth Bomberger. (kfuo.org/category/oratio/)

Sharper Iron airs weekdays at 8:00 a.m., exploring Holy Scripture both in its broad context and its narrow detail, all for the sake of proclaiming Christ crucified and risen for sinners. Discussion is led by the Rev. Timothy Appel and a guest LCMS pastor. *Sharper Iron* was the second-most popular KFUO program overall in 2025 with 114,683 total downloads by 21,826 people. It is sponsored in part by the Lutheran Church Extension Fund. (kfuo.org/category/sharper-iron/)

Thy Strong Word airs weekdays at 11:00 a.m., revealing the light of our salvation in Christ through the study of God's Word verse by verse, and equipping Christians to serve faithfully in our daily vocations. Discussion is led by the Rev. Dr. Phil Booe and a guest LCMS pastor. *Thy Strong Word* was the most popular KFUO program overall in 2025 with 152,395 total downloads by 25,531 people. It is sponsored in part by the Lutheran Heritage Foundation. (kfuo.org/category/thy-strong-word/)

Wrestling With the Basics airs Saturdays at 9:00 a.m. and is a humorous yet edifying approach to Bible study and the basics of our faith, hosted by Pastor "Jolly" John Lukomski and Pastor Matt "Youngblood" Clark. (kfuo.org/category/wrestling-with-the-basics/)

Worship and Sacred Music Programming

Weekend Worship Services airs Saturdays at 4:00 p.m. and Sundays at 8:00 a.m., 10:30 a.m., and 4:00 p.m., providing a way for anyone, especially the homebound, to hear an LCMS worship service and be nourished by God's Word. Various LCMS congregations partner with KFUO to provide this service. This is one of KFUO's most tuned-in-live productions. (kfuo.org/category/weekend-worship-information/)

St. Paul's Des Peres Bible Study airs Sundays at 9:30 a.m., with a rebroadcast on the following Saturday at 9:30 a.m., and joins the pastors and people of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Des Peres, Mo., for an in-depth study of the books of the Bible. KFUO provides broadcasting equipment and technical support. (kfuo.org/category/st-paul-bible-study/)

Sacred Music complements the programs of KFUO and airs several times each day and throughout the night (approximately 5:30 p.m. to 7:15 a.m.), filling hearts and minds with God's Word set to song, comforting the soul and proclaiming the saving Gospel of Christ. Our music library consists of instrumental, choral, and vocal music from throughout the church's rich history.

Seasonal Programming

The Twelve Days of Christmas is special programming from Christmas Eve through Epiphany each year and has become one of KFUO's new favorite seasonal traditions among our listeners. This special programming features sacred Christmas music, Scripture readings, and greetings from LCMS missionaries and military chaplains.

Seasonal Worship Services are coordinated between KFUO and our partner LCMS congregations to provide listeners with special worship services during Advent and Lent such as midweek prayer services, German Language services, the three-hour Tre Ore service, and Christmas and Easter services.

LCMS Partner Podcasts

KFUO is uniquely positioned to share the mission and ministry work of Synod ministries and recognized service organizations as well as provide information about how listeners can support and get involved with them by producing and distributing podcast programs. These partner programs are recorded in KFUO's "user-friendly" Podcast Studio, recently renovated through a grant from the Lutheran Women's Missionary League.

5 Minutes with a Missionary is the podcast of the LCMS Office of International Mission, featuring an unfiltered take from LCMS missionaries about life abroad for the sake of the Gospel and the uniqueness of the places in which God has called them to serve. (kfuo.org/category/missionary-podcasts/)

End Goals is the podcast of LCMS Youth Ministry in the Office of National Mission and explores practices for healthy youth ministry with interviews that provide insight for experienced and new youth leaders alike. (kfuo.org/category/lcms-youth-ministry-end-goals/)

Friends for Life is a podcast of the LCMS Life, Health and Family Ministry and encourages Lutherans to come together as a community of Christ's redeemed people and explore life, health, and family issues in a way that honors our heavenly Father's value of human life, serves our neighbor, shares the faith, and connects us to others who are doing the same. (kfuo.org/category/friends-for-life/)

God's Mission Here is the podcast of the Office of National Mission that spotlights the work that God is doing through His people and strives to inspire and encourage listeners to get involved. (kfuo.org/category/gods-mission-here/)

LCMS Worship Institute is the podcast of the Institute on Liturgy, Preaching and Church Music and brings selected recordings of the presentations, workshops, and services from the multiday worship conference so that others can get a taste of the experience and benefit from the beautifully unique sphere of Luther worship. (kfuo.org/category/lcms-worship-institute/)

The Lutheran Witness Podcast is the podcast of LCMS Communications that provides readings of stories and articles posted that help you interpret the world from a Lutheran perspective. (kfuo.org/category/the-lutheran-witness-podcast/)

Mission Field: USA – Church Planting is the podcast of the Office of National Mission and offers guidance on theological background and best practices for launching new congregations and ministries within a Lutheran framework. (kfuo.org/category/mission-field-usa/)

Set Apart to Serve Series is the podcast of the Office of National Mission that strives to build a culture of raising up future church workers through conversations with experienced church workers as well as current and prospective church work students. (kfuo.org/tag/set-apart-to-serve/)

Specialized Pastoral Ministry is the podcast of the LCMS Office of National Mission. In this series, nine individuals share their journeys into chaplaincy, how they serve, and how they bring the

love of Christ to those in need. (kfu.org/category/specialized-pastoral-ministry/)

Syndicated Programming

KFUO airs certain syndicated programs that align with our mission and values to provide broader program offerings. Programs or organizations who desire to broadcast on KFUE partner with us and purchase airtime for their independently produced programs. (kfu.org/syndicated-programs/)

Issues, Etc. airs weekdays at 3:00 p.m., offering *Christ-Centered, Cross-Focused Talk Radio* with host the Rev. Todd Wilken and guests. It is produced by Lutheran Public Radio.

Lamplighter Theatre airs Saturdays at 11:00 a.m., using dramatic audio to creatively bring redemptive hope to broken lives and compel its listeners to live life skillfully and sacrificially for the benefit of others. It is produced by Lamplighter Ministries.

Liberty Action Alert airs Saturdays at 9:30 a.m. and Sundays at 12:00 noon, bringing thoughtful responses to questions about important current issues and events by the Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz (executive director of the Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty). It is produced by the Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty.

The Lutheran Hour airs Sundays at 12:30 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. and is the flagship program of Lutheran Hour Ministries that helps equip and engage a vibrant volunteer base to passionately proclaim the Gospel to more than 56 million people worldwide each week. It is produced by Lutheran Hour Ministries.

Worship Anew airs Sundays at 7:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., offering weekly worship services for aging adults seeking to live an abundant life in Christ. It is produced by Worship Anew.

Programming and Production

KFUO's office and recording studios are located at the IC. Most of our programming and production editing happens here.

KFUO Programming supports the baptismal life of listeners and our life together in Christ with faithful, Christ-centered programming:

- *Faithful worship services* are broadcast from LCMS congregations that support the homebound and those who are unable to regularly attend services at their local congregation with faithful preaching of God's Word, liturgy, and hymns to strengthen them in faith.
- *Teaching programs and Bible studies* are hosted by LCMS pastors who demonstrate a strong ability to engage guests and listeners in faithful study of God's Word that is relatable to people in all stations of life.
- *Practical talk programs* provide listeners with updates on the national and international mission work of LCMS universities, seminaries, congregations, schools, and organizations.
- *Sacred music programs* aim to teach, encourage, and comfort souls with music from throughout the church's history, including ancient and modern music that points us to the love of God in Christ Jesus.

KFUO Production is dedicated to sharing the Good News of Christ for you, anytime, anywhere. To make anywhere possible, we utilize the unique spiritual gifts that God has given each of our staff alongside the blessing of modern-day technology.

KFUO has seen increased engagement from around the globe

and in many demographics with the utilization of social media and video equipment provided by a grant from Village Lutheran Church in St. Louis. Adding a visual element to our Bible studies, podcasts, and other theological content supports a more face-to-face experience and is more engaging for a younger audience.

While KFUE is a ministry like many others, we are also unique in that we often must operate like a small production house with all the aspects of a radio/video studio, branding company, and marketing firm, in addition to the regular responsibilities of a department within the Synod. We write, record, edit, and publish much of our own programming, along with facilitating the recording, editing, and creative consulting needs of other ministries from around the Synod.

All of this is achieved through the blessing of our technologically savvy and compassionate production staff. We are also blessed, doubly so, with a dedicated, multi-generational listenership.

Audio Outlets and Platforms

Listeners can access KFUE content through several outlets and platforms; and it is being heard in all 50 states (and the District of Columbia) and in over 300 cities across 150 countries worldwide. After the U.S., the areas downloading KFUE podcasts the most have come from Hong Kong, Canada, Germany, Australia, Singapore, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Philippines, and Ireland. Our podcasts are downloaded by an estimated 1.5 million people each year—a number that continues to grow.

Traditional Radio “On the Dial”: Within the St. Louis region, KFUE has completed the radio tower move from the Concordia Seminary Campus to Dupo, Ill. The new site hosts both KFUE AM850 and KXFN AM1380, our two full-power AM stations. KFUE has also set up three FM radio translator signals in the greater St. Louis area, giving KFUE a 24-hour broadcast presence to thousands of FM listeners.

The KFUE Website provides a 24/7 live internet stream of KFUE's daily broadcasting. KFUE manages and updates its own website kfu.org, which houses and archives all KFUE-produced programs. In addition to the stream, KFUE's web services include email newsletters, church and bulletin information, online event registration, and archives of KFUE and partner podcasts.

The KFUE Mobile App is an easy way for listeners to connect with KFUE wherever they go and provides the same content as our website. A unique feature found only on the KFUE app is the “Open Mic” button, which allows users to verbally ask questions and provide feedback directly to KFUE through the app. Currently, the KFUE app has 7,400 users.

Podcast Outlets include Apple Podcasts, Spotify, YouTube Music, and anywhere else you listen to podcasts via KFUE's RSS Feed. These platforms allow KFUE to reach more listeners with suggested media and cross-promotion.

Social Media

KFUE has a social presence on Facebook, X/Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Threads, and LinkedIn, with a combined 46,000 followers. Content on these platforms consists of images and posts pointing followers to Christ, their Savior. KFUE programs are posted daily to share the message of Christ through our programming. Weekly features include Memory Verse Monday (in collaboration with LCMS social media), Catechesis Friday, weekend One-Year Lectionary posts, and seasonal hymns and prayers. Weekly video

reels with hymns (in collaboration with the Michigan District's Hymnal Project) or other theological content continue to increase engagement. Daily hymn texts receive the most engagement on X/Twitter.

Supporting KFUE's Ministry

KFUE maintains its own Development and Fundraising team to support the mission and goals of the station and ensure the Gospel continues to be proclaimed through Bible studies, worship services, sacred music, and theological talk programs. At the heart of this is love for the neighbor that engenders a generous spirit in our listeners.

KFUE's development staff help to deepen this meaningful relationship and help donors of any amount or ability to leverage their love for the Gospel into the proclamation of God's Word heard around the world on KFUE, not only on the radio but also through internet streaming broadcast, podcasts, and social media engagement.

KFUE is funded by listener donations and partner organizations. Throughout each fiscal year, our team works on several development and fundraising efforts, such as mailings, personal phone calls, donor luncheons and meet-and-greet events, and our annual *Sharathon*, our premier fundraising event held every spring.

You can often find KFUE Radio at many LCMS events and gatherings because many in our church body are yet unaware of this treasure of our Synod. Look for KFUE Radio when you attend the LWML National Convention, Synod convention, LCMS Youth Gathering, or select local and district events.

We are thankful to the Lord for the blessing of so many generous, faithful, and passionate supporters of KFUE's ministry, and for the opportunity to share *Christ for You. Anytime. Anywhere.*

Gary Duncan, *Executive Director of Broadcast Services*

R2

First Vice-President

The First Vice-President is the only full-time Synod vice-president. He is also an officer of the Synod who, like the other vice-presidents, is elected by the Synod at each convention. He is responsible to the President for the performance of his duties, many of which are assigned by the bylaws and others that are established by the President (Bylaws 3.3.1.3 [i] and 3.3.2.2 [a]).

Among his *duties that are established by the bylaws* are to serve as:

- chairman of the Colloquy Committee for Pastoral Ministry (**Report R2.1**);
- chairman of the Colloquy Committee for Commissioned Ministry (**Report R2.2**);
- a voting member of the Council of Presidents, where he also serves on the Program Committee;
- a nonvoting member of the LCMS Board of Directors;
- a nonvoting member of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations; and
- a member of the Administrative Team (Bylaw 3.5.1.1).

The First Vice-President serves along with five regional vice-presidents and the President on the Praesidium (**Report R3**).

In addition to the board and committees listed above, the Synod President has also appointed the undersigned to serve as a regent for Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, since September 2019. In that capacity, he also serves on the Academic Committee.

The paragraphs above, together with the detail provided in the three reports immediately following this one, provide a record of most of the First Vice-President's activity during this triennium.

Duties Not Specified in Other Reports

The following are some aspects of the First Vice-President's work that aren't specified in the three reports that follow (**Reports R2.1, R2.2, R3**). For the most part, these are assigned by the President, rather than the bylaws. The First Vice-President:

- serves as a liaison between various Synod leaders and the Office of the President, including regular communication with:
 - the chairman of the Council of Presidents; and
 - district presidents regarding:
 - questions they have about their work in their districts;
 - matters of concern in their districts that are brought to the attention of the Synod President;
 - participation in district conventions by members of the Praesidium; and
 - colloquy matters;
- participates in district visitations, per 2013 Res. 7-01A (during this triennium, the First Vice-President participated in *17 official district visitations*, totaling 43 days);
- participates in district conventions (during this triennium, the First Vice-President *attended 12 district conventions*, totaling 30 days, preaching three times and giving the Synod report at six conventions);
- meets regularly with the Synod President to assist and give counsel;
- responds to letters and emails of concern that are sent to the Synod President (during the triennium, the Office of the President and Office of First Vice-President implemented a new system to track, collaborate upon, and respond to these inquiries in a more timely manner);
- assists the President triennially with:
 - orientation of new district presidents on the nature and conduct of their office (Bylaw 3.3.1.3 [b]);
 - orientation of new district presidents on the conduct a district convention;
 - the circuit exception process for Synod conventions (Bylaw 3.1.2);
 - floor committee assignments (Bylaw 3.1.7) and the orientation of floor committee chairs and vice-chairs; and
 - reviewing all overtures to the Synod convention (Bylaw 3.1.6.2 [c]);
- reports quarterly to the Council of Presidents;
- writes four reports (**Reports R2, R2.1, R2.2, R3**) for the *Convention Workbook* once every three years;
- presents triennially (and as needed) to the district presidents'

administrative assistants, especially on colloquy matters; and

- participates in frequent meetings of the Office of the President.

During this triennium, the Office of the First Vice-President said farewell to its long-time and capable executive administrative assistant, Karen Dowbnia, and welcomed Carrie Beary as its new and gifted executive administrative assistant.

The undersigned is honored to serve the Synod in its mission of proclaiming to the world that *Christ Is Risen Indeed!*

Peter K. Lange, *First Vice-President*

R2.1

Colloquy Committee for Pastoral Ministry

Pastoral colloquy is the process by which a man who has served as a pastor in another church body or trained for the pastoral ministry in a non-LCMS seminary while being a member of another church body can be declared qualified for a first call in the Synod.

By means of colloquy, the Synod vets and provides pastors for the LCMS—over and above those men trained by our two seminaries—thus indirectly supporting the third objective of the LCMS to “recruit and train pastors ... and provide opportunity for their continuing growth” (Constitution Article III 3). Colloquy is also one way that the Synod “work[s] in support of and on behalf of congregations to assist them in carrying out their ministries” (Bylaw 1.1.1). Lastly, colloquy supports the first, second, and fourth of the seven mission priorities that the 2023 Synod convention adopted for this triennium (Resolution 4-03), namely, to “plant, sustain, and revitalize Lutheran churches,” to “support and expand theological education,” and to “collaborate with the Synod’s members and partners to enhance mission effectiveness.”

The Colloquy Committee for Pastoral Ministry (CCPM) administers the colloquy process by establishing policy, receiving and reviewing applications, conducting in-person interviews, and deciding on each applicant based on the application and interview. Bylaw 3.10.2 governs the process. Applicants can be certified immediately, declined certification, or assigned one or more of the following: supplemental seminary coursework, mentored readings, a traditional vicarage, or a shorter, less-formal internship.

A. Committee Composition and Turnover

The composition of the CCPM is stipulated in Bylaw 3.10.2.1, which states that, in addition to the LCMS First Vice-President, the committee “shall consist of ... a district president appointed by the Council of Presidents, and the presidents of the seminaries or their representatives.”

This triennium saw significant turnover on the committee, with *three of its four members replaced*. Concordia Seminary President Dr. Tom Egger replaced Dr. Glenn Nielsen in September 2023, Concordia Theological Seminary President Dr. Jon Bruss replaced Dr. Detlev Schulz in June 2024, and Southern Illinois District (SID) President Rev. Heath Curtis replaced outgoing SID President Timothy Scharr in December 2025. This is the first time since 2005 that both LCMS seminary presidents have regularly participated on the committee.

B. Statistics

From January 2023 to January 2026, the CCPM received 45 applications, three of which were withdrawn. Of the remaining 42, six are temporarily on hold, and three are currently invited for an interview as of this writing. Of the remaining 33 for whom a decision has been reached, 20 were certified, two are fulfilling requirements and likely to be certified, and 11 were declined. Of the 11 who were declined, 10 were not invited for an interview, and one was declined after the interview. Reasons for being declined include not meeting the prerequisites for colloquy (especially either of the two colloquy category definitions), the number or circumstances of divorce(s), or the need for more remedial theological study than can be provided through the colloquy process.

Because there are always applicants already in process when a triennium begins, *a total of 33 were certified during this triennium*, 11 of whom applied in the previous triennium. See the tables below for a breakdown of church bodies and LCMS districts from which applicants came, as well as the country of origin for those not born in the United States.

#	Church Body
6	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
4	Baptist
2	Lutheran Church of Australia
2	Nondenominational
2	North American Lutheran Church
1	Anglican Church in North America
1	Assemblies of God
1	Association of Free Lutheran Congregations
1	Brethren / Charis International
1	Canadian Association of Lutheran Congregations
1	Christian and Missionary Alliance
1	Conservative Lutheran Association
1	Independent Lutheran
1	Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ
1	United Methodist Church
1	Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Table 1: Church body of origin (U.S. only) for successful general colloquies (certified February 2023–January 2026)

#	Country
5	Ethiopia
3	Cuba
2	Australia
2	Canada
1	Brazil
1	Liberia

Table 2: Country of origin for successful general colloquies (foreign only) whose first language was not English (certified February 2023–January 2026)

#	District	#	District
6	Florida-Georgia	0	Atlantic
5	Ohio	0	California-Nevada-Hawaii
5	Pacific Southwest	0	Central Illinois
4	Southeastern	0	Iowa East
3	Minnesota South	0	Kansas
3	Rocky Mountain	0	Montana
2	English	0	Nebraska
2	Michigan	0	New England
2	Missouri	0	New Jersey
2	South Wisconsin	0	North Dakota
2	Texas	0	North Wisconsin
1	Eastern	0	Northwest
1	Indiana	0	Oklahoma
1	Iowa West	0	SELC
1	Mid-South	0	South Dakota
1	Minnesota North	0	Southern Illinois
1	Northern Illinois	0	Wyoming
1	Southern		

Table 3: District from which general colloquy applications came (February 2023–January 2026)

C. Work Performed

C.1. Meeting Schedule

During this triennium, the CCPM reduced its meeting schedule from five to four in-person meetings per year, occasionally supplemented by a video conference to consider new applications or discuss policy, but not to conduct regular interviews. Most in-person meetings were two days with an occasional one-day meeting when there were fewer applicants awaiting an interview. This meeting schedule is currently sufficient for keeping up with the number of applications received. In 2025, the CCPM also began using BoardEffect for its meeting dockets.

C.2. Policy Revision

In June 2024, after four and a half years of work, the CCPM adopted a significantly revised policy manual which:

- reduced the length from 26 to 14 pages;
- sharpened the definitions of the two (long-standing) colloquy categories;
- added a requirement for applicants to submit two sermons;
- added a requirement for applicants to take the entry-level competency exam for theology from either of our two Synod seminaries;
- reduced the number of required essays from two to one; and
- added language to allow for a follow-up video interview, in some cases, after assigned work was completed.

In addition, the CCPM clarified that all applications should be submitted in English using the one application that is maintained

by the CCPM. It also clarified that translation assistance may be used, where needed, for the application, interview, and seminary entry-level competency exam.

C.3. Additional Policy Discussions

Also, during this triennium, the CCPM discussed the “academic, theological, and personal standards” for colloquy that the committee is charged with establishing (Bylaw 3.10.2.2).¹ As it continues this discussion, the CCPM desires to act in concert with our two seminaries—especially in regard to personal standards—since the seminaries, along with the CCPM, are the three LCMS certifying authorities for the pastoral ministry. The CCPM has been especially mindful of this in its discussions of divorce and applicants with non-LCMS wives.

In addition to standards, the CCPM is also considering placing a time limit for completion of assignments given by the committee. Finally, though it wouldn’t be a policy, the CCPM is considering a flowchart that would aid district presidents in determining whether a potential applicant clearly fits one of the two colloquy categories. These and other potential policy discussions continue.

C.4. Policies Versus Bylaws

Through the policy discussions mentioned above, the CCPM has become aware of numerous long-standing colloquy requirements that were removed from the bylaws to policy by the 2010 Synod convention. The committee has been discussing a convention overture to reinsert some of these policies into the bylaws for the sake of greater policy stability since policies can be changed by the CCPM, acting alone, at any meeting, whereas bylaw changes require a convention vote. As of January 2026, the CCPM is hoping to finalize an overture for the 2026 Synod convention, though it is not certain that goal will be met.

D. Bylaw 3.10.2.4—A Clarification

Various CCPM members have heard numerous times during this triennium that Bylaw 3.10.2.4, which precludes the possibility of colloquy for LCMS men who have graduated from a non-LCMS seminary, was new in 2023. Actually, *this bylaw was adopted by the 2016 Synod convention and only clarified in 2023* to reflect better the original intention.

E. Bylaw 2.5.2 Concerns

The CCPM has increasingly been concerned by the number of colloquy applicants who are already regularly preaching and sometimes even serving in full Word and Sacrament ministry, as the *de facto* pastor of an LCMS congregation, before even coming to the attention of the CCPM. Bylaw 2.5.2 stipulates that congregations “shall call *and be served only by* ordained ministers who have been admitted to their respective ministries in accordance with the rules and regulations set forth in these Bylaws. ...”

The CCPM understands that there is a wide range of meanings for a congregation to “be served” and that there may be extenuating circumstances, such as a church plant in a language other than English. Yet the CCPM believes that this issue is outside of the committee’s authority and that a larger group, such as the full Council of Presidents (COP), should be aware of these situations. A particular challenge in such situations is that they put additional pressure on the CCPM to approve such applicants since such men are already serving in a congregation and have developed strong ties with their congregation.

For this reason, the CCPM intends to be more proactive in discussing this issue with a wider circle so that it better understands if and how Bylaw 2.5.2 should factor into colloquy decisions.

F. Licensed Lay Deacons (LLDs)

With 2016 Resolution 13-02A, the Synod ended the ongoing licensing of lay deacons for Word and Sacrament ministry. The only exception to that is for a small group of LLDs who were already trained and licensed when the resolution was adopted. *For these deacons only* an annual exception to continue to serve in Word and Sacrament ministry may be requested of and granted by the CCPM and the COP. Every fall, both the CCPM and the COP vote on these annual exceptions. In 2019, the number of those exceptions was 51. With retirements, etc., that number decreases each year. During the three years of this triennium, the number of exceptions granted was eight in 2023, six in 2024, and *five in 2025*, with the average age of the five being 74.

G. Challenges

Two of the greatest challenges for the CCPM are (1) having to discern an applicant's readiness to serve in the LCMS based only on the written application packet and one 90-minute interview and (2) the limitation (at least perceived) on the seminary coursework that can be assigned by the committee for what it considers to be necessary remedial work. Because of this second challenge, especially, the CCPM often feels it is left with no choice other than to deny colloquy since it has insufficient tools at its disposal.

There are two primary reasons for this second challenge. First, over the last 30 years, a culture or expectation has developed that it is only reasonable for the committee to assign *a few* courses (perhaps one to three, with four being the rare absolute maximum). Second, because *residential* seminary coursework is no longer the norm for colloquy (as it was from 1959–95), the committee is largely limited to the smaller selection of online SMP courses, perhaps with an occasional residential intensive. Related to this is the complicating factor that colloquy candidates have historically not received seminary financial aid for colloquy coursework, partly because such coursework is not eligible for federal financial aid since colloquy is neither a degree nor a certificate program.

As it grappled with these challenges during this triennium, the committee undertook a study of the history of pastoral colloquy in the LCMS since the mid-20th century, and especially the significant change that was made in 1995, prior to which one to three year(s) of residential seminary coursework was required of all colloquy candidates.²

One *opportunity* that the committee has begun discussing is the possibility of offering seminary financial aid as one element of an increased partnership between pastoral colloquy and our two Synod seminaries.

H. Strengths and Threats

The committee has been increasingly mindful of how the use of artificial intelligence can impact essays and sermons for colloquy applications. One safeguard to this is the required in-person interview where what an applicant writes can be probed to ascertain better whether the applicant “thinks like a Lutheran.”

The strengths of the colloquy process are many. Numerous applicants have thanked the CCPM and LCMS for our great care in vetting colloquy applicants with a view toward maintaining the high standards of the LCMS ministerium and providing the best

pastors possible for the congregations of the Synod. The active participation of both seminary presidents on the CCPM, the revised policy, application, and procedures, together with all the CCPM work described above, are together serving to proclaim the good news that *Christ Is Risen Indeed!*

Peter K. Lange, *First Vice-President*

Endnotes

1. This bylaw mandate was established in 1956. In 1995, the phrase “and personal” was added. Also in 1995, the bylaws began specifying four standards with the language, “including but not limited to...” In 2010, these four specific standards were transferred from the bylaws to policy, and two more standards were added.

2. 1992 Bylaw 6.97 (a) required one full academic year of residential training at an LCMS seminary, plus a vicarage, for colloquy candidates from other Lutheran church bodies; and Bylaw 6.97 (b) required “not less than two and up to three full academic years of instruction” at an LCMS seminary, plus a vicarage, for colloquy candidates from non-Lutheran Christian church bodies.

R2.2

Colloquy Committee for Commissioned Ministry (CCCM)

Colloquy programs for commissioned ministry are not just about theological education! They *are* that, but they are much more. These programs exist also for the purpose of vetting applicants to ensure that they are fit to serve as ministers of religion—commissioned in the congregations, schools, and agencies of the Synod (Bylaws 3.10.3 [a–b]). Commissioned colloquy programs are for men and women who are *not* graduates of Synod-affirmed programs for the various commissioned ministries that are available through our Concordia University System (CUS) universities yet who still desire, or are required by their congregations or schools, to be called and rostered as commissioned ministers in the LCMS (Bylaw 2.8.1 [a]).

Though the vast majority of those who colloquize as commissioned ministers do so as *teachers* (92 percent during the last triennium), there are nevertheless *seven* distinct colloquy programs for commissioned ministry: teacher, director of Christian education (DCE), director of Christian outreach (DCO), director of family life ministry (DFLM), director of parish music (DPM), deaconess, and director of church ministries (Bylaw 2.6.1.1).¹ Each CUS university offers *some* of these colloquy programs, though no CUS university offers *all* of them. For additional information about commissioned colloquy programs and how to apply, see lcms.org/colloquy-ministers-of-religion-commissioned.

“Colloquy” for “schoolteachers” has been a part of the Synod’s bylaws since its second constitution (1854). Still today, the Synod’s commissioned colloquy programs address the third objective of the LCMS—to “recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth” (Constitution Article III 3) as well as the second and sixth of the Synod’s seven mission priorities for this triennium to “support and expand theological education” and to “enhance early childhood education, elementary and secondary education, and youth ministry.”

Statistics

During the three years prior to this report, 295 *colloquy applications* were forwarded to the Office of First Vice-President (OFVP) by the Concordia University Education Network (CUEnet) and the CUS colloquy directors. Two hundred seventy-two of these were for *teacher* colloquy. Teacher colloquy applications increased 67 percent during the third year of the triennium compared with the second year, with a similar percentage increase in comparison with the first year of the triennium. As far as the human component of this great blessing, this can likely be attributed to *Set Apart to Serve* efforts, the policy and application overhaul, and great work on the part of CUEnet and the CUS colloquy directors.

	Total	2/2025 to 1/2026	Change from prev. year	2/2024 to 1/2025	Change from prev. year	2/2023 to 2/2024
Teacher	272	122	67%	73	-5%	77
DCE	11	5	-17%	6		0
DPM	9	7	250%	2		0
DCO	3	0	-100%	2	100%	1
TOTAL	295	134	61%	83	6%	78

Table 1: Commissioned Colloquy Applications Received
February 2023–January 2026

Colloquy Partners

Though the CCCM “directs” the Synod’s activity in matters of colloquy (Bylaw 3.10.3.2), it cannot carry out the Synod’s commissioned colloquy programs by itself. Rather, the Synod’s colleges and universities, assisted by the CUS, are key partners in administering commissioned colloquy programs on behalf of the Synod as part of their bylaw responsibility for the “preparation of commissioned ministers for service in the Synod” (Bylaw 3.6.6). In doing so, the Synod’s colleges and universities, as well as the CCCM, rely on the valuable assistance of CUEnet.

CUEnet was founded in 1996 as a service organization of the CUS. In 2001, CUEnet began offering the Concordia Online Teacher Colloquy Program. The relationship between CUEnet, the colleges and universities of the Synod, the CCCM, and commissioned colloquy is explained further at lcms.org/colloquy-ministers-of-religion-commissioned#cuenet.

As of this writing, the full cost *before scholarships* for teacher colloquy through CUEnet is \$8,014, which includes the following:

- \$7,792 – tuition for eight courses (\$974 per course)
- \$172 – Concordia Electronic Theological Library
- \$50 – endorsement processing

It is important to note, however, that tuition assistance is available through a generous grant that CUEnet has received for the last several years—a gift that CUEnet anticipates will continue. Currently, the tuition grant for students is just over 40 percent of tuition costs. In addition, most students also receive financial assistance from their congregation, school, and district.

A more detailed report from and about CUEnet can be found in the CUS report (**Report R14**).

Program of Study

Common to all seven commissioned colloquy programs are *six core courses*—Old Testament, New Testament, History of Theology, Lutheran Confessions, Christian Doctrine, and Varieties of Be-

liefs. These areas of study have been specified in the LCMS Bylaws or the CCCM policy manual since 1960. In addition to these six core courses, each of the seven colloquy programs also requires other coursework that is necessary for that particular type of commissioned ministry.

CUEnet is authorized to offer the six core courses *online* to colloquy students in any of the seven colloquy programs. As far as the remaining “program-specific” courses, CUEnet offers those only for *teacher* colloquy.² Colloquy students in the other six commissioned colloquy programs must take their program-specific coursework through one of the CUS colleges or universities.

CCCM Composition

The general composition of the CCCM is stipulated in Bylaw 3.10.3.1. Specific members are listed in the *Convention Workbook’s* Directory—Officers, Boards, and Commissions of the Synod. This triennium, Concordia University, Nebraska, President Dr. Bernard Bull replaced Dr. John Nunes, who resigned in early 2021, and Concordia University, Irvine, Professor Dr. Cari Chittick was added as a third CUS university faculty member because of a 2023 change to Bylaw 3.10.3.1.

Work Performed

The CCCM met 13 times since the writing of its last convention report—10 times via internet conference, and the three most recent in person. Going forward, the committee plans to meet in person at least half of the time. In 2025, the CCCM began using BoardEffect for its meeting dockets.

Most of our meeting time has consisted of discussion and decisions on policy revisions, though requests for policy exceptions (or clarifications) have also consumed a fair amount of time. These requests for exceptions and clarifications have resulted in continuing conversation on recent policy changes with an eye toward a relatively minor update in the next triennium.

Policy Update

After almost five years of work, the CCCM adopted a significantly revised policy manual on Sept. 30, 2024. Significant features of this revision include

- replacing the former pre-requisite for teacher colloquy: “past or present state certification, or an advanced degree in the field of education from a regionally accredited institution” with the following new language: “past completion of an education program from an accredited institution OR three years of experience in the field of education;”
- removing, for the six non-teacher colloquy programs, the prerequisite that one had to be “trained to do the work of [that specific type of ministry, e.g., DCE] through an accredited institution that offers an equivalent degree” and replacing it with the prerequisite of “three years of experience in the field of [that specific type of ministry]” as one way of giving “evidence of being a competent worker in the field of [that specific type of ministry],” per Bylaw 3.10.3 (b);
- clarifying the length of LCMS membership required for colloquy, namely one year prior to application and two years prior to final interview and certification;
- requiring applicants and colloquy directors to forward applications to LCMS district offices *at the beginning of colloquy coursework*;

- adding a (recent) background check as an admission requirement; and
- adding a policy section to “facilitate the examination, remediation, and qualification for first call of suitable candidates from disaffirmed or discontinued programs applying under Bylaw 2.8.4.1,” per Bylaw 3.10.3.3. This new bylaw and policy directive were required by 2023 Resolution 7-04B as a result of the situations with Concordia University Texas and the CUS colleges and universities that have closed in recent years.³

Application Update

In addition to revising the policy manual, the CCCM also significantly revised the application and application process. Most significant was consolidating to a single colloquy application designed to be used by all CUS schools and CUEnet for any of the seven commissioned colloquy programs. Previously, CUEnet and at least several CUS universities had their own applications, and there were no applications that were specifically designed for use with non-teacher colloquy programs. Second, the new application is now a fillable PDF.

Other Work

In addition to the major policy and application revision, the CCCM, primarily through its chairman, the LCMS First Vice-President and his office, also accomplished the following:

- Revamped the commissioned colloquy website;
- Conducted annual Zoom meetings with the Conference for [LCMS District] Education Executives (CONFEDX);
- Conducted annual Zoom meetings with the CUS colloquy directors; and
- Collaborated with the LCMS Office of Pastoral Education and Standing Partnership on a *Set Apart to Serve* initiative for second career teachers. See the Oct. 15, 2025, webinar, available at lcms.org/colloquy-ministers-of-religion-commissioned, at which a colloquy mapping PowerPoint was unveiled and discussed.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities

The major strengths of the CCCM are

- a very capable and dedicated committee;
- an excellent working relationship with CUEnet and the CUS colloquy directors; and
- a very capable and efficient executive administrative assistant in the OFVP.

Possible weaknesses are

- limits on meeting time due to the other primary duties of committee members; and
- limits on work that can be undertaken due to the other duties of the LCMS First Vice-President, who chairs the CCCM.

A definite opportunity exists to educate, vet, and roster *many more* teachers and other commissioned workers through colloquy.

Challenges

Challenges that the CCCM has identified include the following:

- Carrying out its work without unduly undermining the commissioned minister programs at our CUS schools or without

“lowering the bar” too much, especially with regard to colloquy admission requirements;

- Understanding what the phrase “currently serving in ministry roles” means (Bylaw 3.10.3), as well as the term “ministry” in the phrase “complete dedication to the ministry” (Bylaw 2.8.1 [b]) (This question is important for understanding whether Lutheran school administrators, other than principals, should be eligible for *teacher* colloquy; the same question applies to counselors at Lutheran schools.);
- Interpreting and applying the new policy that “three years of experience in the field of [teacher, DCE, etc.] ministry” is one way of fulfilling the bylaw requirement of giving “evidence of being a competent worker in the field of [teacher, DCE, etc.] ministry” (Bylaw 3.10.3 [b] and CCCM Policies X.1.1.5.2) (For example, is three years of helping out with a congregation’s youth ministry for several hours per month “three years of experience in DCE ministry”?);
- The fact that several important colloquy prerequisites and requirements, that were formerly in the Synod Bylaws, were reassigned to the policy manual by the 2010 Synod convention;
- The amount of time that sometimes elapses between submission of application and the OFVP’s ability to publish the applicant’s name in the *Reporter*; and
- The temporary inability to offer director of family life ministry (DFLM) colloquy due to recent changes at CUWAA.⁴

Future Priorities

CCPM priorities for the coming triennium include the following:

- Continuing to clarify questions that have arisen from the recent policy revision, especially the “three years in the field of [one of the seven types of commissioned] ministry,” as explained above;
- Continuing to improve the application and application process;
- Seeking to define or understand better the word “ministry” as it is used in Bylaws 3.10.3 and 2.8.1 (b);
- Developing “academic and theological standards for each of the colloquy programs” as directed in Bylaw 3.10.3.2 (b), yet in concert with the commissioned ministry program standards that are currently being developed by the CUS per Bylaw 3.6.6.4 (c);
- Working with the CUS university faculty examining committees for colloquy to strive for greater consistency in those assessments; and
- Considering a convention overture for the 2029 Synod convention to move some things back from policy to bylaw that were removed from the bylaws in 2010.

Conclusion

The committee is honored to serve the Synod in this important work. We are thankful for the improvements that have been made, the tremendous increase in colloquy applications that we have seen, and the great working relationships with others throughout the commissioned colloquy system. And we pray that, through the ministry of the commissioned ministers who are rostered through the colloquy process, the people of God in the congregations, schools,

and agencies of our Synod may be given joyful hope for the future because *Christ Is Risen Indeed!*

Peter K. Lange, *First Vice-President*

Endnotes

1. *There is no longer a parish assistant colloquy program, though parish assistants who were previously rostered retain that roster status. See later in this report for an explanation of director of family life ministry colloquy.*

2. *For teacher colloquy, there are two program specific courses, namely Lutheran Teacher I & II.*

3. *Fifteen individuals have inquired of the OFVP re. this (CCCM Policy 4.4) process—all graduates of CTX. Ten of the 15 are currently in the process, with seven certified to date: three teachers, two DCEs, and two DPMs.*

4. *As of this report date, the CUS, with the approval of the CCCM, has cleared the way for master's level DFLM programs at two of our CUS universities, which would, once again, make DFLM colloquy a possibility.*

R3

Praesidium

The Praesidium consists of the Synod President, the (full-time) First Vice-President, and five regional vice-presidents, each of whom represents the geographical region in which he lives. The five regional vice-presidents serve in a part-time capacity and, together with the First Vice-President, are responsible to the President for the performance of their duties (Bylaw 3.3.2.3). They are ranked by vote of the Synod convention to determine the order in which they would assume the presidency should that office be vacated (Constitution Article XI C 2; Bylaw 3.3.2.1).

A listing of Praesidium members, regions, and ranking can be found in the Convention Workbook's Directory—Officers, Boards, and Commissions of the Synod. Late in the triennium, after 18 and a half years of service to the Synod as a vice-president, Rev. Dr. John C. Wohlrabe Jr. moved out of the Great Lakes region and thus, according to the Bylaws, was no longer able to serve. In his place and in accordance with Bylaw 3.3.2.4, President Harrison appointed Rev. Eric Skovgaard. Two other vice-presidents, Rev. Dr. Scott Murray and Rev. Nabil Nour, retired from full-time parish ministry during the triennium but continued their duties as vice-presidents. After 16 years of service to the Synod as a vice-president, Dr. Murray has announced that he will not stand again for election.

Duties

The vice-presidents give counsel to the President and, upon his request, represent the President and assist him in discharging his responsibilities (Const. Art. XI C 1; Bylaw 3.3.2).

The Council of Presidents

The Praesidium and the 35 district presidents comprise the Council of Presidents (COP), which, in recent years, has met four times per year for three and a half days each time to carry out the duties assigned in Bylaws 3.10.1.2–3.10.1.4.

District Conventions

In addition to serving on the COP, the vice-presidents assist the President by attending district conventions to report and advise in fulfillment of Const. Art. XI B 6 and Bylaw 3.3.1.3 (a). Generally, the regional vice-presidents attend the district conventions in their

region, together with the President and/or the First Vice-President, as travel schedules allow. At these conventions, the President and/or vice-presidents preach at the primary worship service, report on the state of the Synod, observe convention sessions, visit with attendees, and install the district president.

During this triennium, President Harrison attended all or part of 25 district conventions, and various vice-presidents attended a total of 33 district conventions. Of the 35 district conventions, 22 of them took place during June 2025.

District Visitations

Another duty of the vice-presidents is to assist the President with district visitations as part of the President's responsibility of ecclesiastical supervision (Bylaw 1.2.1 [j] and 2013 Res. 7-01A). In recent years, these visitations have mostly been with district boards of directors, though in the past, they have also focused on district pastors' conferences, circuit visitors' conferences, etc. During this triennium, over the course of all district visitations, the vice-presidents were present 38 times (cumulatively). In some cases, two vice-presidents participated in the same visitation. In other cases, one vice-president alone conducted the visitation, representing the President.

Board Appointments

Appointed membership to the boards of various agencies of the Synod is another way in which vice-presidents may serve. One vice-president is designated by the President of the Synod for each seminary board of regents (Bylaw 3.10.5.2 [2]). This triennium,

- Vice-President Lange served as a regent for Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (Bylaw 3.10.5.2 [2]);
- Vice-President Murray served as a regent for Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne; he also chairs the board;
- Vice-President Ball was appointed by the Praesidium to serve as a regent for Concordia University, Nebraska (Bylaw 3.10.6.2 [5]);
- Vice-President Esget concluded his service as a regent for Concordia College—New York;
- Vice-President Wohlrabe continued his service as president of the Concordia Historical Institute Board of Governors and editor-in-chief of *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*; and
- Vice-President Murray served as a member of the board of directors of the International Lutheran Society of Wittenberg.

Appointments

Besides these regular and ongoing types of service, there are numerous occasional ways in which vice-presidents represent or assist the President at his request. During this triennium, various vice-presidents

- served on floor committees for the 2026 Synod convention (in some cases serving as chair or vice-chair);
- installed several district presidents;
- preached at numerous services and taught or presented in numerous venues;
- attended the inaugurations of one Synod seminary president and one Synod university president;

- attended funerals for two former Synod vice-presidents, a retired district president, a sitting district president, and a former member of the Board of Directors, among others;
- attended regional meetings of district presidents;
- attended the October 2024 International Church Relations Conference in Wittenberg, Germany;
- participated in, and in some cases presented at, district pastors' conferences;
- participated in the annual conversation between leaders of the LCMS, Wisconsin Synod, and Evangelical Lutheran Synod;
- participated in two mission trips to the Dominican Republic; and
- attended the 2025 March for Life in Washington, D.C., along with the district presidents (or their representatives) of every district;
 - At least one vice-president attends the March for Life in Washington, D.C., annually, normally along with the Synod President.

Lastly, in addition to frequent communication via electronic means, the Praesidium strives to meet in conjunction with each COP meeting to give opportunity for the vice-presidents' role as advisors to the President. When there are more urgent matters, the Praesidium has also met by internet conference.

In all it does to assist the President, the Praesidium strives to keep at the forefront the pure proclamation of the Gospel—that Jesus Christ was crucified to make atonement for the sins of the world and that *Christ Is Risen Indeed!*

Peter K. Lange, *First Vice-President*

R4

Secretary

The Office of the Secretary is a constitutional office of the Synod (Constitution Article XI D) and, with the Department of Rosters, Statistics, and Research Services (reporting to the Secretary; see **Report R4.1**) and the Department of Archives and History (on whose board the Secretary serves *ex officio*), a significant portion of its “organ of recording, recollection, and regulation.”

A. Constitutional and Customary Duties

The Synod is first and foremost a *confessional* union. It is also a *constitutional* one, the offices, boards, commissions, and agencies being specifically empowered by the member congregations to serve them and on their behalf. The well-being and well-functioning of the whole as a *confessional* union, in which the congregations are served with what they need and the service on their behalf is what they have authorized, depends on the health of the *constitutional* part. While the polity of a church can take many forms, fundamental to each is that one runs only as sent to run, and that offices are received and not assumed. The structure of a church, to be worthy of being called that, must be able to regulate the teaching and practice, to keep the whole growing up “until we all attain to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” together “into Him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph. 4:13). This involves, at our scale, a constitutional framework

capable of supporting the ecclesiastical work this involves. The President is responsible for ecclesiastical supervision (Const. Art. XI B 1–3). The Board of Directors handles property, business, and legal matters (Const. Art. XI E 2) so the work of the Church can be less concerned with “civilian pursuits.” The Secretary’s work is specified but not so neatly bundled by the Constitution and Bylaws. But much of it comprises the necessary maintenance of the constitutional framework on which all else hangs, and in which a broad and diverse and long-running Synod of sinful people, if we are truly “joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Eph. 4:16).

The Secretary, with the help of his office, carries out “all the customary duties of a corporate secretary” for corporate Synod, serves on the Board of Directors of the Synod, facilitates most of the official convention nomination, election, registration, and business processes, administers dispute resolution and expulsion processes, supervises the maintenance of the Synod’s official rosters and statistical information, and retains documents on Synod’s agencies, while performing “such other work as pertains to his office” or “as the Synod in convention, the President, or the Board of Directors may assign to him” (Bylaws 3.3.3, 3.3.3.2). It is a demanding office, even at the “minimum” defined in the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod. The office proper consists of the Secretary; an assistant to the secretary, Christian Boehlke—a new addition in this triennium, which has already proven to be useful in helping the office achieve electronic form submission and support major higher education governance and corporate formation requirement projects—and one office administrator, Lori Leighton, without whom I could not do. I am blessed and the Synod is blessed that the office has the support it has. There is never a slow day. We live by grace and sometimes have to ask for patience.

B. Analysis and Technological Advance

The Synod convention and the Synod offices, districts, entities, and educational institutions, if they are to make wise and forward-looking decisions, must be properly informed by facts. The Synod has from its inception provided for the gathering and publishing of information on Lutheranism in America. The office continues to encourage submission of annual parochial statistics, which continues at a steadier 70–75 percent submission rate, with statistics less than three years old available for 85 percent of congregations and 93 percent of confirmed membership. This remains far below the “unanimous” expectation of Bylaw 1.3.4.3, particularly in the Eastern, Northwest, Southern Illinois, Minnesota North, California-Nevada-Hawaii, and English Districts, in which both more than 20 percent of congregations and more than 20 percent of people have not been reported on in at least three years (South-eastern, South Dakota, Texas, and Southern Districts lack recent reports on more than 20 percent of congregations, but not more than 20 percent of their people). As we try to understand the impact of events like COVID-19—from which attendance is now finally, largely, on aggregate, recovering to trend lines—or investigate the implications of change on things like circuit health and parameters, which we did this triennium, this is a significant impediment. It is but one of many areas in which congregational disengagement threatens our ability to serve as Synod as the congregations have asked and need.

As circuit parameters for this convention have been discussed extensively in white papers prepared for the 2023 Res. 9-06A Circuit Alignment Task Force, I’ll not report further on that here.

While work with the “parochial service report” continues and we hope to have a significant report ready for floor committees on patterns of pastoral service and ordained minister supply and demand, we have not made the progress we’d like on supplying the Synod with deep and broad analysis or work with the entities to achieve an “enterprise data” approach of value to the Synod. Other areas of work—principally legal and governance matters—have taxed our capacity. Intention remains firm, and with a new triennium at hand, hope is being renewed.

C. Nominations and Elections

The office supports the nomination and election processes of the Synod convention (Bylaw 3.12), performing the preliminary and final work for the Committee on Convention Nominations (CCN) as well as the administration of the processes for nomination of the President and his election and for the nomination of the vice-presidents of the Synod—these latter nomination processes being ballot-based and numerical.

In the CCN process, a total of 459 individuals (210 ordained, 59 commissioned, and 190 lay), including incumbents, were nominated for at least one of the 62 officer, board, or commission positions to be filled by the convention through the work of the Committee on Convention Nominations (excluding the seven praesidium positions). Despite about 25 percent more nominations (including more duplicates), the total is the same as the previous triennium (though those were comprised of slightly more ordained, more commissioned, and fewer lay) but up from 347 the one previous. A new electronic system supported the process, enabled gathering of more complete and more timely information, eased the work of the committee, and reduced the amount of staff time required to be devoted to the process. We could still use more, and more thoughtful, nominations.

The nominating process for President and vice-presidents, conducted electronically for the second time through YesElections (formerly Election America, the contractor used by the Synod since 2013 to conduct the election of the President), will be reported on separately. Registration of presidential voters, also online for the second time, is underway at the time of this report’s preparation. The accustomed, relatively low level of participation in these processes remains of concern for the Synod. The last two triennia, this office again provided a detailed report on participation in the online presidential election (2019 *Today’s Business* [TB] 2B:239–45; 2023 TB 2B:286–90). The pre-convention election of the President continues to deserve the convention’s careful review.

The office continued its revised approach to convention-related communications this triennium, focusing on official notices and electronic communications with congregations, which can be more timely and have a broader reach than print. Districts were engaged to strongly encourage submission of congregational and congregational leader emails at lc.lcms.org, which have been used consistently and with timely information from online processes to remind multiple leaders in each congregation of opportunities to participate. There remain a small number of generally smaller congregations without many means of email contact and initial, “official” communications are still made on paper. Our evaluation is that this works probably better than the old postcard approach, although participation rates continue, across the board, on their accustomed downward trend—also a concern for the convention.

D. Facilitation of Appointment Processes, Vacancy and Regular

The office facilitates appointment processes for positions elected by the convention that become vacant mid-term and for positions appointed by the Board of Directors and Council of Presidents. Annual appointments include Concordia Plans / Plan Services Boards of Trustees / Members and the Lutheran Church Extension Fund Board of Members; triennial appointments, the LCMS Foundation and Commissions on Constitutional Matters and Handbook, as well as various appointments by the Council of Presidents. This triennium saw a decline to a more typical rate of vacancy appointments under Bylaw 3.2.5: Board for National Mission, 2; Board for International Mission, 2; LCMS Foundation Board of Trustees, 1; Concordia University Chicago, 2; Concordia University, Nebraska, 1. District boards of directors and others often have the opportunity to participate in the nomination processes, and their input is generally low in volume but greatly appreciated. These processes, too, have been supported with a new electronic system, which is still working its way to full realization in the time we have to give it.

E. Dispute Resolution and Expulsion Processes

The office administers the Synod’s processes of dispute resolution and expulsion, provides associated training, and has a key practical role, with the Commission on Constitutional Matters and Council of Presidents, in maintaining the processes’ Standard Operating Procedure Manuals. The triennium now drawing to a close saw the conclusion of hearing panel proceedings as follows: two expulsion proceedings under Bylaw section 2.14 (one is underway and one concluded by resignation after a panel was requested but before the hearing). Many suspensions of workers and congregations do not result in a panel, resolving instead in a removal by default or resignation. Reconcilers on the Synod’s roster function extensively in the districts, whether in informal or formal capacities; this activity is not regularly reported to the Office of the Secretary. Appeals from panel decisions were requested in three of four concluded expulsion proceedings, but no review hearings were granted by an appeal panel.

Given infrequent activation of reconcilers and hearing facilitators by blind draw for panel roles, the office, together with the Commission on Constitutional Matters and Council of Presidents, is engaged in review of the training apparatus and size of the pools. Ambassadors of Reconciliation, Synod’s training partner, will be providing the January 2027 training online in an effort to increase accessibility and retention of material, as well as to shift cost from travel and lodging to the creation of “off-year” continuing education for hearing facilitators and already-rostered reconcilers.

F. Other Roles Reported Elsewhere

The Secretary of the Synod serves *ex officio* on the Board of Directors of the Synod and the Concordia Historical Institute Board of Governors, as Secretary of both the Commission on Constitutional Matters and the Commission on Handbook. He regularly assists the Council of Presidents and is involved in many task forces and other efforts (including particularly, this triennium, the 2023 Res. 9-06A work on electoral circuit requirements); as these are reported on elsewhere and by others, these activities are not reported here. Suffice it to say that in everything touching on the Bylaws or the polity of the Synod, the office is usually in some way involved.

Unusually extensive litigation this triennium as well as a change in legal counsel, the present vacancy in the Chief Administrative

Officer position, an abortive attempt to replace the Synod website, and a now-underway effort to replace and vastly increase the scope of corporate Synod's constituent relationship management system—all touching on important aspects of the Office of the Secretary—have curtailed bandwidth for other important projects, like data analytics and the Commission on Constitutional Matters' effort to revise congregational constitution guidelines. With a new triennium, hope may be renewed. Part of that hope rests on the board's proposal to revise the Operations Team structure, to consolidate the Chief Financial and Chief Administrative Officers into one Chief Operating Officer and then build out under that officer a rank of high-caliber leaders for important areas of corporate Synod function, including legal, compliance, and information functions. It is hoped that some of the work that falls to this office can find its new and proper home, were that realignment to be achieved.

G. Conclusion

I conclude with a note of appreciation for the many folks throughout the Synod whose concern for the Synod's well-being and cooperation have made our work, to the extent it has been accomplished, possible.

In Fiscal Year 2026, including the commissions and dispute resolution and expulsion, the staff of Rosters, Statistics, and Research Services, and all overhead, the office cost each parish in the Synod about \$326, on which we earnestly attempt to deliver value, and to do so all the more effectively in years to come. (The Secretary also maintains the Council of Presidents budget, which amounts to an additional \$44 per parish per year.) We remain deeply grateful for and humbled by the Synod's investment in this work. Even though now augmented with the new position, we daily find ourselves taxed beyond capacity but with no shortage of opportunities for new and improved work with significant promise. The Synod is worth it and needs our work if it is to accomplish its vital objectives, for and on behalf of our member congregations. The Lord prosper the work of our hands so that the investment of the “diversity of gifts” in us may truly be “for the common profit.”

John W. Sias, *Secretary*

R4.1

Rosters, Statistics, and Research Services

The Department of Rosters, Statistics, and Research Services (RSRS), reporting to the Office of the Secretary, provides the core “organ of recollection and administration” for roster, leadership, contact, and statistical information related to congregations, individual members, schools, districts, and other agencies and affiliated entities of the Synod. Some of this information is published in *The Lutheran Annual* or to the Synod webpage; some is utilized by districts and others in the Synod for ministry, administrative, and research purposes. The preceding three years have continued to produce meaningful changes for the department. Using updated systems and optimized processes, RSRS continues to transform from a transactional data-entry unit into a strategic information and user support provider. Noteworthy accomplishments include the following:

- Implementation of two new applications to support LCMS District offices with
 - the call process and general roster management of ordained and commissioned ministers—unifying, for the first time, the roster management system jointly

used by the Synod's districts and national office; and

- mapping and analysis of congregations and schools by district and circuit.
- Implementation of a new online reporting tool for congregations to manage and submit lists of seventh–twelfth grade students in support of *Set Apart to Serve* and recruitment efforts by the Synod's universities and seminaries.
- Redesign and upgrade of the LCMS internet locators (locator.lcms.org) with a focus on heightened security to thwart the increased level of attempts by external parties to scrape Synod's data; this included adding a log-in element to access the information on rostered church workers.
- Acquisition of new scanning hardware to support the continued updating and accessing of Synod's roster archives.
- Implementation of the collection of an array of new statistical data points covering enrollment capacity, programs, staffing data, finances, and admissions practices on behalf of LCMS School Ministry.

Research Services provides a full range of research and analysis services for the Synod and its agencies. Close integration of Research Services with Rosters and Statistics and the Office of the Secretary, as well as close interaction with ministry units at the International Center, the Council of Presidents, and Synod's partner agencies (CPS, LCEF, etc.) has proven fruitful in exploration of new approaches and fields of study with potential to impact the present and future ministry of the Synod and its constituents; the same connections will continue to grow in importance as core technologies and access to analyzable data continue to be enhanced.

Some of the key reports delivered in the past three years include the following:

- Multiple studies on pastoral formation and routes to pastoral ministry.
- Extensive study of church worker wellness, surveying rostered workers, congregation leaders, and district presidents.
- Research support for the Circuit Alignment Task Force (Res. 9-06A), including surveys of parish pastors and district presidents.
- Research support for the Created Male and Female Task Force (Res. 1-04A), including two major surveys of rostered workers.
- Multiple yearly surveys of congregations, church workers, and LCMS youth in support of *Set Apart to Serve*.
- Program evaluation support for major events, including the 2023 Synod convention, the 2024 Worship Institute, and the 2025 LCMS Youth Gathering.

Scott Kostencki, *Director*

R5

Board of Directors

A. Relationship to the Synod

It is necessary to understand clearly what the Synod is when considering a report from the Synod Board of Directors (BOD).

The Synod is an organization of congregations. The congregations created the Synod to carry out specific activities that congre-

gations cannot do alone or can do more effectively when acting together. The Synod was created by, is maintained by, and continues to exist to serve the Synod's congregations and individual members.

Synod Const. Art. VII establishes the relationship of the Synod to the congregations: "Synod is not an ecclesiastical government exercising legislative or coercive powers." It is only advisory with respect to the individual congregations.

The congregations that formed and continue to maintain the Synod have a common confession stated in Art. II. This confession is that the "written Word of God is the only rule and norm of faith and practice" and that the Lutheran Confessions are "a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God." It is this confession that binds the congregations (and individual members) together. Every member of the Synod accepts this confession "without reservation" and is not free to depart from it.

The Synod, under Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, has established, in Const. Art. III, the Synod's objectives. To carry out these objectives, the member congregations, through their Synod, have created seminaries and universities, synodwide corporation and trust entities, and various other *agencies* (see Bylaw 1.2.1 [a]), as well as various offices and the BOD.

The BOD, all Synod agencies, offices, and others were created to serve congregations and other members. They do so by carrying out the objectives established by the Synod. This is always to be done (1) consistent with Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions; and (2) according to the directives given by the Synod congregations in the form of a Constitution, Bylaws, and convention resolutions.

The role of the BOD within the Synod is unique. The BOD is both the board of corporate Synod, the Missouri corporation (compare Bylaws 1.2.1 [f] and [v]), and "an officer" of ecclesial Synod (Const. Art. XI A 4), overseeing especially the business, property, and legal aspects of the Synod's work in the agencies of the Synod outside corporate Synod (Const. Art. XI E 2) and exercising the specific business, property, and legal authority and duties not delegated otherwise.

The important role of the BOD makes it directly "accountable to the Synod in convention for the discharge of its duties" (Bylaw 3.3.4). The BOD takes this accountability very seriously. In all its work, it keeps at the forefront of its actions the decisions and interests of the Synod congregations and individual members.

The BOD's work involves left-hand kingdom matters, including *property of the Synod* (Bylaw 1.2.1 [r]) and a broad variety of business and legal matters. The BOD has *oversight* (Bylaw 1.2.1[p]) and other responsibilities over the Synod's seminaries, universities, synodwide corporation and trust entities, and other agencies. *Oversight* means "to monitor; to make inquiry and receive a response thereto; to make suggestions; to bring to a higher authority." The "higher authority" for the BOD is the Synod in convention. The right-hand kingdom ecclesiastical responsibilities are given to the Synod President, district presidents, and other officers.

B. Stewardship Actions of the Board

More specifically, and as an example, over the past triennium, the BOD considered and took the following actions as part of its stewardship of Synod resources:

- Approved master plan changes and capital projects for both seminaries and most of the universities.

- Made numerous appointments and filled vacancies as provided by the Bylaws.
- Updated and modified various policies that guide the work of both the BOD and agencies of the Synod.
- Received, considered, and sometimes acted relating to reports from Synod agencies.
- Monitored, and when in the best interests of the Synod, resolved, defended, and pursued litigation involving corporate Synod.
- Monitored litigation involving agencies of the Synod and submitted amicus curiae briefs on issues of significance to First Amendment rights, including religious freedom and freedom of speech, considered by the courts.
- Released funds to resolve a corporate Synod guarantee of Concordia University System (CUS) debt.
- Continually monitored giving and other financial trends.
- Approved the purchase of property in Wittenberg, Germany, that will provide space to support Synod mission work across Europe.
- Directed a comprehensive review of the scope and efficiency of work within each of the corporate Synod officers' respective departments.
- Established policies to ensure adequate reserves for corporate Synod to avoid future deficiencies of available cash to meet budget requirements.
- Retained new legal counsel for Synod to provide informed options, perspectives, and support for actions taken or considered by the BOD and Synod officers.

C. Proactive Initiatives of the Board

The BOD has also worked diligently to take a more proactive approach to address significant issues that have broad synodwide impact. In this process, the BOD has worked to create a cooperative working atmosphere with and among the agencies of the Synod. These efforts include:

- Formed an LCMS Entity Activity Development (LEAD) Committee that has worked extensively with the synodwide corporate and trust entities and other agencies to prepare and submit for consideration by the 2026 Synod convention proposed changes to bylaws that impact corporate Synod and agencies of the Synod when creating corporations. If adopted, this will provide uniformity across the Synod and—by retiring confusing former regulations in large part not previously captured in the Bylaws—clarity for those forming and evaluating the formation of new corporations.
- Identified and sought opportunities to engage boards of Synod agencies for collaboration, discussion, and training on matters including Synod governance and compliance, relationship of the BOD to the various agency boards, fiduciary responsibilities owed to the agency and to the Synod, the First Amendment, and hard decisions on challenging issues.
- Approved and submitted to the convention overtures that relate to the mission boards, appointed Synod officers, and CUS and in response to opinions of the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM).

- In response to the leadership and diligent work of Concordia Plan Services (CPS), the BOD approved the creation of a property and casualty insurance company, named Concordia Risk Solutions (CRS), that will be able to provide insurance to corporate Synod, agencies of the Synod, auxiliaries, recognized service organizations, and member congregations. The BOD also delegated the management of CRS to CPS.
- With the help and insight of Synod's Chief Financial Officer, Nathan Haak, the BOD has adopted a balanced budget each of the past three years and continued a multi-year process of improving the financial condition of corporate Synod. Please note CFO Haak's Report (**Report R5.2**).
- Worked with the Operations Team in long-range planning to develop long-term plans to sustain corporate Synod operations and foster financial stability and integrity.
- Adopted policies and protocols to maintain financial strength and integrity when adopting future budgets.
- As part of its regular monitoring of gifting and other financial trends, noted, in particular, continuing decline in receipts from the districts, resulting in large part from the decline of receipts by the districts from congregations.
- Updated policies governing executive compensation for corporate Synod and the synodwide corporation and trust entities.

D. 2023 Resolution 7-04B

This resolution made comprehensive changes to the CUS and the overall governance of the Concordia universities. It also addressed certain long-standing issues that have impacted how "property of the Synod" (Bylaw 1.2.1 [r]) is to be managed by the Synod with respect to the Concordia universities and Synod seminaries. Resolution 7-04B provided:

Resolved, That the BOD, after input from the Commission on Constitutional Matters, review within the upcoming triennium the governing documents and governance practices of all higher education institutions of the Synod, and all boards of regents and boards of associated foundations be directed to correct any identified noncompliance with the Synod Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions; and be it further

Resolved, That each university of the CUS shall acknowledge in a written agreement, facilitated by the BOD of the Synod, the paramount right, title, and interest of the Synod in the name *Concordia*, ... ; and be it finally

Resolved, That the BOD report to the subsequent Synod convention its progress in achieving the foregoing and any proposed bylaw changes or other action needed to more faithfully steward resources for higher education in the Synod.

As required by Res. 7-04B, the CCM conducted an extensive review of the governing documents and governance practices of all Concordia universities and Synod seminaries. The CCM then provided comprehensive and detailed reports to each of the higher education institutions and the BOD. The BOD has accepted the CCM opinions in their entirety and has worked with the higher education institutions to bring all their governing documents and governance practices into compliance with the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions.

Much progress has been made in this effort. But there remains more work to be done.

Res. 7-04B directs the BOD to report to the 2026 Synod convention its progress in achieving this resolution requirements and to propose bylaw changes and other action as may be necessary. Because of the detail involved, the number of corrections that remain to be made, and the intensive work the institutions are engaged in at the *Workbook* deadline, the BOD intends to continue its work over the upcoming months and provide a supplemental report to the 2026 convention identifying any remaining corrections to be made and proposing any further action that might be necessary.

E. Challenges for the Board

In large organizations it is not uncommon to have "silos," which are units within the organization that pursue an agenda or direction at least isolated from and often increasingly inconsistent with the objectives and mission of the organization. That has occurred in the Synod. Perhaps the best example of this is the theological direction that the Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, administration and faculty majority took in the 1960s and 1970s that was in direct conflict with our confession. Correcting this had a dramatic impact on all aspects of our church body that continues today.

But the Seminex circumstance, while perhaps the most significant and best known, is not the only silo that has existed or could exist in our Synod. Silos have existed through many agencies in all aspects of the Synod. Absent intentional effort, they naturally arise and strengthen. They have hurt the Synod and cost her vital resources. All must consciously resist their development. Sometimes the misdirection is theological, sometimes it involves left-hand kingdom matters, and sometimes it involves both.

There has been steady progress in recent years by many in the Synod, including the BOD, to eliminate these silos. This effort will continue. Eliminating silos will help the Synod more faithfully and efficiently carry out its objectives consistent with its confession; will help avoid unnecessary conflict, disputes, division, and improper utilization of *property of the Synod*; and, simply put, will help us all walk together more faithfully. While the President is charged with promoting and maintaining "unity of doctrine and practice" and seeing that the officers and agencies of the Synod "act in accordance with Synod's Constitution" (Const. Art. XI B 1-3), the BOD in its sphere must oversee business, property, and legal aspects in a way that keeps the whole responsible and responsive to the convention.

The BOD faces with some regularity concerns that individuals or agencies are failing, with regard to property, business, or legal matters, to comply with the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod. It is then incumbent upon the BOD to address and attempt to correct any noncompliance. On occasion, the individuals or agencies continue to proceed in a fashion that conflicts with what the Synod has decided. In these situations, it is important to consider again that the Synod and all its agencies are responsible to the member congregations. The congregations have made decisions as to how they will be served best by those who they have put in positions to carry out their decisions. This means that when individuals or agencies fail to comply with the Synod Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions, they are failing to honor and respect what the Synod's member congregations have decided.

The BOD, with some frequency, receives an assortment of excuses or justifications for noncompliance. Sometimes, efforts are made to negotiate with the BOD an agreement that would allow the noncompliance. The BOD, of course, has never been given the authority to excuse noncompliance with Synod's Constitution, By-

laws, and resolutions. For this reason, the BOD is always steadfast in maintaining that all officers and agencies of the Synod must always respect and serve the congregations by complying with the decisions the congregations have made in the Synod Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions.

Another challenge faced by the BOD is the apparent lack of appreciation of some Synod agencies and officials of the breadth of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Historical and recent opinions by the U.S. Supreme Court have consistently affirmed the great protections given to us as a church body in the U.S. to both freedom of religion and the avoidance of government compulsion on how we conduct our affairs as a Christian church body. The First Amendment is not just an individual right—the First Amendment broadly protects the church’s power to decide internal matters of faith, doctrine, and governance free from state interference. It is a limitation on government authority founded in the Establishment Clause and Free Exercise Clause. The BOD, from time to time, encounters arguments or resistance to how Synod congregations have chosen to organize and conduct their business. Sometimes these arguments incorporate a lack of understanding of the broad scope of our First Amendment rights. Bylaw 1.2.1 (f)(2) reminds us of the congregations’ directive in this regard: While the Synod “intends to acknowledge its responsibility to be subject to civil authority, in all such references [to laws] the Synod *intends to retain all authority and autonomy allowed a church* under the laws and Constitution of the United States and the State of Missouri.”

To ensure a better understanding of our First Amendment rights across the Synod, the BOD intends to continue to highlight the importance of our First Amendment and other religious rights. This will be done with the training provided to the Concordia university boards of regents under Bylaw 3.10.6.2.2 and when the opportunity otherwise arises.

The members of the BOD express their sincere thanks to the Synod for the special privilege afforded them to serve the Lord by serving the Synod’s congregations and other members.

Christian A. Preus, *Chairman*

R5.1

Chief Administrative Officer

The work of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) is succinctly described in Bylaw 3.4.2: the CAO “shall assist the Board of Directors of the Synod in carrying out the responsibilities given to it by the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod.” Over the past triennium, there was significant work related to legal matters. The CAO’s office manages these efforts by coordinating LCMS legal counsel, local legal counsel, stakeholders internal and external to corporate Synod, the Board of Directors, and others as necessary. With three significant legal matters active during large parts of the triennium (*HotChalk*, *Concordia University Texas*, and *Hong Kong International School Association, Ltd.*), and other items frequently arising requiring attention, this was no small task during the last triennium.

Beyond these legal efforts, and in other work with many external stakeholders including Concordia University System and the Concordia universities, the CAO represents and supports the Synod Board of Directors and undertakes significant efforts in the work of corporate Synod, some of which are highlighted as follows:

A. International Efforts

The CAO works with Synod legal counsel, foreign legal counsel, and the Office of International Mission to determine how to best structure LCMS operations in the many foreign countries where we work. These efforts are critical for protecting LCMS assets abroad, protecting LCMS employees working abroad, and protecting LCMS assets in the U.S. by ensuring appropriate structures are in place. As we clarify a strategy and preferred methodology for entering a country, this work can shift from setting up new entities to managing and maintaining what’s already in place.

B. Operations Team

The CAO is charged with convening the Operations Team, comprised of the CAO, Chief Financial Officer, and Chief Mission Officer of the Synod. This meeting provides a regular forum to ensure operational and strategic alignment across LCMS programs.

The Operations Team regularly meets with leaders of LCMS operational units including Human Resources, Information Technology, Operations Support Services, and others to align key efforts in those areas.

C. Process Improvement

As mentioned in the Chief Financial Officer report (**Report R5.2**), we have been working to improve the tools and processes we use to do the work of the Synod. A key effort currently underway is implementation of a new constituent relationship management system, which is a key tool used daily by many of the employees of the Synod, helping manage relationships with donors, congregations, church workers, other entities, and more. This program has brought together a substantial portion of our workforce to ensure our many varied requirements are met, and the objectives of the program include increasing efficiency in how we work, improving our relationships with constituents across the Synod, and identifying opportunities to increase revenues.

We cannot accomplish the work given to us by convention in support of the Synod without the significant support of the church, via your prayers, time, talents, and treasures. I pray that the Lord continues to bless our efforts for the good of the Synod, recognizing that in all things His will is done, that the world may know that *Christ Is Risen Indeed*.

Nathan M. Haak, *Interim Chief Administrative Officer*

R5.1.1

Event Planning and Procurement

The Event Planning and Procurement Group provides exemplary event planning services, including hotel negotiation, travel, housing, transportation, and conference needs for all LCMS organizations resulting in enormous cost savings and efficient event planning. The services are provided for national and international events, including Synod conventions, LCMS Youth Gatherings, and a variety of organizational needs. Since the 2023 Synod convention, this department has deftly renegotiated for hundreds of meetings as well as planned and assisted with nearly 1,000 offsite events, accommodating an estimated 200,000 people.

Lynne C. Marvin, *Senior Director*

R5.1.2

Human Resources

Christ Is Risen Indeed! The LCMS Department of Human Re-

sources (HR) holds Gal. 5:13, “through love serve one another,” as the pillar of our values. With that mindset, we are able to provide consummate HR services to over 350 employees, both domestic and internationally deployed, so that all may succeed in furthering the Church’s mission to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ around the world. This is a wonderful opportunity and an immense challenge, for which we are grateful to serve.

HR coordinates the development and administration of personnel policies, procedures, and supporting systems within and between boards, commissions, departments, entities, and other agencies of the Synod. The last triennium presented opportunities to concentrate on enhancing the employee experience at the International Center (IC) from a system and process standpoint.

HR was successful in carrying out a number of accomplishments in this triennium, starting with the acquisition of a new human resources information system, implemented in October 2025. This system allowed our department to efficiently coordinate efforts and deliver comprehensive services to our employees at the IC.

A restructured HR service delivery with IC entities has allowed HR to redirect more targeted services to our missionaries around the world, with specific focus on recruiting and talent development. This endeavor continues to bear fruit!

From a recruiting standpoint, we have hired key leadership positions in the program areas including executive director of the Office of National Mission, a director of discipleship ministry, and a director of video production.

Lastly, I am proud of our team’s efforts to create a best-in-class onboarding program to ensure employees are properly enculturated into the organization, enhancing engagement and long-term retention.

HR is well positioned to execute on the strategy for the next triennium. Our objectives include: increasing efficiencies in service delivery with existing resources; creating a learning culture with the specific goal of developing leaders; enhancing engagement as long-tenured employees retire and new talent is hired; and providing support and education for employees that assists them in all stages of their vocational life cycle. Accomplishment of these objectives will lead to enhanced service delivery to the boards, commissions, agencies, departments, and corporate entities we support so that they can focus on their mission.

Nathan Thomas, *Executive Director*

R5.1.3

Operations Support Services

The overall mission of Operations Support Services (OSS) is to provide core services that support the mission and ministry of the LCMS. The following service units make up OSS: Operations Service Coordination, Technology Applications Group, Information Technology Desktop and Infrastructure Support Services, Mail and Print Services, Reception and Meeting Services, and Facilities Management Services. In addition, the LCMS Technology Steering Committee (TSC), which is chaired by the Executive Director of Operations Support Services, reviews projects to assess their benefit to the organization, looks for potential collaboration across department, and evaluates resources available to support the work. Other functions of the TSC include advising on proposed policy changes or additions, as well as fostering positive communications throughout the LCMS organization.

A. Operations Service Coordination (OSC)

Operations Service Coordination provides the communication and coordination link between the Operations Department and the departments of the LCMS. OSC also ensures that policies and procedures are in place to ensure Operations Services are delivered in a timely and efficient manner. Through regular communication, OSC makes sure that the needs of the departments are being met. OSC works closely with Concordia Plan Services (CPS) in managing the help desk team that supports both organizations.

B. Technology Applications Group (TAG)

The Technology Applications Group is dedicated to the application of technology solutions that enable the ministry and business functions of LCMS to operate in the most innovative and cost-effective manner possible. TAG provides technical support to the major LCMS Business Applications: Banner Accounting, Pay-Com Human Resources Information System, LCMS Information Support Network, Blackbaud Constituent Resource Management System, M365 toolset, and LCMS websites. TAG also provides technical support to many other department-specific tools: Genetec Security Camera, P Badge System, Office365 Applications, and others. Various applications of technology solutions are prioritized by the LCMS Operations Team with OSS providing technical expertise to approved projects.

C. Information Technology Desktop and Infrastructure Support Services

CPS provides network infrastructure support for the LCMS. This includes the help desk, now staffed fully by CPS employees, and many infrastructure support functions. Oakwood Technology Group is the primary outsourced provider for infrastructure support.

D. Mail and Print Services (MPS)

Mail Services handles all mailing (standard mail, express mail and packages) from the International Center (IC) properties, including USPS, UPS, FedEx, and DHL. The MPS staff also provide the following special services: preparation of bulk mailings, address labeling, folding, envelope/mailler inserting, bulk paper delivery (for copiers/printers), and managing overnight package mailing needs. Print Services provides full-service printing to not only the departments of the LCMS but also to CPS and the LCMS Foundation. Print Services include: full-color and black/white printing, large format printing, envelope printing, folding, cutting, GBC plastic comb binding, booklet-making, padding, three-hole punching, lamination, photocopying, and wide format printing (banners, posters, stickers), as well as personal printing services for our employees. We are also expanding these services to local LCMS congregations and schools.

E. Reception and Meeting Services (RMS)

Reception and Meeting Services is responsible for coordinating meetings and events that take place at the IC. This includes assistance with room scheduling and set up, as well as any event catering needs. RMS provides Front Desk services ensuring that all guests are greeted in a friendly and professional manner. The Front Desk also ensures all building entry security policies and procedures are followed.

F. Facilities Management Services (FMS)

The LCMS is continuing our facility management partnership with Cushman and Wakefield at the IC. Cushman's expertise in property management will help ensure the LCMS is adhering to industry best practices. The mission of FMS is to ensure a safe, healthy, and Christian work environment for employees at the IC.

G. Significant Accomplishments

(1) Completed major building capital projects to include: modernizing the IC's three elevators, installing new building hot water boiler system, replacing large HVAC unit on the North wing, and cracking/filling/sealing/stripping parking lots. (2) Installed new front entrance camera/intercom to vet visitors before entering the building and new all building paging/intercom system that integrates with our phone system. (3) Upgraded meeting room video conferencing hardware to better support Zoom and TEAMS meetings. (4) Upgraded all the Multi-Function Printers at the IC and moved to the cloud-based PaperCut solution, allowing more accurate and efficient tracking of prints to better control costs. (5) Continuing a comprehensive cyber awareness training program for employees, moving from KnowBe4 to Microsoft Defender for an annual savings of over \$5000. (6) Migrated most LCMS data and Enterprise applications from onsite servers to the LCMS cloud M365 SharePoint environment further reducing the reliance on the IC for business operations. (7) Upgraded the Print Center high volume printer and added a wide format and envelope printer. This has provided additional cost saving to the LCMS and allowed us to expand this service to local LCMS congregations and schools. (8) Migrated from our Avaya IP phone system to Microsoft Teams Voice. This fully integrates our phone system within our Microsoft M365 environment. (9) Continue to work with Rosters and Statistics to expand the LCMS Information Support Network (LISN) to meet the needs of the LCMS.

Joel Rivers, *Executive Director*

R5.2

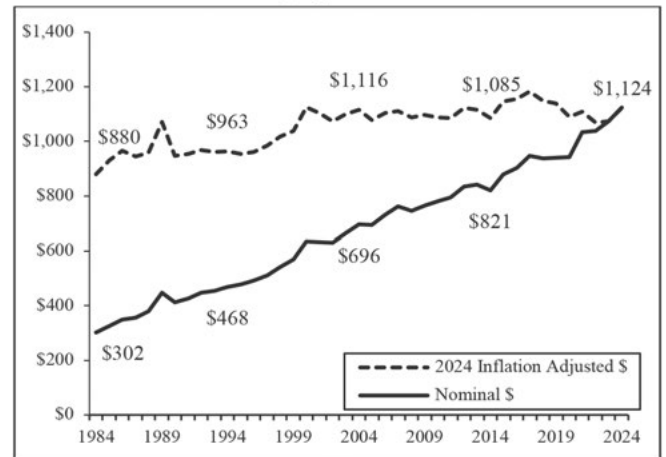
Chief Financial Officer

We are blessed to be part of a Synod that is built on the foundation of our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and is governed and supported by a strong and educated laity and willing member congregations who have voluntarily chosen this walking together. As Chief Financial Officer, my primary focus is faithfully stewarding the financial gifts that are passed up through that structure to support our work together. In this effort, I strive to maintain transparency regarding the Synod's finances, while also looking to understand the broader context of those finances. The financials may vary from year to year, but the love of Christ remains.

Synodical Context

Giving by individuals in the Synod remains strong. In my 2023 convention report, I indicated that giving to congregations by individuals (as reported by congregations as dollars used for both "Work at Home" and "Work at Large") had surpassed \$1,000 per confirmed member for the first time in 2021. 2024 was again a record high, with the average confirmed member giving \$1,124 during 2024 to the congregation.

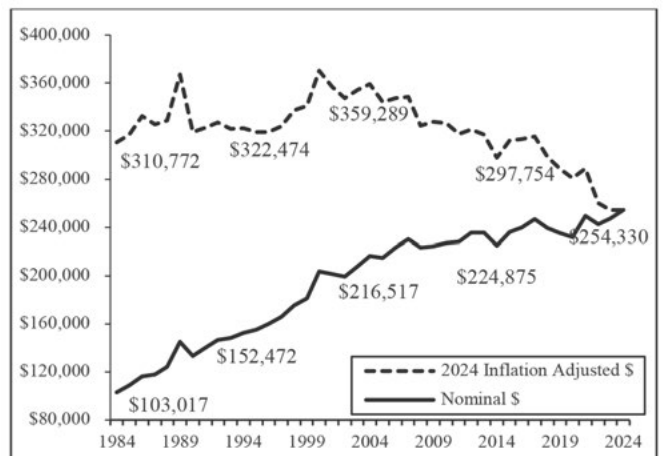
Graph 1: Giving to Congregations for Work at Home and Work at Large, per Confirmed Member



Thanks be to God for the generosity He bestows upon His people, and the generosity they show to the church! It is encouraging to see not only steady growth in nominal giving but also steadiness in the face of the pressures of inflation.

Even as giving by individuals has remained strong, the pressure on congregational budgets has increased. The average congregational budget for work at home (in the congregation) plus work at large (district, Synod, etc.) increased from \$103,017 in 1984 to \$254,330 in 2024, a 147 percent increase. However, the purchasing power of that decreased by 18 percent over the same time.

Graph 2: Average Total Congregational Budget for Work at Home and Work at Large



The downward trend in the purchasing power of the gifts received by congregations (the dotted line) is unmistakable. What drives this disconnect between the steady support of the people of the Synod and the decline in availability for the congregations? Simply put, the decline in total confirmed members of LCMS congregations has outpaced the decline in the number of member congregations. Since 1984, the number of member congregations of the LCMS decreased by only 5 percent. Over the same period, the number of confirmed members decreased by 37 percent.

The impact of this on the work of the Synod is significant, both at the congregation and beyond. The following table shows the trend of giving to the Work at Large of the Synod, and the portion of that passed on to corporate Synod, since 1984.

Table 1: Giving to Work at Large and Corporate Synod in Nominal and 2024 Inflation Adjusted \$ (millions of dollars)

Year	Nominal \$ (millions)		2024 \$ (millions)	
	Work at Large	Synod Budget	Work at Large	Synod Budget
1984	\$81.7	\$21.0	\$246.6	\$81.3
1989	\$104.3	\$30.3	\$263.7	\$76.5
1994	\$96.0	\$26.4	\$203.1	\$55.8
1999	\$123.6	\$25.2	\$232.6	\$47.5
2004	\$121.8	\$20.9	\$202.1	\$34.7
2009	\$126.9	\$18.5	\$185.4	\$27.0
2014	\$118.3	\$15.2	\$156.5	\$20.1
2019	\$115.0	\$13.1	\$141.0	\$16.1
2024	\$114.2	\$13.0	\$114.2	\$13.0
vs. '84	+40%	-52%	-54%	-84%

Corporate Synod

Despite facing the headwinds above, the financial position of the Synod continued to improve over the last three fiscal years (7/1/2022 to 6/30/2025). The following tables summarize the expenditures of corporate Synod, and how our work was funded.

Table 2: Corporate Synod Expenses 7/1/22 to 6/30/25 (\$ millions)

Budget Area	Expenses	% of Total
International Missions	\$84.3	38%
National Mission Areas*	\$37.7	17%
Higher Education**	\$14.1	6%
Communications***	\$13.8	6%
Total Mission Programs	\$149.9	67%
Ecclesiastical Programs	\$28.5	13%
Total Programs	\$178.4	80%
Management, Admin, Items****	\$24.7	11%
Fundraising	\$20.4	9%
Total Expenses	\$223.5	100%

*Includes the Office of National Mission, the Office of Pastoral Education (except for grants to seminaries), and Youth Gathering

**Includes grants to seminaries and subsidies to Concordia University System (CUS)

***Includes LCMS Communications and KFUD

****Includes portion of the HotChalk settlement paid with Synod funds

Table 3: Corporate Synod Funding Sources 7/1/22 to 6/30/25 (\$ millions)

Support Type	\$ Million	% of Total
District Support	\$39.8	14%
Gifts from Individuals and Entities	\$130.4	44%
Bequests	\$34.9	12%
Investment Income	\$20.1	7%
Earned Revenues and Others	\$32.1	11%
Revenues for Operations	\$257.3	88%
Gifts to Endowments	\$9.0	3%
Change in Value of Investments	\$27.1	9%
Total Revenues	\$293.4	100%

If there is a silver lining to the downtrend of support to corporate Synod from congregations via the districts, it is that a diverse revenue stream has been developed to support the work of the Synod. At the same time, the support from the districts is what is primarily available to fund our collective work, as many gifts from individuals and other entities carry restrictions as to their use. More than that, the gifts from districts represent, at least as a proxy, our collective willingness to contribute financial resources to our life together as Synod.

The excess of revenues for operations over total expenses was a surplus of almost \$34 million over the last three years. Some of this surplus was the result of unanticipated items, such as unusually large bequests and dividends received from our international operations. Some was intentionally targeted while the prospect of significant litigation in the *HotChalk* matter loomed. Fortunately, this matter is behind us. The total impact of this settlement on the LCMS financial statements is included in the expenses shown above and was included in the fiscal year 2025 audited financial statements of the Synod. The portion funded by Synod funds was immaterial to the fiscal year 2025 financials and did not require specific disclosure.

Even with these surpluses, we work to remain faithful stewards using the gifts and treasures entrusted to us. The \$223.5 million of expenses represents a 22 percent increase over the prior three-year period. The significant portion (80 percent) of spending on programs exceeds best practice guidelines for nonprofit organizations. Additionally, since the end of fiscal year 2025, the LCMS has put more of this surplus to use, paying down substantially all of CUS' debt owed to the Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF). With that, corporate Synod is free of debt and the guarantee of the indebtedness of others. Beyond the investments made in the programs and mission of the church described by others in this *Workbook*, we are also beginning necessary investments in technology and systems needed to support our programs and mission and the people of the Synod today and into the future.

Additional transparency and information can be found in regularly available sources. I give regular financial reports to the Board of Directors that are reflected in the minutes of their meetings. Monthly and annual financial statements are posted to the LCMS website. We annually prepare a budget report showing the work not only of corporate Synod but also of all synodical entities and agencies. There is an annual report highlighting broadly the work of the Synod, the financials, and other statistical information. We are committed to transparency, and endeavor to remain so. In my

opinion, you would be hard pressed to find a church body more transparent about its financials with its parishioners.

In addition to the work of corporate Synod, I represent the Board of Directors on the boards of several entities: LCEF, Concordia Plan Services, LCMS Foundation, Concordia Publishing House, and CUS. I support the work of other LCMS entities that are part of the consolidated financial statements, including the Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty and LCMS Holdings, Inc. This would not be possible without the dedicated and hard-working staff across the teams who support me in accounting and finance at the LCMS International Center in St. Louis.

The Lord has blessed the LCMS in many ways. Over the last several years, He has seen fit to provide a financial position previously unseen in the Synod's history. I pray that He will grant us wisdom in stewarding these gifts to support our bold proclamation of the Gospel—that *Christ Is Risen Indeed!*

Nathan M. Haak, *Chief Financial Officer*

R6

Board for National Mission

As stated in Synod Bylaw 3.8.2, the Board for National Mission (BNM) “is charged with developing and determining policies for the coordination of and in support of district ministries which support congregations and schools (Bylaw 1.2.1 [n]).” Furthermore, under the President of the Synod, “the board shall assist in identifying the specific goals for the Office of National Mission [ONM].” In addition, Bylaw 3.8.2.1 states that the BNM “shall have oversight of the implementation of policies adopted by the board and implemented by the Office of National Mission for the coordination of and in support of district ministries which support congregations and schools.” Finally, the BNM works conjointly with the Board for International Mission (BIM) “offering ideas and guidance for proposing triennial mission and ministry emphases to the national convention” (Bylaw 3.8.2.2). This last aspect is officially addressed through a Joint Mission Assessment Committee served by two members of the BNM and two members of the BIM. This committee in turn reports to both mission boards toward finalization of overtures to the Synod and other recommendations to the President of the Synod.

Increased Fraternal Dialogues with District Presidents and Staffs

A major goal which has been realized and to which we are committed to continuing is increased communication and partnership between the BNM and our district presidents and staffs. We had the privilege to work with the ONM unit executive, the Rev. Dan Galchutt, who with a mighty and joyful servant's heart epitomizes bridge-building and networking between Synod at the national level and Synod at the district and congregational levels. The BNM has shared this commitment to work more closely with our districts and has been proactive in meeting with our district presidents and staffs for living out our walking together.

A Record Number of Submitted Overtures to Proclaim *Christ Is Risen Indeed*

The current BNM has never been as driven to offer overtures that will make a positive impact for providing the best resources we possibly can to our districts and congregations as we celebrate the

Gospel, the power of God unto salvation for all people to know the Risen Christ. We have offered ways to confront the increased idolatry in our country through Lutheran resources in Christian apologetics; to increase church planting at the parish level; to faithfully respond to the resurgence of young men and women in the Church; to encourage and support campus ministry; and to increase and support establishing new and strengthening current LCMS schools. These are but a sampling of the BNM making strides to address and supply the real needs of our Synod in respect to national missions.

Establishing Clear “Policy Areas” to Serve the Most Important National Mission Needs

While we are supporting the sunseting of “mission priorities” for the Synod and rejoice to focus on our newly proposed mission and ministry emphasis, *Tell the Next Generation* (see **Report R8**, the report of the Joint Mission Assessment Committee of the BNM and BIM), we have put before ourselves in the BNM seven “policy areas” that are lucid priorities for LCMS national mission today. Here are the seven policy areas which guide the BNM's policymaking for the ONM: 1. Congregations; 2. Catechesis, Apologetics, and Theological Education; 3. Mercy Work; 4. Fraternal Cooperation Across the Synod; 5. Church Worker Wellness; 6. Lutheran Schools and Youth Ministry; and 7. Marriage and Family.

Related to these areas is what we all witnessed during this past triennium in the establishment of All Nations Ministry led by its manager, the Rev. Stephen Heimer. No one is excluded and everyone is included in our determination to faithfully live out the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ. In addition, we celebrate the ministry of the Rev. Andrew Becker, manager, Family Ministry. The Lord is truly blessing our Synod with these increased resources for national mission.

New Board for National Mission Manual

During this past triennium, led by board member Rev. Peter Bender, we saw the fruition of a thorough BNM manual that will bring greater clarity, consistency, and efficiency to our board going forward.

2023 Resolutions to Board for / Office of National Mission Accomplished

Every assignment given to the BNM and ONM from the 2023 Synod convention has been fulfilled. This is especially reflective of the outstanding service of our unit executive, but also the managing directors working with him, including Deaconess Dr. Tiffany Manor (Mercy Ministry area) and the Rev. Michael Meyer (Witness area). Please see **Reports R1.2.1** and **R60**, submitted by ONM unit executive Rev. Dan Galchutt, which cover all the assignments. The only other assignments going beyond Rev. Galchutt's reports are 2023 Resolution 4-03, “To Affirm and Continue Mission Priorities for 2023–26 Triennium,” and 2023 Res. 9-04, “To Establish Mission Board Responsibilities Regarding Mission Office Strategic Plan and Annual Budget Proposal.” As for Res. 4-03, this resolution is being effectively addressed by our Joint Mission Assessment Committee overture entitled, “To Commend and Sunset the Mission Priorities of Synod.” Regarding Res. 9-04, the BNM has worked closely with the Chief Mission Officer as well as the ONM unit executive to finalize a thoroughly systematic approach to strategic planning and annual budget proposal for the ONM. This project has clarified our own responsibilities as the BNM, which in turn benefits the ONM.

Changes and Blessings on the Board for National Mission

This past triennium the BNM was blessed to welcome the Rev. Craig Niemeier, the Rev. Michael Schuermann, and Mr. Stephen Weller. To say that these servants of the Risen Christ have been helpful to us would be an understatement. They have all brought exceptional and timely gifts to the board and have clearly made us more effective in fulfilling our responsibilities. Furthermore, the other executive committee members I have the privilege to serve with are among the most talented disciples I know. Mrs. Crysten Sanchez has served with meticulous detail and organization as our secretary, and the Rev. Dr. Dien Ashley Taylor has served with wisdom and love as our vice-chair.

Finally, the entire board has had the distinct pleasure of partnering with Ms. Carla Claussen who, upon entering the end of this triennium, is no longer eligible to serve on the BNM. I must take this opportunity, however, to point out the gem in Christ the Church has had in Ms. Claussen. In July 2004, Ms. Claussen was elected to serve the Board for District and Congregational Services and she fulfilled her duties from 2004 to 2010. Since the restructuring of the Synod in 2010, Ms. Claussen has served the BNM from 2010 to the present. That is, our sister in Christ has served in this arena of national ministry for 22 years. We are in awe of her dedication and her living faith which has led Ms. Claussen to demonstrate the love of Christ in heart, soul, and mind to her brothers and sisters in Christ in our Synod and for all those we serve in the world. We give thanks and praise to God for her!

Going Forward

The BNM is focused on the upcoming triennium to be our very best since our inception in 2010. We are determined to understand what we can do at the national level to be truly helpful and meaningful to our districts and congregations. In this vision, we are determined to make strides in better coordination and stewardship of our shared Synod resources. We are focused on providing for the next generations so that they not merely *know* what we believe, but also *why* we believe and how to “give an answer for the hope that is within [us]” (1 Peter 3:15). We desire real ways of growing and increasing local congregations and schools and we are focused on making our best contributions for supporting worker wellness, especially with resources that keep us spiritually strong while abiding in our baptismal grace in the Risen Christ. We cannot provide only for the body but must also provide for the mind and most importantly for the spirit, so that we abide in our baptismal grace and reliance upon the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word and Sacraments of Christ not just for those our church workers minister to, but for themselves and their families.

Alfonso O. Espinosa, *Chairman*

R7

Board for International Mission

The Board for International Mission (BIM) is charged with developing and determining policies in support of mission and ministry in foreign countries for the Office of International Mission (OIM). These policies shall embrace and apply the mission and ministry emphasis adopted by the national convention.

BIM serves as the only sending agency through which workers and funds are sent to foreign mission areas of the Synod including

the calling (ordained and commissioned) and appointing (lay workers) as missionaries in foreign areas.

The board also reviews and endorses the OIM strategic plan and provides input on the OIM annual budget.

A. Assignments from the 2023 Convention

The 2023 Synod convention adopted three resolutions directing the board to study the following matters.

2023 Resolution 2-03, “To Strengthen Pastoral Care of Missionaries and Clarify Ecclesiastical Supervision,” and Res. 2-06A, “To Study Synod Relationships with Independent Lutheran Congregations in Foreign Mission Areas”: These resolutions, respectively, called for BIM to: (1) identify and implement measures to improve pastoral and spiritual care of foreign missionaries; assess and revise ecclesiastical supervision policies, procedures, and practices in collaboration with the Council of Presidents (COP); and (2) to study and provide recommendations to the 2026 convention regarding a mechanism for receiving international, independent Lutheran congregations into Synod membership in collaboration with the COP.

The BIM established a task force for each of these resolutions and appointed two of its members, and the COP appointed two of its members to each task force to study these matters. The Chief Mission Officer and Executive Director for the OIM also were members of the task forces. After careful study, the two task forces determined the issues being considered were similar and they joined together to carry out further discussions.

The combined task force concluded that the issues raised by the resolutions could be addressed by joint policy statements by the BIM and the COP. The work of developing those policies continues.

2023 Res. 4-02, “To Affirm and Continue Making Disciples for Life as Mission and Ministry Emphasis for 2023–26 Triennium”: The Joint Mission Assessment Committee of the BNM and BIM was assigned to define activities under continued mission and ministry emphasis; recommend refined process to the 2026 convention; and engage districts in conversation regarding the next mission and ministry emphasis. This was undertaken as part of their normal triennial mission assessment and is discussed further in their separate **Report R8**.

B. Calling of Missionaries

The BIM works closely with the OIM in the selection and calling of missionaries. Currently the OIM has over 100 LCMS missionaries, 15 alliance missionaries (missionaries ordained by other church bodies with whom we are in fellowship), and over 345 missionary family members in foreign mission fields. A high priority of the BIM is to encourage the recruitment of new missionaries to expand our presence in foreign mission areas of the Synod and to provide missionaries to fill positions as current missionaries retire or accept calls to serve in other contexts. The BIM also works closely with the Office of Ministry to the Armed Forces (MAF) to call military chaplains. The recruitment, orientation, and deployment support efforts carried out by both the OIM and MAF are exemplary. Currently we have 51 LCMS military chaplains on active duty, and 65 pastors/chaplains in the Reserve, National Guard, Coast Guard Auxiliary, and Veterans Affairs Hospitals, as well as 2 directors of religious education serving the military.

C. BIM Policy Development

The BIM established policies addressing multiple mission and ministry areas in its initial years of existence (2010–13) and has regularly updated these policies in support of programs carried out by the OIM. In 2023 the BIM approved a complete rewrite of its policies to focus on monitoring the strategic plan of the OIM and the supporting budget. The policies allow the BIM to monitor the OIM strategic plan to assure that OIM staffing and programs support Articles II and III of the Synod Constitution and the mission and ministry emphasis established by the Synod in convention.

D. Assessment of Mission and Ministry

The Board for National Mission and BIM under Bylaws 3.8.2.2 and 3.8.3.2 are, during each triennium between national conventions, to gather sufficient information from Synod members to facilitate the boards' assessment of the effectiveness of the Synod's mission and ministry. See **Report R8** of the Joint Mission Assessment Committee. Based on this assessment, the boards jointly submitted two overtures for the 2026 convention's consideration regarding the mission and ministry emphasis for the next triennium and proposed changes to the process for developing the same in the future.

E. International Schools

The LCMS schools in Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Hanoi continue to be exemplary academic college preparatory schools. These schools primarily serve children K–12 of expatriate families. Due to religious freedom restrictions in effect in China and Vietnam the ability to maintain a Lutheran identity and to proclaim the pure Gospel is constrained for Shanghai and Hanoi. In order to address these concerns, the Synod Board of Directors and the BIM working with the Chief Mission Officer and the OIM have established an International Schools Task Force that is researching options and developing plans for the Synod's international schools going forward. The task force is comprised of representatives from the BIM, Board of Directors, and officers of the Synod.

The Hanoi and Shanghai schools are accredited by the National Lutheran School Accreditation Commission (NLSA) and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. During 2026, the Hanoi and Shanghai schools will commence the process of re-accreditation with NLSA.

While there are fewer restrictions in Hong Kong on religious freedom, the local school leadership in Hong Kong has not been supportive of the operating agreement provisions regarding the LCMS religious doctrine and education as well as governance matters. Therefore, in the fall of 2025, the Synod filed a lawsuit against the local management group, Hong Kong International School Association, Limited.

John W. Edson, *Chairman*

R8

Report of the Joint Mission Assessment Committee of the Boards for National and International Mission

A. Committee Responsibilities

The Joint Mission Assessment Committee (JMAC) is a stand-

ing committee of the Synod's two mission boards, the Board for National Mission (BNM) and the Board for International Mission (BIM). It is composed of two members from each mission board. Its primary task is to facilitate and oversee the execution of Bylaws 3.8.2.2 and 3.8.3.2, which task the BNM and BIM to work together for the "assessment and evaluation of the effectiveness of the Synod's triennial mission and ministry emphases." The JMAC assists the BNM and BIM in providing ideas and guidance to the Synod's district conventions in order to fulfill their duty in accordance with Bylaw 4.2.1 (d) to "forward to the national convention a list of two or three triennial mission and ministry emphases for consideration by the national convention." In addition to this responsibility, the BNM and BIM were tasked by the 2023 Synod convention (Resolution 4-02) to "to continue to assess, clarify, and further refine the process whereby a recommendation for the triennial mission and ministry emphasis is brought before the Synod in convention for consideration and adoption," and to "recommend a new mission and ministry emphasis for consideration at the 2026 Synod convention." The mission boards were also given the task (2023 Res. 4-03) to "recommend possible revisions to the mission priorities and possible bylaw revisions that would articulate both the process for developing mission priorities and how those priorities would function in the mission and ministry of the Synod."

B. Assessment and Conclusions from Conversations with District Leaders

The JMAC first facilitated members of the two mission boards into conversation with all 35 districts to assess how the current mission and ministry emphasis (*Making Disciples for Life*) and the Synod's seven mission priorities were perceived and being used in their district and among their congregations. Next, a survey was taken of a random sampling of pastors, church workers, and congregations throughout the Synod to gather more grassroots feedback as to the awareness, visibility, applicability, and relevance of the current mission and ministry emphasis and mission priorities. As a result of these conversations and feedback, it was determined that: (1) many districts were coming up with and using their own mission and ministry emphasis in place of the Synod's; (2) the Synod's mission priorities, while good, were too many and too wordy to be easily remembered and employed; (3) the mission and ministry emphasis and mission priorities were often confused, not clearly defined, and not coordinated; and (4) the process for developing and adopting a new Synod mission and ministry emphasis was too cumbersome, unworkable, and not being carried out.

C. Recommendations

The JMAC recommended to the BNM and the BIM that three overtures be offered at the Synod convention:

1. A new and streamlined process for assessing, evaluating, and proposing a mission and ministry emphasis;
2. To sunset the mission priorities of the Synod and in their place recommend attention to and use of the 10 objectives of Synod as listed in Article III of the Synod Constitution; and
3. To recommend to the Synod that *Tell the Next Generation* be adopted as the mission and ministry emphasis for the next triennium.

The new process being proposed for assessing, evaluating, and proposing a mission and ministry emphasis will give the mission boards a more direct role in guiding the mission emphasis of the Synod in collaboration with the President of Synod and in fraternal

dialogue with the district presidents and should make the use and development of the mission and ministry emphasis more adaptable and responsive to the needs of the Synod. The sunseting of the mission priorities will eliminate confusion and enable greater attention and focus to be given to the use of the mission and ministry emphasis. The new mission and ministry emphasis being proposed also aligns the mission emphasis of the Synod with other efforts currently ongoing in the Synod to raise awareness of and recruit more church workers and in looking to the future and the next generation of Lutherans the Lord will raise up. To this end it is the hope of the mission boards that this mission and ministry emphasis will be enthusiastically adopted and used by all the districts of the Synod and promoted in all her circuits and congregations.

Alfonso O. Espinosa, *BNM Chairman*
John W. Edson, *BIM Chairman*

R9

Commission on Constitutional Matters

The Rev. John W. Sias, ex officio member and Secretary of the Synod, convened the meeting of the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) to welcome returning members Mr. Thomas Deadrick, attorney, and the Rev. Larry A. Peters; and the new members, the Rev. Kevin A. Karner and the Rev. David D. Vandercook, appointed by the President and Council of Presidents (COP) on Sept. 19, 2023, to the seats formerly occupied by Dr. Gude and Rev. Bode. (Mr. Scott A. Killian, attorney, was also returned to the commission in his first full term since being appointed to fill an attorney vacancy on the commission in 2023.) The commission designated Rev. Peters as its representative to its sister commission, the Commission on Handbook, for the new triennium but deferred the election of officers until the first in-person meeting. At the Dec. 1–2, 2023, meeting in St. Louis, Mo., the commission elected the Rev. Peters as chairman, Mr. Deadrick as vice-chairman, and Mr. Killian as secretary *pro tempore*.

The commission took note of the appointments by the COP to the 2023 Resolution 9-06A, “To Appoint Task Force to Evaluate Current Electoral Circuit Parameters,” and the designation of three members by the Commission on Handbook. The commission designated Mr. Thomas Deadrick, the Rev. Larry Peters, and the Rev. David Vandercook; Rev. Peters was subsequently elected chairman of the task force.

The commission met 7 times in person and 11 times via Zoom over the course of the past three years, in addition to the individual hours spent preparing for the meetings so that the work of the CCM might be accomplished.

The responsibilities of the commission are set forth in Bylaws 3.9.2.2–3.9.2.2.3, and they fall into two main areas:

Opinions: The first area is that the commission is to interpret the Synod’s Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions. A member of the Synod (congregation or ordained or commissioned minister) and an official board, commission, or agency of the Synod may submit a written request for such an opinion. At the time of this report, the commission has issued 88 opinions (a listing of those opinions is included in this *Workbook (Report R61)* in the present triennium. The minutes of the commission and their opinions and reviews of bylaws and documents are published on the website of the Synod and are available at lcms.org/ccm.

Review of Governing Documents: A second area of the commission’s charge is to ensure that the articles of incorporation, bylaws, and policy manuals of all the agencies of the Synod are in harmony with the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod. To this end, Synod Bylaws require that every agency submitting any desired changes to its articles of incorporation or bylaws receives prior approval from the commission. (Note: Because districts can only change bylaws at their triennial conventions, Bylaw 3.9.2.2.3 [b] provides a process by which district conventions may amend a district bylaw proposal previously submitted and approved by the commission and have the result take effect upon the commission’s subsequent approval of the amended, adopted proposal.)

If any agency of Synod fails to receive prior approval of the commission on any proposed change to their bylaws or articles of incorporation (as required by Bylaw 3.9.2.2.3 [a]), these changes are of no effect and have no power or authority unless and until they are approved by the commission.

The definition of an agency of the Synod is found in Bylaw 1.2.1 (a)(1): “Agencies include each board, commission, council, seminary, university, college, district, Concordia Plan Services, and each synodwide corporate entity.”

In addition, Bylaw 1.5.3.6 (and associated 2016 Res. 9-02A) requires all agencies to include certain specific language in their most fundamental governing documents or to seek and receive an exception from the Board of Directors of the Synod. This remains one of the ongoing tasks of the commission to complete the review and approval of such documents.

Dispute Resolution and Expulsion Processes: Finally, the commission together with the COP maintains the *Standard Operating Procedures Manuals* for the dispute resolution and expulsion processes of the Synod. As a result, following each convention, the commission, with the concurrence of the COP, reviews these manuals and makes any changes necessitated by changes to the Bylaws approved by the convention.

Although the commission has not been able to meet with the COP annually, it has enjoyed the opportunity to meet and share with the district presidents of the Synod in their various responsibilities toward the common good. Whenever an opinion affects agencies of the Synod, the commission invites comment and counsel from the various agencies and their leadership before rendering an opinion.

The Synod has stated since the inception of the CCM that “an opinion rendered by the commission shall be binding on the question decided unless and until it is overruled by a convention of the Synod” (Bylaw 3.9.2.2 [c]). Taking seriously the charge given by the Synod, the commission has worked diligently so that the will and desire of the Synod as expressed in our Constitution and Bylaws is honored in such a way that protects the rights and authority of the Synod and ensures that all its agencies act within their purview and the authority granted to them by the Synod in fulfilling the objectives of the Synod. This remains the single agenda of the commission. The commission wishes to thank the Secretary of the Synod, the Rev. Dr. John W. Sias, for his exemplary service, for keeping and publishing the minutes, and for maintaining the records of the commission and the agencies of Synod so that this commission might fulfill its purpose.

Larry A. Peters, *Chairman*

R10

Commission on Doctrinal Review

A. Actions During the Present Triennium

The main responsibilities of the commission are to rule on appeals of decisions of a doctrinal reviewer before an item is published and to rule on a challenge to the doctrinal content of a publication by any of the Synod's entities.

During the present triennium the commission received one appeal of a doctrinal reviewer's decision. The commission denied the appeal and ruled in favor of the decision of the original doctrinal reviewer.

Also, the commission received one challenge to a published item and ruled that the item needed to be revised to correctly present Christian doctrine. The required revision was made by the publishing entity.

Also, the commission dealt with two other matters:

- The commission received a question about vague or misleading wording in an already published item. While vague or misleading wording is to be corrected in the doctrinal review process before publication, bylaws do not allow this to be the basis for a challenge after publication, so no action was taken.
- The commission received a question about the doctrinal statement in a publication, but no formal appeal was received. The publisher was contacted and agreed with the questioner that, due to a typological error, there was a misstatement that needed to be corrected. The publisher agreed to make the needed change, and the questioner agreed that no formal appeal needed to be filed in this case.

B. Bylaw Revision to Consider

The commission is concerned that there is a difference between the reasons a doctrinal reviewer can reject a submitted item or ask for a revision of an item and the reasons that a member of the Synod can challenge an already-published item. Specifically, language that is vague or misleading is to be rejected by a doctrinal reviewer (Bylaw 1.9.2 [f]), but such language cannot be challenged once an item is published (Bylaw 3.9.3.2.2 [a]). If vague or misleading language is not desirable before publication, it is difficult to understand why it should be allowed to stand in an item that has been published. On the other hand, opening challenges to a publication on the basis of vague or misleading language may prompt many challenges and overwhelm the commission's capacity to deal with them. This situation ought to be examined as to whether a bylaw revision is necessary or desirable.

C. Need for Training for Doctrinal Reviewers to Provide More Uniformity in Review Procedures and Doctrinal Analysis of Items Submitted for Review

While doctrinal reviewers are conscientious and take their responsibilities seriously, there is little guidance offered them in performing their duties other than informing them of the bylaws that are to guide their work. This inevitably leads to a certain lack of uniformity in decisions. While total uniformity can never be achieved, the process might be improved by developing an online training module for reviewers that they should complete when they

are appointed. Synod has the institutions of the Concordia University System and two seminaries that could help in producing such a module. This training module could include:

- a review of the bylaws concerning doctrinal review and the duties of a reviewer;
- examples of documents to be reviewed with items that need to be corrected either because they contain false doctrine or because of vague or misleading statements;
- an introduction to the appeal process when an author challenges the decision of a reviewer; and
- an introduction to the bylaws governing the process followed by the Commission on Doctrinal Review when an item is challenged after publication.

Andrew E. Steinmann, *Chairman*

R11

Commission on Handbook

The Commission on Handbook (Bylaw section 3.9.4) has eight members, five voting and three advisory (nonvoting). Of the present voting members, three are on the Synod's clergy roster and two are lay attorneys. The current nonvoting members are the Synod's Secretary, its Chief Administrative Officer, and the chairman of its Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM). These members' names are found in the *Workbook* Directory.

The commission provides for ongoing maintenance and management of the Synod's *Handbook*. It assists convention floor committees in their work relative to *Handbook* contents; it revises the *Handbook* in consultation with the CCM immediately following Synod conventions to bring it into line with convention actions (as it did after the 2023 convention); it maintains a file of *Handbooks* through the years for reference and comparison; it carries out *Handbook*-related assignments from conventions; and it responds to requests from agencies of the Synod to propose measures to address *Handbook*-related issues arising between national conventions.

Since the 2023 Synod convention, the commission has made minor, non-substantive changes to the *Handbook*. (These are identified in the *Handbook—Update Edition*, available on the Synod's website.) It changed the address of the Synod's registered agent in the Articles of Incorporation. In addition, it supplied a missing word in a bylaw; made minor spelling and grammatical corrections; made changes to harmonize language across the *Handbook* or to correct errors in numbering or cross-referencing; made changes to prevent misunderstandings where proper understandings are attainable, sometimes with the help of the CCM; and rearranged bylaws for improved understanding (especially in Bylaw sections 2.2–8 and subsection 3.3.4).

The commission has also formulated changes to recommend to the Synod in the following areas of the Bylaws (see overtures elsewhere in the *Workbook*): doctrinal review bylaws; specific ministry pastor supervision terminology; conflict of interest bylaws; the call of a special district convention; bylaws regulating committees in Bylaw section 1.5; a mechanism for addressing incapacity on the part of the Synod's Secretary; ordering of the provisions in Bylaw 3.10.6.1 (university board of regents' duties); electronic district convention registration; Synod convention certification/registration nomenclature; and university faculty overture submission.

The commission has met 12 times, so far, between the Synod's 2023 and 2026 conventions, all via electronic means. It also took two electronic actions without a meeting and plans to meet in person in conjunction with floor committee weekend and the convention. Its minutes are available at lcms.org/coh.

Ken Ray Schurb, *Chairman*

R12

Commission on Theology and Church Relations

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) has three primary functions: (1) to “assist the President of the Synod at his request in discharging his constitutional responsibilities for maintaining doctrinal unity within the Synod” and “for maintaining doctrinal integrity as he relates to other church bodies”; (2) to “provide guidance to the Synod in matters of theology and church relations”; and (3) to assist the members of the Synod in their witness regarding “societies, lodges, cults, or any organizations of an unchristian or anti-Christian character” (Bylaws 3.9.5.2 to 3.9.5.4). Further CTCR responsibilities include responding to expressions of dissent (Bylaw section 1.8) and approving church body requests for altar and pulpit fellowship (Bylaw 3.9.5.2.2). It also renders official theological opinions as requested or mandated by Synod bylaws.

The CTCR consists of sixteen voting members and four advisory members. Voting members elected by the synodical convention include two parish pastors, one parish teacher, and two laypersons. Other voting members include four Council of Presidents (COP) appointees, including two pastors (one of whom is a district president) and two laypersons; four seminary professors (two from each seminary faculty); and three additional members (one of whom is a Concordia University System professor) appointed by the President of the Synod, in consultation with the Synod vice-presidents. The President and First Vice-President of the Synod and the presidents of the two seminaries are advisory members, with no term limits on their service. CTCR members elected in convention serve a six-year term and may be reelected once. Members appointed by the president or elected by a seminary or the COP serve three-year terms and may be reappointed twice.

For the sake of efficiency, the commission operates with an executive committee and three working committees. The executive committee includes the CTCR's officers, the chairmen of the three committees, and the executive staff (see below). While not rigidly defined, one of the working committees focuses on matters pertaining to church and ministry (including church relations matters), the second on other doctrinal issues, and the third on social and ethical matters of concern to Christians and the church. All official reports, opinions, or documents of the CTCR are approved before their release or publication by the entire commission meeting in plenary. CTCR officers during the past triennium were the Rev. Dr. Brian Saunders, chairman; the Rev. Dr. Roland Ziegler, vice-chairman; and the Rev. Dr. Gerhard Bode Jr., secretary. Chairs of the respective committees were the Rev. Dr. Naomichi Masaki (Committee One), the Rev. Dr. Joel Biermann (Committee Two), and Dr. Andrea Pitkus (Committee Three). The Rev. Dr. Lawrence Rast began the triennium as CTCR chairman but relinquished his position upon retirement from the presidency of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. His successor, the Rev. Dr. Jon Bruss, replaced him as

ex officio member of the commission, while Saunders was elected to succeed him as chair. All other members of the commission are as noted in the *Workbook* directory.

The CTCR is currently served by three executive staff members, two full-time and one part-time. From 1991 through 2007, the CTCR was served by three full-time executive staff members. Since 2008, however, one of those full-time executive staff positions had been continuously vacant, primarily due to Synod budgetary limitations. The Rev. Dr. Joel Lehenbauer, who has served on the CTCR executive staff since 1991, has been executive director since 2008. At its April 2023 meeting, the commission took action to reappoint Lehenbauer for a fourth five-year term (Bylaw 3.9.5.3.1[a][3–4]). The Rev. Dr. Richard Serina Jr. is associate executive director (2020–present) and the Rev. Dr. Larry Vogel is assistant to the executive director (2009–present; part-time deployed since 2020). In addition to facilitating the work of the commission detailed below in this report, the executive staff also responds to emails, letters, and telephone calls requesting further information about or clarification of the Synod's view of various topics and teachings, and regularly presents to members, agencies, and other groups and meetings of the Synod on its responsibilities and work, past or present. Staff also represented the CTCR on the Created Male and Female Task Force and the Concordia University System Board of Directors this past triennium, coordinated and contributed to numerous intra-church and interchurch relations meetings, and served as theological advisors for the LCMS Youth Gathering.

I. Theology

A. Completed Assignments (Reports, Responses, Special Studies, and Study Documents)

The CTCR organizes its work using a variety of categories, as described in its duly adopted policy guidelines. The primary form that the completion of assignments takes is in reports, which are ordinarily convention-requested documents that set forth what the commission regards as a soundly biblical and Lutheran exposition of a particular issue of importance to the church. Study documents include study guides of existing reports, Bible studies, or more preliminary studies intended to stimulate discussion. Additionally, special studies and responses to various theological, ethical, synodical, or ecumenical matters may be produced. In certain cases, the commission receives requests for opinions which require more explanation than a customary opinion and/or may be of broader relevance to the Synod, so those opinions would be included in this section. Completed assignments are listed below in chronological order of completion. Since 2014, due to budgetary constraints, the commission has been unable to print and disseminate its documents to the Synod, with limited exceptions. All completed assignments, once published, are available online at lcms.org/ctcr.

1. *Christian Decision-Making and the End of Life: An Update and Supplement to 1993's Christian Care at Life's End* (1977 Res. 03-26)

In compliance with the standing assignment to provide direction in matters of bioethics, the commission reviewed its 1993 report, *Christian Care at Life's End*, and concluded that an update to that document was needed. The 1993 report had attempted to provide more practical case studies that built on 1979's *Report on Euthanasia with Guiding Principles*, which was appended to *Christian Care at Life's End*. In the intervening years, medical and legal developments, particularly physician-assisted suicide, have changed

the landscape dramatically. After outside consultation and internal discussion, a new report was drafted to address those developments from several vantage points: theological foundations for the sanctity of human life, medical-ethical considerations related to end-of-life care and decision-making, and the distinctively Lutheran approach to pastoral care and personal reflection at life's end. It also includes extensive chronological and bibliographical resources as appendixes. The commission unanimously approved the report at its February 2023 meeting. Though this report was approved during the previous triennium and reported in the 2023 *Workbook*, it is included again in this triennium's report and printed in the 2026 *Workbook* appendix.

2. Responses to Overtures

2023 Omnibus Resolution A included 12 overtures for referral to the CTCR (and in some cases also to other entities; see 2023 *Convention Proceedings*, 235–37). At its December 2023 meeting, the commission approved responses to those who had submitted these overtures, indicating various ways that their concerns were being or would be addressed. In numerous cases, the concerns of those overtures were taken up in current assignments.

3. Response to Wyoming District Request regarding Immortality of the Soul (2021 Wyoming District Res. 1-01)

In July 2021, the Wyoming District communicated its Res. 1-01, which requested clarity concerning the Synod's position on the immortality of the soul. The commission unanimously approved a response at its February 2024 meeting. The commission detailed the position of its 1969 report and affirmed the teaching on the immortality of the soul expressed by the 1973 convention (1973 Res. 2-03) in commending that report. The response is included in the *Workbook* appendix.

4. Mission and Ministry Principles and Practical Observations and Suggestions (2023 Res. 1-02A/2023 Res. 5-12)

2023 Res. 1-02A asked the CTCR to produce a brief document on mission and ministry principles to be disseminated to the COP, Office of the President, and Pastoral Formation Committee for their use in aiding small congregations and multi-congregation pastors and parishes. The CTCR produced a set of theological principles outlining the basic biblical and confessional parameters of the church and its ministry, as well as a set of accompanying practical observations and suggestions for how, within those parameters, the Synod might faithfully and realistically address its shortage of pastors and provide for congregations who are unable to obtain a regularly called pastor. The CTCR approved this document at its February 2024 meeting, shared it with the above-named entities at the February 2024 COP meeting for consideration and feedback, and then revised it in accordance with that feedback. The document was finalized at the CTCR's October 2024 meeting. It is included in the *Workbook* appendix.

In addition, 2023 Res. 5-12 asked the CTCR to produce a report on “the present challenges to Christianity in the North American context to equip pastors and congregations for faithful ministry and outreach in a post-Christian world.” However, this assignment is so closely related to the *Mission and Ministry Principles and Practical Observations and Suggestions*, which arises from the same convention via 2023 Res. 1-02A, that the commission believes it has already adequately addressed the concerns of 5-12 in its response to 1-02A.

5. Response to the 2021 *Final Report of the Theological Conversations between the ILC and the Roman Catholic Church*

The President of the Synod officially requested that the CTCR respond to the *Final Report* of the theological conversations between the International Lutheran Council (ILC) and the Roman Catholic Church's Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity. The CTCR drafted a response that assessed the arguments of the *Final Report*, noted which important issues remain and which should be further addressed, and commended the continuation of these discussions. At its October 2024 meeting, the CTCR unanimously approved the document and subsequently shared the draft with the President of the Synod, the chairman of the ILC, and other members of the ILC conversation team. The response is included in the *Workbook* appendix.

6. Response to the Lutheran Church of Australia's *Way Forward Proposal*

The President of the Synod officially requested that the CTCR evaluate the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) *Way Forward* proposal to approve a path for women's ordination, which was adopted by the LCA at its assembly in October 2024 and allowed for two different practices within the church. At its December 2024 meeting, the CTCR unanimously approved a critique of the LCA proposal and has since submitted it to the President's office for consideration and dissemination. The response is included in the *Workbook* appendix.

7. Use of Online Technology in the Church: Study Document (2023 Res. 5-13A)

2023 Res. 5-13A directed the CTCR, in conjunction with the COP and the Office of the President of the Synod, to produce a joint document considering the various uses of online technology in the church. After consulting with representatives of both the COP and the Office of the President, it was decided the CTCR would provide a study document on the uses of online technology in the church that would then be shared with the above-named entities, who would disseminate it throughout the Synod. The document evaluates five practical applications of online technology: livestreamed services, virtual multipoint parishes, online reproof and church discipline, online membership, and artificial intelligence-generated sermons. It was unanimously adopted by the CTCR at its December 2024 meeting and conveyed to the COP and Office of the President for distribution, study, and conversation. The study document is included in the *Workbook* appendix.

8. A Theology and Philosophy of Lutheran Education (2023 Res. 5-10)

2023 Res. 5-10 asked the CTCR to develop “principles of education rooted in Lutheran doctrine,” in consultation with representatives of the Concordia University System and its universities and Synod educational executives, among others, to be shared with Lutheran educators from kindergarten through higher education. The CTCR drafted a report that asserted the authority of Scripture in all matters of faith and life, including education, as well as addressing perennial questions in Lutheran education according to the three creedal articles of creation, redemption, and sanctification. The CTCR approved a draft of this report at its May 2025 meeting. The report was distributed to all ministers of religion—commissioned and ordained—by Concordia Publishing House. It is included in the *Workbook* appendix.

9. Unity in Doctrine and Uniformity and Variety in Practice: Study Document (2019 Res. 5-11)

2019 Res. 5-11 tasked the CTCR with preparing a report on the relationship between unity in doctrine and uniformity and variety in practice, the current language for which is stipulated in Article III 7 of the Synod Constitution. After discussing the constitutional history of this issue, the commission produced a study document that examined disputes over adiaphora in three distinct periods of church history and the lessons they may teach us for reconciling disputes over adiaphora in the present. The commission unanimously adopted this study document at its October 2025 meeting. It is included in the *Workbook* appendix.

10. Deacons, Evangelists, and the Office of the Holy Ministry in the New Testament (2023 Ov. 5-48)

2023 Ov. 5-48 asked the CTCR to produce a document that “defines and distinguishes the New Testament terms used for the Office of the Public Ministry and its auxiliary offices, including special discussion of the offices of deacon and evangelist.” The convention referred this overture to the CTCR, which opted to accept it as an assignment. The commission produced a draft that explored the different New Testament terms related to the Office of the Holy Ministry and offered suggestions for how they might be best used in the future to avoid confusion. The commission approved this special study at its December 2025 meeting. The report is included in the *Workbook* appendix.

11. Proper Administration of the Lord’s Supper: Some Practical Matters (2023 Res. 5-15)

2023 Res. 5-15 asked the CTCR to take up concerns related to upholding the proper elements and reverential administration of the Lord’s Supper, including the use of prefilled communion cup and wafer sets and the use of non-wheat hosts and grape juice. The commission unanimously approved a report addressing these concerns at its December 2025 meeting. The report is included in the *Workbook* appendix.

12. Abortion—A Continuing Crisis: Update to 1984’s Abortion in Perspective (2023 Res. 11-04)

2023 Res. 11-04 asked the CTCR to update its 1984 guidance on abortion in light of recent developments, which include the 2022 Supreme Court decision striking down *Roe v. Wade*, the rise of medication abortion, and the use of fetal tissue in vaccines, among others. At its February 2026 meeting, the commission unanimously approved a document that addresses the changing nature of abortion in our current legal, political, and medical climate; a theology of life rooted in Scripture and Luther’s catechisms; and practical direction for clergy, congregations, and advocacy in the civil realm. The report was not published in time for inclusion in the *Workbook*, and so it will be included in the 2029 *Workbook*.

B. Work in Progress and Standing Assignments

The CTCR has numerous assignments on its agenda requested by convention action and underway but not completed in time for the submission of materials for publication in the convention *Workbook*. Additionally, the CTCR has multiple standing assignments stemming from convention resolutions that did not specify a particular response but urged the commission to consider how it might respond as circumstances necessitate or asked it to monitor developments.

1. Apostolic Succession (Bylaw 3.9.5.2.1 [a])

Synod Bylaw 3.9.5.2.1 (a) directs the CTCR to “bring matters of theology and church relations through special studies and documents to the membership of the Synod and to conferences.” In conversations with partner churches and prospective partner churches in various contexts internationally, it came to the CTCR’s attention that there are differing perspectives on the issue of apostolic succession and whether (or in what sense) apostolic succession is compatible with a biblical and confessionally Lutheran understanding of the doctrine of the ministry. Differing teachings and practices in this regard have at times caused confusion in our wider fellowship and have the potential to do so in the future. The commission is presently considering a draft that addresses apostolic succession from a historical, biblical, and confessionally Lutheran perspective. The commission intends to complete work on this report by the end of the triennium, though not in time for inclusion in the *Workbook*.

2. Third Commandment (2023 Res. 4-06)

2023 Res. 4-06 directed the CTCR to produce a study of the biblical, confessional, and practical dimensions of the Third Commandment, along with an accompanying Bible study. The commission is presently considering a report that treats the relevant Old Testament and New Testament passages, Luther’s catechisms, and a series of practical questions related to the Third Commandment’s applicability to Christian worship. The Commission intends to complete work on this report by the end of the triennium, though not in time for inclusion in the *Workbook*.

3. Church and State in Contemporary Society (2023 Res. 11-05)

2023 Res. 11-05 directed the CTCR to produce a document on church, state, and the Christian love of neighbor in an increasingly secularized society. Since the commission has an extensive document on the topic in its 1995 *Render unto Caesar*, which it still considers applicable today, the CTCR decided to produce a supplement to the 1995 report that summarizes its basic theological and practical guidance, then applies that guidance to a number of changing political circumstances the church has faced in the intervening thirty years, including those surrounding abortion, same-sex unions, religious liberty, the conscription and military service of women, and illegal immigration. It is expected that the new report will be completed by the end of the triennium, though not in time for inclusion in the *Workbook*.

4. Contemporary Racism and Racist Ideologies (2023 Res. 11-02A)

2023 Res. 11-02A urged the Synod to utilize the 1994 CTCR document on racism, *Racism and the Church*, but also directed the CTCR to examine contemporary “movements, methodologies, and ideologies that divide people by race.” The CTCR assigned this project to its executive committee, which examined the topic and related issues, including the constantly evolving forms of and debates over racism in American culture. After considering the ongoing relevance of its 1994 document and the general nature of the request from the 2023 convention, the commission has decided to place this request on its permanent agenda as a standing assignment, which would allow it to address those new “movements, methodologies, and ideologies” as they arise and as the commission deems appropriate.

5. Provide Assistance Regarding Bioethics (1977 Res. 03-26)

The 1977 convention encouraged the CTCR to address the moral implications of developments in bioethics and biomedical technology in order to provide guidance to clergy, workers in those fields, and the entire Synod. The commission uses this standing assignment to address pertinent matters as they arise, such as the recent report on end-of-life decision-making (see I.A.1. above). It continues to monitor developments in artificial intelligence, trans-humanism, medication abortion, IVF, fetal tissue vaccines, and euthanasia, among others, in preparation for potential projects on them in the future.

6. Inter-Christian Relationships (1981 Res. 3-03A)

Since 1981, the CTCR has completed a number of documents relating to the subject of inter-Christian and inter-church relationships, some in specific response to 1981 Res. 3-03A and subsequent resolutions related to it. These include: *Inter-Christian Relationships: An Instrument for Study* (1991), *The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship: Study Materials* (2000), *The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship: Report on Synodical Discussions* (2001), *Church Relations in the 21st Century* (2009), *Principles for "Cooperation in Externals" with Theological Integrity* (2010), *Theological Dialogue with Other Christian Church Bodies* (2011), and *Policy for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Declaring Altar and Pulpit Fellowship with Another Church Body* (2009, rev. 2014, rev. 2021). The materials are all available on the CTCR's website at lcms.org/ctcr.

The Synod's request for "practical guidelines ... to assist officials, pastors, teachers, congregations, and individuals in the Synod in determining which practices and activities are appropriate to the various levels of inter-Lutheran and inter-Christian relationships in which the Synod is involved" (1981 Res. 3-03A) remains permanently on the commission's agenda as a standing assignment. The CTCR continues to provide such guidance as needed and requested.

7. Beginning of Life Issues (2019 Res. 11-01A)

2016 Task Force 3-04 reviewed all previous CTCR resources related to relevant beginning of life issues and prepared an overture for convention consideration. 2019 Res. 11-01A then asked the CTCR to "review and revisit" all pertinent documents in its corpus "to determine whether and/or where updates to these documents are needed, particularly regarding IVF, and recent developments in genetic testing, and how such potential updates might best and most effectively be communicated to the Synod." The commission and its staff have reviewed and continue to review these reports with an eye toward if, where, and how updates might be undertaken.

8. Biblical Six-Day Creation (2019 Res. 5-09A)

2019 Res. 5-09A encouraged pastors to study and discuss various CTCR reports related to biblical six-day creation, including *Creation in Biblical Perspective* (1970), *Together with All Creatures* (2010), and *In Christ All Things Hold Together* (2015). It did not request any direct action from the CTCR, but the commission continues to review its current resources and consider new ones. It has also developed a bibliography of resources defending biblical six-day creation that may be commended to the Synod prior to convention.

C. Requests for Opinions and Bylaw-Mandated Assignments

The CTCR receives and responds to requests for two types of opinions:

- Advisory opinions are requests for guidance from the Synod President, district presidents, and other Synod officers, boards, and commissions on matters of theology and practice under the general rubric that the CTCR "shall provide guidance to the Synod in matters of theology and church relations" (Bylaw 3.9.5.2.1) and "shall assist the President of the Synod at his request" (Bylaw 3.9.5.2).
- Bylaws also specifically require the CTCR, when requested to do so, to render opinions (within 30 days) on theological questions that may arise in cases of dispute resolution or cases involving potential expulsion of an LCMS member (see, e.g., Bylaw 1.10.18.1 [h]; 2.14.7.8 [h][3]).

The CTCR is also responsible for responding to expressions of dissent. Bylaw section 1.8 provides a process for orderly "dissent from the doctrinal position of the Synod as expressed in its resolutions and doctrinal statements." That process involves, first, discussion "within the fellowship of peers" and thereafter the dissent is to be "brought to the attention of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations" (1.8.2).

The CTCR received no official requests for bylaw-mandated opinions or for responses to expressions of dissent in this triennium. It did, however, receive several requests for advisory opinions on various matters.

1. President of the Synod Request for Opinion on Lay Reading of Sermons and Conduct of Worship in the Absence of a Pastor

In November 2022, the CTCR received a request from the President of the Synod to provide a rationale and recommended guidelines for laymen who must publicly read sermons or conduct worship services in the absence of a pastor, whether in an emergency situation or for an extended period of time. The CTCR completed this assignment, which was unanimously approved at its May 2023 meeting, but was unable to include it in the 2023 *Workbook*. Therefore, the opinion is included in the present *Workbook* appendix.

2. President of the Synod Request for Opinion on Lawsuits between Christians or Members and Institutions of Synod

In December 2024, the President of the Synod requested an opinion from the CTCR that would address the appropriateness of lawsuits between individual Christians, members of the Synod, or other institutions and corporate entities of the Synod in light of the CTCR's 1991 report on 1 Corinthians 6 and the Lutheran Confessions. The commission approved an opinion on this issue at its February 2025 meeting and forwarded it to the Synod President for his information and use. The opinion is included in the *Workbook* appendix.

3. Joint Seminary Board of Regents Request for an Opinion on Admission to Seminary for Divorced Men

In November 2024, the commission received a request from the joint board of regents of Concordia Seminary and Concordia Theological Seminary on the admission of prospective seminarians who have been previously divorced. The commission produced an

opinion addressing whether divorce disqualifies a man from serving in the Office of the Public Ministry and whether the remarriage of a divorced man makes him unsuitable for the Office of the Public Ministry. At its May 2025 meeting, the commission unanimously approved this opinion and subsequently conveyed it to the boards for their information and use. The opinion is included in the *Workbook* appendix.

II. Church Relations

The CTCR has the responsibility to “assist the President of the Synod at his request in discharging his constitutional responsibilities for maintaining doctrinal integrity as he relates to other church bodies” (Bylaw 3.9.5.2.2). This includes circumstances in which a church body officially requests recognition of fellowship by the Synod. The commission’s approval is required for each such fellowship request. In light of the many changes occurring in worldwide Lutheranism, the Synod has had increasing numbers of fellowship requests in recent years and the CTCR seeks to address them both efficiently and faithfully. The following shall report on (A) formal requests for fellowship that have been approved by the commission or may be approved prior to the convention, and (B) official theological conversations with various church bodies that the commission does not believe will eventuate in formal recognition of church fellowship.

A. Requests for Church Fellowship Approved by the CTCR

1. Evangelical Christian Lutheran Church of Bolivia (ICEL)

In June 2022, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bolivia (ICEL) formally communicated a request to begin fellowship conversations with the LCMS concerning altar and pulpit fellowship. After multiple rounds of discussions, including a trip to Bolivia by Lehenbauer and the Office of the President’s church relations representatives, the CTCR considered ICEL’s request at its February 2025 meeting. Following the presentation by and discussion with ICEL president Limberth Fernandez, the CTCR unanimously approved the request and recommended formal recognition of altar and pulpit fellowship, pursuant to Bylaw 3.9.5.2.2 (b) (2), and forwarded its recommendation to the Office of the President for declaration and subsequent endorsement by the Synod in convention. President Harrison declared recognition of fellowship with ICEL in May 2025. The CTCR has submitted an overture to the 2026 convention urging formal endorsement by the Synod.

2. Lutheran Mission—Australia (LM—A)

When the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) moved to change its constitution to allow for women’s ordination in 2024 (see I A 6 above), a group of confessional Lutherans formed the Lutheran Mission—Australia (LM—A). Both before and after the LM—A was officially constituted as a church body, LM—A representatives engaged in conversations with the LCMS. At its December 2025 meeting, the commission met with LM—A President Matt Anker and unanimously approved recommending church fellowship according to Bylaw 3.9.5.2.2 (b)(2). That recommendation was conveyed to the Synod President with the understanding that his consideration of formal recognition will be delayed until after the LM—A’s inaugural convention in August 2026. If and when such recognition is declared by the Synod President, it will come before the subsequent LCMS convention for endorsement.

3. Mission Province in Sweden (MPS)

The Mission Province in Sweden (MPS)—formerly Mission Province of Sweden and Finland—was formed in 2003 to support the ordination of confessional Lutheran pastors in the liberal Church of Sweden. Representatives of the MPS began meeting with the LCMS in 2006 and have held several rounds of theological conversations, expressing an interest in altar and pulpit fellowship consideration by the LCMS as early as 2009. After multiple conversations in the current triennium involving the Synod President’s church relations staff and CTCR members and executive staff, the commission planned to give continued consideration to the MPS’s request at its May 2026 meeting.

B. Meetings and Discussions with Other Churches and Groups

Since the inception of the CTCR in 1962, when it absorbed the responsibilities of the church relations-focused Committee on Doctrinal Unity and Committee on Finnish Relations (1962 Res. 6-03), the commission has assisted the President of the Synod in conversations with other church bodies. The CTCR was expressly designed to aid in “discussions of theological and/or ecclesiastical relationships with the synods comprising the synodical conference; sister churches in foreign countries; groups of churches, councils, federations,” among others (1962 Reports and Memorials, 251). At the President’s request, the CTCR has been involved in many official and unofficial theological conversations with a variety of Christian denominations and organizations over the years. For an explanation of the role and benefits of such conversations, even where full altar and pulpit fellowship may not be immediately foreseen, the commission commends its 2011 report, *Theological Dialogue with Other Christian Church Bodies*.

In the present triennium, CTCR staff and select members have participated in four such discussions: with the Anglican Church in North America (in collaboration with the Lutheran Church-Canada), the North American Lutheran Church (in collaboration with the Lutheran Church-Canada), the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and Evangelical Lutheran Synod (jointly), and the Anglican Catholic Church, the Anglican Church of America, and the Anglican Province of America (jointly). Detailed information on the nature and content of these theological conversations may be found in the report of the Office of the President on Church Relations.

III. Religious Organizations and Movements

The CTCR is charged with assisting “congregations and ordained and commissioned ministers of religion in fulfilling their commitment to witness publicly and privately to the one and only Gospel set forth in the Holy Scriptures” (Bylaw 3.9.5.4 “Fraternal and Other Organizations”). This bylaw includes the Synod’s longstanding provisions for dealing with lodges as well as other organizations which have “an unchristian or anti-Christian character.” In providing resources and information to the members of the Synod regarding such organizations, philosophies, and religious movements, the CTCR website features a section designated “Evaluations” (see lcms.org/ctcr). Evaluations fall into two general categories: *lodge organizations* and *religious organizations and movements*. The evaluations consider, from a Lutheran theological perspective, a broad range of religious practices, organizations, movements, claims, and individuals—both Christian and non-Christian. In addition to material previously available, during the past triennium the commission has provided several new evaluations. New topics addressed include Deepak Chopra, Falun Gong,

Hillsong, International House of Prayer, Neo-Paganism, and New Apostolic Reformation. A goal of the commission is to continue to provide Spanish-language translations of its evaluations. The entire current listing of topics addressed by CTCR evaluations includes (new documents this triennium are noted in bold below):

- Lodge Organizations:
 - Elks Lodge
 - Fraternal Order of Eagles
 - The Lodge
 - Membership in Certain Fraternal Organizations: A Pastoral Approach (also available in Spanish)
 - Moose International
- Other Religious Organizations and Movements:
 - Abrahamic Religions
 - Alpha Course
 - Baha'i Faith
 - Beth Moore Ministries (also available in Spanish)
 - Buddhism (also available in Spanish)
 - Center for Progressive Christianity
 - Christian Identity Movement
 - Christian Reconstructionism
 - Christian Science (also available in Spanish)
 - Church of Scientology (also available in Spanish)
 - Churchless Christianity
 - Cults—An Overview (also available in Spanish)
 - Cursillo Movement (also available in Spanish)
 - **Deepak Chopra**
 - Emergent Church
 - Enneagram
 - **Falun Gong**
 - Fellowship of Christian Athletes
 - **Hillsong**
 - Gideons International
 - Gnosticism
 - God's Learning Channel
 - Hinduism
 - Human Potential Movement
 - The International Churches of Christ (also available in Spanish)
 - **International House of Prayer**
 - Islam (also available in Spanish)
 - Jehovah's Witnesses (also available in Spanish)
 - Joel Osteen
 - Joyce Meyer Ministries
 - Judaism
 - Kabbalah
 - Latter Day Saints (also available in Spanish)
 - Moralistic Therapeutic Deism
 - Near Death Experiences (also available in Spanish)
 - **Neo-Paganism**
 - New Age Movement
 - **New Apostolic Reformation**
 - New Atheism
 - Newer Atheists
 - The Occult (also available in Spanish)
 - Rastafarians
 - Red Letter Christians
 - Reiki
 - Restorationism
 - Salvation Army
 - Satanism
 - Secular Humanism (also available in Spanish)
 - Secularism
 - Seventh-day Adventism (also available in Spanish)
 - Shriner's International
 - Swedenborgianism (New Church)
 - Theophostic Prayer Ministry
 - Transhumanism
 - Unification Church (also available in Spanish)
 - Unitarian-Universalist Association (UUA)
 - United Pentecostal Church International
 - Unity School of Christianity
 - Universalism
 - Vineyard Ministries
 - Wicca
 - Word-Faith Movement
 - Yoga

Brian S. Saunders, *Chairman*
Joel D. Lehenbauer, *Executive Director*

R13

Pastoral Formation Committee

The Synod's Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC), comprised of the Chief Mission Officer (chair, voting), the presidents of the two Synod seminaries (voting), and the executive director of the Office of Pastoral Education (nonvoting advisory), is tasked with the following regular assignments under Bylaws 3.10.4–3.10.4.7:

- Ensure that the Synod's objective of training pastors is filled consistently.
- Recommend, following consultation with the seminaries' boards of regents in their annual joint meeting, any new routes leading to ordination for approval by resolution of the Synod.
- Review, assess, coordinate, support, and make suggestions for improvement of all existing noncolloquy routes leading

to ordination in the Synod.

- Monitor and receive reports from all directors and committees charged with oversight of all routes to ordination and foster coordination and collaboration between such directors and committees.
- Consider the long-term strategic direction of the Synod's pastoral formation, and facilitate discussion of the same with the seminaries' boards of regents in their annual joint meeting.

Over the 2023–26 triennium, the PFC convened consistently (and far more frequently than Bylaw 3.10.4.7's minimum annual meeting requirement), via face-to-face and internet conference meetings, in order to carry out its above-listed duties, including consultations and facilitation of discussions with the seminaries' boards of regents in their annual joint meetings.

2023 Convention Assignments

Beyond such regular duties, most notable over the triennium was the PFC's ongoing work to fulfill assignments given to it under 2023 Resolution 6-03A (*Proceedings*, 162–63):

- Prepare a report that analyzes and assesses ministerial or pastoral formation programs that have emerged within the Synod over the past several years, especially those preparing persons to perform the distinctive functions of the Office of the Holy Ministry, which lack approval of the Synod under its current Constitution and Bylaws and are not included in the current list (i.e., M.Div., RAR/AR, Specific Ministry to General Pastor Certificate, SMP, Specific Ministry Pastor-Espanol/English Program, Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology, Center for Hispanic Studies, Cross-Cultural Ministry Center) of the Synod-approved routes to ordination.
- Prepare a report that examines and compares approaches and outcomes of residential (i.e., in-person) and non-residential (i.e., distance learning) routes to ordination as these relate to the Synod's commitment to a well-formed clergy for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Identify and evaluate options and rationales, and prepare a report to the 2026 Synod convention, which proposes a beneficial, clear, and concise definition of appropriate contexts for the ministry of SMP pastors.
- Develop and present a comprehensive, uniform, synodwide Specific Ministry Supervision Plan.

Reports R13.3–6 address the PFC's assignments from the above-referenced convention resolution.

In May 2025, the PFC posted “Frequently Asked Questions: Unauthorized Non-LCMS Pastoral Formation Programs.” This document was released at the same time President Harrison, Dr. Egger (CSL), and Dr. Bruss (CTSFW) issued statements regarding unauthorized, non-LCMS pastoral formation programs (reporter.lcms.org/2025/lcms-addresses-unauthorized-non-lcms-pastoral-formation-programs/).

Daniel M. Galchutt, *Interim Chief Mission Officer*

R13.1

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri

Concordia Seminary serves church and world by providing

theological education and leadership centered in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ for the formation of pastors, missionaries, deaconesses, scholars, and leaders in the name of the Synod.

The mission of Concordia Seminary flows from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God has sent His own Son into the world to redeem sinners by His death and resurrection. The Good News of repentance, forgiveness, and eternal life in His name is being preached to the ends of the earth. Concordia Seminary is a part of this beautiful, salvation-bringing work of our Triune God. As grateful heirs of the Reformation, we teach, preach, and confess in accord with the scriptural, Christ-centered witness of the Lutheran Confessions.

The primary mission of Concordia Seminary, now in its 187th year, is to prepare men for the Holy Ministry of Word and Sacrament in the LCMS. The Seminary also prepares women for service to the church through its Deaconess Studies programs, offers advanced degree programs to qualified students of theology, and serves as a center for theological research, scholarship, and continuing education of the clergy and laity. Since its founding in 1839, Concordia Seminary has provided more than 13,000 workers for the church.

Concordia Seminary is aligned with and assists the Synod in achieving key objectives, including to: “conserve and promote the unity of the true faith” (Constitutional Article III, Objective 1); “strengthen congregations and their members in giving bold witness” (Objective 2); “recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth” (Objective 3); “aid congregations by providing a variety of resources” (Objective 6); and “strive for uniformity in church practice, but also ... an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs” (Objective 7).

The greatest strength of Concordia Seminary is our outstanding faculty—learned, dedicated, experienced, pastoral, faithful men. To our already strong roster, we have been blessed with a number of top-notch new professors over the last triennium: Dr. Sam Eather-ton, the Rev. Dr. James Fickenscher, the Rev. Joel Fritsche, the Rev. Dr. John Genter, the Rev. Dr. Adam Hensley, the Rev. Dr. Jason Lane, the Rev. Dr. Stephen Pietsch, and the Rev. Dr. Ryan Tinetti. We have also been recently blessed with an outstanding new Director of Deaconess Studies, Dcs. Dr. Jennie Asher.

In the spring and fall of 2023, respectively, Concordia Seminary received regular accreditation visits from the Higher Learning Commission and the Association of Theological Schools. Both accrediting organizations gave Concordia positive reviews and full 10-year reaccreditation.

Church worker recruitment remains a key priority, and enrollment at Concordia Seminary has increased over the last triennium. As of the Fall 2025 census, Concordia Seminary serves 641 students across all academic programs, our highest enrollment in 17 years. We give thanks to God and to His Church for three consecutive years of growth in our residential pastoral formation programs, a clear sign of renewed momentum and confidence in preparing future pastors. This growth reflects the faithful partnership of pastors, congregations, districts, and leaders across the Synod, along with the tireless work of our enrollment team, who continue to recruit, encourage, and walk alongside those preparing for service. The Synod's *Set Apart to Serve* initiative is bearing fruit, and strong current enrollment in the pre-seminary programs of our Concordia Universities is very encouraging. Concordia Seminary continues to partner with Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, in re-

cruiting future pastors and deaconesses through our “We Are Your Seminaries” efforts.

Thanks to the generous people of the LCMS, Concordia Seminary’s financial condition is stable and strong. In step with our sister seminary in Fort Wayne, we offer 100 percent tuition coverage to students in the residential Master of Divinity program and significant student support and discounts to students in all programs. Concordia Seminary’s endowment now provides about 40 percent of its annual operating budget, and additional endowment development will be important to sustain our mission for coming generations. Our senior leadership is committed to financial discipline and limits the growth of the annual operating budget to the rate of inflation.

The Concordia Seminary Board of Regents recently approved a comprehensive Campus Master Plan 2026, subsequently reviewed and approved by the Synod Board of Directors in February 2026. This plan prioritizes improved housing for married and single students, additional on-campus faculty housing, and the ongoing stewardship of our historic stone buildings, including complete interior renovation of three large wings of the campus core. We view strong community life at our Seminary as a tremendous resource and vital component for the formation of future pastors and deaconesses and for the long-term shared life and mission of our church.

In late 2025, the Board of Regents renewed the appointment of Dr. Thomas Egger as Seminary president for a second five-year term (2026–31). In February 2026, three new regents joined the Seminary board: the Rev. Dr. Peter Elliott and Mr. Troy Prehar as board-appointed regents, and the Rev. Ryan Wendt, appointed as the Council of Presidents representative to the board.

In 2022, the Board of Regents adopted the *Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Strategic Plan 2022–26*. The plan was developed with input from a broad cross section of our Seminary’s constituencies within the LCMS. It lists nine guiding objectives that undergird the plan:

1. Keep God’s written Word at the center of ministerial formation.
2. Continue to add quality faculty. It is the faculty who execute our mission and determine our impact.
3. Creatively strengthen our short-term and long-term efforts in student recruitment.
4. Instill in our students a fervent *both-and* commitment to Lutheran teaching and outreach to the lost.
5. Make the case to the broader church for the distinct value of residential theological formation in community, even as we seek to be realistic and responsive to the church’s varied situations and needs.
6. Cultivate shared forms of piety and form a praying ministerium through the centrality of daily chapel in our Seminary life.
7. Cultivate a *community* of learning, hospitality, and mutual service.
8. Maintain strong collaborative and respectful relationships within the LCMS at all levels.
9. Resource international Lutheranism with clear biblical and confessional Lutheran teaching.

The plan contains 42 specific initiatives supporting the following key priorities:

Priority #1: Faithful and Full-Person Formation

Priority #2: Commitment to Community and Collaboration

Priority #3: Strong Recruitment and Enrollment

Priority #4: Lutheran Resources and Worldwide Impact

A copy of the plan is available at: csl.edu/about.

The Seminary board, administration, and faculty are currently developing the next five-year plan, and, toward that end, conducted a survey of the Seminary’s broad constituencies in January 2026. The new strategic plan will be finalized and published in late 2026.

The 2023 Synod convention passed twelve resolutions giving assignments, affirmations, and counsel to the seminaries. Concordia Seminary has acted upon or is in the process of acting upon all of these. Space precludes commentary on each, but examples include the following:

The convention adopted 2023 Res. 1-01A, “To Stimulate Training for Witness,” by unanimous voice vote. Over the last three years, in addition to the required course “Pastor and Congregation in Mission,” Concordia Seminary has offered its students weekend workshops facilitated by Synod staff on evangelism and community outreach. We have piloted a neighborhood canvassing and evangelism program and plan to implement it as a regular part of our students’ training. We have resumed the practice of traveling with small groups of students to experience sites of LCMS church planting. We have also held fruitful discussions with our sister seminary, Synod staff, and nearby district mission executives regarding ways in which the seminaries, Synod, and districts can partner to equip our future pastors to be “chief evangelists” in their congregations. President Bruss at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, initiated this project, and we are grateful to be participating. This is one of several dimensions of fraternal and fruitful collaboration between the two Synod seminaries.

2023 Res. 6-02A and 6-03A direct the seminaries to encourage men to residential pastoral ministry routes as the preferred option and to position and promote the residential M.Div. as the strongly preferred route for pastoral formation, maintaining the current practice of full tuition support for that route and using the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program only for its specific, intended purposes. Concordia Seminary advocates within the LCMS for the prioritization of residential seminary study, and our recruitment and admissions team gives this message consistently to all applicants, most especially to younger applicants desiring to prepare for a lifetime of ministry within the LCMS. Our faculty take very seriously the task of preparing, examining, and certifying men for the Holy Ministry. We plead with the church to maintain its longstanding shared commitment to thorough theological and personal formation, recognizing that encouraging men to pursue full-time study in person and in community on the campuses of our seminaries gives us the best opportunity to accomplish such formation for the good of the church. At the same time, and in harmony with Res. 6-03A, we value and thank God for the men preparing in our alternate route programs, and we operate those programs with seriousness, integrity, and increasing excellence. Our SMP, Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology, Center for Hispanic Studies, and Cross-Cultural Ministry Center programs fulfill real needs in the overall mission and ministry of our church.

On the campus of Concordia Seminary, we gather each morning in our chapel to hear the voice of our Shepherd, to receive His gifts, and, in turn, to call upon Him in prayer and joyfully sing His praises. The chapel is the center of our life and work because Christ is the center of our life and work: His mercy, His forgiveness, His Word, His hope. From this crucial center, our life and work flow

out to our classrooms, to our campus life together, to the broader church, and to the ends of the earth.

On behalf of the students, faculty, and staff of Concordia Seminary, thank you to the people of the LCMS for the privilege of serving with you. Thank you for entrusting future church workers to us for instruction and formation. Thank you for your enthusiastic financial support. Thank you for your prayers, for your witness, and for your work in Jesus' name.

Thomas J. Egger, *President*

R13.2

Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne was established in 1846 to meet the urgent need for pastors in Lutheran congregations. Our work remains the same today, and we go about it with a strong sense of purpose and faith in the promise that "Christ is risen indeed!" In the past triennium, after the election in 2024 of Rev. Dr. Jon S. Bruss as CTSFW's 17th president, the seminary revised its mission statement to more clearly convey who we are and why we exist: "Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW), is an institution of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod committed to the Holy Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the liturgical life of the Church, forming servants in Jesus Christ who teach the faithful, reach the lost, and care for all."

We give thanks to our Lord and Savior, who continues to bless CTSFW through the faithful support of alumni, friends, and donors who have enabled the seminary to carry out this mission for the sake of the church and the world. In what follows, we share highlights from the past triennium and discuss our strategic goals for the future.

Forming LCMS Pastors for LCMS Congregations

As one of the two seminaries entrusted by the LCMS with the duty to form faithful pastors for its congregations, CTSFW's activities are guided by the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod as well as directives from the Synod in convention. The foremost purpose of the seminary is to recruit and form pastors, which addresses Objective 3 of Constitutional Article III. CTSFW offers five pastoral formation programs, with the most comprehensive and in-depth being the residential Master of Divinity program. We encourage men preparing for ministry to enroll in the residential M.Div. program if possible (consistent with 2023 Res. 6-02A and 6-03A) but offer additional paths to ministry, including the Alternate Route certificate program and the Specific Ministry Pastor program, to accommodate students with considerable experience in church work or an interest in serving a particular congregation that might otherwise have difficulty securing a pastor.

Much has been said in the past triennium about the pastor shortage in the LCMS, which can largely be attributed to demographic shifts, retirements, and insufficient numbers of seminary graduates to fill calls. We recognize that challenge and have been working hard on the recruiting front, collaborating with the Synod on its *Set Apart to Serve* initiative as well as with Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, on recruitment activities supported by a grant from the Lilly Foundation. Additionally, we received a multimillion-dollar gift from the Munderloh Foundation in 2025, which has been used

to establish endowments for scholarships and recruiting activities.

We're starting to see the results of these efforts, with an incoming 2026–27 class that is expected to be significantly larger than in recent years. Thanks be to God!

Producing enough pastors is critically important. Even more important is producing faithful confessional Lutheran pastors who will conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Const. Art. III 1), strengthen congregations with their bold witness (Art. III 2), and support all other objectives of the Synod through their work in our congregations. That's part of our charge too, and we're committed to keeping these aims at the forefront in all our strategic activities.

Highlights from the 2023–26 Triennium: Building on the Past and Planning for the Future

The first year of the past triennium was the last year in office for Dr. Lawrence R. Rast Jr., who faithfully served the seminary as president for 13 years. Under Rast's leadership, the seminary introduced full tuition coverage for residential formation students, completed the Wayne and Barbara Kroemer Library, completed a successful capital campaign, increased the endowment, and instituted a disciplined strategic planning process.

Highlights from 2023–24:

- Added two new faculty chairs, the Reverend Victor H. and Lydia Dissen Chair in the Lutheran Confessions and the Roemer-Baese Chair in Pastoral Ministry and Missions
- Significantly upgraded the fiber and data infrastructure on campus
- Celebrated the 25th anniversary of Christ Academy
- Completed a comprehensive Facilities Condition Assessment, which provided the groundwork for the campus master plan

Notable Activities from 2024–26:

With the election of a new president in 2024, the seminary ramped up its planning efforts and has made top-notch residential formation a foremost goal. Notable activities include:

- Developed a comprehensive campus master plan
- Developed an aggressive strategic plan for 2024–29
- Installed three faculty members and a new director of deaconess formation
- Revised the mission statement as part of the strategic planning and curriculum revision processes
- Established Munderloh Endowments in support of recruiting
- Launched a new website
- Executed several campus improvement projects, guided by the campus master plan

In addition, the seminary continues to play a pivotal role in strengthening confessional Lutheranism domestically and internationally, supporting 2023 Res. 1-01A, concerning training for witness, and Res. 2-02A, which encourages collaboration with the LCMS Office of International Mission. Activities in this area include:

- Responding to the steady demand from international partners for theological education in their locations

- Annual student mission trips to sites including the Dominican Republic and Romania
- Advanced graduate programs that support the development of Lutheran leaders
- The Chemnitz Library Initiative, which provides support for seminary libraries throughout the world
- Leadership in established international programs including the STM-Gothenburg program, Lutheran Leadership Development program, and Concordia Pastoral and Diaconal Training Program
- A robust Continuing Education program, with over 40 theological short courses offered throughout the U.S. annually

In 2023 and 2024, CTSFW conducted campus-wide scenario planning exercises about the future of pastoral and diaconal formation, gathered feedback from constituents, and engaged in institutional assessments. Identified strengths include clarity of mission, unity around our confession, top-notch faculty, demand from international partners for our theological education, and significant support from the church. The 2024–29 strategic plan was developed to maximize our strengths and take advantage of key opportunities to minimize our weaknesses and mitigate threats to successfully fulfill our mission.

Looking Ahead: Strategic Plan 2024–29

The Board of Regents of CTSFW has adopted an ambitious strategic plan to build on past strengths and to provide for future generations by forming exemplary pastors and deaconesses for faithful service in the LCMS and its mission fields. The plan has five main objectives:

1. Recruit **capable students** for robust education and formation—men of faith in Christ, of character and integrity, of intelligence and commitment to the people of God (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:6–9). Our students will graduate with utter confidence in God’s Word and our Lutheran Confessions as they apply all they have learned in sacrificial service for Christ and His church.
2. Cultivate a **talented faculty**. We will strengthen the teaching and mentoring provided to our students through ongoing faculty development focused on teaching the primary texts and critical thinking. Our faculty will ignite a passion for God’s Word and our Lutheran Confessions so CTSFW graduates may be courageous in mission and ministry.
3. Shape a **rigorous curriculum** that forms Lutheran pastors and deaconesses prepared for service in today’s church. We will instill in our students an even deeper grounding in God’s Word and our Confessions so they leave prepared to lead their congregations in evangelistic outreach and to plant churches where they are needed.
4. Create an **inspiring campus** and vibrant community. We will enhance our facilities to meet the needs of the 21st century, build new spaces, including new housing for students and a new food and clothing co-op, and update classroom buildings.
5. **Support** this work with an efficient, well-funded operation. CTSFW faithfully stewards the resources entrusted to us to maximize their impact both here and abroad. *Thank you* for your continued trust in us and the value you place on the faithful formation of your future pastors!

CTSFW is deeply thankful for the generous and steadfast support of the church that makes our work possible. Our pastors, deaconesses, and missionaries must be determined to know in church and the world nothing but Christ in all His fullness (1 Cor. 2:2; John 1:15) so that in all His fullness, He may be grasped by you in faith (John 20:31).

For more information, visit our website: ctsfw.edu.

Jon S. Bruss, *President*

R13.3

Report on Unapproved Programs Preparing for the Office of the Holy Ministry (Pastoral Formation Committee, 2023 Res. 6-03A)

LCMS Bylaws on Placement, Ordination, Commissioning—Why?

“Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” (1 Tim. 4:16)

At the conclusion of the “Preface” to the Christian Book of Concord of 1580, the confessors enumerate four chief motivations in drawing together and drafting the *Book of Concord*:

- the extension of God’s name and glory;
- the propagation of His Word, from which we hope for salvation;
- the peace and tranquility of churches and schools; and
- the instruction and consolation of disturbed consciences. (Preface, 22)¹

For these reasons also The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was formed and still exists, as Article III, “Objectives,” of the constitution of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod attests. Enumerated among those objectives is also the recruitment and training of pastors. The bylaws of Synod reserve for the two seminaries of Synod, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (CSL), and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSF), the duty, to the exclusion of other seminaries, to recruit, educate, form and train the pastors of Synod (Bylaws 2.7, 2.8, 2.9, 2.13.1, 3.10.5.7.10(h)).

Why?

In the cultivation of a pastorate fit for the high calling of serving the congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the Synod has developed a handful of critical mechanisms to ensure two things:

- that the promise extended by the pastor at ordination can be knowledgeably, faithfully and conscientiously kept;
- that the congregation’s expectation of the pastor’s fidelity can be met.

The pastor’s promise is to “perform the duties of [his] office in accordance with [the Lutheran] Confessions, and that all [his] preaching and teaching and [his] administration of the Sacraments will be in conformity with Holy Scripture and with these Confessions.”² In the boilerplate language supplied by the Commission on Constitutional Matters and typically encoded in a congregation’s constitution as Article 2 or 3, the “Confessional Standard,” the congregation expresses its expectation of the standard to which the pastor will conduct his ministry when it says: “This congregation accepts without reservation: 3.1 The Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and practice. 3.2 All the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and

¹ Unless otherwise noted, references to the *Book of Concord* are from Paul T. McCain et al., eds., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005).
² “Rite of Ordination” and “Rite of the Installation of a Pastor,” in *Lutheran Service Book Agenda* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 166, 179.

theological education and pastoral formation from a seminary lacking the guarantees of fidelity provided by the bylaws cited above or from a seminary that is heterodox in teaching or unionistic in practice.

These two bylaw provisos — the exclusive use of pastors formed in Synod seminaries and prior approval of seminary faculty members based upon thorough theological review — protect the right of congregations to receive the ministration of the Gospel and the whole counsel of God in their midst and the ability and freedom of the pastors to conduct their office in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Without these two bylaw provisos, this right of congregations and this ability and freedom of pastors are abrogated, and the truth of the Gospel, which alone creates saving faith, is placed at risk.

Unauthorized Seminary Programs

Notwithstanding our Synod’s agreement described above, two extra-synodical routes to earning the M.Div. have gained attention in the LCMS: a cooperative between Unite Leadership Collective (ULC) and Luther House of Study (LHOS) and, more recently, the establishment of The Center for Missional and Pastoral Leadership through the Center (*thecenter.info*) within the Institute of Lutheran Theology’s Christ School of Theology (*cst.ilt.edu/cmpl*).

Since at least 2020, the Rev. Dr. Tim Ahlman, along with his congregation Christ Lutheran Greenfield and the ULC, an organization dedicated to “connecting the dots between theology, ministry, and leadership to empower you to spread the Gospel in explosive ways,”³ has been running what Ahlman on his podcasts, *Lead Time* and the *Tim Ahlman Podcast*, has repeatedly referred to as an “experiment.” This experiment consists of enrolling students from Christ Lutheran Greenfield and numerous other LCMS congregations in LHOS to receive a degree from Kairos University, a completely online program for theological study. Students may enroll in an M.A. in counseling or an M.Div.

In addition, in February 2025 at the pre-conference in Phoenix, Ariz., for Best Practices in Ministry, the Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Kloha announced a new initiative through the Institute of Lutheran Theology (ILT) to create an online-only M.Div. program known as the Center for Missional and Pastoral Leadership (CMPL). Earlier, less public, announcements of the launch of CMPL were made by Tim Ahlman and Jeff Kloha at the Large Church Network Conference in San Diego on Jan. 24–25, 2025, and on Facebook on Feb. 7, 2025, respectively.⁴ The program confers M.A., M.M., and M.Div. degrees.

Luther House of Study

The LHOS curriculum is readily available. What follows is an analysis of that curriculum.

Overall Structure

The LHOS curriculum, since its accreditation is through Kairos University, is characterized foremost as being “contextual” and “competency based.”⁵

Competencies

The competencies outlined by the Kairos model consist of the following:

⁵ “Get Started,” *uniteleadership.org*, accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

⁶ Source of January 22–24 announcement, Ron Mudge, CSL Provost, who was in attendance at the Large Church Network Conference; the Feb. 7, 2025, announcement is found at *facebook.com/watch/?v=2010013649497735*. Accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

⁷ *kairos.edu/academics/programs/master-of-divinity*, accessed on Feb. 9, 2026.

unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God, to wit: the three Ecumenical Creeds (the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed), the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Large Catechism of Luther, the Small Catechism of Luther, and the Formula of Concord.”⁸ One might express the matter this way: LCMS pastors for LCMS parishes; LCMS parishes for LCMS pastors.

Apart from that understanding and the practice that follows from it, the doctrinal fidelity of the member congregations and pastors of the Synod is wantonly and carelessly placed at risk. Indeed, as one sadly witnesses all too often, it fails. Such failure is a matter of both temporal and eternal consequence. No one is saved by his orthodoxy, but a right faith in Jesus cannot be long maintained under a false confession.

Why This Is Vitrally Important

In the temporal realm, this failure violates the congregation’s and pastor’s obligation to proclaim the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), to abide by the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2.42) and “not [to] speak or write anything contrary to this Confession, either publicly or privately” (FC SD XII 40). It also violates the congregation’s *right*, as baptized children of God, to receive the unadulterated teaching, witness and confession of the Holy Scriptures.⁹ For their failure to preach this Word, the Lord Jesus upbraids the Pharisees who corrupt His Word when He calls them sheep-killers and opposes them (John 10). It also causes division (Rom. 16:17) thereby constituting a breach of love (1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:3-16).

Eternally, the consequences are dire. Paul warns the Galatians that a little leaven leavens the whole lump (Gal. 5:9), that the message of the “Christian” Judaizers is a “different Gospel” that cannot be called another, equal Gospel (ἑτερον εὐαγγέλιον, ὃ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλο, [Gal. 1.6–7]). It is “the truth” — the Lord’s Word — that sets free from sin, death and the power of the devil (John 8:31–32), not just a part of it or that truth mixed with error.

Heeding the imperative to keep love and a true confession of Jesus Christ, for the sake of both the saints and the lost, the LCMS has insisted that the formation of our pastors not be left to others who ignore, despise or eschew the truth or mix it with falsehood, but that, for the sake of both the ministry and mission of the LCMS, this formation be committed to the LCMS’ seminaries — Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (Bylaws 2.71., 2.8.1 (a), (c), 2.8.3 (a)). Indeed, to ensure the fidelity of the theological education and pastoral formation, the LCMS further requires that all faculty members staffed to the two seminaries receive prior approval. The prior approval committee consists of nationally elected representatives, to wit, “the President of the Synod (or his designee), the chairman of the Council of Presidents (or his designee), and the chairman of the Board for National Mission (or his designee).” It may grant prior approval for a man to be called to the faculty of a seminary only on the basis of “a thorough theological review” of the man and his work (Bylaw 3.10.5.7.3 (a)).

While clergy from other denominations who later in life discover their agreement with the teaching and confession of the LCMS may be admitted into membership in the Synod and serve parishes in our Synod through our colloquy program (Bylaw 3.10.2), the Synod, for good and self-evident reasons, does not admit to the roster men from LCMS congregations who have chosen (a) not to seek a theological education and pastoral formation from one of the two LCMS seminaries and instead (b) to seek a

³ Commission on Constitutional Matters, “Guidelines for Constitutions and Bylaws of Lutheran Congregations,” rev. 2012, 4–5.

⁴ “Wherever the Church is, there is the authority [right] to administer the Gospel” (Tr 67).

1. Articulate how their life in Christ exhibits the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit as formed in their Christian community and devoted to the glory of God the Father.
2. Demonstrate skillful exegesis through in-depth biblical study and awareness of methodological frameworks.
3. Demonstrate effective cultural exegesis and awareness of cultural frameworks, empowering them for effective, faithful, dynamic, and culturally appropriate communication of the Gospel.
4. Demonstrate a coherent Christian theological understanding and awareness of theological frameworks, informing their life and ministry, including corporate worship of the Triune God.
5. Demonstrate appreciation and critical awareness of their own and other Christian traditions as implemented in strategies for ministry.
6. Articulate their understanding of Christian ethics and demonstrate how it informs daily living and their philosophy of leadership.
7. Demonstrate competent care and collaborative leadership informed by integrative reflection, an understanding of human and organizational systems, and emotional-relational intelligence.
8. Demonstrate competence in the integration of knowledge, character, and ability specific to their ministry context.
9. Articulate and engage their vocation in a mentored life, intentional Christian community, and whole-life stewardship.⁸

Chris Croghan, the academic director of LHOS, has indicated that as he and his team at LHOS were developing their curriculum in conjunction with Kairos, he advocated for competencies broad enough to allow for the “Lutheran emphasis” that LHOS sought to have in its curriculum.⁹ The same set of competencies are thus used not only by Lutherans, but by a broad mix of differing confessions.

Mentorship

Each student in the Kairos/LHOS program is assigned three mentors, who accompany the student all the way through his or her education: an LHOS faculty mentor, a vocational mentor and a personal mentor.¹⁰ Students must demonstrate their nine-fold competency to these three mentors.¹¹

Distance education modules

Aside from their interactions with their vocational and personal mentors, students’ academic work consists of readings, written assignments and online modules. On average, 60–70% of the learning directed toward gaining a competency is not achieved synchronously, and the ratio of synchronous to asynchronous work varies greatly. Asynchronous elements require students to watch pre-recorded lectures, for example; synchronous elements are conducted via Zoom or other similar platforms. Because of the flexibility allowed by the preponderance of asynchronous learning modules, there is no specific curricular schedule to which students must adhere: Students thus pay a \$300 monthly fee for access to the curriculum and may take as short or as long as they wish.¹²

Faculty

⁸ “Luther House of Study Curriculum Master of Divinity Kairos 9.0,” *docs.google.com/document/d/1e8okNL2DW1G0ZA9lHlqgr6fMQKVEVjQWxR3dhevUk/edit?tab=t.0*, accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

⁹ Zoom meeting between J.S. Bruss and Chris Croghan on Jan. 2, 2025.

¹⁰ “Master of Divinity,” *kairos.edu/academics/programs/master-of-divinity/*, accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

¹¹ Zoom meeting between J.S. Bruss and Chris Croghan on Jan. 2, 2025.

¹² “Students,” *lutherhouseofstudy.org/students/*, accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

Despite claims to the contrary, the Lutheran faculty of LHOS are not “confessional” Lutherans in the sense that LCMS has typically understood the term. Confessional Lutheranism, as understood by the LCMS, is undergirded by (a) confessing the verbal inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, and therefore both their inerrancy (errorlessness) and their infallibility (their inability to mislead or to fail to accomplish that which they set out to do); (b) subscribing the entire *Book of Concord of 1580* as a correct exposition of the verbally inspired, inerrant and infallible Scriptures, still determinative of doctrine and practice.

LHOS faculty have varied roster status. Chris Croghan, LHOS’s chief academic officer, was educated as an undergraduate at Augustana University in Sioux Falls, holds the M.Div. and Ph.D. from Luther Seminary (ELCA) in St. Paul, Minn., and is rostered in the ELCA.¹³ CEO Sarah Stenson is a Lutheran, but holds the M.Div. from Sioux Falls Seminary (Baptist, now Kairos University); she is rostered in the LCMC with significant NALC ties.¹⁴ Lars Olson, director of pastoral formation, is rostered in the ELCA; his wife also serves as a pastor.¹⁵ Despite protestations to the contrary (and even the ELCA ordination vows) and based on the clear evidence of breaking with Scripture on the ordination of women, none of the faculty hold a *quia* subscription to the Lutheran Confessions¹⁶ nor do they uphold the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures. They cite as their favorite work of theology a book by Gerhard Forde,¹⁷ which is telling given the significant departures of Forde-esque theology from Confessional Lutheranism, as the LCMS has traditionally understood it.

Curriculum

Transcripts from Kairos/Luther House of Study are markedly different from those of institutions, showing little concern for academic and theological rigor. With one exception, the transcript shows no credits and no grades; students may meet the requirements for a competency without taking the accompanying coursework. The confusing nature of the transcripts makes it nearly impossible to understand what a student has learned.

Overview

Despite these difficulties, the curriculum does have a shape. It groups readings and written assignments under the nine competencies. Competency assessment seems to be built into the curriculum on the basis of a fairly standard pattern of written assignments: Students may choose one of a handful of parish-level writing assignments, such as a series of five 75- to 100-word bulletin inserts summarizing the four Gospels and Acts, or five 300-word newsletter articles that give an overview of the four Gospels and Acts, or a Bible study lesson plan to cover the four Gospels and Acts. The assignment for what appears to

¹³ “Chris Croghan,” kairos.edu/faculty/chris-croghan, accessed Feb. 9, 2026; [Rostered Ministers Results](https://rosteredministers.org) for “Croghan,” accessed Feb. 10, 2026.

¹⁴ “Sarah Stenson,” kairos.edu/faculty/sarah-stenson, accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

¹⁵ “Get to know the Luther House of Study staff,” lutherhouseofstudy.org/get-to-know-the-luther-house-of-study-staff, accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

¹⁶ A *quia* subscription to the Lutheran Confessions indicates that the one who subscribes them does so *because* they are a correct exposition of Holy Scripture. Conversely, there are Lutherans who hold a *quatenus* subscription — a subscription that indicates they accept the teaching of the Lutheran Confessions only to the extent they feel the Lutheran Confessions accurately represent the teachings of Scripture. While there are numerous varieties of *quatenus* subscription, they all tend to fall into one of two varieties. In the first variety, the subscriber holds a different confession than that of the Lutheran Confessions on one or more points; in the second variety, the subscriber verbally assents to the Lutheran Confessions (*quia* subscription) but teaches and allows teaching and practices that deviate from Lutheran Confessions.

¹⁷ “Get to know the Luther House of Study staff,” lutherhouseofstudy.org/get-to-know-the-luther-house-of-study-staff, accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

page 5 of 12

currently being served.” Quite explicitly, “The program is designed for students who are seeking to grow in service in their local ministry context, perhaps eventually to become a **pastor** or church leader.” “Congregations in every tradition, and in particular Lutheran congregations, are struggling to find **pastors** to serve them. In some cases, congregations go without a **pastor** for three and four years. This program will help raise up more **pastors** and leaders for congregations that need them, and especially congregations in settings where maintaining a full-time pastor is a challenge. Students are equipped not simply to occupy the office of **pastor**, but with tools to engage their congregations and communities with the Gospel, so that the Lord of the Church might call even more people to himself.”²²

Overall Structure

CMPL is housed in the Institute of Lutheran Theology in Brookings, S.D., a completely online institution of theological education, offering seven degrees: Ph.D., D.Min., S.T.M., M.Div., Master of Chaplain Ministry (M.C.M.), Master of Ministry (M.M.), and an M.A. CMPL presently enrolls students in one of three of those programs: M.A. [in Religion], M.M., and the M.Div. The curriculum for those three programs is structured in such a way that the M.A. (36 credits) uses a subset of coursework for the M.M. (45 credits), which in turn uses a subset of coursework for the M.Div. (90 credits). According to CMPL leadership, the enrollment of the “25–26” students is split roughly 1/3, 1/3, 1/3 among the programs. In other words, students who enroll and begin coursework in one may apply for admission to another and bring their credits along.²³

Mentorship

Mentorship in the field for the program, which, as noted, enrolls both LCMS and non-LCMS students, is coordinated by CMPL faculty member the Rev. Todd Jones (LCMS rostered pastor), who serves as CMPL’s Director of Formation.²⁴

Distance education

The CMPL program uses primarily synchronous, online coursework. While the CMPL model seems to have been dependent upon the formation of cohorts as a powerful educational tool, most students enrolled in Fall of 2025 vary in how many courses they are taking,²⁵ meaning that the starting cohort will soon break apart and its power as an educational tool will diminish. These distance courses are taught on a Fall Semester/J-Term/Spring Semester/Summer Semester schedule.

Faculty

The CMPL faculty includes the following: Jeff Kloha (Associate Pastor at Our Savior Lutheran Church, Arlington, Va. [LCMS]), James Marriott (Associate Pastor at Faith Lutheran Church, Georgetown, Texas [LCMS]), Todd Jones (Candidate, living in Bella Vista, Ark., but rostered in LCMS Michigan District), Benjamin Haupt (Assistant Pastor at Christ Memorial Lutheran Church, St. Louis, Mo. [LCMS] and Global Executive Director at the Pastoral Leadership Institute, a non-RSO para-church organization),²⁶ Dale Meyer (President Emeritus of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis [LCMS]) served as a guest professor during

²² “Frequently Asked Questions,” cst.ilt.edu/cmpl, accessed Feb. 9, 2026. Emphasis added.

²³ Zoom meeting with Jeff Kloha, Sept. 22, 2025.

²⁴ facebook.com/6157267626956/videos/71837199431122, accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

²⁵ Zoom meeting with Jeff Kloha, Sept. 22, 2025. At least one student is presently enrolled in three ILT/Christ School of Theology courses (some which are not CMPL courses), while others are enrolled in one or two.

²⁶ “Center Contributors,” cst.ilt.edu/cmpl, accessed Feb. 9, 2026; current assignments from locator.lcms.org/worker, accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

page 7 of 12

be academic assessment is a 750- to 1000-word treatment of a passage from the Gospels or Acts.¹⁸ The assignments are at best appropriate for an undergraduate survey course on the New Testament. This level of appropriation of theological content is found throughout the curriculum.

Finally, each of the nine competencies are measured by a “master assessment.” In the case of competency two, which focuses on the Bible, students submit two sermons, one on the Old, one on the New Testament, for evaluation. The sermons may be written out or recorded. Presumably the three mentors come to an agreement, or at least vote, on whether the sermons demonstrate competency.¹⁹

It is difficult to see how the ability to engage in close, critical reading is engendered by this curriculum.

Reading Assignments

Perhaps the most distressing element of the curriculum, besides its low expectations for the level at which theology is to be grasped, is the reading list. While punctuated here and there by LCMS authors and Luther, the reading list is utterly dominated by Steven Paulson, Gerhard Forde and James Nestingen, ELCA and former ELCA theologians. With their well-known problems in the areas of scriptural inerrancy, the atonement and the third use of the law, and their Barth-inflected proclamation theology, the preponderance of these authors in the secondary literature that makes up so much of the curriculum represents a significant divergence from confessional Lutheranism. According to one student, LCMS theologians and teaching are often used as a foil.

Furthermore, the assignments in Luther are surprisingly basic. The vast majority consist of his introductions to the books of the Bible and some of his basic writings, such as those contained in Dillenberger’s *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*.

Students do encounter the entire *Book of Concord*. The interpretive readings that accompany the *Book of Concord* assignments tend to come from Paulson, Forde and Nestingen, along with some LCMS authors. But on the whole, the “pattern of sound words” (2 Tim. 1:13) that our LCMS seminaries, CTSFW and CSL, uphold is utterly lacking.

Center for Missional and Pastoral Leadership²⁰

According to a video on the CMPL site, the program is intended to be “a fully-online, fully-accredited master of divinity program” aimed at missional leadership in the local congregation.²¹ The CMPL program rests on five pillars: biblical, reformational, missional, affordable and global.

In line with its name, the video referenced above claims that the Center for **Missional** and Pastoral Leadership weaves mission into every class.

More concerning is the Center for Missional and Pastoral Leadership’s claim to be educating and forming *pastors* for the church. Such formation occurs entirely outside of the healthy LCMS oversight to which the LCMS seminaries willingly and gladly submit for the sake of maintaining sound doctrine. According to the CMPL FAQ, CMPL was founded at the request of (presumably LCMS) “congregations and church leaders” to “equip potential **pastors** and church workers for missional ministry in areas that are not

¹⁸ “Luther House of Study Curriculum: Master of Divinity Kairos 9.0,” 7.

¹⁹ “Luther House of Study Curriculum: Master of Divinity Kairos 9.0,” p. 9.

²⁰ Information on CMPL can be found on the Center for Missional Pastoral Leadership Facebook page, thecenter.info and at cst.ilt.edu/cmpl.

²¹ “The Pillars of the Center for Missional and Pastoral Leadership Formation,” cst.ilt.edu/cmpl, accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

Fall 2025; and Matthew Borrasso (Pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, Lexington Park, Md. [LCMS]) was likewise enlisted to teach in Fall 2025.²⁷ None of these faculty have received Synod prior approval for these teaching positions and are not sanctioned by the LCMS. CMPL instructors in Fall of 2025 included:

- Haupt — Introduction to Pastoral Ministry
- Borrasso — Faith, Knowledge and Reason
- Meyer — 1 Peter (elective)
- Kloha — Biblical Hermeneutics

Notwithstanding the numerous LCMS clergy associated with and teaching in the CMPL program, CMPL students may take ILT/Christ School of Theology courses, and ILT/Christ School of Theology students may enroll in CMPL courses. While the courses in the first term of offerings were taught by the LCMS pastors listed above, as of February 2026, CMPL courses are cross listed with ILT courses and staffed by ILT instructors.²⁸

Curriculum

The CMPL M.Div. curriculum is a boilerplate four discipline, theological seminary curriculum with courses in Biblical Theology (24 credits), Historical and Systematic Theology (24 credits), Philosophical Theology and Ethics (12 credits) and Pastoral Theology (21 credits). Together with introductory courses in hermeneutics, New Testament Greek and classical Hebrew, the M.Div. program comprises 90 credits. The M.A. [in Religion] (non-thesis, 36 credits) and the M.M. (45 credits) use smaller bits of the same curriculum. While the M.Div. requires Greek and Hebrew, the M.M. requires Greek only, and the M.A. requires no language. Language is taught not with the goal of interpreting or even translating the text on one’s own (“The student will still be dependent upon others’ translations”), but with the goal of being able to make sense of a commentary. The curricula are shared with ILT/Christ School of Theology. Definite marks have been made on this shared curriculum by the CMPL faculty: Biblical Hermeneutics and the entire Pastoral Theology curricula have been rewritten by CMPL faculty and adopted by ILT/Christ School of Theology.³⁰

To be noted is that only three credits are devoted to the reading of the *Book of Concord*, while the description of Biblical Theology courses is isagogic rather than exegetical (related, no doubt, to the Greek and Hebrew proficiency aimed for in the curriculum).³¹ In other words, the level of close reading of the text of the Bible is diminished. The quick reading of the *Book of Concord* represents a deficient exposure to and encounter with the *Book of Concord*, and may hint at what is meant by the term “reformational” in the five pillars that undergird CMPL. The LCMS does not take “Lutheran” to mean a vaguely defined “spirit of the Reformation” but connects it specifically to the teachings and spirit of the *Book of Concord of 1580*. Nor should the sub-minimum level of proficiency in Greek and Hebrew be waved off. As Martin Luther put it, “We will not long preserve the gospel without the languages. The languages are the sheath in which this sword of the Spirit [Eph. 6:17] is contained.”³²

²⁷ Zoom meeting with Jeff Kloha, Sept. 22, 2025. Current assignments from locator.lcms.org/worker, accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

²⁸ Conversation with ILT faculty member on Friday, Feb. 6, 2026.

²⁹ *Academic Catalog 2025–2026 The Christ School of Theology Institute of Lutheran Theology*, p. 44; cst.ilt.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/CST-2025-2026-final-5.3.pdf, accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

³⁰ Zoom meeting with Jeff Kloha, Sept. 22, 2025.

³¹ *Academic Catalog 2025–2026*, pp. 25, 45, 49.

³² Martin Luther, “To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools,” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 45 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 360.

page 8 of 12

Student Body

Of the “25 to 26” students currently enrolled in CMPL, “between five and six” are not in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The remaining students “have a connection” with the LCMS and identify their congregational and synodical membership as LCMS, but when queried on the ILT application regarding the church body in which these students wish to serve, many put down a question mark.³³ Four to five of the 26 students in Kloha’s Biblical Interpretation class in Fall 2025 are from other [Lutheran?] church bodies, and at least one is an ELCA woman seeking ordination in the Canadian Association of Lutheran Congregations, whose official seminary is the Institute of Lutheran Theology.³⁴ CMPL leaders express hope that their graduates may be rostered in the LCMS, despite Bylaw 3.10.2.4.

Is CMPL Distinct from ILT/Christ School of Theology?

(1) Since the CMPL link on *thecenter.info* directs to the Christ School of Theology site, CMPL and Christ School of Theology share a curriculum, even as CMPL faculty have had a hand in re-shaping some coursework.³⁵ (2) Because of (1), there is no evidence that Christ School of Theology and CMPL courses are *different* courses. (3) Because of (2), the only conclusion one may reach is that the courses CMPL students enroll in are those that Christ School of Theology students enroll in. (4) Finally, because of (3), the only conclusion one may reach is that CMPL students, notwithstanding the advertisement of four LCMS clergy as “Center Contributors” (namely, Ben Haupt, Jeff Kloha, James Marriott, and Todd Jones), may or will be taught also by ILT faculty members.

Indeed, the statement on the CMPL FAQ in response to the question, “How does the [CMPL] program balance deep theological learning with practical application in daily life?” that “the faculty of ILT and CMPL have years of experience” gives every indication that it is the intention of CMPL that its students will, indeed, learn from ILT faculty.³⁶ Finally, in a CMPL Newsletter 1:7 dated May 8, 2025, Kloha directs prospective CMPL students to ILT courses that were on queue for Fall 2025. Along with LCMS instructors Kilcrease (non-rostered), Kloha, Kolb and Schumacher, the instructors for those courses include Robert Benne and Dan Lioy.³⁷

There is a certain amount of opacity regarding the roster status of ILT faculty, though with some investigation one may discover members of the ministerium of the LCMS (Rynereson), the NALC (Sorum), CALC (Kwok) and the LCMC (Hillmer). One member of the faculty holds dual roster status in the NALC and the Evangelical Church Alliance (Lioy).³⁸ That said, of the nine teaching faculty, a couple (Benne, Kilcrease) are not ordained and others’ ordination status is unclear (Hackman, Vestrucci), at least calling into question assertions by CMPL that “the faculty of ILT ... have years of experience serving as pastors, missionaries, and church planters....”³⁹

Like the LHOS program, the CMPL/Christ School of Theology/ILT program is inadequate for the purposes of cultivating a ministerium in and for the LCMS that is faithful to the Holy Scriptures and our Confession. The affiliation of numerous faculty with the North American Lutheran Church (NALC), a church body

³³ Zoom meeting with Jeff Kloha, Sept. 22, 2025.

³⁴ “Training Clergy,” *calc.ca*, accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

³⁵ Note that *thecenter.info/cmpl* directs users to *cst.ilt.edu/cmpl*, accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

³⁶ “Frequently Asked Questions,” *cst.ilt.edu/cmpl*, accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

³⁷ Jeff Kloha, “Fall Courses Announced!” in *https://thecenter.info/cmpl-notes-1-7*, accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

³⁸ The Evangelical Church Alliance denies the efficacy of the Sacraments, confessing Baptism merely to be a symbol and for believers only and the Lord’s Supper merely as a commemoration. See “Tenets of Faith,” *ecainternational.org/images/uploads/ECA_Standards/Tenets_of_Faith_15_July_2020.pdf*, accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

³⁹ “Frequently Asked Questions,” *cst.ilt.edu/cmpl*, accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

page 9 of 12

cited in the study indicates that overall seminary enrollment among schools accredited by the Association of Theological Schools declined by 11% from 2006 to 2016, even as online enrollment grew by 195%. In other words, the expansion of online theological education coincides with an overall drop in enrollment in theological education.

In fact, in the online game, there are a handful of huge “winners” and a mountain of “losers.” In a study of 14 prominent seminaries who offer the M.Div. online, 3 show a gain in M.Div. enrollment (both online and residential) after introducing an online option for the M.Div.: Midwest Baptist Theological Seminary posted a gain of 358%, Reformed Seminary, a gain of 22%; and Palmer, a gain of 2%. But they are the outliers. The remaining 11 seminaries posted an average loss of overall M.Div. enrollment (both online and residential) of 32%. The average length of time it took to achieve that loss of enrollment was 8.3 years — a 4% decline per year. The same seminaries have lost 31% in their M.Div. enrollment since 2016, a time during which the two LCMS seminaries have enjoyed a fluctuating but stable enrollment in their M.Div. and Alternate Route programs.⁴⁴ While some M.Div. programs have seen astounding growth, that is coupled with global and extra-denominational expansion. But if the most pressing need LCMS seminaries fill — indeed, if this is their only charge — is supplying pastors for LCMS congregations and missions, both domestic and overseas, the surest route to meeting that need is through the residential M.Div. and Alternate Route programs. Inflating enrollment numbers through overseas and non-LCMS enrollments does not help the LCMS. And the surest way to decrease the number of theological candidates is by offering online M.Div. and Alternate Route programs.

But even such studies are insufficient. The charge given pastors is of eternal consequence: They must give an account, before God, for those in whose midst they are called by the Lord God to proclaim the Word and administer the Sacraments (Heb. 13:17). At every turn they encounter troubled consciences, a world set against the Lord and His Chosen One, and a cacophony of false teaching meant to deceive and mislead the believers, jeopardizing their eternal salvation. Yet, it is specifically in this context where they are called upon by the Lord and their solemn charge to shepherd the flock of Christ, to be ready in season and out, with patience and persistence, to reprove, rebuke, exhort (2 Tim. 4:2–5). For that reason, Paul instructed Timothy not to lay on hands hastily. It takes time, concentrated, intense time, to instill in a man in the theological, pastoral, personal and spiritual qualities that make a pastor.

Nor is the church’s long-standing insistence on residential education a historical hiccup, as if the only hurdle to be cleared for non-residential, dis-enfleshed theological education and formation was the lack of online delivery. The word has been technologized and available for broad dissemination since before the time of Jesus, since the invention of papyrus. It was enhanced with the development of the minuscule script; the minuscule’s impact was multiplied many times over with the advent of scriptoria; printing press followed scriptorium; voice recording succeeded printing press; the wide dissemination of video superseded even that feat. And yet, at no time throughout those two millennia did the church use those means to replace the face-to-face, in-the-flesh, residential formation of pastors.

That’s because residential education and formation of the future pastorate of the church are rooted in the Lord’s own enfleshment among us (John 1:14). The reflection of His enfleshment among us cast itself over the education and formation of His emissaries, who stand *vice Christi* (in Christ’s stead), in both the Old and New Testaments. The Levites, charged with teaching the people the things of God, dwelled in

⁴⁴ Statistics available at *gts.edu/Data-Visualization - DVT*. Schools included in the study: Midwest Baptist Theological Seminary, Reformed Seminary, Palmer Theological Seminary, Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Luther Seminary, Fuller Seminary, Denver Seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Asbury Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Bethel Seminary, Talbot School of Theology, Northern [Baptist Theological] Seminary.

page 11 of 12

which, contrary to the Scriptures, ordains women — indeed, affirms the ordination of women⁴⁰ — betrays the unfaithful stance on Scripture shared or tolerated by numerous of the faculty.⁴¹

A concluding word on online theological education

There is clearly not no value in online education (yes: the sentence reads “not no”). It has been widely effective in helping students earn certifications for various professional specialties. It helped, albeit limpingly and with significant negative downstream impacts, sustain U.S. education through the recent pandemic. And, in the absence of other modes of learning, it is one way to learn.

Indeed, numerous studies uphold the value of online education. Truly, students come out of online education knowing more than when they entered. But no one measures the value of education that way. The measure of educational goodness must always be of the *relative* value of one mode of education versus another, one curriculum over against another, this teaching method in comparison to that. Thus, the question before the church is not whether online is of *some* value — we readily concede it is. The question for the church must be of its value relative to that of face-to-face, in-the-flesh, residential seminary education. Nor is the church’s question limited merely to education and knowledge; it must also extend to the formation of a man personally, spiritually, intellectually, emotionally and pastorally. The answer to the question of the value of online education is more sober and sobering when considered in relation to face-to-face, in-the-flesh, residential education, as numerous studies demonstrate.⁴²

One study frequently cited by LCMS advocates for online theological education is titled “(Not) Being There: Online Distance Theological Education.”⁴³ A closer look at the study, however, reveals significant flaws: It deals with only one year of data and asks no longitudinal questions on issues such as attrition from the ministry. It also works with a data set that asks only students whether they feel they are prepared for the ministry, with no objective evaluation of their preparedness. One alarming statistic

⁴⁰ Andrew Ames Fuller, “An Affirmation of Women in Ordained Ministry,” *thenalc.org/en-us/2020/07/23/an-affirmation-of-women-in-ordained-ministry/*, accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

⁴¹ The NALC’s “The Bible as the Word of God,” p. 8, shows this weakness. See *thenalc.org/en-us/2018/11/28/the-bible-as-the-word-of-god*, accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

⁴² A good study on the impact of screen culture, including online education, is Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing Mental Illness* (New York: Penguin, 2024). Most studies of online education are undertaken by advocates of online education. The following studies were undertaken by people who are genuinely interested in the most effective and cost-effective way to educate: William T. Alpert, et al., “A Randomized Assessment of Online Learning,” *American Economic Review* 106, no. 5 (May 2016): 378–82; Eric P. Bettinger, et al., “Virtual Classrooms: How Online College Courses Affect Student Success,” *American Economic Review* 107, no. 9 (Sept. 2017): 2855–75; Cassandra Hart, et al., “Online Course-taking and Student Outcomes in California Community Colleges,” *Education Finance and Policy* 13, no. 1 (2018): 42–71; Nick Huntingdon-Klein, et al., “Selection into Online Community College Courses and Their Effects on Persistence,” *Research in Higher Education* 58 (2017): 244–69; Stephanie Cellini and Hernando Gueso, “Student Learning in Online College Programs,” *AERA Open* 7, no. 1 (2021): 1–18. These studies indicate significant deficiencies with online education. Most interesting, perhaps, is the California Community Colleges study. The State of California clearly has an interest in maximizing outcomes and reducing costs. The study found that students who take the same course online as peers in person lag in learning, and that the lag in learning only builds over time. Deficient learning in a fundamentals course leads to greater deficiency in a mid-level course, which leads to even greater deficiency in an advanced or capstone course.

⁴³ Sharon L. Miller and Christian Scharen, “(Not) Being There: Online Distance Theological Education,” *Auburn Studies*, no. 23 (Fall 2017). Available at *auburnseminary.org/reports/as2017-distance-education*. Accessed Feb. 9, 2026.

page 10 of 12

their own cities, where their business was the transmission of the things of God so that every new generation of Levite could faithfully teach it to all Israel. The “sons of the prophets” located in Bethel, Jericho, Gilgal and Ephraim gathered, lived, slept and ate together as they learned to become prophets in Israel (2 Kings 2–6). The apostle Paul was educated and “raised up” in his own rabbinic training far from his home, Tarsus, at the feet of Gamaliel in Judea (Acts 22:1–3). And the Lord Christ called His disciples, the future apostolate of the holy Christian church, to drop their nets and follow Him (Luke 5:1–11; John 1:35–51). To those unwilling to leave behind nets, parents, plough and livelihood, the Lord Jesus had words of rebuke (Luke 9:57–62; Matt. 8:18–21); he cannot stand in *loca Christi* who must have a place to lay his head. Indeed, in one of the few educational-formational scenes we get in the New Testament after Christ’s ascension, Apollos, the teacher, has gathered around himself “about twelve” disciples (future pastors) in Ephesus, where together they were instructed and grew in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ so that they might in turn bring this message to church and world (Acts 19:1–10).

O Lord, grant unto Your church faithful pastors who shall declare Your truth with power and live according to Your will. Send forth laborers into Your harvest and open the door of faith unto all unbelievers and unto the people of Israel. Amen.

page 12 of 12

R13.4

Report R13.4: Report on Approaches to and Outcomes of Residential and Non-Residential Routes to Ordination (Pastoral Formation Committee, 2023 Res. 6-03A)

Faithful Lutherans formed The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) to confess the truth of the Gospel as revealed in Holy Scripture and faithfully testified to in the *Book of Concord*. To this end, the Synod has many important tasks. One of the LCMS' essential ecclesial tasks is the formation of pastors.¹ The LCMS has tasked the Synod seminaries — Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW) and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (CSL) — to prepare men for the Office of the Holy Ministry through the residential Master of Divinity (M.Div.) and Alternate Route (AR) programs. In addition, in 2007 the Synod in convention approved that its seminaries offer the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program.² In addition to the SMP, CSL prepares men for the pastoral office through the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT, which began in 2010) and the Center for Hispanic Studies (CHS, which began in St. Louis in 2006). CSL partners with Concordia University Irvine, Calif., to prepare pastors through the Cross-cultural Ministry Center (CMC, which began in 1995). CTSFW offers the SMP in both English and Spanish (SMP-EsE).

Reason

The present report fulfills the Synod's request at the 2023 Convention for the Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) to "to prepare a report that examines and compares approaches and outcomes of residential (i.e., in-person) and non-residential (i.e., distance learning) routes to ordination as these relate to the Synod's commitment to a well-formed clergy for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ."³ Since the SMP program was initiated in 2007, the current clergy roster of the Synod contains an adequate number of men prepared for ordination through either the SMP (non-residential) or M.Div./AR (residential) routes to provide data and feedback for study and examination of the routes. To examine and compare these routes, the PFC enlisted the services of an outside agency, Standing Partnership, to interview various people from within the Synod to reflect on not merely supposed or ideal outcomes, but to evaluate those who are serving in the Synod from either the residential or non-residential route.⁴ The following report reflects observations and experiences, but does not claim to address the concepts of non-residential and residential routes in the abstract. Various opinions exist concerning the efficacy and

¹ From the first Synod constitution, 1.6 (Reasons for forming a synodical organization): "The unified spread of the kingdom of God and to make possible the promotion of special church projects (Seminary, agenda, hymnal, Book of Concord, schoolbooks, Bible distribution, mission projects within and outside the Church)." IV.6 and 7 (Business of the Synod): "6. To provide for ecclesiastical ordination and induction into office. 7. The preparation of future preachers and teachers for service in the Church."

² CTSFW states, "The Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program trains pastoral leaders from existing or planned ministry or mission contexts. The curriculum centers around the pastoral acts of baptism, preaching, and the Lord's Supper. These marks of the church define us as Christians and unite us with the universal church. Pastoral formation takes place through engagement with the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the hymnal" (<https://www.ctsfw.edu/academics/programs/specific-ministry-pastor>). Similarly, CSL states, "Concordia Seminary's Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) Program is a four-year state of the art distance education program that prepares men for specific pastoral ministries in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). Students receive academic training in the setting where they will continue to serve following ordination. While taking classes through Concordia Seminary, they work with local pastor-mentors who support them in the program with day-to-day guidance, encouragement and prayer" ([csl.edu/academics/programs/specific-ministry-pastor-smp](https://www.csl.edu/academics/programs/specific-ministry-pastor-smp)).

³ Res 6-03A, 2023 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 162-63.

⁴ For more information on this, see "Method" below.

1

knowledge of Greek or Hebrew for ordination or for program completion, whereas the M.Div. requires proficiency in both languages. Thus, district presidents, circuit visitors and pastors (both M.Div. and SMP) agree that the men who earned their M.Div. at a residential seminary are better equipped theologically (both Scripture and the Confessions of the church) than SMP pastors. Everyone also agreed that this was a strength of the M.Div. route and a weakness of the SMP program. Yet not everyone agrees that biblical languages are necessary or even a true benefit to pastoral practice and ministry. Men ordained through the SMP route are often described as possessing more life experience and a more intimate knowledge of the context/setting into which they are called, since they remain in their setting for both their training and ministry. SMP pastors are often described as having more relational skills, since they do not need to adjust to a new situation after their ordination and call.

Examination and Comparison of Approaches to Residential and Non-residential Routes to Ordination

Residential routes to ordination at LCMS seminaries include M.Div. and Alternate Route programs at both CSL and CTSFW. The M.Div. requires men to learn Hebrew and Greek and to be in residence in St. Louis or Fort Wayne for two years of study, to leave campus for a year of vicarage, and then to return for the last year to complete the M.Div. program. M.Div. students gain practical experience during their time at the seminary through field education congregations. Normally, the third year of the M.Div. program is a vicarage year, during which the student moves away from the seminary to serve an LCMS congregation as a vicar, learning from a supervising pastor as a kind of apprentice (Bylaw 2.8.1(d)).⁵ The M.Div. route at both seminaries remains the route through which the majority of LCMS pastors are formed for lifelong service to Christ's church. The SMP program at each seminary includes online classes and in-person intensives to fulfill the academic requirements. SMP students remain where they live to serve their vicarage during their coursework phase and are ordained at the end of the second year of classes (about halfway through the program). Each SMP student must have a supervisor who is an M.Div. pastor. The supervisor works with the student to model ministry and meets weekly with his SMP supervisee during his classwork (most assignments for SMP courses contain a section that requires supervisor involvement).⁶

Method

Standing Partnership, working with the PFC, conducted interviews with all 35 LCMS district presidents and 59 circuit visitors. In addition, they met with 7 focus groups made up of seminarians, representatives from the seminaries, and those involved in pastoral formation preparation within institutions of the Concordia University System. A survey was also sent to the clergy of the Synod, representing all ministry routes, with more than 1,800 pastors completing the survey. The goal of these interactions was to understand how district presidents, circuit visitors, pastors and others involved in pastoral formation view the outcomes of residential and non-residential pastoral formation routes.

⁵ In certain and rare cases, based upon petition of the student and concurrence of the faculty, students may postpone their vicarage to their fourth year.

⁶ For more information, see the PFC Report, "A Comprehensive, Uniform, Synodwide Specific Ministry Supervision Plan."

3

effectiveness of online or non-residential education. While those debates may contain some beneficial observations, the formation of a man for the Office of the Holy Ministry involves more than educational pursuits. Therefore, the following report seeks to provide reflections of actual outcomes from the Synod's routes to ordination.

The important question for the Synod is how to best serve our Lord and His church through the formation of pastors. Prior to ascertaining the efficacy of routes, the LCMS must reckon with the scriptural description of the Office of the Holy Ministry. One way to frame this discussion is to ask what sort of education and formation prepares a pastor to fulfill the dominical and apostolic mandates to teach "them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19), to hold fast the pattern of sound words (2 Tim. 1:13), to teach and preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), to guard the flock against the "fierce wolves" who teach falsely (Acts 20:29), to be ready in season and out of season to apply the word of truth (2 Tim. 4:2), to use the Holy Scriptures to make men "wise unto salvation" (2 Tim. 3:15), to be faithful in his stewardship of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1)?

One reason for this report and many other current discussions in the Synod is the inequity of those who are ordained through residential and non-residential routes. On the one hand, people perceive different "classes" of pastors, based on their training. On the other hand, surveys (such as the one summarized below) have revealed an observable difference between pastors who have gone through the routes. While each pastor brings to the ministry his own strengths and weaknesses, this report focused on the strengths and weaknesses inherent in each route leading to ordination. No route is perfect, and God can and will work through each man He calls into the Ministry through His church. The question before the Synod is: "What is our Lord's description of the Office of the Holy Ministry, and what kind of pastor, therefore, should the Synod prepare and supply for our congregations?" This report addresses the question: "Are the current routes training such men for the ministry?"

From these observations, the next questions arise: "What can we do to improve the route(s) to ordination? What has our experience taught us? How do we provide faithful, well-equipped pastors for the future generations of the LCMS, for the sake of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ?"

It should be noted that since the bulk of this report reflects the responses to surveys and interviews, the responses reflect both the perceptions and the presuppositions of the respondents. In other words, there was not a predetermined definition of what makes a good pastor, or what is a pastoral strength or a weakness. Therefore, the summaries of these opinions sometimes reflect a view of the role of a pastor that diverges from the LCMS' historic stance. This end of the report offers a commentary on and evaluation of these divergent views.

There was no real divergence on the observation that pastors with an M.Div. received more comprehensive and thorough training in biblical theology and Lutheran doctrine. This preparation and ability results from the presence of the biblical languages and the curricular focus on the Scriptures and the Confessions/Systematic theology in the M.Div. curriculum. The length and breadth of the residential curriculum provides a fuller and more in-depth study, since the SMP requires about one-third the curricular hours of the M.Div. Also, the SMP requires no

2

Results

Participants noted the strength of pastors formed through the residential routes to be theological depth and acumen. The strength of non-residentially formed pastors was identified as understanding contextual relevance.

The interviews and surveys also revealed perceived inadequacies of those produced from all routes. When those interviewed expressed areas needing improvement among residential M.Div. graduates, the most common areas mentioned included leadership training, pastoral care and the ability to relate to people in the congregation. Those interviewed noted the lack of scriptural and confessional understanding and knowledge among SMP graduates. Those interviewed also noted the perception that two classes in the clergy of the LCMS have developed — those who attended the seminary and those who were formed through non-residential routes.

Importance of Research

These findings provide clear and practical insights to guide immediate and long-term decisions about pastoral formation in the LCMS. As the Synod seeks to prepare capable, faithful pastors across diverse contexts, this feedback highlights where formation is working well and where improvements are needed to strengthen readiness, unity and the impact of mission.

Examination and Comparison of Outcomes of Residential and Non-residential Routes to Ordination

Similarities/Shared Concerns

The interviews and meetings produced some noticeable and overarching observations regarding both residential and non-residential routes to ordination. Those interviewed noted a lack of structured opportunities for hands-on ministry leadership and pastoral care. The general lack of proficiency in leadership and business acumen was a constant refrain about the men formed by both residential and non-residential routes. Another general observation raised the issue of a perceived existence of two classes of clergy in the Synod. Those who do not have an M.Div. noted that they feel as though they are seen as "second-class" pastors. This observation was shared by district presidents, circuit visitors and those with an M.Div. Some noted that Synod bylaws create structural inequities that reinforce perceived hierarchies among pastors (e.g., SMPs are ineligible to serve as voting delegates or supervisors for other pastors). Not everyone said this division of clergy is inappropriate — since there is a disparity of education and formation, though all agreed this perceived or real stratification of the clergy is not beneficial to the LCMS. Some noted that this perceived class system or different level of clergy often manifests itself in the absence of many non-residential pastors in winkles. This absence means those men miss not just fellowship opportunities, but also theological discussions and some possible continuing education events.

Respondents expressed that the seminaries need to adapt their current curricula and delivery methods to serve today's learners without sacrificing theological integrity. Some feel that the seminaries are not preparing men to serve in real-life situations of the 21st century, but are still preparing men to serve in congregations facing the realities of previous generations when Christianity enjoyed a more positive role in society and the members of LCMS congregations were generally more biblically literate. There was also consensus that all clergy need to be

4

encouraged to pursue continuing education. Though many do attend conferences or find theological resources (online content or informal study and meetings with peers), many expressed the need for Synodwide continuing education opportunities offered by the seminaries or other Synod entities. The Synod's PALS program provides continuing education for those who are in their first three years of ministry, but there is no current Synodwide program for continuing education following those initial years. One other common observation addressed the (A) lack of a Synod/Lutheran identity among many of the clergy; and (B) graduates of both residential and non-residential routes lack a complete understanding of how Synod and districts work. There seems to be a paucity of training in how to exist as a member of a circuit, district and Synod. Generally, pastors are not familiar with the particularities of how Synod functions and how each pastor is to properly perform official duties such as installations, or to participate in circuit forums, district and Synod conventions, etc.

Weaknesses in Non-Residential Routes

Those involved in the surveys and conversations consistently noted several weaknesses in graduates from the non-residential routes to ordination. Chief among these weaknesses is the lack of theological understanding and an inability to interpret and apply the Scriptures on a level commensurate with graduates of an in-person M.Div. program.⁷ This is due to the lack of biblical languages in non-residential curricula, as well as the fewer number of courses in biblical theology and interpretation. The lack of theological understanding also betrays a curricular imbalance between residential and non-residential routes. The SMP curriculum does not afford the same amount of time for instruction and growth in the Scriptures (e.g., students take one total class on the New Testament in the CSL curriculum, whereas M.Div. students study the New Testament each of their six semesters; at CTSFW, SMP students take 12 credits in the Bible versus 41 for the M.Div.). Less measurable, yet observed by some, is the typical person who pursues non-residential versus residential routes to ordination. Those who do not want to move to seminary for years of study often cite non-theological reasons for avoiding residential education. The given reasons often reflect a focus on relationships, culture, "mission" or personal comfort and finances. While these concerns may be important aspects of the pastoral ministry, non-residential routes sacrifice depth of theological education in favor of these concerns.

The requirement of lifelong supervision for SMP pastors creates an ongoing challenge for the Synod. When a man is ordained as an SMP pastor, the Synod is committing to always provide an M.Div. pastor as a supervisor for as long as that SMP pastor serves. This ongoing supervision was part of the original design of the SMP program approved at the 2007 Synod convention. The rationale comes from the "specific" nature of this training. The Synod (or delegates) thought it wise to have SMP pastors, who have less theological study, serve under the supervision of a pastor with the full M.Div. preparation. Yet, practically speaking, the requirement for ongoing supervision poses significant challenges. Already instances exist wherein the man who served as the SMP's supervisor takes a call or retires. The district president then needs to appoint a new supervisor. With the rise of more SMP pastors, there are fewer M.Div. pastors per SMP pastor.

⁷ A typical example of an interview response to the question about the theological training and ability of the SMP and the M.Div. programs: "The M.Div. guy is going to have a just, simply a better understanding ability to read and understand the Holy Scriptures, knowledge and depth of our Lutheran theology, our confessions. Just no question that the M.Div. guy is going to be better equipped at that point than an SMP guy, or at least he's had the opportunity to be better equipped."

them in the pastoral ministry. Skills included leadership, business management, adaptability, emotional intelligence, administration, listening skills, people skills, public relations, organization and interpersonal communication.

While differences between residential (and all) students exist, like the life experience that second career students bring compared to first career students, some said that the seminaries do not adequately prepare residential students for the unpredictable realities of parish ministry.¹⁰ Some even suggested that the seminaries prepare men only for the "ideal" LCMS congregation. Graduates serve in Synod congregations that are diverse in size, congregational structure and even worship styles. Yet many perceive that the seminaries prepare men to serve in a traditional midwestern, medium-sized LCMS parish. Those that make this observation posit that when congregations do not fit this model, graduates of the residential route may struggle to adjust. Some feel the residential route simply does not prepare men to face the differing realities of the Synod.

Strengths of Non-residential Routes:

The perceived strengths of the non-residential routes include the personal skills of the man and his familiarity with his congregation. Since the man who applies to and is formed through the non-residential routes must learn while serving within a congregation, it logically follows that he will have greater familiarity with the congregation he serves upon graduation. On-the-job contextual experience from the start of the program through ordination, and then a call to that same congregation provides continuity in service for both the man and the congregation. In this way, non-residential pastors often display superior understanding of the congregation and the contextual setting of that congregation. Non-residential pastors were praised for their high level of emotional intelligence and interpersonal relational skills.¹¹ Many non-residential route pastors have a working knowledge of business practices and other practical skills useful in congregational leadership. This is often due to prior experience in other fields. Overall, non-residential route pastors are viewed as having a better grasp on real-world situations and familiarity with various aspects of congregational life, including local tendencies and contextual or local particularities. In short, non-residential pastors were often portrayed as being better able to engage with people and situations.¹² These abilities allow new graduates to immediately lead congregations without the need for situational learning or adaptation. Contextual and congregational familiarity also allows non-residential pastors to know how to introduce changes while being sensitive to and aware of the congregation's situation and history. This familiarity helps avoid conflict that may occur when situational awareness is lacking. Non-residential route

¹⁰ One district president observed, "The greatest strength I think of the formation that happens for a non-residential student is that they are learning and they're applying in a real situation, and not just laboratory."

¹¹ One pertinent response: "A fair number of M.Div. guys are not necessarily attuned to the needs of God's people. So they are very well trained in the content. But the ability to apply that lack of emotional intelligence. We don't see that a ton with SMP guys because they don't have a local pastor saying you should really be a pastor. But you get a lot of guys that go away at 18, wanting to prepare for pastoral ministry that may not have a lot of connection with their pastor, and so they go. They handle all the academics, but they may struggle with bringing the Word of God to bear in the lives of people."

¹² For example: "But you know, leading a congregation, you know there's only so much you can do before [the] rubber meets the road in terms of the training, you see, but putting into practice. But it's tough, because every congregation is a little different. There's no one size fits all for how those things work, but I do think there could be more in terms of administration that could be dealt with at the seminary. There are other categories, such as emotional intelligence that are not necessarily being taught, some things that can be improved."

Many pastors are already serving multi-parish situations and find it difficult if not impossible to provide consistent and beneficial supervision. Another potential difficulty may occur when the only M.Div. pastor available in reasonable proximity to the SMP pastor is a new graduate. There could potentially exist a situation in which a new graduate is assigned as a supervisor for a pastor who has more experience in the ministry. Even when supervisors are found, many — SMP and M.Div. pastors alike — noted the inconsistency in supervision. There does not appear to be an understood standard or even expectation for supervision both during the SMP program and for graduates of the program. Some observed that SMP pastors are unaware that they will have a supervisor throughout their ministry.⁸

Weakness of Residential Route:

Those involved in the surveys and conversations noted weaknesses in graduates from the residential route to ordination. These weaknesses generally fell in the areas of congregational leadership, real world experience, and relationships. The perception was regularly expressed that residentially trained pastors are consistently well-prepared theologically yet often lack skills and abilities to lead a congregation in ways that require business acumen or organizational understanding.⁹ Some also noted that residentially trained pastors sometimes lack interpersonal skills including basic listening skills, emotional intelligence and the ability to relate to other people. Residential pastors, according to some, do not have the same level of contextual awareness or intelligence as non-residential pastors. Indeed, the first several years after a residential student arrives is often spent learning the context and history of the congregation, whereas non-residential students already know these, since they were members of their congregations before they began their seminary studies.

Another factor to consider is that the assessment of the weaknesses of the residential route generally pertains to younger men or men who go straight through from high school to college to seminary. Standing Partnership recently conducted a research project of second-career pastors for *Set Apart to Serve*. This research sought to identify the journey and background of second career pastors who graduated from a residential program at either of the two LCMS seminaries. Previous vocations include marketing management, intelligence work in the military, administration, business owner, retail management and schoolteacher. As identified in non-residentially trained pastors, second career residentially trained pastors bring life experiences, skills and maturity into the first call of the pastoral ministry. In this research project, second career pastors were asked to describe the skills of their previous vocation that are now useful to

⁸ For more information about supervision, see the PFC Report, "A Comprehensive, Uniform, Synodwide Specific Ministry Supervision Plan."

⁹ One respondent who noted he preferred the residential route made the following observations: "The guys that went to residential routes certainly know how to handle the Scriptures. We do a Bible study each month, and I get to use our Greek and Hebrew a little bit, too there, which is great. [Their understanding] of Lutheran theology is very good or excellent. Preaching is also very good. And teaching with teeth. Teaching as well is excellent. Pastoral visitation and care are very good. Leading a congregation? That one, I would say that one you probably have the most questions about after seminary. How do I do this? Are there particular areas that come up when that topic arises? How to affect healthy change? How to address financial issues? Not that you must be involved in the business of the congregation, but you still need to speak about it. Do you need to do a capital campaign? Do you need to talk about stewardship or teach about it? ... And having a good understanding of a church's polity is another area. ... Are they policy based? Is there a parish council? Is there a is it a board model? How do these systems work? Those are questions that we have most often."

pastors were also noted as having a better awareness of a work-life balance since most have already had a full-time job and have had to wrestle with such family issues.

Strengths of Residential Route:

The perceived strength of pastors formed through residential education lie primarily in the area of traditional and necessary biblical and theological formation. Residential routes produce pastors who are well formed in their ability to read, interpret and apply the Holy Scriptures. Due to their study of the original languages, classes in biblical interpretation and biblical theology, and opportunity to hear hundreds of sermons from strong theologians in daily chapel, pastors who moved to and attended residential seminary programs are well-trained in biblical interpretation. This knowledge of Scripture enables them to be effective in preaching, teaching and in pastoral care as they apply the Word of God to the lives of Christ's sheep. In addition to their ability to faithfully use the Scriptures, residentially trained pastors are also experts in Lutheran theology, which is vital to protect the sheep from false doctrine, which hurts and hardens the soul. They are well-versed in the *Book of Concord* and the Creeds of the church. Residentially formed pastors are competent to engage in high-level theological discussions with both those inside the Lutheran church and those from outside the church. Residential formation programs also inform their students of the historical realities of the church, providing the needed context for both the formation and confession of the doctrine of the church. This historical background and understanding helps pastors identify trends and issues as they arise and face the church today. Residential programs also produce men who are apt to teach and preach, which is the means through which the Spirit works faith (Rom. 10:17).

Many noted that although preaching is an art that takes years to master, men who graduate from residential programs have a stronger foundation as preachers. The residential programs provide men with the necessary tools to become good preachers during their ministry. Both the coursework during the residential education years and the experience of vicarage produce men who begin their ministry with a solid foundation of good preaching. Vicarage was noted as an important part of residential formation, since it provides real-world application of the theological education during the three years of seminary education. Fieldwork experience also aids in forming men with practical and contextual experience during their time at seminary. Fieldwork congregations provide a man with an opportunity to experience a congregation that differs from his home congregation. Vicarage provides experience in yet another congregational context and setting. Therefore, by the time a man graduates from a residential seminary route, he has experience in at least three LCMS congregations and can bring that experience to benefit the congregations he serves throughout his ministry.

In addition to their superior training in biblical and doctrinal theology, residential programs provide for essential and beneficial community. Seminary classmates often remain close, and the shared experience of seminary strengthens the bond and the fraternity of the clergy of the LCMS. In addition to lifetime friendships, daily chapel and other campus formation events prepare men and their families for lifetimes of service to the church. The sacrifice and move to St. Louis or Fort Wayne conditions men and their families for lives of service and sacrifice, understanding that they will go where and when the Lord calls (Isaiah 6:8).

Though many respondents noted that many pastors struggle to understand the complexities of the Synod (and districts), residential formation provides more opportunities for exposure to and experience in Synod and district relations. Since a non-residential student remains in the same district in which they have been catechized and formed, their view of the Synod may reflect this limited point of view. Residential routes provide for experience in the student's home district, the district of the seminary, and the district of their vicarage, all before the church calls a student to (possibly) yet another district. During their time at seminary, students are often involved in events that involve officials from the Synod. Thus, by the time a man graduates from a residential seminary, they have experienced at least a tangential exposure to a broader swath of the Synod than a man who remains in the same location and situation during his training and subsequent call.

Strengths of Both Routes:

Though discussion often focuses on the distinction between residential and non-residential routes to ordination, men formed by either route share some strengths. First, those who graduate from either route are largely described as men of sincere faith who are committed to serving the church. Non-residential and residential route pastors confess the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the only means of salvation and confess the Lutheran Confessions as a true exposition of God's Word. Graduates from both routes desire to learn more and to improve their ability to serve their congregations. Overall, graduates of both routes express their appreciation for the cohesive community created through their education; residential pastors with those in their class and time on campus together, while SMP pastors through their cohorts.

District Presidents noted residentially formed pastors bring formal theological leadership, while SMP formed pastors offer strong relational credibility.¹³

Observation from Standing Partnership

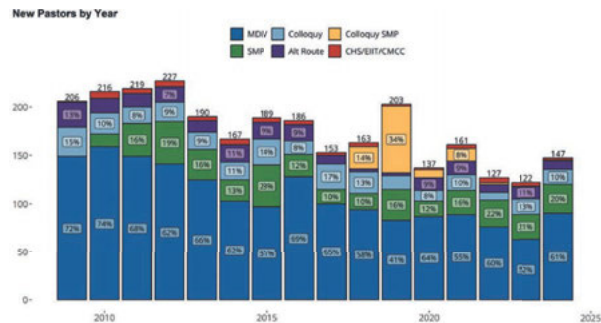
In their summary of the information gained through their extensive interviews and surveys, the employees of Standing Partnership observed: "Even those who are not in the LCMS [i.e. employees of Standing Partnership] noticed a strong perception that non-residential pastors are not prepared theologically on the same level as residential pastors. There is a clear perceived lack in theological understanding and ability to read and interpret the Scriptures with adequate depth and knowledge. This is due not only to the lack of biblical languages, but also to the overall depth of theological knowledge in the non-residential routes. This disparity does not necessarily reflect the integrity or faith of the men who have received such training, but the curricular differences between the routes."

¹³ One such observation: "I think many of our SMPs are very conscious of the mission of the Gospel and have a zeal for outreach and are energized along those paths. That's why they went into the program and wanted to become pastors, even though the challenges were daunting. I do think there may be a tendency for those men to be more governed by their zeal in an emotional way. And perhaps there's a temptation to rely upon those interpersonal kind of skills and emotional motivations and not the same kind of reliance on the objective Word, and a trust that the Word is going to do the heavy lifting. On the other hand ... when you spend 3 years in classroom ... earning an academic degree ... I think those men may be more tempted to rely upon their academic prowess and rely upon the objective power and authority of the Word — which I would absolutely say is a good thing — but perhaps undersell the importance of the way in which the Lord works through means.... So, I think again, there's dangers and temptations on either side."

9

and to pronounce judgment against people he has known and grown up with (or even family members). Historically, the LCMS has sought to not place a man in his home congregation, since such a relationship can be difficult for both the pastor and the congregation.

Data from LCMS Rosters and Statistics (compiled 7/30/2025):



The yellow Colloquy SMP numbers reflect the move from Licensed Lay Deacons to SMP as per Synod Convention resolution. That process has been completed.

The number of pastors formed each year through the SMP and other non-residential routes continues to increase relative to the number of pastors formed through residential routes. This means that the percentage of non-residentially formed pastors in the LCMS is increasing.

This increased percentage of non-residentially formed pastors has implications. First, since each SMP pastor requires lifetime supervision by an M.Div. pastor, there are relatively fewer M.Div. pastors available for an increasing number of SMP pastors. Some of this is mitigated by the average length of service of an SMP pastor compared to M.Div. pastors. On average, SMP pastors serve for 17 years before retirement, while M.Div. pastors serve an average of 37 years.

Non-Survey Observations

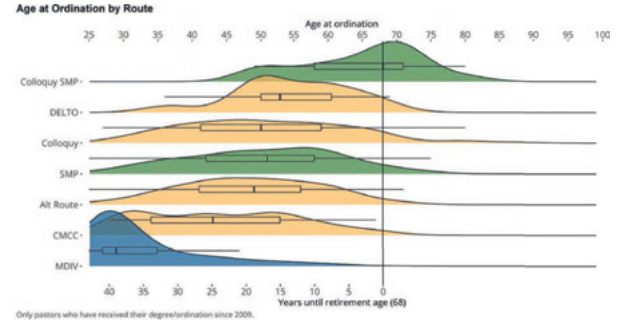
Aside from the training differences, pastors from the different routes also manifest other differences. One major difference is age, with M.Div. pastors much younger on average than SMP pastors. This has several implications. First, M.Div. pastors have many more years of service ahead of them, and therefore the church's investment in their training bears longer service to the church and the world. The age difference may also account for the perceived weakness of M.Div. pastors being less inclined to emotional intelligence and less adequately prepared for leadership and cultural understanding due to their youth. Although pastors formed by residential routes are younger and may need to learn "on the job" how to be more adept at leadership and how to interact with the congregation's unique setting and history, experience shows that who have served for several years usually learn the culture of their congregation and grow in their ability to lead the congregations they serve.

When a congregation sends a man to seminary, they are offering up a young man from their midst for the good of the church at large. That man may return to serve them, or he may be called to serve other congregations in the LCMS. God may even call him into mission work; chaplaincy; teaching in an LCMS high school, university or seminary; or other areas of ministry. When a congregation chooses an SMP pastor, that man is not available for the whole church, but already has a defined call and ministry. This is a major departure from the way the church has historically called and shared pastors.

Though many see cultural familiarity as a strength of non-residential routes, this perceived strength may not be an advantage in every respect. Pastors are called to proclaim the truth of God's Word. A person from outside a congregation may have an easier time diagnosing problems and issues that have become part of the culture of that place. When Jesus called the 12 Apostles, He did not send them to ministries reflective of their cultures. Peter, Andrew, James and John were all fishermen from Galilee, who were called out of their culture to fish for men. The book of Acts records that they were in Jerusalem (an urban setting, unlike fishing in Galilee). John lived out his days in Ephesus where he served as pastor/bishop. Jesus did not teach His disciples to stay in their homes or cultures, but He called them to leave all things for the sake of the Gospel. Even the young pastor Timothy was not instructed regarding culture and familiarity, but instead to preach the truth of the Word to people who looked down on him because he was young. Paul does not say that he should lead with vision or understanding of the culture of the congregation. Paul, a man from Tarsus and who was trained in Jerusalem, conducted his ministry in Gentile locations. This is as far from his native culture as possible. Men grow from exposure to different cultures and can bring the knowledge of other cultures to the congregations he serves throughout his ministry in varied contexts and locations.

Receiving a man from the seminary or from another congregation means that both pastor and congregation must learn together. This is not negative. Though a man from the congregation comes with familiarity, that familiarity may also come with some blind spots and a timid spirit in the face of inevitable adversity and controversy. If a man is restricted to one congregation (his specific ministry), that man may be reticent to address concerns that may result in the congregation no longer desiring his ministry in that specific context, meaning he may lose his job. The pastor who serves his home congregation may find it difficult to truly proclaim the law

10



Another implication, and one that bears much more importance for the life of the church is the reality that SMP pastors have had less theological and biblical study in their programs. This means that a larger percentage of LCMS pastors are less theologically trained each year. In other words, the clergy of the LCMS is less theologically informed and trained each year. Since SMP pastors are noted as being more able relationally and culturally, this ratio could also imply that the clergy of the LCMS is growing more relational and culturally aware. But this does not take into consideration that residentially trained pastors do grow relationally and in their understanding of the culture in which they serve. Preaching Law and Gospel and providing pastoral care naturally enmeshes a man into the lives of his people and draws the members of the congregation to interact with their pastor to receive from him the Word of God and the Sacraments. Pastor and congregation thus grow together as the Body of Christ. Due to the restrictions placed upon SMP pastors, they are not eligible for leadership positions within the district or Synod. Therefore, this decreasing ratio of M.Div. pastors also means fewer candidates for leadership positions in the Synod moving forward.

Concluding Thoughts

The SMP program (and other routes) was not initiated to create an alternative pathway for any man who desires to become a pastor. Indeed, the SMP program was designed and implemented to provide pastors for congregations and ministries facing a situation that made waiting for or calling a residentially trained pastor impossible or extremely unlikely. The experience and observations of district presidents, circuit visitors and even parish pastors verifies that the difference in curriculum manifests in pastors with different levels of biblical and theological acumen. Therefore, strong reasons exist to provide theological supervision for our SMP pastors throughout their years of ministry. We owe this to our SMP pastors and to their congregations. We also owe it to young men preparing for a lifetime of ministry in the church and to the future

11

12

congregations they will serve to steer them toward the fuller initial preparation of the residential M.Div. program.

The Synod must wrestle with a simple but vital question: “How do we train men to serve as pastors according to God’s institution of the office for the sake of His church?” Since AC IV, “Our churches teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works. People are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in His sight (Romans 3 and 4 [3:21–26; 4:5])”¹⁴ forms the material principle of our confession, AC V confesses a vital truth for our Synod: “So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given [John 20:22]. He works faith, when and where it pleases God [John 3:8], in those who hear the good news.” The Office is given to the church for delivering the Gospel through the Means of Grace by “a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

Many desire that pastors should be better trained in business and relational acumen. Yet leadership and business skills, as valuable as they might be, are not essential characteristics or roles of the office. (Indeed, just as the members of a body do not and cannot do the same thing, the many members of the Body of Christ should and do make up for what is missing in any one member [Rom. 12:4–8]). These strengths are noted with the consistent observation of accompanying biblical and theological deficiencies compared to residentially formed pastors. Yet the office is given precisely for the Word and Sacraments. The church does not desire for her pastors to be under-formed or less formed in reading and interpreting God’s Word, in preaching and teaching the full counsel of God as taught in the Scriptures and confessed in the *Book of Concord*, in administering the Sacraments according to our Lord’s own institution and will. Scripture and theology cannot be replaced with emotional intelligence or cultural understanding as the main qualification for the clergy of the LCMS.

Jesus gave His church the gift of the pastoral office (Eph. 4:11) to make disciples of all nations through Word and Sacrament (Matt. 28:19), to forgive sins (Matt. 16:19; John 20:23), to preach His Gospel (2 Cor. 5:20), and to administer His Sacraments (1 Cor. 4:1). This ministry takes place in the midst of God’s people and within various cultural manifestations. God’s Word alone instructs the church on what is essential for the Office to be the Office as our Lord desires and gave it to the church. Each man called into a concrete situation must learn how to preach and teach God’s Word to the people in that setting. This will always require growth in understanding the unique challenges and joys of that community. Yet the essence of the call is not visionary leadership or community understanding, not budget administration or congregational organization. The essence of the call remains the Word of God and the primary duty of the Office is the preaching of the Word and administration of the Sacraments. And the church must seek men who are well-trained in that Word, those who can stand against the devil’s schemes (Eph. 6:10–17) and proclaim Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 1:23). In so doing the pastor will provide salvation for all who hear (1 Tim. 4:16). Relationships, friendliness, leadership,

¹⁴ All references to the Lutheran Confessions are from Paul T. McCain et al., eds, *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, 2nd ed. (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005).

continue to give His church faithful shepherds, and we trust that His Word will continue to accomplish exactly what He intends and desires (Isaiah 55:10–11; John 8:31–32).

organization, cultural awareness or whatever other human qualifications and abilities may be found in or desired in a man called to the Office must all exist in service to the ministry of Word and Sacraments. When human qualities become the primary qualification or even desired characteristics of one in the Office, the church places herself in danger of losing not just the Office, but the very Word of the Gospel itself.

Many describe our current culture as post-Christian or post-Constantinian, as one dominated by normal nihilism or characterized by “nones.” Into such a setting, God continues to call men as His undershepherds to care for His flock (John 21:15–17), which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). The care His lambs need the most is that which comes through and from God’s Word (Rom. 10:17), the only source of eternal life (John 6:68). Those called to be pastors must be fully trained (as much as possible) in this Word of God. Pastors must know deeply the confessions of the church and the history of that confession. Let us not listen to the itching ears of this world, seeking pastors who are earthly leaders who employ earthly strategies to “grow” the church. Let us trust our Lord’s own will and direction, that His church will continue in the steadfast confession that He is Lord, which comes through His Word (Rom. 10:9–17). Let us never tire in our meditating on that Word (Psalm 1) and thus rejoicing in God’s gracious justification through faith in Christ alone (Rom. 3:24–25).

Pastoral training must focus on instruction in the Word, trusting that the Word of Christ is the only means through which God’s people receive salvation, deliverance from death and the power of the devil. God gave His Word to us in Hebrew and Greek. Those called to proclaim that Word must be equipped to read and interpret His Word fully and with complete confidence, confessing the Lutheran Confessions with boldness. Where this theological knowledge and ability is lacking, the Synod must seek to better equip and train, for faith in God’s own promises in the efficacy of His Word (Isaiah 55:10–11) thus compels us (2 Cor. 5:14–15).

The organizational and functional needs of congregations cannot be fully taught in the seminary, but are learned in part during vicarage and in fieldwork. These skills are often learned more fully through experience in each unique setting. Pastors in the field should be encouraged to pursue learning in various fields to best serve their congregation. Pastors may acquire such skills and knowledge through official continuing education through the universities of the Concordia University System working with the seminaries, or by learning from laypeople who are experts in leadership, budgeting and other organizational elements. Such continuing education must be available to all pastors regardless of their route to ordination.

Growth in understanding the Word of God will continue until Christ returns, as Paul encourages the church to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col. 3:16). Therefore, the LCMS provides continuing education opportunities for her clergy, where they can gather to study God’s Word and address today’s concerns in accord with the confession of the church based on the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord has described the blessed life as one marked by day and night meditation upon His Word (Psalm 1).

Our Lord bid His disciples to pray the Lord of the harvest for workers (Matt. 9:38). He promised that the harvest is plentiful (Matt. 9:37). And so we pray, and we trust. We pray that the Lord

R13.5

POLICY REQUIREMENTS FOR THE SPECIFIC MINISTRY PASTOR PROGRAM:

ADMISSION, ADMINISTRATION AND SUPERVISION
— LCMS PASTORAL FORMATION COMMITTEE —
NOVEMBER 2025

PREAMBLE

The 2013 convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) charged the Synod's "SMP Committee" with providing refined parameters and policies for continuing and strengthening the Synod's Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program.¹ This assignment was never completed, and the "SMP Committee" no longer exists. Therefore, the 2019 and 2023 LCMS conventions tasked the Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) to provide such parameters to the church.² The PFC has explored these matters through significant engagement with the broader Synod at many levels, including one-on-one formal interviews with all 35 district presidents; additional informal conversations with many of the district presidents; surveys returned by more than 1,800 pastors; attendance and conversations with pastors and laypeople at most of the 35 district conventions in 2025; and meetings with the SMP directors of the seminaries, the seminaries' boards of regents, the LCMS Council of Presidents (COP), the COP and seminary faculties together, and a joint meeting of the two seminary faculties. Informed by Synod convention actions and the above interactions, the PFC hereby establishes the following policy requirements for the SMP program. These are preceded below by several premises that have emerged as important considerations.

PREMISES

Premise 1: "[God] desires all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). Our gracious Lord established the Office of the Holy Ministry and calls men to serve as pastors over His dear flock. Moved by compassion as He looked upon crowds, Jesus declared, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Matt. 9:37–38). St. Paul says that those who desire to serve in this way desire "a noble task" (1 Tim. 3:1). God has established the office of preaching that, by means of "the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments" people might receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation "freely ... for Christ's sake, through faith" (Augsburg Confession V and IV; hereafter, AC). This office of preaching should be treated in the church with diligence and good order, so that "no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call" (AC XIV). It is a serious and necessary calling, for pastors "are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account" before God (Heb. 13:17). For these reasons the LCMS has always given great care to the preparation of its pastors.

Premise 2: The LCMS has entrusted its two seminaries with the task of preparing well-formed pastors for the flock of God and for Christ's commission to make disciples of all nations. These pastors must be wise and faithful disciples of the Holy Scriptures and confessors of *Book of Concord* Lutheranism. These undershepherds of Christ must be bold, faithful, joyful proclaimers of Christ. The church needs many such pastors.

Premise 3: The Synod's SMP program was created by action of the 2007 convention "to address real-world needs with an urgency for bringing the Gospel to a dying world" while acknowledging the reality that "emerging needs and economic pressures often make it impossible to call a pastor who has received a broad and thorough theological education to every congregation or mission station where, nevertheless, people need to hear the Gospel" (2007 Res. 5-01B). The SMP program, as implemented at

¹ 2013 Res. 5-02E and 5-04B.² The PFC is "responsible for ensuring that the Synod's objective of training pastors is fulfilled consistently (Constitution Art. III §) [LCMS Bylaw 3.10.4].

- 1 -

provides invaluable tools for such later learning, including broader perspectives on church history, doctrinal resources and knowledge of the original languages of the Bible. Bivocational SMP pastors, in particular, may find it challenging to engage in many continuing education opportunities, such as conferences and weekday circuit pastors meetings, because of work commitments.

Premise 9: The SMP program is more suitable for older men than for younger. Evidence shows greater completion rates in the SMP program for men over 40, compared to younger participants. A man who begins pastoral preparation before age 40 is likely to be able to provide 30 years or more of full-time service to the broader church. Young men preparing for a lifetime of ministry in the LCMS should attend a full-time residential program at one of the Synod's seminaries. The church affirmed this at the 2023 LCMS convention: "Resolved, 'That the district presidents and seminaries be strongly encouraged to direct men to residential pastoral ministry routes [at our Synod's seminaries] as the preferred option.'"³ See also the 2023 PFC Report 60: "The PFC and seminaries affirm the proposition that 'the most complete means of preparing a man for the general responsibilities of the pastoral office and a lifetime of service is the residential master of divinity route at the Synod's seminaries.'"⁴

Premise 10: The ongoing supervision of SMP pastors throughout their years of service places extra commitments on the other pastors of the church (work in addition to the call to serve a congregation). That supervisory burden will become more pronounced and more challenging to fulfill as the number of SMP pastors grows in proportion to the number of general pastors.⁵

Premise 11: Many SMP applications arrive to the seminaries fully completed, with the endorsement of a congregation and their district president included, before any contact or conversation has occurred between the student and the seminary. In other words, without any consultation with the seminaries, these men have decided to pursue distance education and more limited-scope service to the church rather than pursuing full-time residential preparation in the M.Div. or Residential Alternate Route (RAR) programs. These same students often report that they are pursuing the SMP program because it would not be possible for them to attend the seminary residentially. However, an individual's perspective on the question, "Would it work for me to pursue the residential M.Div. or RAR?" will be better informed by speaking with seminary admissions officers, staff and residential seminarians. If congregations and district presidents can put all men aspiring to be pastors (including those interested in SMP) into contact with seminary admissions officers as early as possible in their planning process and if seminary admissions officers will maintain good communication with district presidents, this will benefit these men and the broader church. The goal should be to fully inform these men so they can make the best decisions regarding the stewardship of their sacrificial service to the church.

Premise 12: The SMP route should not be seen as a "choice among route-to-ordination alternatives" by a man desiring to serve, even in his local context, in the pastoral office. The mistaken perception exists among some in the LCMS that the SMP program is an "online option" as is typical in some fields today. This treats the SMP program as one option among others from which an individual may decide how he wants to pursue pastoral formation and ministry in the LCMS. The 2023 PFC Report 60 helpfully clarifies this, stating: "Generally speaking, such contexts [approved for SMP ministry] should be thoughtfully identified and assessed by the congregation in careful consultation with the district (especially the district president). ... In creating the SMP route and acknowledging the role that distance learning would play in its implementation, the Synod's objective was not simply to offer a nonresidential distance learning alternative to the residential MDiv route."⁶

Premise 13: The SMP program is not designed to theologically re-wire recent Lutheran converts from non-Lutheran backgrounds; it is not sufficient for this purpose. The SMP curriculum assumes that the men enrolled have a firm and mature grasp of and commitment to basic Lutheran theology.

Premise 14: There are some circumstances in which part-time or bivocational ordained pastors can be a great blessing to the church's mission, and the ministry of these men should be valued and honored. The SMP program is particularly useful in

¹ 2023 Res. 6-02A, which is here quoting 2019 Res. 6-02.² 2023 Convention Workbook, 129, citing 2013 Res. 5-14A Task Force and 2016 Res. 6-03, emphasis added.³ COP Document 14.2.8, states that the district president will identify a local pastor to serve as supervisor, and will secure replacement if he leaves, in consultation with the seminary; it also states that the district president will support a non-SMP pastor to serve as the ongoing supervisor for the SMP pastor throughout his years of service.⁴ 2023 Convention Workbook, 129, emphasis original.

- 3 -

our two seminaries, has served the church well by providing basic theological and pastoral formation for men willing to serve as pastors in such situations, who then serve under certain restrictions and under ongoing pastoral supervision. We thank God for the pastors formed through our SMP program and regard them with honor as called and ordained servants of Jesus Christ conducting valid ministry.

Premise 4: The intention in creating the SMP program was not that it become a preferred or prevalent route for pastoral preparation, given its more limited scope. Since its creation, regular appeals have been made, with formal requests issued by the 2013, 2019 and 2023 conventions, that the Synod provide more specific direction and policy parameters regarding the optimal uses of the SMP program for the well-being of the church and her mission. The PFC has engaged in extensive conversations with LCMS constituencies and, with this document, is providing clarified SMP policy parameters to the seminaries, to district presidents and to congregations, as directed by the LCMS in convention.

Premise 5: Currently, and for the foreseeable future, the LCMS is facing a shortage of pastors. While robust recruitment efforts are underway through *Set Apart to Serve* and through seminary, university and district initiatives, many small congregations struggle to call and support a full-time pastor. Parameters for the SMP program should be conceived, designed and managed to address the challenges faced by these small congregations in particular, and to maintain and enhance the overall long-term well-being of the church and her mission and ministry. The development and calling of an SMP pastor is one among numerous good options for addressing the need for a pastor in certain small congregations. For many such situations, the church also has other good, wise and appropriate options: church consolidation or partnerships, multi-point congregations, use of lay readers of sermons, a blessed closure that enables assets to be used for fruitful ministry elsewhere while ensuring existing members receive care at nearby LCMS congregations, and so forth.⁷

Premise 6: There is long-term value to the man himself, to his congregation of origin, and to the church at large when a young man is sent to the seminary and set aside for years of full-time study by enrolling in the residential pastoral formation programs at our seminaries so that he may be shared with the wider church throughout his lifetime of ministry. The 2023 LCMS convention appealed to all LCMS congregations, districts and seminaries to prioritize and strongly encourage such full-time, residential formation for prospective pastors (2023 Res. 6-02A and 6-03A). The SMP program should be structured in such a way that it does not discourage or detract from full-time, residential seminary preparation for men pursuing a lifetime of ministry in the LCMS.

Premise 7: The proportion of men completing the most comprehensive program of pastoral preparation (M.Div. at one of the two Synod seminaries) matters. When the church's confession is clear and strong, the mission and ministry of the church is invigorated. The long-term scriptural confession and scriptural confidence of the LCMS is placed at risk if a substantial proportion of its pastors have received less preparation in biblical study, the Lutheran Confessions, Lutheran doctrine, church history and the disciplines of pastoral theology. The clear proclamation and defense of biblical truth is hampered when fewer of the Synod's pastors have learned the original biblical languages, Hebrew and Greek. Martin Luther warned at length that learning Hebrew and Greek must not again be lost among the teachers of the church at peril of losing the Gospel itself (see Luther's Works, AE 45:358–68).⁸

Premise 8: Related to the previous, the men completing the most comprehensive program of pastoral preparation (M.Div.) are better positioned than SMP pastors to take up an ensuing lifetime of additional rigorous continuing education that deepens their ability to serve. The ministry of our pastors is greatly enriched by continued theological and practical growth after their years of seminary formation. The Synod in convention has spoken clearly of its desire to support and encourage rigorous continuing education (see 2019 Res. 6-04 and 6-07 and 2023 Res. 6-06A and 6-07A). While some argue that the lesser depth of SMP preparation can be compensated for by continuing education later in ministry, the reality is that richer initial preparation

¹ Regarding these options, including the use of lay readers of sermons, see the April 13, 2023, CTCR document *President of Synod Request for Opinion on Lay Reading of Sermons and Conduct of Worship in the Absence of a Pastor* and the October 4, 2024, CTCR document *Mission and Ministry Principles and Practical Observations and Suggestions, especially "Practical Observations and Suggestions,"* Section 2.a. Both are available at resources.lcms.org/reading-study/ctcr-library-church-and-ministry-lutheran-doctrine-and-practice.² As just one brief excerpt states: "In proportion then as we value the gospel, let us zealously hold to the languages. For it was not without purpose that God caused his Scriptures to be set down in these two languages alone—the Old Testament in Hebrew, the New in Greek. ... And let us be sure of this: we will not long preserve the gospel without the languages. The languages are the sheath in which this sword of the Spirit [Eph. 6:17] is contained; they are the vessel in which this wine is held; they are the ladder in which this God is stored. ... Experience has proved this and gives evidence of it. For as soon as the languages declined to the vanishing point, after the apostolic age, the gospel and faith and Christianity itself declined more and more until under the pope they disappeared entirely. After the decline of the languages Christianity withered until that was worth anything; indeed, a great many dreadful abominations arose because of ignorance of the languages" (AE 45:359–61).

- 2 -

providing pastoral preparation for men serving such settings. At the same time, St. Paul wrote: "Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:13–14; see also vv. 8–12). In view of our Lord's command, the Synod should not intentionally plan its future and mission strategy around part-time pastoral service. For congregations where revitalization or consolidation is in reach, a part-time pastor may not be the best option, since he may not be able to devote to the task the kind of time and effort needed to achieve those ends.

Premise 15: The Synod's collective aim to increase the number of men recruited for service in the pastoral office must always be carefully balanced by the Synod's aim to prepare the highest quality graduates for ministry and mission, and vice versa. In other words, quantity and quality of pastors must always go in tandem.

Premise 16: The 2007 LCMS convention approved the creation of the SMP program to prepare men for certain specific (specialized) ministries. The understanding was that an SMP pastor's future calls and mobility would be restricted to "a similar specific ministry context."⁹ However, the SMP program has not, in fact, been developed with any "tracks" or specializations. (The residential M.Div. program, with greater room for elective courses, is more easily adapted to such specializations.) The SMP curriculum at each seminary is a single, standard curriculum of general, minimal preparation for pastoral ministry. The students in each SMP cohort come from varied ministry contexts. The "specific ministry" (specialization) for which an SMP student prepares is, in fact, the context of their current place/context of ministry. The program routinely asks them to reflect on the learning taking place in view of their current context, and their mentor pastor supports and advises their development within that particular context.

Premise 17: SMP placement and service assume the man's familiarity with the context and community of his place of service, as well as that congregation/community's familiarity with and established confidence in the man. The design of the SMP program as originally conceived did not envision a congregation recruiting an SMP candidate from outside the congregation or a man seeking an SMP placement and, with the assistance of a pastor or district president, finding a congregation where he might serve.

POLICY REQUIREMENTS FOR SMP ADMISSIONS, ADMINISTRATION AND SUPERVISION

1. SMP applicants must have membership and significant service in an LCMS congregation for at least the last 5 years. (*)
2. SMP applicants must have membership in the congregation of placement, or a nearby congregation, for at least the last 3 years. (*)
3. SMP applicants must be at least 40 years old. (*)
4. Prospective SMP applicants will be directed from the beginning of the process to seminary admissions counselors for clarification regarding the nature of the SMP program and for exploration of the possibilities of residential seminary study. A visit to the campus of one of the LCMS seminaries will be strongly encouraged as part of the application and vocational discernment process for SMP applicants. Congregations should not act or vote to approve a man for SMP service before he has confirmed his willingness to enter the SMP program after consultation with one or both of the LCMS seminaries.
5. As part of the SMP application process, congregations in which and supervising pastors under which SMP students will be learning will affirm their ready willingness to teach and practice according to our Synod's doctrines and resolutions.
6. Seminary admissions will give priority to SMP applicants who will serve congregations that could otherwise not receive Word and Sacrament ministry.
7. Congregations and districts should pledge themselves to be responsible for the funding of the student's program (if feasible in the circumstance) to create a clear sense of their involvement, fully considered commitment and valuing of the SMP pastor's program of study and service.

⁹ 2007 Convention Proceedings, 135.

- 4 -

8. Ongoing supervision of SMP pastors throughout their careers of ministry will be formalized, defined, documented (i.e., on LCMS Church Worker Locator, Pastoral Information Forms) and required for continued rostered SMP status. Commitment to long-term supervision will be explicitly acknowledged and planned by the student and by the congregation, circuit and district from the beginning of the program and shall be the responsibility of the district president and the SMP pastor to arrange and document on a continuing basis.

(*) Exceptions to Policy Requirements 1–3 may be recommended to the admissions committees of the seminaries by the Council of Presidents after approval by a majority of the COP.

STATUS AND INTENTION OF THESE POLICY REQUIREMENTS

These policy requirements for the LCMS SMP program stand as:

- An official re-articulation of the nature and parameters of the SMP program to foster a shared, common understanding of the program across our Synod;
- An affirmation of the value and legitimacy of the SMP program for its defined purposes;
- A reassertion of key aspects of the original design of the SMP program;
- A reflection of the church's prioritization of full-time pastoral formation in a seminary community;
- An effort to maintain a salutary balance within our overall ministerium between residentially formed pastors and SMP pastors;
- Policy requirements for district presidents in their counsel of potential SMP applicants and approval of SMP sites; and
- Policy requirements for the seminaries in the operation of the SMP program, including eligibility and prioritization considerations for admission to the program.



R13.6

Report on the Development of a Comprehensive, Uniform, Synodwide Specific Ministry Supervision Plan (Pastoral Formation Committee, 2023 Res. 6-03A)**ASSIGNMENT**

The 2023 LCMS Convention delegates assigned the Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) “to develop and present a comprehensive, uniform, synodwide Specific Ministry Supervision Plan.” (2023 Resolution 6-03A [*Proceedings*, 163]).

PREFACE

For clarity in its fulfillment of the task assigned to it by Resolution 6-03A, the PFC has identified and distinguished three consecutive, distinct time periods during which supervision is provided for specific ministry vicars/pastors. This nomenclature will apply throughout the balance of this report:

- Period A: The initial two-year time of seminary studies undertaken by a specific ministry student-vicar¹, ending with his examination (seminary certification), call, and ordination as a specific ministry pastor;
- Period B: The subsequent two-year time of seminary studies undertaken by a specific ministry student-pastor (newly ordained and serving in context as a specific ministry pastor to his calling LCMS congregation-of-origin), ending with graduation from the seminary’s program of specific ministry instruction; and
- Period C: The subsequent service to an LCMS congregation by a specific ministry pastor following graduation from the seminary’s program of specific ministry instruction.

The provision of adequate supervision over specific ministry vicars and pastors over Periods A, B, and C has been a mandatory feature of the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program since its formal establishment by the Synod in 2007 Resolution 5-01B. LCMS Bylaw 2.13.1 directs that every specific ministry pastor shall “... serve under the supervision of his district president and another pastor who is not a specific ministry pastor” without limitation as to the time period under which the specific ministry pastor shall remain under supervision—that is, for the entire remaining period of a man’s service as a specific ministry pastor in the LCMS.

¹ Every SMP student is, by definition, a vicar serving an LCMS congregation-of-origin from the very start of seminary studies until certification and ordination into the Office of the Holy Ministry as an LCMS specific ministry pastor. Currently, specific ministry pastor certification and ordination occur at the midway point of seminary studies (i.e., after two years, with two subsequent years of seminary studies remaining until graduation); this midpoint timing of SMP certification and ordination remains unchanged from the Synod’s establishment of the SMP program in 2007.

general ministry pastor. As such, they are eligible for calls into a similar specific ministry context, where they continue *under the supervision of a general ministry pastor*” [emphasis added].

Because their theological education is formed within the context of their specific ministry and does not represent the breadth and depth of theology and ecclesiology that forms a basis for pastoral oversight beyond the local level, they may not be placed into ecclesiastical roles of exercising pastoral oversight outside the location of their specific call (i.e., in the church-at-large), such as ... d. *supervising* vicars [emphasis added].

(C) Add a new section at the beginning of Bylaw section 2.3 to define a” specific ministry pastor” and the limitations on membership privileges and responsibilities that pertain, as follows:

Specific Ministry Pastor Status and Limitations

2.13.1 A “specific ministry pastor” is a minister of religion—ordained who has completed the requirements for service as a specific ministry pastor and has been examined by one of the Synod’s seminaries, has received a regular call, and has been placed by the Council of Presidents into a specific Word and Sacrament ministry context. He is eligible to serve only in that specific ministry context for which he has been trained and may not be offered or accept a call for ministry for which he has not been certified as determined by his district president. *He shall serve under the supervision of his district president and another pastor who is not a specific ministry pastor* [emphasis added].

- (a) Because he is *under supervision* of another pastor and because a specific ministry pastor’s theological education has been formed in part by and for a specific ministry context, he may not be placed or called into ecclesiastical supervision roles that exercise pastoral oversight outside the location of his call [emphasis added].³

(E) Change Bylaw 3.1.3.1 to read as follows:

... and be it further *Resolved*, That the DELTO Oversight Committee be renamed as the Specific Ministry Pastor Committee; and be it further

Resolved, That the Specific Ministry Pastor Committee be placed under the *supervision* of the Board for Pastoral Education [emphasis added]; and be it further

Resolved, That the Specific Ministry Pastor Committee develop comprehensive guidelines that are consistent with the theological foundations, educational expectations, rostering process, training of *mentors* and *supervising* pastors, and membership limitations intended for this Specific Ministry Pastor Program [emphasis added]; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Specific Ministry Pastor Committee submit a progress report to the Synod at least nine months prior to the 2010 convention.

³ LCMS 2019 Bylaw 2.13.1, p. 63.

The 2007 Resolution 5-01B, “To Establish Specific Ministry Pastor Program,”² includes the following statements:

Theological Foundations Guiding the Proposal (p. 133)

2. Lutherans affirm that there is only one Office of the Holy Ministry, established by God for the public conduct of the ministry of Word and Sacrament. However, the church may recognize certain distinctions within that one Office of the Holy Ministry and establish *degrees of supervision* without undermining the unity of the office [emphasis added].
 - a. All those who serve Christ in the Office of the Holy Ministry exercise *de iure divino* (by divine authority) the power to preach the Gospel, forgive sins, administer the Sacraments, and exercise church discipline. There is no distinction within the one office with respect to *this* power and authority.
 - b. Nevertheless, all ministers serve under *supervision* [emphasis added]. In ancient times, the practice of making certain distinctions within the one Office of the Holy Ministry *de iure humano* (by human authority) was established so that those ministers with broader and deeper theological understanding should be able to provide doctrinal *supervision* for less experienced, or less well-prepared, ministers [emphasis added]. These distinctions were made to ensure that the Gospel was rightly preached and taught, and to preserve the unity of the church. ...

Overview of the “Specific Ministry Pastor” Program (p. 134)

The specific curriculum will be determined and developed by the seminary faculties, in collaboration with those from the field who represent the specific ministerial contexts at district and congregational levels. It will be based on the following principles: ...

3. The engagement of *supervisors/mentors* by the seminary in consultation with the district presidents as a critical element of the distance education model [emphasis added]. ...

The Specific Ministry Pastor Program will utilize selected *mentors* in the preparation of a man for pastoral ministry with an emphasis on the area of spiritual formation [emphasis added]. ...

Step 2: Preordination Curriculum (p. 135)

Upon entrance into the Specific Ministry Program, the student will be assigned as a vicar in a specific locality but normally will not be authorized to administer the Sacraments. He will preach sermons prepared in collaboration with and approved by *his supervisor* [emphasis added]. ...

Step 3: Certification/Call/Ordination (p. 135)

After certification, call, and ordination according to the usual order, the student is placed on the pastoral roster of the Synod as a “specific ministry pastor.” He now may preach and administer the Sacraments *under supervision* in a specific locality [emphasis added].

Step 5: Completion of the Specific Ministry Pastor Program (p. 135)

Specific ministry pastors are recognized as just that: pastors certified for calls into specific ministry contexts, who serve *under the supervision* not only of the district president but also of a designated

² Floor Committee 5, “Seminary and University Education:” C: Jon Diefenthaler (SE), DP: Vice-chair: Carl Krueger, Jr. (SELC); Richard Boche (WY); John Wille (SW); VOM: Allen Behnke (SE); Philip Kaufmann (CI); Chris Kelllogg (RM); Michael Redeker (IN); VL: John Bahr (AT); Kathy Meier (MNS); Janice Nafzger (MO); AOM: Arleigh Lutz (NW); Ronald Wiese (MDS); ACM: Ron Bork (NEB); Jonathan Laabs (NI).

SUPERVISION OF SMP STUDENT-VICARS AND SMP STUDENT-PASTORS (PERIODS A AND B)**Supervision Documents Developed by the SMP Committee**

In May 2012, the SMP Committee issued its first report to the Synod. The SMP Committee sent a second update on March 15, 2013, “The Specific Ministry Program: A White Paper Presented to the LCMS.”

In its 2013 white paper, the SMP Committee reported that the committee had developed and posted a number of SMP policies, procedures and documents as of March 31, 2008.

Following the adoption of the SMP program in principle at the 2007 LCMS Convention, the SMP Committee’s immediate attention was dedicated to developing common policies, procedures, and documents that both seminaries could utilize Synod-wide. These policies and documents were crafted by sub-groups of the SMP Committee and agreed-upon by all parties involved. They include *Admission Criteria*, *Admission Sequence*, *Application for Admission*, *Pastor Supervisor Responsibilities* [a.k.a. “Specific Ministry Pastor-Supervisor Position Description”], *Covenant Agreement* [a.k.a. “Partnership Covenant for Participation in the SMP Program”], and *Congregational Instructions for Vicarage Application*. The final document developed, the *Application for Admission*, was posted on March 31, 2008. These documents were posted electronically on the Web sites of both seminaries and of the former LCMS Board for Pastoral Education.⁴

Currently, the Council of Presidents Manual (including its accompanying documents) contains the original SMP Committee’s above-cited policies, procedures, and documents in unamended form from 2008. The current (as of May 2025) CSL SMP Manual contains *similar* policies, procedures, and documents, but with some amendments subsequently made that have resulted in differences when compared with both (1) the original SMP Committee’s above-cited policies, procedures, and documents and (2) the COP Manual (including its accompanying documents). CTSFW is currently developing a comprehensive SMP Manual that will gather all SMP policies, procedures, and documents in one place.

The above-cited policies, procedures, and documents developed by the original SMP Committee pertain to the SMP Program during Periods A and B. With some amendments subsequently made, these policies, procedures, and documents (without yet making use of the Period A and B nomenclature), are materially still in use and managed by the seminaries. Two of the original SMP Committee’s documents directly pertain to Period A and B specific ministry *supervision*:

1. *Pastor Supervisor Responsibilities* [a.k.a. “Specific Ministry Pastor-Supervisor Position Description”]. This document details the qualifications, selection, responsibilities, accountability, compensation, and terms of service of the pastor-supervisor.

⁴ The Specific Ministry Pastor Committee of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “The Specific Ministry Pastor Program: A White Paper presented to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,” March 15, 2013, p. 3.

2. *Covenant Agreement* [a.k.a. “Partnership Covenant for Participation in the SMP Program”]. This document details the commitments of the seminary, district president, sponsoring entity/calling agency, pastor-supervisor, and specific ministry student-vicar and student-pastor, among which is a commitment for the provision of SMP supervision.

Both documents—*Pastor Supervisor Responsibilities* and *Covenant Agreement*—are included in the COP Manual and the CSL SMP Manual (with various amendments in the CSL SMP Manual). The *Covenant Agreement* was most recently reviewed by the COP in April 2024. The preface of this document states:

Participation in the SMP program requires a relationship of trust among those involved in this unique opportunity to prepare workers for Christian ministry and mission. A candidate for this program does not initiate the admission process himself, but rather is nominated and supported by those who represent and are responsible for the specific ministry/mission into which the candidate will be placed. This document articulates the covenant of trust and responsibility that exists among the seminary, the candidate, the sponsoring ministry/mission, and the district.

For sake of consistency and to avoid confusion, both of these “old” documents — *Pastor Supervisor Responsibilities* and *Covenant Agreement* — should be replaced as “SMP-Supervising Pastor Position Description Prior to SMP Graduation and Certification (Periods A and B)” and “Partnership Covenant for Participation in the Specific Ministry Pastor Program” in the seminary manuals and the COP Manual with the PFC’s newly developed documents proposed here (Appendix A) in fulfillment of the PFC’s Resolution 6-03A assignment.

SUPERVISION OF SPECIFIC MINISTRY PASTORS
RATIONALE AND FEEDBACK/COMMENTS
(PERIOD C)

Rationale for Ongoing Supervision in Period C

2023 LCMS Bylaw 2.13.1 states that upon graduation the specific ministry pastor “shall serve under the supervision of his district president and another pastor who is not a specific ministry pastor.” From the creation of the SMP Program (2007 Resolution 5-01B) to the present, the specific ministry pastor serves under such supervision for the duration of his ministry as a specific ministry pastor.

The primary reason for SMP supervision after graduation and certification is stated in the original 2007 Resolution 5-01B:

All ministers serve under supervision. In ancient times, the practice of making certain distinctions within the one Office of the Holy Ministry *de iure humano* (by human authority) was established so that those ministers with *broader and deeper theological understanding* should be able to provide doctrinal supervision for the less experienced, or less well-prepared, ministers. These distinctions were made to

ensure that the Gospel was rightly preached and taught, and to preserve the unity of the church [*emphasis added*].

2007 Resolution 5-01B further states:

The church should provide the opportunity for a pastor who has been certified and ordained to serve in a specific kind of ministry subsequently to be prepared to serve the church more broadly through a combination of *further academic preparation*, accumulated pastoral experience, and examination [*emphasis added*].⁴

Credits and Contact Minutes: Master of Divinity and SMP

Pastoral formation through the attainment of a Master of Divinity degree is the route to pastoral ministry in the LCMS that embodies, using the language of 2007 Resolution 7-01B, “broader and deeper theological understanding.” 2023 LCMS Resolution 6-03A reaffirms what previous conventions also stated, namely that:

The residential Master of Divinity (M.Div.) route at our Synod seminaries continues to be positioned and understood as the Synod’s strongly preferred route to ordination, supplying Synod congregations with well-formed, highly educated pastors who as members of the Synod (ministers of religion—ordained, Bylaw 2.6.1) are prepared to preach, teach, and care for souls over a lifetime of faithful ministry in *any and every context* into which the Lord calls them into service” [*emphasis added*].

The following table presents a brief comparison of the pastoral formation routes available through CSL. (Note that total credits are listed here as *semester* credit hours.)

CSL	Total Semester Credits	Classroom Credits	Combination of Credit hour Courses*	Minimum Contact Minutes
MDiv	98	90.5	1.0, 1.5, 2.0, 2.5, 3.0	63,350
RAR	74	66.5	1.0, 1.5, 2.0, 2.5, 3.0	46,550
GPC	60.5	60.5	1.5, 2.0, 2.5, 3.0	42,350
CHS	36	10 modules per course each term	2.0	28,800
SMP	32	32	2.0	22,400
EXIT	0	24 courses		4,080
CHC				

* CSL is on the semester system.
1.0 credit hour course: minimum of 700 contact minutes
1.5 credit hour course: minimum of 1050 contact minutes
2.0 credit hour course: minimum of 1400 contact minutes
2.5 credit hour course: minimum of 1750 contact minutes
3.0 credit hour course: minimum of 2100 contact minutes

The following table presents a similar comparison of the routes available through CTSFW. (Note that total credits are listed here as *quarter* credit hours.)

⁴ Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, (CSL) and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, (CTSPW) offer the online General Pastoral Certificate (GPC) for specific ministry pastors to become a general pastor in the LCMS. specific ministry pastors may also complete the M.Div. or R.A.R. programs. Credit is given for prior SMP coursework in all three routes.

CTSPW	Total Quarter Credits	Classroom Credits	Combination of Credit hour Courses*	Minimum Contact Minutes
MDiv	139	136	1, 2, 3, 4	81,600
SMP	51	48	3	28,800

*CTSPW is on the quarter system.
1 credit hour course: minimum of 600 minutes of direct faculty instruction.
2 credit hour course: minimum of 1,200 minutes of direct faculty instruction.
3 credit hour course: minimum of 1,800 minutes of direct faculty instruction.
4 credit hour course: minimum of 2,400 minutes of direct faculty instruction.

The following table presents a comparison of the Master of Divinity and SMP Curricula at CSL and CTSFW.

CSL MDiv	CSL SMP	CTSPW MDiv	CTSPW SMP
<i>Exegetical</i>	<i>Exegetical</i>	<i>Exegetical</i>	<i>Exegetical</i>
Hebrews	Scripture and Faith	Hebrews	Pastoral/Missionary Theology in Luke/Acts
Greek Grammar	Old Testament Theology	Greek Grammar	The Books of Moses (Gen-Deut)
Hebrew Grammar	New Testament Theology	Hebrew Grammar	The Person of Jesus in John's Gospel
Interpreting and Communicating the Word (Hermeneutics)	The Church and Its Life	Pentateuch I (Gen-Deut)	The Epistles of Paul – Planting the Gospel Mission
The Torah (Genesis – Deuteronomy)		Pentateuch II (Gen-Deut)	The Prophets – Christ and His Mission Foretold
The Prophets		Major Prophets	
The Pauline		The Pauline	
Synoptic Gospels (Matt, Mark, Luke)		Gospels (Hermeneutics, Textual Criticism, Hermeneutics)	
Pauline Epistles		Gospels II (Luke, Mark)	
Gospel of John		Gospels III (John, 1 John)	
Paternal Languages Lab		Pauline Epistles	
		New Testament Greek Readings	
			<i>Historical</i>
Introduction to Historical Theology	The Lutheran Reformation	Church History I (First Eight Centuries)	The Church in Missiological Perspective
The Reformation and the Lutheran Church		Church History II (Reformation Era)	
History Elective		Church History III (Lutheran Orthodoxy/ Modern Church History)	
		Church History IV (Lutheran Church in America from 17th century)	
		History Area Elective	
		Seminar: Historical Text	
		Seminar: Luther Text	
			<i>Pastoral Ministry and Mission</i>
Introduction to Pastoral Ministry	Introduction to Pastoral Ministry	Hermeneutics I	Teaching the Faith
Introduction to Pastoral Ministry	Preaching I	Hermeneutics II	Ministry and Mission in Today's Pluralistic Context
Hermeneutics	Preaching II	Pastoral Theology I	
Worship and Word	Introduction to Worship	Pastoral Theology II	
Teaching the Faith	Teaching the Faith	Theological Ethics	
Pastoral Care and the Word	Pastor as Leader and Theologian	Pastoral Counseling	
Preaching and Preaching the Word (co-taught with Exegetics)		Liturgics I	
Introduction to Pastoral Leadership		Liturgics II	
Pastoral Leadership and Theology		Bibliography and Technology	
Electives: Congregational Revitalization, Worship and Culture, Conflict Resolution, Growing the Faith, Classics of the Devotional Life, Spiritual Autobiography, Communicating the Gospel to Contemporary Culture, Christianity and Literature, Special Issues in Pastoral Counseling		Field Education	
Field Education		Confessing Christ in Today's World (Intro to Missions)	
		Ministry in a Pluralistic Context	
		Formation Lab	
			<i>Systematics</i>
Introduction to Systematic Theology	The Master Narrative	Lutheran Confessions I (AG, Apology)	Introduction to Systematic Theology
Credo and Confessions	Credal Themes	Lutheran Confessions II (Belt & Catechisms, Barmen/Articles, Treatise)	Theologia I: Baptism, Life in Christ
Systematics I	Lutheran Distinctions	Lutheran Confessions III (Formula of Concord)	Theologia II: The Lord's Supper, Life in Christ Nourished and Sustained
Systematics II	Means of Grace	Dignitica I	Lutheran Confessions in Today's World
Church and World	Lutheran Confession of Faith	Dignitica II	The Holy Trinity: The Mission of God in Today's World
Free Electives (12) including: Lutheran Confessions in Today's World, The Holy		Dignitica III	

Trinity – The Mission of God in Today's World		
	Theologia I: Baptism, Life in Christ	
	Theologia II: Preaching	
	Theologia III: Lord's Supper, Life in Christ Nourished and Sustained	

The Master of Divinity degree includes on-campus immersion and formation, with in-person classes, real-time interaction with professors and fellow students, in-person daily chapel, socialization and support for seminary families, and more. SMP certification is a mostly online, hybrid program carried out in the context of an SMP cohort. SMP students are required to attend at least one on-campus, one-week intensive course annually. At CSL, many SMP students attend two, and the majority of those attending only one express that they would like to attend two on-campus intensives but are limited by personal circumstances.

At the 2013 LCMS Convention, delegates adopted Resolution 5-04B “To Continue and *Strengthen* Specific Ministry Pastor Program” [*emphasis added*]. The Rationale states that there are concerns regarding the SMP program. One of the eight concerns listed is “lack of consistent standard for *mentoring* SMP vicars and pastors” [*emphasis added*].

District President and Circuit Visitor Feedback/Comments

In 2024 and 2025, the PFC interviewed each of the 35 LCMS district presidents. In addition, the Standing Partnership marketing and communications firm interviewed 60 circuit visitors and collected surveys from more than 1,800 LCMS pastors. These interviews were conducted to fulfill convention assignments given to the PFC in 2023. The district presidents, circuit visitors, and pastors were asked to provide comments on and suggestions for improvements to the current state of Period C SMP supervision within the Synod’s 35 districts.

One conclusion drawn from these interviews is that the level of Period C SMP supervision varies significantly between districts, between individual SMP supervisors within a district, and across the various ministerial contexts served by SMP pastors. Concerning the general quality and consistency of current SMP supervision (Periods A, B, C), district presidents and circuit visitors noted that:

- Consistency of Period C SMP supervision is rated 1 out of 10 (10 being best), while quality of Period C SMP supervision rated 3.5 out of 10.
- Once an SMP student-vicar is ordained, SMP supervision in Periods B and C is largely hands-off, with merely occasional direct visits. This general practice (with notable exceptions) sends a signal (unintended or not) to SMP student-pastors (still being formed through seminary SMP courses) and SMP pastors (once graduated from the SMP Program at either seminary) that Period B and C supervisors feel that their supervision work is mostly complete and no longer so critically needed.
- Senior pastors serving as SMP-supervising pastors, who are often full-time pastors themselves, find it challenging to provide consistent ongoing SMP supervision. The demands of their congregations often limit the time and attention they can dedicate to

supervising specific ministry student-vicars, specific ministry student-pastors, or specific ministry pastors.

Concerning practical realities that influence the success of ongoing Period C SMP supervision in particular, district presidents and circuit visitors stated:

- A key factor in Period C SMP supervision is the availability and willingness of experienced pastors to serve as supervisors.
- Congregations and pastors with a history of doctrinal fidelity and the ability to supervise less experienced pastors must be identified and utilized.
- Geographic challenges, such as those that arise when pastors (either those supervising or those being supervised) serve dual or multiple parishes, make consistent SMP supervision substantially more difficult.

Sharing perspectives on the need for Period C SMP supervision, district presidents and circuit visitors stated:

- There is general agreement that some form of ongoing support and accountability is beneficial for specific ministry pastors.
- Some suggest that over the term of Period C, SMP supervision might evolve from active, regular supervision to more of a coaching or mentorship relationship, especially for SMP pastors who have already served for several years in their ministry.
- Some firmly stated that the need for ongoing supervision, coaching, or mentorship isn't unique to SMP pastors but in fact applies to all pastors in the Synod, regardless of pastoral formation and route to ordination.
- All acknowledge that LCMS Bylaws stipulate that specific ministry pastors are to be supervised for the entirety of their pastoral ministry after graduation and certification. However, some question the practicality and/or utility of such Period C SMP supervision.

Concerning the variability and/or lack of a universal, across-the-Synod systemic process for Period C SMP supervision, district presidents and circuit visitors stated:

- The organizational structure put in place by a district for SMP oversight, supervision, and ongoing training (per LCMS Bylaws) plays a crucial role in Period C SMP supervision. Some noted that the quality of supervision is largely dependent on how well a district's personnel and other resources are arranged and managed.
- Several district presidents indicated that the quality and consistency of SMP supervision varies significantly from district to district, which is symptomatic of a lack of a unified or consistently implemented system across the Synod.
- While SMP supervision (presumably including Period C SMP supervision) is mentioned in the COP Handbook (14.2.7, "Specific Ministry Pastor-Supervisor Position Description," 709), this guidance document does not provide specific details regarding the desired characteristics and implementation of that supervisor-to-supervised relationship. Lack of clear definitions and full consensus at a broader level (i.e., within the Council of Presidents) is likely contributing to the variability in characteristics and implementation of SMP

education and formation."⁶ While specific ministry pastors often bring maturity and relational skills immediately into the ministry due to their years of life experience, they do not receive a course of pastoral formation that includes the same theological depth, ecclesiastical breadth and formational rigor as that of a residential Master of Divinity (MDiv) degree or a Residential Alternate Route (RAR) certificate. 2007 Resolution 5-01B recognized that an SMP pastor's theological education "is formed within the context of their specific ministry and does not represent the breadth and depth of theology and ecclesiology."⁷

Bylaw 1.2.1(u) defines supervision as such: "For the purpose of these Bylaws (other than those pertaining to ecclesiastical supervision) to have authority over, to direct actions, to control activities." Period C supervision of an SMP pastor has elements of mentorship, such as providing guidance, offering support and encouragement, and developing a brotherly relationship. Regardless of pastors' routes to ordination, these types of mentorship activities are naturally characteristic of any healthy, long-term pastor-to-pastor relationship in the LCMS.

However, as intended in Bylaw 1.2.1(u), proper Period C SMP supervision, always exercised in Christian brotherly love, includes the responsibility to instruct, set assignments and expectations, and provide informed, constructive feedback, especially with respect to doctrine and practice. To emphasize this solemn responsibility, Period C SMP supervision plan documents should by design omit the words "mentor" (mentoring, mentorship, etc.) and make consistent use of the word "supervise" (supervisor, supervising, supervision, etc.).

The Responsibility of the District President

In his role as ecclesiastical supervisor, the district president supervises "the doctrine, the life, and the official administration on the part of the ordained and commissioned ministers who are members through his district" (LCMS Bylaw 4.4.5).

However, as set forth in LCMS Bylaw 2.13.1, the specific ministry pastor serves not only under the direct supervision of the district president (LCMS Bylaw 4.4.5), but also under the supervision of another pastor who is not a specific ministry pastor.

The district president is accountable to the Synod in our life together (Bylaw 4.4) for the oversight and implementation of the SMP program in his district. Therefore, upon a specific ministry pastor's completion of formal SMP studies and entry into Period C, the district president shall:

1. Identify and authorize a local SMP-supervising pastor to serve the specific ministry pastor. The supervising pastor must be an LCMS-ordained, rostered general ministry pastor who is in good standing in the LCMS. He may be an active pastor, retired pastor, or emeritus. The supervising pastor shall not be a specific ministry pastor (LCMS Bylaw 2.13.1).
2. Meet in person with the specific ministry pastor and his SMP-supervising pastor within 30 days of the specific ministry pastor's completion of formal SMP studies and entry into Period C. The meeting shall include a review of the supervisory responsibilities of the

supervision at the district and congregational level. In other words, the current requirement for "SMP supervision" is a very "blanket, one-size-fits-all" requirement without a clear and consistent set of definitions behind it, thus leading to a wide spectrum of inconsistent practices across districts.

PROPOSED SPECIFIC MINISTRY PASTOR SUPERVISION PLAN PERIOD C

Background Note Concerning the Work of the Pastoral Formation Committee

At the 2016 Synod convention, delegates adopted Resolution 6-01 "To Create a Pastoral Formation Committee," resolving, in part, that the newly formed Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) "shall review, assess, coordinate, support, and make suggestions for improvement of all existing noncolloquy routes leading to ordination in the Synod, including seminary and pre-seminary programs" (cf. Bylaw 3.10.4). The work and responsibility of the formerly constituted SMP committee, organizationally located under the former Board for Pastoral Education, is now (that is, is naturally understood to be) located under and overseen by (cf. Bylaw 1.2.1(p)) the PFC.

With the adoption of 2019 Resolution 6-03A (*Proceedings*, 159), delegates directed the COP, in coordination with the PFC, to "draft guidelines and training to enhance the *mentoring and supervision* of specific ministry pastors" [emphasis added].

With the adoption of 2023 Resolution 6-03A (*Proceedings*, 133), delegates directed the PFC "to develop and present a comprehensive, uniform, synodwide *Specific Ministry Supervision Plan*" [emphasis added].

Between the 2019 and 2023 conventions, Pacific Southwest District president Rev. Dr. Michael Gibson submitted (April 2021) a "Specific Ministry Pastor Supervision Plan" to the Council of Presidents (COP). This plan was reviewed but never formally adopted by the COP. Using components of Gibson's 2021 Supervision Plan with appreciation and thankfulness, the PFC proposes the following comprehensive plan that especially focuses on Period C supervision of SMP pastors.

A COMPREHENSIVE, UNIFORM, SYNODWIDE SPECIFIC MINISTRY SUPERVISION PLAN 2026

Preface

The SMP program was adopted "as a sincere and thoughtful attempt to address real-world needs with an urgency for bringing the Gospel to a dying world and to do so with theological integrity with respect to both the doctrine of the ministry and our commitment to high standards of pastoral

district president and the SMP-supervising pastor, the reception of such supervision by the specific ministry pastor, and the SMP Annual Supervision Plan (Appendix B).

3. On an individual, one-on-one basis, meet annually with all district SMP-supervising pastors to review annual SMP Annual Supervision Plans.
4. Immediately address any issues that arise concerning the specific ministry pastor, the SMP-supervising pastor and/or the congregation/context of the specific ministry pastor.
5. Award the specific ministry pastor one continuing education credit (1 CEU) for every 10 hours he meets in person with his SMP-supervising pastor. A yearly maximum of 4 CEUs may be awarded against the SMP Annual Supervision Plan per year.
6. Provide a written district SMP supervision report in the triennial district and Synod convention workbooks.

The Responsibility of the SMP-Supervising Pastor

The SMP-supervising pastor plays a significant role in the continuing education, growth, and refinement of pastoral skills of a specific ministry pastor over the course of his ministerial service in Period C. Desired attributes of an SMP-supervising pastor include biblical and confessional fidelity in doctrine and practice, personal and pastoral maturity, humility, integrity, virtue, ability in one-on-one instruction, and peaceful harmony in life together in the Synod, as described in the Constitution and Bylaws of the LCMS (Bylaw 1.3).

The SMP-supervising pastor may be the pastor who served as the SMP student-vicar's or SMP student-pastor's supervisor in Periods A or B; however, the SMP-supervising pastor in Period C must be a member of the same or neighboring circuit as the specific ministry pastor he supervises. The specific ministry pastor may propose a particular SMP-supervising pastor for himself, but the final decision and assignment of the SMP-supervising pastor in Period C shall always be authorized by the district president.

The SMP-supervising pastor shall meet face to face with the specific ministry pastor for a minimum of 40 hours annually. These 40 hours shall be devoted to the continuing education of the specific ministry pastor, especially focusing on areas where the SMP-supervising pastor and SMP pastor see opportunities for beneficial additional learning and improvement. The SMP-supervising pastor and the specific ministry pastor will identify study topics and readings in advance of their face-to-face meetings. Time spent together shall include a balance of the following:

1. Studying biblical texts (to include a Christocentric hermeneutic, Law and Gospel distinctions and word studies that are applied to the specific ministry pastor's preaching, teaching, pastoral care, etc.);
2. Reading and discussing a section of the Lutheran Confessions (*Book of Concord*) and applying it to preaching, Bible classes, pastoral care, etc.;
3. Discussing theological books (reading no fewer than three LCMS doctrinally reviewed theological books annually, for review during meeting times);
4. Reviewing four sermons written and preached by the specific ministry pastor over the course of the year (discussing preparation, Christocentricity, Law/Gospel distinctions, continuity, pastoral approach, strengths, areas to improve, delivery, etc.);

⁶ 2007 Convention Proceedings, Resolution 5-01B, p. 133.

⁷ 2007 Convention Proceedings, Resolution 5-01B, p. 135.

- 5. Discussing pastoral care and leadership (visitation, applying God’s Word to parishioners’ life situations, weddings, funerals, parish catechesis, crisis situations, church council/voters assembly meetings, elders and other boards, etc.); and
- 6. Discussing operational and cultural matters within the congregation (finance/budget, volunteerism, constitution and bylaws, traditions, etc.).

All Synod pastors, regardless of route to ordination, are encouraged and expected to participate in continuing education on a regular, annual basis. Nevertheless, continuing education experiences outside the 40-plus hours of learning that occur between the SMP-supervising pastor and the specific ministry pastor shall be in addition to the fulfillment of the SMP Annual Supervision Plan.

The SMP-supervising pastor shall also

- 1. Participate in the annual SMP-supervising pastors’ meeting with the district president to report on fulfillment of the SMP Annual Supervision Plans.
- 2. Contact the district president if any issues arise concerning the specific ministry pastor and/or the congregation/context of the specific ministry pastor.
- 3. Contact the district president in the event he can no longer fulfill his SMP-supervising pastor responsibilities.

The Responsibility of the Specific Ministry Pastor

Regarding supervision, the responsibilities of the specific ministry pastor are to:

- 1. Meet with the district president upon completion of his formal SMP education and entry into Period C and any time thereafter as requested by the district president;
- 2. Meet in person for a minimum of 40 hours per year with the SMP-supervising pastor in fulfillment of the SMP Annual Supervision Plan;
- 3. Complete the readings and work assigned by the SMP-supervising pastor in preparation for all in-person meetings;
- 4. Participate faithfully in circuit pastors’ meetings (Winkels) and district pastors’ conferences;
- 5. Submit a completed SMP Annual Supervision Plan to the district president at the conclusion of each year detailing interactions between the SMP-supervising pastor and the specific ministry pastor; and
- 6. Self-report the completion of the SMP Annual Supervision Plan on the continuing education page of the Self-Information Tool (SET). Additionally, self-report 1 CEU for every 10 hours that the specific ministry pastor meets in person with his SMP-supervising pastor. A yearly maximum of 4 CEUs may be awarded against the SMP Annual Supervision Plan per year.

NEXT STEPS

- 1. Adopt edits on the “Partnership Covenant for Participation in the Specific Ministry Pastor Program” (Appendix B).

APPENDIX A

SMP-Supervising Pastor Position Description
Prior to SMP Graduation and Certification (Periods A and B)

The SMP-supervising pastor shall be responsible to the seminary for tutoring, advising, encouraging, and overseeing the work of a student in the SMP program.

- 1. The SMP-supervising pastor shall serve as the supervisor to the student both for his studies in the SMP coursework and for the conduct of his ministry as an SMP vicar/pastor.
- 2. The SMP-supervising pastor shall provide periodic reports to the seminary.

Qualifications

- 1. Personal:
 - a. The SMP-supervising pastor shall possess pastoral and academic aptitude to tutor the student and model biblical and confessional pastoral practice.
 - b. The SMP-supervising pastor shall demonstrate an interest and willingness in leading the student to grow in confessional Lutheran pastoral theology and practice.
 - c. The SMP-supervising pastor shall be a rostered “Minister of Religion—Ordained” of the LCMS, with an LCMS Master of Divinity degree.
 - d. The SMP-supervising pastor shall have at least five years of LCMS pastoral experience in good standing.
 - e. The SMP-supervising pastor shall uphold the doctrinal position of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as confessed in the Scriptures and all the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (*Book of Concord-quia* subscription) (LCMS Constitution Art. II).
 - f. The SMP-supervising pastor shall have the permission and support of his congregation to serve in this capacity.
 - g. The SMP-supervising pastor shall agree to be trained for this role.
- 2. Time Commitments:
 - a. The SMP-supervising pastor shall expect and be willing to spend significant time in personal conversation with the SMP vicar/pastor, tutoring him, discussing lessons learned, providing pastoral guidance and observing SMP vicar/pastor’s vicarage and ministry.
 - b. The SMP-supervising pastor shall expect that a minimum of three to five hours per week will be spent on supervising activities, to include not only in-person meetings (for a minimum of 40 hours per year) but also personal preparation and virtual interaction.
 - c. The SMP-supervising pastor shall attend the in-person Seminary Orientation Seminar with his student.
 - d. The SMP-supervising pastor is encouraged to join the student during on-campus intensives at which the opportunity will be provided to spend time with the faculty and with fellow SMP-supervising pastors.
- 3. Training:

The SMP-supervising pastor shall be required to complete an on-campus supervisor training course conducted by the seminary, for which appropriate CEUs may be available.
- 4. Facilities and Equipment:
 - a. The SMP-supervising pastor shall furnish or arrange for the provision of all facilities and equipment necessary for meetings between himself and the student.
 - b. The seminary shall be responsible for updating the SMP-supervising pastor concerning

- 2. Discontinue the use of “mentor” in SMP supervision materials and instead use the word “supervisor/supervision” throughout Periods A, B, and C.
- 3. Collect from all entities (identified in items 4–6) suggested edits, additions, etc., concerning the proposed SMP Annual Supervision Plan described above, to be received by the Pastoral Formation Committee by December 1, 2026.
- 4. Update the COP Manual and all accompanying documents to reflect the use of the SMP Annual Supervision Plan.
- 5. Update the CSL and CTSFW SMP manuals, webpage, resources, etc., to reflect use of the SMP Annual Supervision Plan and the edited COP Manual.
- 6. Update all district resources, information, website, etc., to reflect use of the SMP Annual Supervision Plan, edited COP Manual, and edited seminary resources.

SMP-supervising pastor training and information concerning his role as SMP-supervising pastor.

Selection

- 1. The president of the district from which the student is enrolled shall identify a local LCMS pastor to serve as pastor-supervisor.
- 2. If the pastor is actively serving a congregation, the congregation shall provide a written and signed statement of its support for this work to the district and the seminary.
- 3. The seminary shall review the assigned SMP-supervising pastor based upon the district president’s selection.
- 4. Should an SMP-supervising pastor behavior, theological position or lack of engagement jeopardize the formation of the student, the district president in consultation with the seminary shall assign a replacement.
- 5. When an SMP-supervising pastor accepts a call outside the circuit, the district president shall identify a new SMP-supervising pastor in consultation with the seminary within 60 days.

Responsibilities

It shall be the responsibility of the SMP-supervising pastor to:

- 1. Guide the student in faith and life through frequent, intentional in-person instruction, encouragement, support, and prayer.
- 2. Instruct and counsel the SMP vicar/pastor regarding pastoral practice.
- 3. Be familiar with the course materials and resources.
- 4. Offer in-person tutoring to the SMP vicar/pastor in situations where he is struggling as he pursues his formal studies.
- 5. Accompany the SMP vicar/pastor as he participates in all circuit and district conferences, district conventions, and events and discuss positive lessons from each.
- 6. Provide thoughtful feedback, as needed or requested, to the seminary and district including, but not limited to:
 - a. Reports on vicarage progress as required and
 - b. Recommendation of the SMP vicar for certification or non-certification.
- 7. Offer support and encouragement to the SMP vicar/pastor to continue the program, remain diligent about his studies, and subsequently consider pursuing General Pastor Certification or a Master of Divinity degree or Residential Alternate Route certificate.
- 8. Provide counsel and support concerning the SMP vicar/pastor’s general state of physical and emotional wellness, including the wellbeing of his marriage and family, if applicable.
- 9. Observe the SMP vicar/pastor in a variety of ministry situations, including preaching, leading worship, Bible studies, hospital calls, outreach activities, etc., as described in the vicarage manual, and provide pastoral instructional feedback to the SMP vicar/pastor.
- 10. If it becomes evident that the SMP vicar/pastor should not continue in the program, provide honest counsel and support in coaching him out of the program.

Accountability

- 1. The SMP-supervising pastor shall be accountable to the SMP vicar/pastor as instructor, guide, advisor and tutor.
- 2. The SMP-supervising pastor shall be accountable to the district president and to the seminary regarding his role as the SMP vicar/pastor’s supervisor.

Compensation

- 1. The seminary will pay the SMP-supervising pastor an honorarium of \$ ____ for one SMP vicar/pastor, per course.

- If the SMP-supervising pastor serves more than one SMP vicar/pastor, he will receive \$ _____ for each additional student. The pastor-supervisor will not be reimbursed by the district or the seminary for any expenses.
- The SMP-supervising pastor's status for tax purposes will be that of a self-employed person rather than that of an employee, since the seminary does not have the authority to control the methods or means by which any pastor-supervisor conducts his services.

Terms of Service

Ordinarily, the SMP-supervising pastor will serve until the SMP vicar/pastor completes the program.

Following completion of the program, the president of the district in which the specific ministry pastor is serving will designate a pastor who is not a specific ministry pastor to provide ongoing supervision for the Specific Ministry vicar/pastor. The district president will be responsible for all matters concerning the membership status and limitations of the SMP (2023 LCMS Bylaw 2.13.1).

SMP-Supervising Pastor	Date
District President	Date
Seminary SMP Director	Date
SMP Vicar/Pastor	Date

17

Supervising Pastor: Position Description."

The SMP vicar/pastor promises

- To apply himself diligently to his study program;
- To conduct himself in a way that is worthy of the office of the holy ministry of Christ's church;
- To respect those in authority over him in his ministry, particularly his SMP-supervising pastor;
- To complete the SMP program in the specific ministry context into which he was called and ordained;
- To agree that refusal to complete the SMP study program following call and ordination will result in his removal from the roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod;
- To take ultimate responsibility for the financial obligations of the program; and
- To acknowledge and agree to serve gladly within the restrictions of SMP rostering, including participation in and reception of ongoing supervision throughout his career as an SMP pastor.

In good faith, the undersigned agree to this covenant and will do everything within their power to uphold it.

Date	District President	Date	Calling Entity Official Representative
Date	Seminary Representative	Date	Candidate for Specific Ministry Pastor
Date	SMP-Supervising Pastor		

19

Partnership Covenant for Participation in the Specific Ministry Pastor Program

Participation in the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program requires a relationship of trust among those involved in this unique opportunity to prepare LCMS pastors for the holy ministry. A candidate for the SMP program does not initiate the admission process himself, but rather is nominated and supported by those who represent and are responsible for the specific ministry context into which the candidate will be placed. This document articulates the covenant of trust and responsibility that exists among the seminary, the district, the sponsoring entity, the SMP-supervising pastor, and the SMP vicar/pastor.

The seminary promises its support to the SMP vicar/pastor by

- Providing theological education through its program of studies;
- Providing orientation, support, and encouragement for the SMP-supervising pastor;
- Intentionally including SMP vicars/pastors in the corporate life of the seminary student body through prayer, encouragement, and student services; and
- Working, with local and district supervision, to provide evaluation leading to certification as a Specific Ministry Pastor.

The district of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, through its district president, promises

- To provide overall supervision of the progress of the candidate, including doctrinal supervision, and to endeavor to support the candidate in every way possible;
- To ensure that once the SMP candidate is ordained as a Specific Ministry Pastor, the district will monitor his continued progress in the program, and should a student refuse to complete the study program for SMP certification, will remove that student from the roster of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod;
- To ensure that once the Specific Ministry Pastor has completed his study program, he will work in a situation which will provide supervision by an LCMS M.Div. pastor (non-SMP) (Period C); and
- To be responsible to ensure that tuitions and fees are remitted to the seminary in a timely manner.

The sponsoring entity (a calling agency of synod) promises

- To pray for the candidate and support him, his family, and his ministry spiritually and emotionally as coworkers in God's Kingdom;
 - To develop and support a financial plan in which the costs of education and the support of the student are met in a realistic way;
 - To utilize the SMP vicar/pastor only as prescribed by the LCMS Constitution and Bylaws; Policy Requirements for the SMP Program; A Comprehensive, Uniform, Synodwide Specific Ministry Supervision Plan; and Seminary SMP Handbook; and
 - To require that the SMP vicar/pastor complete the study program as administered by the seminary; and
- To encourage and support him in subsequent continuing education and reception of ongoing supervision.

The SMP-supervising pastor promises to fulfill all responsibilities outlined in the document "SMP-

18

SMP Annual Supervision Plan for the SMP-Supervising Pastor and Specific Ministry Pastor

vision Plan for _____ to _____
Month Year Month Year

of Specific Ministry Pastor _____

of SMP Supervisor _____

and Length of meeting time

Supervising pastor and specific ministry pastor shall meet in person at least 40 hours per year. 1 continuing education unit is the equivalent of 10 hours actual class time.

ate _____ Length of Meeting _____	☐ Date _____ Length of Meeting _____
ate _____ Length of Meeting _____	☐ Date _____ Length of Meeting _____
ate _____ Length of Meeting _____	☐ Date _____ Length of Meeting _____
ate _____ Length of Meeting _____	☐ Date _____ Length of Meeting _____
ate _____ Length of Meeting _____	☐ Date _____ Length of Meeting _____
ate _____ Length of Meeting _____	☐ Date _____ Length of Meeting _____

s of Continuing Education discussed during this time together:
responsibility of the SMP-Supervising Pastor"

- ☐ Biblical text

- ☐ Lutheran Confessions (*Book of Concord*)

- ☐ Theological book discussion

- ☐ Review of a sermon written/delivered by the SMP

- ☐ Pastoral care focus

20

nents:

1. Years of completed SMP supervision: _____
2. The specific ministry pastor has submitted this annual supervision plan to the district president at end of each year of completion. ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. The specific ministry pastor has submitted the completion of his annual 40-hour supervision plan recorded on his Self-Evaluation Tool (SET) ☐ Yes ☐ No
4. The specific ministry pastor has reported his annual SMP supervision CEUs, granted by his district president, on his SET ☐ Yes ☐ No

R14

Concordia University System

Established by the 1992 Synod convention, the Concordia University System (CUS) unifies the universities of the Synod around our central mission to educate students for godly vocations in the Church and the world, with a biblical foundation and the Lutheran confession of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The 2023 convention further refined this role by relieving CUS of operational responsibilities, allowing us to focus on our universities' Lutheran identity and mission. CUS, under the leadership of its board of directors and new staff, has taken up the challenge of this mission and made great strides toward an established, lasting approach that implements the Synod's convention decisions while honoring the academic freedom and autonomy of our institutions. CUS, as a synodwide corporate entity, serves as a buffer between corporate Synod and the five Synod universities, implementing the directions of the Synod's conventions while maintaining the degree of separation required by national accrediting boards for our institutions.

CUS accomplishes this delicate task through a system of visitation in accordance with Synod Bylaws and the best practices of the Lutheran educational tradition. Under the direction of our board of directors, the CUS staff has diligently maintained open lines of communication with our institutions and demonstrated the Synod's care for our universities through extensive visits and financial support. Throughout our history, the Synod has entrusted us with the stewardship of a large endowment comprising many funds to support our institutions and student scholarships. The CUS staff also facilitates coordinated efforts among our universities to promote Lutheran higher education, recruit students, and drive collaborative improvement.

CUS maintains a small staff to handle assigned tasks. The Rev. Dr. Dean O. Wenthe retired after ten years of service to CUS in 2024. Following the restructuring after the 2023 Synod convention, the CUS Board of Directors called the Rev. Dr. Jamison Hardy to serve as president, the Rev. Dr. Douglas Spittel to serve as vice-president, and the Rev. Dr. Paul Philp to serve as executive director of Concordia University System Education Network (CUEnet).

CUS has completed the formal visitations to the universities. All have received the highest affirmation that CUS can give its schools. This first round of formal visitations has gone very well, and our schools are in a strong place regarding the Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcome Standards (LIMOS).

In 2024, we overhauled our website, *cus.edu*. Visitors to the site now have access to information about all our universities; links to admissions departments; protocols, policies, and procedures governing our work; news from across the system; scholarship applications; and a donor portal. This report references several documents available on the website. Readers are encouraged to visit the site.

CUS has successfully awarded 120 \$5,000 scholarships to LCMS church work students in 2025. This effort has been an excellent new step towards funding church work education throughout the system. We are also seeking to expand our endowment funds to increase the number of scholarships we award. CUS staff have completed a new asset allocation across the portfolio with the LCMS Foundation to maximize returns on endowment funds. We are now working with the LCMS Foundation to expand our asset class and investment opportunities.

CUS, in partnership with *Set Apart to Serve*, held its first admissions summit at Concordia University Chicago in October. This event was grant-funded and brought together representatives from all the CUS schools and both seminaries. This event was highly productive and demonstrated the importance of the CUS operating more as a system rather than as a collection of independent universities in affiliation. Many great ideas and next steps emerged from the summit, and we will follow up on them.

We continue to find ways to sponsor church events to gain recognition and build partnerships. CUS is now a sponsor of KFUO Radio's *The Coffee Hour*, the Higher Things summer youth conferences, various district youth conferences, and the theological symposia at both of our seminaries. These sponsorships provide us with visibility among youth, pastors, and members of our beloved Synod. This has been a very successful endeavor. We look forward to the opportunities ahead in the coming triennium. We are working with all the universities on the CUS exhibit area for the Synod convention. Delegates and guests are invited to visit us.

CUS has held discussions and conducted district visits to explore micro-campus options for church worker preparation. This is a district initiative through which we serve as a conduit for cooperation with the universities. We have worked with the Iowa East, Mid-South, Southern, and Southeastern districts to investigate sites and partnerships. This initiative is progressing well, and opportunities are increasing. We are focusing specifically on the "desert" areas of the country where we have no university campuses.

Representatives from CUS met with Luther Classical College officials and the Wyoming district president to continue discussions on a potential partnership and CUS membership. Currently, Luther Classical College has articulation agreements with two of the five Concordia universities, allowing graduates to complete their education and certification at a CUS school. We are encouraging them to sign agreements with all CUS schools. CUS staff have also met with other independent educational start-ups to encourage adherence to the Synod's biblical and confessional standards and engagement with the Synod's existing system of universities and seminaries for the education of our rostered church workers.

Since the 2023 restructuring, renewed collaboration and partnerships between CUS and the university presidents have emerged. Our presence on campus, through visits and participation in meetings and events, has produced significant results in relationship-building and the growth of trust. The new visitation process is fully implemented, and we are already seeing positive results.

A. Convention Actions

A.1. Res. 7-03, "To Call Concordia University Texas Leadership to Repentance"

The CUS Board of Directors sent a letter to President Donald Christian on September 19, 2024, reiterating Resolution 7-03 and calling on Concordia University Texas "to reverse course and undo the damage it has done to itself and the countless faithful individuals and congregations that founded, prayed for, attended, and selflessly supported the school over these many years" and to "be reconciled to the church that mothered, nurtured and sustained you for so many years." No response was received.

CUS President Jamison Hardy has met with Texas District President Jon Braunersreuther to discuss the matter and seek ways to diffuse the situation.

A.2. Res. 7-04B, “To Revise Bylaws to Revisit and Renew Relationship of Colleges and Universities with the Synod”

The CUS Board of Directors has revised and amended the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws of CUS in compliance with the 2023 convention’s ratification of Resolution 7-04B. After review by the Synod’s Commission on Constitutional Matters, these documents were filed with the Missouri Secretary of State.

The CUS Board of Directors ratified the Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcome Standards (LIMOS) in 2024. The three-page document, which may be found at cus.edu, includes specific points to define and clarify the seven main standards:

Identity Standard I—Ecclesiastical Mission and Goals

The institution’s ecclesiastical mission and goals appropriately center on Christ, the Holy Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the shared confession and practice of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Identity Standard II—Spiritual and Academic Life

The spiritual and academic life of the institution reflects and embraces its ecclesiastical mission and goals.

Identity Standard III—Student Recruitment and Student Life

Student recruitment, student affairs, campus life, and other programs reflect and embrace the institution’s ecclesiastical mission and goals.

Identity Standard IV—Planning and Resourcing

Planning, resourcing, and personnel reflect and embrace the institution’s ecclesiastical mission and goals.

Identity Standard V—Governance, Leadership, and Administration

The governance, leadership, and administration of the institution foster and embrace the institution’s place in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Identity Standard VI—Assessment of Effectiveness

The institution’s assessment of its achievement of the Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcomes is foundational to and effective in advancing its ecclesiastical goals.

Identity Standard VII—Handling and Resolving Concerns of Constituents

The institution’s handling of legitimate concerns expressed by constituents is foundational to and effective in advancing its ecclesiastical goals.

This document is supplemented by an evaluation tool that provides discussion-starting questions for use during formal and informal visits.

The formal and informal visitations form the backbone of the implementation of Res. 7-04B. The CUS Board of Directors has established protocols for conducting these visits in accordance with the Synod Bylaws. Curriculum standards for programs leading to vocations in the church have also been established. All these documents are available to view on cus.edu.

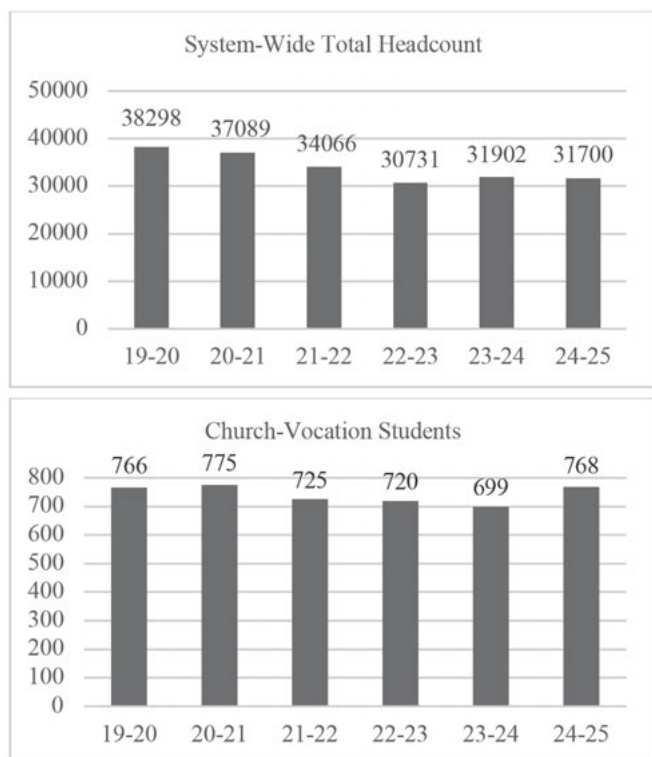
A.3. Res. 7-05A, “To Bring Accountability to Concordia Boards of Regents and to Improve Doctrinal Fidelity and Amenability to Ecclesiastical Supervision”

In keeping with Bylaw 3.10.6.2.2, CUS works with the LCMS Board of Directors to provide orientation and ongoing education for elected and appointed members of the boards of regents of our several universities. The orientation is conducted in person. Follow-up education and training are delivered in person and online to ensure all regents have ready access to the material.

Meetings with regents are also included in the visitation process, in the spirit of Resolution 7-05A, to keep regents involved in the implementation of Res. 7-04B, especially LIMOS IV and V. CUS staff have also been invited to attend regular regents’ board meetings to report on CUS activities and observe university governance. This comprehensive system of visitation has strengthened the Synod’s connection with our universities.

B. CUS Institution Data

B.1. Enrollment



B.2. Scholarships and Institutional Support

Fiscal Year	General Support	Institutional Support	Direct Student Scholarships
2023	\$650,344		
2024	\$601,695		
2025	---		
2026		\$750,000	\$600,000

In FY2026, Direct Student Scholarships were separated from General Institutional Support to better honor donor restrictions.

C. Concordia University System Education Network (CUEnet)

CUEnet was founded in 1996 as a collaborative effort among CUS colleges and universities to provide online teacher colloquy education. Online teacher colloquy remains the primary activity of CUEnet. CUEnet's offices are located in Bend, Ore., while students are served throughout the entire Synod. Administratively, CUEnet is responsible to the leadership of the CUS and the CUS campus presidents.

In addition to providing online teacher colloquy, CUEnet also offers colloquy courses for those pursuing colloquy in other categories of commissioned ministry through one of the CUS colleges or universities. The first six courses (Old Testament, New Testament, History of Theology, Christian Doctrine, Lutheran Confessions, and Varieties of Belief) are common to all commissioned colloquy programs. As such, students may take these six courses with CUEnet if the institution through which they are seeking certification allows.

CUEnet provides a seminar program, Gemstones, and Images of Faith as additional educational resources. These programs draw on material from the colloquy courses, along with additional materials, to further enhance Lutheran education within the Synod and beyond. Additional information will be shared about each of these elsewhere in this report.

C.1. Leadership Change

During the 2023–26 triennium, CUEnet experienced a leadership change. Prior to the 2023 convention, several individuals who had previously served CUEnet for many years discontinued their service. CUEnet's founder, the Rev. Dr. Ray Halm, was called to his eternal rest. CUEnet's chief operations officer, Dr. Heather Stueve, accepted a call to serve at another LCMS ministry. Another long-time staff member also left CUEnet to pursue a different area of service. The result of these various staff changes was a period of vacancy, which included additional staff transitions.

In the summer of 2024, the Rev. Dr. Paul A. Philp was called by CUS to serve as executive director of CUEnet. Dr. Philp served the ten years prior as the CUS director of institutional research and integrity. In that role, he regularly interfaced with the CUEnet staff on various issues and served as the CUS representative to the Colloquy Committee for Commissioned Ministry (CCCM). Dr. Philp was installed in September of 2024 and continues also to serve as assistant to the CUS president and CUS representative to the CCCM. Dr. Philp's connections to the CUS, the individual CUS institutions, the CCCM, and CUEnet enable regular interaction and partnerships to continue the work of teacher colloquy.

C.2. Strategic Planning

CUEnet is developing a strategic plan for the future. This strategic plan will build on CUEnet's strengths in colloquy education and explore new and expanded ways for CUEnet to partner with various stakeholders in this area. A critical component of CUEnet's strategic future will be strengthening its relationships with the CUS institutions it serves. Closer relationships with the campuses will enable sharing of ideas with content experts, strengthening CUEnet's offerings. CUEnet will also seek to build strategic partnerships with other entities to bolster the work of CUEnet, increase philanthropic support for student scholarships, and develop added resources for use in the congregations and schools of the Synod.

C.3. Curriculum

As noted above, the CUEnet courses include the first six courses common to all categories of the commissioned ministry colloquy. CUEnet's curriculum includes two additional courses specific to teacher colloquy: Lutheran Teacher I and Lutheran Teacher II. Each course in the curriculum is offered in a month-long format. The courses are offered in an asynchronous format so that students may progress at their own pace. Students watch prerecorded course videos, read from various sources, and complete assignments, which are submitted to their course mentor. Each course is mentored by an ordained LCMS pastor with expertise in the course content area. CUEnet is currently blessed to have five pastors serving as mentors. Students may take courses each consecutive month, enabling them to complete the coursework portion of their colloquy journey in as little as eight months.

The current CUEnet curriculum and associated videos are due for review and upgrade. This process is beginning and will be a significant focus during the 2026–29 triennium. Res. 7-04B required the CUS to develop theological and curricular standards for all programs leading to certification as a commissioned minister. This process has been undertaken, and the overarching theological standards have been completed. Phase II of this work, to develop program-specific standards, is currently underway. The CCCM is also responsible for developing standards for all categories of commissioned colloquy. This parallel but separate process is also currently transpiring. The CUEnet curriculum will be required to be responsive to these standards as it is revised and redesigned. As such, the curriculum review process timeline depends on the work of the CUS and the CCCM on standard development.

An advisory committee will be formed to facilitate the curriculum review process. This committee will draw its membership from educational leaders and subject-matter experts across the Synod's higher education institutions. District education executives and other Synod leaders will also be important resources for this committee. The committee will advise on the curriculum redesign and assist in course development. They will also review the course delivery model and seek to determine the best means for the future of online teacher colloquy course delivery.

C.4. CUEnet Non-Colloquy Offerings

- **Seminar** is a program of theological study designed to enhance a non-Lutheran teacher's understanding of the distinct teachings, practices, and identity of the Lutheran school in which they are teaching. The program surveys the major doctrines of the Lutheran Church and compares and contrasts these teachings with those of other Christian denominations and other religions. Compared with colloquy, seminar is a significantly shorter, less rigorous introduction to Lutheranism. It does not lead to becoming rostered. Neither scholarships nor college credit is available.
- **Images of Faith** is a set of multimedia presentations designed to supplement a congregation's catechism program. Complete with a handbook that offers discussion points and conversation starters, this collection of 23 videos covers topics including the Ten Commandments, the Creeds, the Lord's Prayer, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and more. It is available at no cost to the congregations and schools of the LCMS, WELS, and ELS.
- **Gemstones** is an ever-expanding, searchable library of video presentations on a variety of theological topics. It is designed

for church and school leaders to supplement sermons, Bible studies, conference presentations, and other educational activities. The videos are drawn from five courses in particular: Old Testament (Rev. Dr. Reed Lessing and Dr. Mark Meehl), New Testament (Rev. Dr. Michael Middendorf and Dr. Mark Meehl), Christian Doctrine (Rev. Dr. Joel Biermann), Lutheran Confessions (Rev. Dr. Robert Kolb), and Varieties of Belief (Rev. Dr. Lawrence Rast and Dr. Adam Francisco).

Gemstones 2.0 was reintroduced on October 1, 2025, with a completely new front end that makes it easier to browse the many videos available for viewing. Both searching and browsing by lecturer, collection, or topic is now possible. Hundreds of videos, largely drawn from CUEnet's flagship colloquy program, are available at no cost to the congregations and schools of the LCMS, WELS, and ELS after completing an easy sign-up process.

C.5. Enrollment and Recruitment

CUEnet offers courses in a continuous format so that students may begin coursework throughout the year. In January 2026, CUEnet launched a pilot program offering all eight courses each month. This pilot program is designed to make it easier for students who may need to step away from coursework due to teaching or family obligations to reenter coursework at their convenience. Previously, they may have had to wait up to a month, or, in one unique circumstance, up to four months. CUEnet recognizes that her students are busy teaching the children in their classrooms while they are taking their courses. This pilot program is one way to increase flexibility. The increased flexibility for students in the pilot program also means it is now possible to begin teacher colloquy in any month the student becomes eligible.

CUEnet partnered with *Set Apart to Serve* (SAS) of the LCMS to develop a webinar on the teacher colloquy process. In October of 2025, CUEnet and SAS hosted a live webinar with over 100 participants throughout the hour-long presentation. The webinar was recorded and is available on the SAS section of the LCMS website. CUEnet is exploring opportunities to offer webinars of this nature on a regular and ongoing basis.

In addition to opportunities such as the webinar noted above, CUEnet recruits via mailers sent to those serving in Lutheran schools who are not on the Synod roster. CUEnet is also regularly present at events for teachers hosted by the Synod, including district and Lutheran Education Association functions and others. CUEnet leadership meets on an annual basis with the district education executives as part of its recruitment strategy.

CUEnet enrollment tends to fluctuate with the time of year, reflecting the activities in which teachers are engaged. Nevertheless, the average enrollment for CUEnet has remained between 50 and 60 students per month. CUEnet will be evaluating the effect of the pilot program of monthly courses as it relates to enrollment. The current course model, with the use of mentors, allows for scaling up and down as enrollment fluctuates. CUEnet can always accommodate additional students. The chart below provides enrollment data for the 2023–26 triennium through January of 2026. Completion data is also included.

Year	Average Monthly Enrollment	Total New Students Enrolled	Total Students Completed
2023	58	106	48
2023 (July – Dec)	52	48	25
2024	64	113	59
2025	50	109	50

2023–25 Enrollment. The statistics for enrollment for the final months of the 2023–26 triennium were not available at the time of the publication deadline.

C.6. Tuition and Scholarships

Current (academic year 2025–26) tuition is \$974 per course. The total cost of the eight courses is \$7,292 before any scholarships are applied. CUEnet has received a generous scholarship grant that covers \$400 per course for each student in the current academic year. Many students also receive scholarship assistance from their LCMS district and the ministry in which they are currently serving. Additional fees include \$50 for the endorsement process and \$172 for the Logos library subscription. Tuition, scholarship amounts, and costs are subject to change.

Jamison J. Hardy, *President*

R14.1

Concordia University Chicago

Greetings and God's blessings to all of you from Concordia University Chicago (CUC), President Dr. Russell P. Dawn, the board of regents, the executive cabinet, and other faculty and staff. We are grateful to share updates as we work together and rejoice, as this year's theme reminds us, that Christ is risen indeed!

A. Introduction

Steadfast in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, CUC promotes academic rigor in its liberal arts and professional programs; grounds students in objective truth, integrity, and excellence; and practices faithfulness to the confessional teachings of the Synod, as it forms students for vocations in church, family, and the world.

B. Goals

In alignment with and in support of Synod's constitutional objectives (Const. Art. III), bylaw purpose (Bylaw section 1.1), and triennial priorities (2023 Res. 4-03, *Proceedings*, 136–37), CUC set the following goals in our strategic plan for 2026–28.

B.1. Enhance CUC's reputation for academic excellence with *Christ at the Center* to drive enrollment and philanthropic engagement

Critical to driving both enrollment and philanthropy, CUC will expand mission-aligned programming by strengthening Lutheran school and church pipelines, hosting faith-centered events, and integrating vocation-centered curricula and co-curricular support. Academically, the university will launch new mission-centric and high-demand programs, revise general education curricula to align with outcomes, and encourage students to participate in high-impact practices and experiential learning. Concurrently, CUC will

grow its national visibility by increasing faculty and student features in media, highlighting alumni achievements, and consistently delivering Christ-centered messaging across platforms.

B.2. Strengthen financial health through increases in enrollment, retention, and auxiliary services

Central to ensuring stability, sustainability, and reinvestment capacity, CUC aims to increase annual revenue through a balanced portfolio of tuition, room and board, the Early Childhood Education Center, auxiliary services (conferences, camps, events), grants, and philanthropic support. Our strategic plan sets goals for operating surplus, cash flow, and reduction of long-term debt. These financial outcomes are supported by robust enrollment strategies: growing traditional undergraduate enrollment, expanding online undergraduate programs, increasing graduate enrollment, and raising residential participation through enhanced co-curricular, athletic, and faith-based engagement.

B.3. Growing philanthropy

To ensure CUC can sustain scholarships, reduce tuition dependence, and invest in facilities, we will continue strengthening donor relationships, expanding alumni-donor engagement, and increasing unrestricted annual support to underwrite university operations and programs. Advancement operations will be enhanced with improved customer relationship management tools and donor analytics to personalize engagement.

C. Performance Analysis

While the goals shared in section B of our report outline the objectives of our newest strategic plan, they build upon the themes of our prior plan, *F²: Focusing Our Future 2025*. Because that plan brought us to the end of 2025, we are sharing select updates on our university's performance relative to Synod's constitutional objectives, bylaw purpose, and triennial priorities, organized according to our *F²* themes.

C.1. Provide a formative student experience

CUC promotes academics, co-curricular activities, and pre-professional experiences that emphasize truth, freedom, and vocation in forming students for lives of influence and service. Over the last triennium, we:

- Crafted new University Essential Learning Outcomes that provide direction to our curricula for undergraduate and graduate students. Curricula must seek learning outcomes based on our pillars of *truth*, *freedom*, and *vocation* in the pursuit of lives of faithfulness to God and service to neighbors.
- Initiated the Classical Lutheran Educator program as one of our six church work programs. Students are formed through Lutheran doctrine and practice as well as a classical, Socratic pedagogy that engages ancient languages and primary source materials through the lenses of the virtues.
- Invested in campus facilities to enhance learning and the student experience, including a state-of-the-art nursing simulation lab for our fast-growing BSN program and a new welcome center for prospective students and other visitors.
- Established an Apologetics Boot Camp for CUC students to prepare them to defend and promote the true faith and the inspiration of Scripture.

- Started La Mesa Ministries to reach out to CUC's Latino students; engage them in meaningful conversations, prayer, and Bible studies; foster collaborations between the Latino Student Union and the student-led campus ministry (Spiritual Life); and promote bilingual chapel services.
- Implemented a Faith Delegates program to connect residential students more effectively to campus ministry events and worship.
- Initiated a program of pre-game prayers, allowing Spiritual Life to improve and build relationships with the athletics department and student athletes.

C.2. Increase fiscal strength and agility

Through data-informed decision-making, a commitment to enrollment management best practices, the development of new programs, and fiscal discipline, CUC worked to ensure student completion and our university's future by:

- Reducing long-term debt by 45 percent over the last two convention cycles (12/31/2019 to 12/31/2025).
- Utilizing a \$7.7 million state capital grant to improve and maintain our historic campus.
- Investing in facilities and staffing for a new nursing program, which resulted in increased enrollment while furthering our mission.
- Adopting a customer relationship management tool, which has led to cost savings while enabling graduate and online undergraduate admissions to bring more communication in house.
- Increasing retention of first-year, full-time freshmen from fall-to-fall by 9 percentage points from 2021–24.

C.3. Foster partners for mission and excellence

We established new partnerships and strengthened existing ones to benefit our partners, university, and the common good.

- The new Office of Church Relations and Mission (OCRM) builds relationships with LCMS districts, congregations, schools, and their people.
- The Advance with Purpose tuition discount launched in 2025 to provide a 50 percent tuition discount on any of CUC's graduate programs for full-time employees of the LCMS, its entities, and its recognized service organizations.
- The university's Centers of Excellence work to bring our Lutheran identity and Christian ethos to outside communities and partners. These centers serve God and neighbor for the common good and include the following:
 - College of Health, Science, & Technology's Center for Gerontology
 - College of Education's Center for Christian Education
 - College of Business's Free Enterprise Center
 - College of Theology, Arts, & Humanities' Center for Church Music

C.4. Develop our vibrant, unified community

Together, we developed, lived, and shared a common vision for our work.

- We introduced the Prepared to Serve Church Professional Guarantee, enabling students who study in one of our six church work programs to pay a maximum of \$5,000 per year in tuition. We continue to demonstrate our commitment to the church by keeping our top-quality formation for church work students affordable.
- The mission and identity of the university have been a major focus in the last triennium:
 - The OCRM led the development and implementation of a faculty course on the mission and identity of the university. All full-time faculty must take the course. A capstone assignment is required to assess tenure eligibility. A similar course for staff is in development.
 - We expanded and enhanced our mission and identity interview process for all finalists for full-time faculty and senior staff positions. This process, which includes interviews by the OCRM as well as President Dawn, fosters the ongoing development of a unified, faithful community at CUC.
- CUC built a course called “Unity and Civility in a Diverse Community,” which provides an opportunity for faculty and staff to learn how to apply biblical and confessional teachings to dialogue and discourse on socially and politically sensitive topics.
- We initiated the Lectureship in Christianity, Humanities and Public Life, generously funded by Dr. and Mrs. C. Ross Betts. This semi-annual lecture series hosts leading scholars who engage with our students, faculty, and staff around critical issues that affect the church, our neighbors, and the world.
- Chapel life is central to the ongoing development of a vibrant, unified community at CUC. Chapel is centered on *Lutheran Service Book*. All services are liturgical, biblical, and confessional, delivered with the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. Wednesday evening Divine Service is properly sacramental. The Church Year is observed with its seasons, feasts, and observances to draw faculty, staff, and students into the life of the church.
- **Strong and growing church work programs:** We have seen increased enrollment in our six church work programs that prepare students for lives of service to the church.
- **Growing nursing and strong education programs:** Nursing classes began in August 2023, and the program is already one of our most popular. Our 162-year heritage of teacher education remains strong, with more of our traditional undergraduate students enrolled in teaching programs than in any other field.
- **Revitalized honors program:** Our new honors program aims to challenge and nurture students throughout their undergraduate career, forming them in truth and honing their minds and character.
- **Centers of Excellence:** The university’s four Centers of Excellence provide an array of diverse resources to help students and community members fulfill their callings.
- **Dynamic Office of Enrollment:** The team continues to build on its successes in recruitment for our church work programs while also continuing to strengthen recruitment of those who seek Christ-centered education for vocations outside the church.
 - For undergraduates, transfer students and home-school students are two areas of growth.
 - Graduate enrollment continues to be healthy, with more than 3,000 students.
- **Dedicated Office of Advancement and OCRM:** These offices continue their strong work in donor cultivation, communication, and service that addresses the needs of congregations and constituents.
- **Outstanding senior administrative staff:** All members of the president’s executive cabinet are faithful, highly motivated experts in their respective fields.
- **Desirable location:** Just a short train ride from downtown Chicago, our location allows students to explore a world-class city while enjoying the benefits of living in leafy, suburban River Forest.
- **Christ-centered chapel life:** Commitment to a rhythm of worship that is based on *Lutheran Service Book* and the Church Year, all ordered by the proper distinction of Law and Gospel.

D. Conclusion

We thank God for the many ways He has blessed and continues to bless CUC and its students, faculty, and staff. Our past successes were only possible due to His grace and the ways He has worked, through us, to bring students into our Christ-centered community.

D.1. SWOT Analysis

As we look ahead with open eyes and hearts, we reflect on our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats we may face.

D.1.a. Strengths

- **Mission and identity:** Comprehensively, the university continues to focus on initiatives that emphasize our strong Lutheran identity and mission. This includes hiring aligned faculty and staff. We received a strong and very positive report from the Concordia University System with respect to their formal visit in 2025.

D.1.b. Weaknesses

- **Financial strength and flexibility:** Although greatly improving for CUC, this continues to be a challenge for us and for many private Christian universities.

D.1.c. Opportunities

- **New scholarships and discounts:** Both *Prepared to Serve* and *Advance with Purpose* provide opportunities for donor cultivation and student recruitment to provide church workers to the Synod and support continued education for employees of LCMS entities.
- **New academic programs:** Innovative programs provide opportunities to address the market while being defined by our three pillars of truth, freedom, and vocation.
- **Distinctiveness in local market:** Our commitment to Christ-centered university education is without peer in our

area, providing us with opportunities to reach the large local base of aligned families.

D.1.d. Threats

- **Demographic trends:** Declines in the traditional college-age population in the U.S., overall population loss in the upper Midwest, and decline in LCMS membership impact our university.
- **International laws:** Some laws pose a deterrent to international students.
- **Governmental policy:** Federal laws and regulations reward colleges whose programs fit the government's goals for education and punish those that do not. These goals do not necessarily match our own goals and may negatively impact church work programs and awards given to students. State government regulations also attempt to dictate that some programs adopt non-Christian ideologies.

D.2. Future Goals

Please refer to section B of our report for a list and explanation of our current goals, which will take us through 2028. Beyond that, we will continue to set intermediate goals in pursuit of our 15-year strategic vision to:

Strengthen CUC's reputation as a Christ-centered institution of academic excellence and student success, expanding its impact regionally and nationally while developing financial independence and enhancing operational effectiveness and employee engagement to achieve its mission.

Dr. Russell P. Dawn, *President*

R14.2

Concordia University, Irvine

A. 1976–2026: 50 Years of Faithfulness

Our Lord and Savior continues to bless the ministry of Concordia University, Irvine (CUI)! Called into being as Christ College Irvine, with 38 students, 5 professors, and 1 building, CUI now serves 5,000 undergraduate and graduate students annually by offering 60+ degree programs throughout southern California and beyond. Join us in early October as we celebrate this amazing milestone!

A.1. CUP's Continued Faithfulness

We are proud to report that the formal and informal ecclesiastical accreditation visits by the Concordia University System (CUS), as required by 2023 Resolution 7-04B, have demonstrated CUI's exemplary commitment to our shared confession as we carry out our specific calling as a university of the LCMS. CUS' official reports are filled with commendations testifying to how we carry out our mission and inculcate our core convictions and values each and every day, in classrooms, labs, athletic fields, music and theatre venues, residential halls, and online.

A.2. Mission Statement

Concordia University Irvine, a comprehensive Lutheran Christian university guided by Christ's Great Commission, develops wise, honorable, and cultivated citizens to serve society and the church.

A.3. Core Convictions and Values

CUI serves our students, colleagues, and community by being:

- **Gospel-Centered:** The faculty and staff, guided by God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions, welcome all students who are both willing and able to engage with its mission and proclaim God's grace in Christ to each person.
- **Faithfully Relevant:** CUI offers exceptional, rigorous, holistic, and sought-after programs in the liberal arts and professional studies, rooted in the Lutheran intellectual tradition, that prepare servant leaders who proactively address the contemporary needs of the church and the world.
- **Sustainably Excellent:** CUI invests its finite resources of time, talent, and treasure in wise and sustainable ways by empowering each faculty, staff, and student to live out their vocations and to support the ongoing excellence and fulfillment of the university's mission.
- **Courageously Loving:** At CUI, all are called to love one another, forming a community that faithfully cultivates humility and responsibility, fosters honest and charitable conversations, and offers a path to personal growth that equips students for lives of service in a diverse world.
- **Relentlessly Hopeful:** CUI is ever hopeful as it carries out its mission in the face of the world's challenges. Our hope is rooted in the confidence that God in Christ has reconciled the world to Himself and that Christ is the Lord of all creation.

Lutheran Identity is enshrined in our faculty and staff as they interact daily with our students in and out of the classroom:

- Each full-time faculty and staff member is a professing, practicing Christian who is interviewed for fidelity by the Chief Mission Officer, Rev. Dr. Steven Mueller. At CUI, 57 percent of our full-time faculty are members of Synod congregations, and 39 percent of full-time faculty are called church workers of the Synod.
- All full-time employees, both faculty and staff, are required to complete Vision-Mission-Vocation, a Lutheran higher education orientation program which helps ensure the continuance of Lutheran identity and culture.
- Our church work programs continue to raise up faithful leaders for the Synod in undergraduate and graduate programs. With generous financial aid (matching what we provide to the children of our faculty and staff) and with high-quality, faithful instruction, they are being well formed for their callings.

B. University Updates

CUI, as a faithful and thriving university of the Synod, is grateful to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for innumerable blessings and is excited to report the following updates:

- As part of the 50th anniversary celebration, CUI will "cut the ribbons" and open several new facilities: (1) the CU Center for Worship and the Performing Arts has been fully remodeled with the addition of 300 seats (for a total of 800); (2) the Golden Eagle Athletics Complex, which includes two new buildings to support NCAA Division 2 athletes and the entire undergraduate student community, adds 20,000 square feet of amenities; (3) a new softball stadium; and (4) a renovated CU Arena. These projects total \$45 million (M). As of Janu-

ary 2026, CUI has raised \$43M in gifts and pledges towards these projects! Thanks be to God!

- In 2025, CUI received a \$5M pledge to support the building of new engineering and computer science labs to support the expansion of new concentrations in these two majors, including mechanical, electrical, and biomechanical engineering, and cybersecurity and robotics as concentrations in computer science. Thanks be to God for this transformative educational gift!
- CUI's partnership between Music and PBS SoCal and national PBS syndicates continues each year to produce a made-for-TV special called "A Concordia Christmas." Since 2021, CUI has created six award-winning broadcasts, sharing the Gospel through music and spoken word, which have reached audiences in the millions throughout the U.S. During the 2025 Christmas season, CUI led all of higher education in reach and impact by delivering over 750 hours of nationwide programming, outstripping even St. Olaf College and Belmont University, known nationally for music. We were pleased to feature a song in the 2025 show that was filmed and recorded at the LCMS Youth Gathering.
- As part of our ongoing effort to communicate more boldly, clearly, and widely that CUI is the premier Christian university in Orange County, Calif., the university entered into a 12-year partnership with the National Hockey League (NHL)'s Anaheim Ducks and OCVICE, one of the nation's largest sports and entertainment locations (over 100 acres) as the "Official Educational Partner." Throughout this partnership, which includes extensive marketing through digital billboards throughout the complex and inside the Honda Center, CUI will tell our story visually and orally. Additionally, this partnership includes guaranteed annual student internships, performances at new venues, educational offerings for Ducks and OCVICE employees, and community events, prominently sponsored by CUI. This is a wonderful opportunity to introduce CUI more fully to southern California and, through NHL broadcasts, to the nation.

Michael A. Thomas, *President*

R14.3

Concordia University, Nebraska

Greetings from Concordia University, Nebraska (CUNE) where we continue our joyful work of equipping men and women for lives of learning, service, and leadership in the church and world. In the spirit of the 2026 Synod convention theme, *Christ Is Risen Indeed* (1 Cor. 15:20–22), we give thanks that hope in the resurrected Christ continues to shape our students, strengthen our mission, and sustain our shared service to families and churches of the Synod and their neighbors who are sympathetic to our confession.

A. Enrollment

CUNE continues to experience significant enrollment growth, reflecting a strong interest in Christ-centered higher education. Last fall, the university welcomed 1,281 undergraduate students, along with 422 graduate students pursuing advanced degrees. The university also celebrated substantial growth in its dual credit program, which now serves 2,038 high school students across 43 schools in the United States and internationally.

Retention remains strong, supported by faculty mentorship, comprehensive student services, and a vibrant, Christ-centered community, reflecting CUNE's distinctive mission and enduring appeal.

This vibrant community life is especially evident in the growing participation in daily chapel among students, faculty, and staff. As CUNE's worship life continues to flourish at the heart of campus, the steady increase in attendance suggests that the university may need to consider how to provide worship space that can fully support a growing campus family and a shared life of Word and worship through a stand-alone chapel.

Strategically, the university remains focused on recruiting mission-fit students seeking a Lutheran higher education. Recruitment pipelines have been strengthened through partnerships with Lutheran schools, districts, and ministries, while marketing outreach highlights CUNE's Christ-centered academic excellence, academic communities, and pathways into church work vocations.

A.1. Academic Communities and Christ-Centered Excellence

CUNE continues to focus on mission-driven student support, as well as disciplinary catechesis and vocational discipleship. A key thread of the strategic plan is strengthening our commitment to Christ-centered academic excellence through the development of distinct, inspiring, and holistic academic communities, including:

- Luke Scholars Honors Program—a rigorous, Christ-centered honors community emphasizing academic excellence, leadership, and service.
- Micah Pre-Health Scholars Program—supporting students pursuing medical and health-related careers through mentoring, advising, and service-learning grounded in Christian compassion.
- Paul Scholars Work Education Program—supporting students through meaningful classroom experience integrated with vocational exploration.
- Uzziah Ag Scholars Program—equipping the next generation of agricultural leaders through hands-on experiences, industry engagement, and a theology of stewardship.

A.2. Church Work Recruitment and Support

CUNE continues its commitment to raising up faithful church workers for the LCMS. The university's current undergraduate enrollment includes more than 300 students majoring in church work with a goal to recruit 100 new church work students each year. Recruitment initiatives include collaboration with districts and Lutheran high schools, revitalized visit days for church work recruitment, digital storytelling highlighting current church work students and alumni, and a dedicated church work admissions recruiter.

CUNE's Church Work Scholarships, together with church and outside scholarships and federal aid, mean that church work students pay, on average, less than \$3,500 in tuition per year, helping students pursue their callings in ministry without undue financial burden. As the number of students preparing for service in Christ's church continues to grow, additional gifts and ongoing support will be essential to sustain and enhance the financial aid packages that help make this formative preparation possible.

B. Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning

CUNE continues to expand professional learning opportunities for Christian educators, ministry leaders, and other professionals through a growing menu of new *Studia Vitae* continuing education units which include short-form online modules, workshops, and micro-credentials designed for immediate application in schools and congregations. Single course graduate offerings, certificates, and full degree programs are similarly tailored to Lutherans serving in ministry and Christians seeking faith-grounded professional preparation, to help prepare leaders who embody faith, learning, and service.

Guided by the conviction that God's Word is the lamp and light that guides study across every discipline, these professional development experiences apply the unchanging truth of God's Word to shed light on the shifting sands of modern life, thought, and cultural trends. *Studia Vitae* reflects CUNE's commitment to lifelong vocational discipleship, equipping Christians to grow continually in wisdom and to serve with clarity and confidence anchored in God's Word.

B.1. Preferred Partnerships

CUNE's newly launched preferred partnership program extends the reach of our mission in Christ-centered education. These collaborations, which include tuition discounts on *Studia Vitae* courses and graduate offerings, allow CUNE to make high-quality, Christ-centered education accessible to more students while enhancing the value these organizations provide to members, empowering Christians to grow in knowledge, strengthen their vocations, and serve others with excellence.

C. Outreach and Institutes

CUNE's institutes provide outreach, service, and educational efforts that enhance the university's mission and vision by engaging audiences beyond campus while serving as a resource to the church at large.

Active institutes include:

- Center for Liturgical Art
- Initiative for Early Childhood Education
- Institute for Ethical Leadership
- Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship
- Institute for Literacy
- Institute for Religious Education
- Institute for Rural and Small-Town Ministries
- Trinity Academy

Through resources, workshops, and conferences, these institutes equip Christian leaders and provide resources that serve congregations, districts, and Lutheran organizations.

D. Looking Ahead

As CUNE looks to the future, the university remains steadfast in its commitment to equipping students for faithful service in Christ's church and the world. Enrollment initiatives will continue to focus on recruiting mission-fit students and strengthening partnerships with Lutheran schools, districts, and congregations.

New academic communities will continue to develop innovative approaches to formation, mentorship, and vocational preparation, ensuring students are equipped with the knowledge, faith, and skills to serve in schools, congregations, or wherever God leads them.

A defining emphasis for the years ahead is the vision of a higher education community whose first loyalty is to the Scriptures—an increasingly rare but urgently needed orientation in modern higher education. This commitment will continue to shape every discipline and professional field, guiding how CUNE forms students for thoughtful, faithful engagement in the church and world.

This scriptural foundation also informs CUNE's long-term aspiration to be a year-round, lifelong learning Lutheran university that supports Christians not only during their undergraduate years but throughout every stage of life and vocation. Through academic programs, continuing education, and emerging initiatives, CUNE seeks to extend learning, formation, and discipleship across the full span of a Christian's service in home, congregation, and community.

The university's outreach through institutes and centers will likewise continue to grow, offering research, resources, and training that strengthen Lutheran identity, support congregational vitality, and equip leaders for service in both local and global contexts.

Finally, CUNE remains committed to raising up the next generation of church workers, responding faithfully to the Synod's call to support Lutheran ministries through robust recruitment, formation, and scholarship programs. Guided by the principle of Christ-centered education in service to the church, the university looks forward to continuing to partner with the Synod in forming leaders who will impact congregations, schools, and communities for years to come.

Bernard D. Bull, *President*

R14.4

Concordia University, St. Paul

Greetings from Concordia University, St. Paul (CSP), where we walk in the light of Jesus Christ as we live, learn, and serve together as a university of the Synod (1 John 1:7).

As I returned to my alma mater and began my tenure as president of CSP in January 2020, I could not have envisioned the opportunities and challenges of the past six-plus years. However, I've experienced much joy in serving at this Christ-centered Lutheran university, working alongside talented faculty, staff, regents, and constituents to support our dynamic and diverse student population.

A. Introduction

Established in 1893 as a high school to prepare young men for pastoral ministry, Concordia University, St. Paul, is now a university that serves more than 7,000 students annually and confers associates through doctoral degrees. The university offers more than 100 academic programs and students learn in face-to-face settings in St. Paul, Minn.; Portland, Ore.; and Denver, Colo., as well as online around the world. As we have over the past 130-plus years, CSP is committed to raising up workers for the Synod and offers the following church work tracks and certifications: pre-seminary, pre-deaconess, director of Christian education, director of Christian outreach, director of parish music, and Lutheran classroom teacher.

B. Goals

CSP is guided by a comprehensive strategic plan titled *Vision 2030*. This plan contains the following elements:

Mission: The mission of Concordia University, St. Paul, a university of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, is to prepare students for thoughtful and informed living, for dedicated service to God and humanity, and for enlightened care of God’s creation, all within the context of the Christian Gospel.

Vision: The vision of Concordia University, St. Paul, is to be a Christ-centered, nationally prominent Lutheran university known for excellence and innovation that fosters success for all students.

Promise to students: Concordia University, St. Paul, empowers you to discover and engage your purpose for life, career, and service in a dynamic and multicultural environment where Christ is honored, all are welcome, and Lutheran convictions inform intellectual inquiry and academic pursuits.

Strategic Goals:

1. Grow enrollment to 10,000 students.
2. Increase persistence to graduation.
3. Deliver career-connected curriculum.

Concordia University, St. Paul, includes in *Vision 2030* a focus on **financial sustainability** to ensure its strategic goals can be met and the university can remain vibrant into the future.

At the center of the strategic plan is the fact that CSP is a **Christ-centered, Lutheran university**. May we remain faithful to God’s Word as we serve all students who choose Concordia St. Paul as their higher education institution.

C. Performance Analysis

C.1. Grow Enrollment to 10,000 Students

Over the last triennium, Concordia University, St. Paul, has continued to grow enrollment. As many of our peer institutions struggle with changing demographics, the economy, international student enrollment, and other challenges, we have seen a tremendous response to our efforts to provide a Lutheran, Christ-centered, high-quality, and career-focused higher education.

- Total student enrollment during the 2024–25 academic year was 7,614 students.
- Fall semester enrollment decreased slightly from 5,819 in fall 2023 to 5,797 in fall 2025, driven primarily by a decline in international student enrollment (due to fewer visas). Still, it was the third largest in the university’s history.
- Traditional undergraduate enrollment increased from 1,725 students in the fall of 2023 to 2,102 students in the fall of 2025, marking the largest traditional undergraduate enrollment ever.
- Doctoral enrollment increased from 393 students in fall 2023 to 520 students in fall 2025.
- Traditional church work enrollment increased from 82 in the fall of 2023 to 92 in the fall of 2025.
- In 2025, CSP acquired Platt College, a for-profit nursing school in Denver, Colo., and now serves over 100 students at that location.

- In January 2027, CSP plans to launch a physician assistant program, pending accreditor’s approval.

C.2. Increase Persistence to Graduation

Concordia University, St. Paul, staff and faculty work diligently to ensure students can continue their studies until they complete their chosen degrees. We celebrate the increase in the total number of graduates from 1,910 in the 2022–23 academic year to 2,242 in the 2024–25 academic year. We will continue to work hard to remove barriers and increase retention among new freshmen and transfer students. The primary obstacles to persistence are financial challenges, followed by a mismatch between the academic program and individual needs. Our retention of LCMS new freshmen and transfer students remains strong.

C.3. Maintain a Quality, Relevant Curriculum to Strengthen Transition to a Job or Graduate School

As we continue to track the data on the success of our graduates, we celebrate their accomplishments in launching the next phase of their careers or education. Our most recent data is from the class of 2024, where 98 percent of graduates reported successful transitions to career or graduate school. We also see similar success with our church work population, where we have a 100 percent placement rate for geographically mobile graduates as well as a growing number of students matriculating to seminary following graduation. CSP consistently ranks in the top two of Minnesota institutions at promoting social mobility of its graduates, measuring our success at helping students advance their socioeconomic status.

C.4. Financial Sustainability

From FY2022 to the end of FY2025, Concordia University, St. Paul’s net assets increased from ~\$140 million (M) to ~\$170M, or by 18 percent. Growth was achieved through positive operating results, a reduction in long-term debt, an increase in the value of invested assets and property, and growth in philanthropy.

CSP publicly announced the seven-year, \$55M *Elevate the Promise* campaign in March 2024, a comprehensive campaign intended to ensure student success with a focus on unrestricted gifts, scholarships, and endowment growth. All gifts between July 1, 2020, and June 30, 2027, are counted as part of this campaign. The initial \$55M goal was reached as of December 31, 2025. CSP’s endowment has grown from \$55M in fall 2023 to \$76M in fall 2025.

C.5. A Christ-Centered, Lutheran University

Accomplishments during the triennium to promote and enhance CSP’s Lutheran identity include the following:

- Receiving a \$10M gift from the Rev. Jim and Karen Laatsch to endow the Department of Theology and Ministry, including two endowed faculty chairs in Old and New Testament.
- Expanding the Church Work Tuition Guarantee so that, beginning in fall 2026, all students in church work programs pay \$0 in tuition. Congregational, district, Synod, or other outside financial aid can be applied toward room and board costs.
- Offering the Solus Christus Fellows program for undergraduate students, which fosters reflection on the connections between the Christian faith, academic learning, and life together.
- Cultivating an understanding of Christian vocation and mission amongst CSP students through the CUS-wide Beautiful

Feet Mission Conference and a CSP-specific winter vocation retreat.

- Receiving the 2025 Formal Visitation Report from the CUS which “affirmed without concerns Concordia University, St. Paul, and each of its implemented church work programs.”
- Calling the Rev. Dr. Mark Koschmann to serve as CSP’s Chief Mission Officer and Vice President of Faith and Ministry.
- Calling Joshua Schumacher (LCMS commissioned teacher) as head football coach.
- Calling the Rev. Dr. Kendall Davis to serve as Assistant Professor of New Testament Studies.
- Calling DCE Shelly Schwalm as Assistant Professor of Christian Ministry and Director of Christian Education program director.
- Calling the Rev. Dr. Ryan Peterson to serve as Senior Development and Church Relations Officer, where he engages donors and the broader CSP community and leads CSP Sundays.
- Calling Dr. Paul von Kampen as Director of Choral Activities and Director of Church and School Engagement Through the Fine Arts, where he engages with the church through music.
- Holding events through the Center for Biblical Studies—under the direction of the Rev. Dr. Reed Lessing—to provide ongoing training and resources for clergy, commissioned workers, and laypeople. More than 850 unique individuals have attended these events since the center launched in 2021.
- Sponsoring participant Bibles for the 2025 LCMS Youth Gathering.
- Visiting LCMS congregations for CSP Sundays, where the Rev. Dr. Ryan Peterson or another faculty member preaches and leads Bible studies. CSP led 20 Concordia Sundays in the 2024–25 academic year and will lead another 20 or more by the end of the 2025–26 academic year.
- Offering the Lutheran Higher Education Seminar for new faculty and staff to explore the richness of Lutheran theology and how it shapes their vocations at CSP.
- Hosting the annual Gundermann Reformation Lecture and *Confessio*: A Retreat on the Lutheran Confessions.
- Partnering with LCMS organizations like the Association of Lutheran Secondary Schools, Lutheran Education Association, and National Association of Directors of Christian Education.
- Attending numerous district conventions and pastors’ conferences throughout the eight-district region that surrounds CSP.

D. Conclusion

God has richly blessed Concordia University, St. Paul, throughout the past triennium as we continue to “prepare students . . . in the context of the Christian Gospel.” While we celebrate our successes, we also acknowledge the challenges that lie ahead. The following SWOT analysis summarizes our current position as we look forward to our next 133 years under God’s grace.

D.1. Strengths

- Lutheran identity
- Enrollment growth
- Fiscal strength
- Global reach
- Breadth of academic programs and degree levels
- Expertise and experience in delivering higher education in multiple modalities (face-to-face, online, hybrid)
- Talented and faithful faculty and staff
- Strong board of regents and executive leadership team

D.2. Weaknesses

- Persistence to graduation for traditional undergraduate students
- Heavy reliance on tuition revenue
- Historic lack of philanthropic support
- Small endowment in comparison to student-body size
- Landlocked campus in St. Paul

D.3. Opportunities

- Demand for workers in healthcare, business, and technology
- Opportunities to add new academic programs in Denver and Portland
- Preparation of a new generation of church work students in the urban context
- Dynamic locations of physical campuses and real-world opportunities for students
- Ability to innovate and adapt quickly to changing market conditions and student needs

D.4. Threats

- Cultural headwinds
- Public policy and legislation
- Reduction in State of Minnesota financial aid programs
- Economic conditions
- Increased higher education competition

Concordia University, St. Paul, thanks and praises God for all those who support us through their prayers, philanthropic gifts, time, and referral of students. As we walk together in our common mission and confession, may we continue to point to Jesus Christ, crucified and “risen indeed” to bring forgiveness, life, and salvation to all who believe.

Brian L. Friedrich, *President*

R14.5

Concordia University Wisconsin and Ann Arbor

A. Introduction

As of the fall 2025 census, Concordia University Wisconsin and Ann Arbor (CUWAA) serves 5,025 students at its two campuses and online. The university’s six schools offer 84 undergraduate ma-

jors and programs, 19 graduate/master's degrees and programs, 9 doctoral/professional programs, 2 associate degrees, and 43 certificate programs. The university's largest programs include business, education, computer science, nursing, and rehabilitation science programs. CUWAA is strongly committed to preparing professional church workers as described in section C.

B. Changes at Ann Arbor Campus

In 2013, Concordia University Wisconsin (CUW), out of a sense of generosity and support for the work of the Church, acquired Concordia University Ann Arbor (CUAA). Because of that acquisition, CUAA ceased to exist legally as an independent entity, and instead served as a branch campus of CUW. In 2023, CUW's internal financial review determined that the university had, over the past decade, experienced \$4–5 million (M) (~16.5 percent) in annual operating losses at the Ann Arbor campus. The review also documented that from 2013–23, CUW invested more than \$90M in the Ann Arbor campus. An external evaluation of the finances of the Ann Arbor campus in 2023 determined that the financial model for the Ann Arbor campus was unsustainable and recommended that the campus should be reduced or closed. The board of regents, after exploring numerous options, voted in 2025 to reduce operations and move all remaining programming to the North Building, which is approximately 1.5 miles from the Geddes Road campus. The university is actively fulfilling these four commitments:

1. Continuing physical presence in Michigan
2. Delivering academic programs that align fully with the mission of the university
3. Delivering high-quality academic programs
4. Achieving a financially sustainable model for the Ann Arbor campus

In addition to the online Lutheran Ed program, the university will continue to pursue the reintroduction of face-to-face church work programs in Ann Arbor if the university is able to achieve the fourth commitment. At the time of the writing of this report, the university has not finalized any plans for the sale or development of the Geddes Road campus. The university has determined to retain the property the Michigan District office occupies and maintain its lease with the Michigan District.

C. Church Work

CUWAA remains deeply committed to preparing professional church workers for service in the Synod. The university's church work programs include Pre-Seminary, Lutheran Teacher Diploma, Parish Music, and the Synod's only Director of Christian Ministry (DCM) program.

As of the fall 2025 census, the university serves 235 church work students in those programs as follows: 47 pre-seminary, 122 Lutheran teacher, 34 DCM, and 4 parish music. As these numbers indicate, CUWAA continues to promote and prioritize its church work programs.

In the 2025–26 academic year, the average church work student paid \$0 out of pocket for tuition. In order to support the students enrolled in those programs, the university is continually evaluating and enhancing its commitment to its church work scholarship program and seeking new ways to partner with the church broadly.

D. Health Professions

Overall, our various healthcare studies programs play a primary role at both campuses and remain a strength of the university. These programs include nursing, athletic training, physician assistant studies (in Ann Arbor), occupational therapy, and physical therapy. They attract highly qualified students and strengthen the academic reputation and financial position of our university.

E. Core Revisions

The faculty is in the process of revising the core curriculum to provide a unified, coherent educational foundation for all undergraduate students and to be more transfer friendly.

F. Artificial Intelligence

The faculty has developed undergraduate and graduate programs that prioritize professional and ethical applications of artificial intelligence. A faculty task force is also developing policies and practices to guide the implementation and management of artificial intelligence across the domains of teaching and learning.

G. Campus Master Plan

The Synod's Board of Directors has approved a new campus master plan for the university. The first phase of the plan covers the next five years and includes these projects at the Mequon campus: a revitalization and expansion of the nursing facilities, a revitalization and expansion of fine arts space, development of new space and place for engineering, the transformation of the library into a learning commons, and the renovation of the chapel to include a baptistry, an expanded narthex/gathering space, and a bell tower. The next projects envisioned for the Ann Arbor campus include the development of the Maier Center and a fitness center.

H. Strategic Plan

For the past two years, the university has followed its strategic plan, *Wholeheartedly, We Will*, with these four strategic pillars:

1. Live our mission.
2. Create transformational student experiences.
3. Secure resources for mission.
4. Enhance the CUWAA strategic model.

At the time of the writing of this report, the majority of plan initiatives are completed or nearing completion. The university intends to begin the next iteration of strategic planning in 2026.

I. Conclusion

While the university continues to face the same disruptions and challenges as any other university in the nation, it is financially stable, strong in its missional commitments, and, most importantly, faithful to the truths of Holy Scripture. In fact, during the 2025 formal Concordia University System visit to assess the university's ability to address the Synod's Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcome Standards (based on 2023 Res. 7-04B), the team identified no major concerns. CUWAA, as a Lutheran university community, will continue to prioritize the Christian tradition, foster a culture of thoughtful innovation, and prepare students—grounded in Christ—for lives of faithful service in their vocations, serving the Church and loving their neighbor in the world.

Erik P. Ankerberg, *President*

R15

Concordia Historical Institute

The Department of Archives and History
of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

concordiahistoricalinstitute.org

Treasuring and Trumpeting the Redeeming Work of Christ in the Faith and Life of the Missouri Synod

Under our three-year convention theme, *Christ Is Risen Indeed* (1 Cor. 15:20–22), Concordia Historical Institute (CHI) reminds the Synod that its history is a sacred trust—one we are called not only to preserve, but to joyfully proclaim. Our Lord Jesus Christ has redeemed not only His people, but our history as well. Because of this, CHI staff and board continue to steward the resources entrusted to us so that the Institute may continue to serve as the premier provider of Lutheran historical resources for Synod leadership, districts, congregations, and families. *Soli Deo gloria.*

A. Our Charge: Active Stewardship of Lutheran Historical and Archival Resources

The roots of CHI reach back to the founding of the LCMS 179 years ago, when the Synod Secretary was tasked with recording the church's history and preserving documents and artifacts of lasting historical value. Officially incorporated as a nonprofit institution in 1927, CHI has continued this mission—retrieving, organizing, preserving, and sharing historical treasures for the benefit of church and community. Today, CHI serves as a resource for Synod, district, university, and congregational archives, giving fresh opportunities for us to rediscover Christ's merciful hand as we recall major anniversaries related to the Missouri Synod.

As the Synod's official department of archives and history (By-law 3.6.2), CHI curates the largest Lutheran archival collection in North America. This collection includes documents, publications, rare books, photographs, audiovisual materials, artifacts, numismatics, and fine art connected to the Reformation and the Lutheran Church in North America. CHI's primary area of collection encompasses all materials directly related to the history of the Synod, while its secondary scope includes materials that provide essential historical context for understanding that 179-year history.

Through these efforts, CHI documents the life of a church body that, by the mercy and grace of Christ and His Word, has endured crises, navigated conflict, and continued to grow and flourish in difficult and threatening times.

Currently, CHI actively manages the following:

- Over 20,000 linear feet of archival materials—nearly 67 football fields in length—preserved in climate-controlled facilities
- A rapidly expanding collection of historic photographs, film, audio and video recordings, artifacts (many originating from the mission field), numismatic pieces, and fine art
- Professional archival and research services that organize, catalog, digitize, and provide access to more than 4 million individual items
- Two high-quality museums:
 - Rotating history exhibits in the exhibition hall in the CHI building on the campus of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis
- The 80-page, illustrated *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly (CHIQ)*, the longest-running journal of Lutheran history in North America, now in its 99th year
- A redesigned, smartphone-friendly website with access to the CHI catalogs and offering an expanding array of downloadable historical resources
- An annual awards program—now in its 53rd year—recognizing excellence in publishing Lutheran historical scholarship
- A newly launched CHI Monograph Series, making significant research in historical topics available in English and other languages
- Hill of Peace Lutheran Memorial in Friedenberg, Missouri—a historic touchstone of 19th-century Lutheran faith and life

B. Major Accomplishments Over the Last Triennium

B.1. Developed and Shared Resources to Observe/ Commemorate Synod-Related Anniversaries

Over the past three years, CHI has produced and shared a wide range of resources to commemorate key anniversaries in Synod history, including the following:

- Fall 2021: A museum exhibit marking the 500th anniversary of the first numismatic portrait of Martin Luther, featuring more than 70 artistic portrayals of Luther, Katharina von Bora, Philip Melancthon, and Frederick the Wise
- Spring 2022: The 175th anniversary of the LCMS, observed through a special full-color *CHIQ* issue, a commemorative bronze medal, 49 downloadable biographies, new publications, and Walther Roundtable XXXIII
- Fall 2022: Online museum exhibit commemorating the 500th anniversary of Martin Chemnitz's birth
- 2022–2023: Multiple *CHIQ* essays and issues recognizing LCMS World Relief and Human Care, Deaf Ministry, the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference, and the 1973 New Orleans convention
- 2024: Extensive observance of the 50th anniversary of the 1974 Concordia Seminary walkout, including bibliographies, special issues, and a major scholarly publication
- 2024–2026: Commemorations of KFUE Radio, missionary journeys, global mission work, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and Lutheran history in the United States

CHI is preparing to commemorate upcoming ethnic ministry and mission anniversaries in Brazil, Latin America, and Japan in the next three years, supported by museum exhibits, multilingual publications, and special presentations.

B.2. Expansion and Greater Accessibility of CHI's Archival Collection

CHI has continued to prioritize the retrieval and preservation of records from closed Synod congregations, institutions, and church leaders. Significant progress includes the processing of archival

materials from Concordia College Alabama; Concordia University, Portland; and Concordia College—New York, as well as the completion of a two-year project organizing the extensive files of Synod missionary and church planter Robert Gussick. These materials are now fully accessible to researchers.

In addition, CHI has launched an initiative to conduct oral history interviews with church leaders and missionaries on the Synod, district, and congregational level, preserving firsthand testimony of our Lutheran faith and life for future generations.

B.3. Expanded Guidebooks with a Stronger Focus on Digitally Accessible Historical Resources

In the wake of COVID-era research restrictions, demand for digital access to historical resources has grown significantly. This shift aligns with the increasing volume of historically valuable materials that are now “born digital.” In response, CHI has developed three new and updated handbooks to help congregations, districts, and Synod entities responsibly steward their historical records.

Revised in 2025, these handbooks—*Collection Policies and Procedures*, *District Archivist Handbook*, and *Record and Archive Management Program (RAMP) Handbook*—provide clear, practical guidance for managing historical materials in both physical and digital formats. All are freely available on the CHI website and may be shared and printed at no cost, extending their impact across the Synod.

B.4. Over 20,000 Historical Photographs Digitally Processed and Available

CHI is home to a collection of over 200,000 photographs, many documenting LCMS mission work around the world. Beyond digitization alone, CHI carefully embeds detailed descriptive information into each digital image, making it easier to discover specific people, places, times, and events within LCMS history.

As a result of this work, more than 16,200 photographs from India are now accessible online, along with 2,400 images documenting mission efforts in Japan and 1,400 from Brazil. These growing digital collections allow global audiences to engage more deeply with the story of Lutheran mission and ministry.

B.5. Strengthened Global Partnerships That Inform and Inspire

CHI continues to cultivate meaningful partnerships with Lutheran church bodies and archival institutions worldwide to advance the shared work of preserving and proclaiming Lutheran history. Memorandums of Understanding have been established with *Book of Concord* Lutheran church bodies in Brazil, South Korea, and India, as well as with historic archives in Neuendettelsau, Halle, and Gotha, Germany.

These collaborations enrich research, expand access, and strengthen global connections. Additional partnerships are anticipated in the coming months.

B.6. Completed Renovations and Upgrades to More Efficiently Preserve and Proclaim Our Treasured History

CHI gives thanks to the Lord of the Church for the successful 2024–25 capital campaign, *For All the Saints*. Through the generosity of CHI members and Synod entities, \$1.6 million was raised to address critical building improvements and aging equipment that

directly impacted CHI’s ability to preserve and proclaim our shared history.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of Synod leadership, districts, congregations, and individuals whose generosity has strengthened CHI’s capacity to preserve, protect, and share Lutheran history for decades to come.

B.7. 2023 Res. 6-09, “To Recognize and Honor the Pastor’s Wife”

At the 2023 Synod convention, CHI was charged with considering the commissioning of a commemorative medal that could be used by LCMS districts, institutions, congregations, and individuals.

CHI has now struck a large copper-nickel medal highlighting Katharina von Bora as “loving wife, devoted mother, and a faithful servant of Christ and His Church.” These attractive memorials are now available for use in recognizing and honoring the faithfulness of women in the Church, especially the faithfulness of the pastor’s wife.

C. Strategic Priorities for the Next Triennium

By the grace of God and with the prayers and financial support from Synod and CHI members, over the next three years, CHI is positioned to

- strengthen long-term financial sustainability amid rising operational costs, ensuring stable staffing and adequate resources;
- process and make discoverable 50 historically significant collections (over 1,100 linear feet) that are currently unorganized and not adequately discoverable;
- produce resources marking upcoming anniversaries, including
 - the 150th anniversary of Black Lutheran Ministry (July 2027),
 - the 500th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession and the 450th anniversary of the *Book of Concord* (June 25, 2030), and
 - the 100th anniversary of CHI (April 28, 2027);
- implement innovative methods to capture and preserve Lutheran historical materials that may otherwise be lost within the next three to five years;
- develop new and engaging approaches—especially for youth and young adults—to rediscover Synod history within the broader context of Martin Luther and *Book of Concord* Lutheranism; and
- begin phase 1 of installing a fire suppression system to better protect archival areas within the CHI building.

D. Summary

As we look ahead to this coming triennium in light of the charge entrusted to CHI by the Synod, we do so with gratitude for God’s abundant blessings. By God’s grace,

- our financial position continues to strengthen;
- the CHI collection continues to deepen;
- the population we provide with services and resources continues to widen; and

- our partnerships in advancing *Book of Concord* Lutheranism outside of North America continue to expand.

At the same time, we remain mindful that these resources are not ends in themselves. In a world increasingly indifferent to the faithful preservation of history, the Church's historical treasures must be actively placed in service of Christ's work in our history and ongoing promises. Our prayer and purpose: *that more within the Missouri Synod would come to treasure and trumpet Christ's redeeming work as it has been lived out in the life of the Lutheran Church.*

Every document preserved, every church record safeguarded, every photograph digitized, every exhibit opened, and every student whose Lutheran identity is clarified and strengthened through archival research bears witness to the faithfulness of our crucified and risen Lord—who has sustained His Church in the age of Luther and the age of Walther, Wyneken, and Pieper.

These responsibilities call for sustained focus as we press on to increase value while reducing risk. With the continued support of the Synod and CHI's membership, CHI is committed to

- continuing the organization and cataloging of materials to improve discoverability;
- further ensuring the long-term preservation and safekeeping of irreplaceable treasures;
- expanding accessibility—both digitally and in person—for those engaged in historical research;
- fostering deeper gratitude for our distinctive Lutheran heritage among the saints today—for the sake of the saints who will follow us; and
- increasing long-term financial sustainability.

We meet these opportunities and challenges confident in the steadfast promises of our crucified and risen Lord. As we treasure and trumpet His work in the faith and life of the Missouri Synod, we honor the saints who have gone before us, that we may inspire the saints now and into the future.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. (Heb. 12:1–2a)

In thanksgiving for the blessings over the last three years, CHI asks for your continued prayers and financial support as we press on to further the redeemed history of our merciful Redeemer among us.

Daniel N. Harmelink, *Executive Director*

R16

Concordia Publishing House

The world we live in today is constantly changing, often in directions contrary to our faith. But we know that the Word of the Lord endures forever (1 Peter 1:25). Concordia Publishing House (CPH) is proud to serve as the official publishing arm of the Synod. It is our privilege to provide resources that equip congregations, schools, and families to effectively share and teach God's enduring Word in a changing world.

From the days of CPH's founding, equipping schools with resources to teach our children has been a priority. Our pre-K through

eight grade religion curriculum, *Enduring Faith*, is now used by a vast majority of Synod schools. We continue to supplement this curriculum with online resources that provide additional value and meet unique needs.

Our support of Lutheran schools is not limited to classroom curriculum. In this "golden era" of Lutheran education, a significant challenge to the growth of our schools is the lack of rostered teachers to fill the classrooms. We are excited for the April 2026 launch of Lutheran Educator Academy, a video-based resource for use by Lutheran school administrators as they navigate the reality of nonrostered and often non-LCMS faculty and staff. We have designed this tool especially with those teachers in mind. It complements other efforts to serve those teachers who choose not to or have not yet completed colloquy by equipping them to understand the Lutheran setting in which they are teaching and introducing them to its opportunities, ways of thinking, expectations, and common language. An experienced mix of pastors and Lutheran educators have contributed to this.

During the COVID-19 era, our churches and schools recognized rapidly rising rates of anxiety, depression, loneliness, and other mental health issues among our youth. In response, CPH introduced *Resilient Minds*, a mental health curriculum for grades 5 through high school for use in our schools, and with additional support materials for the home.

CPH is further serving families and children in an exciting way through the launch of *Words of Worship*, a new program funded through a \$1.25 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc., within their Nurturing Children Through Worship and Prayer Initiative. In partnership with the Missouri and Northern Illinois Districts, CPH has formed three cohorts of congregations to advise on and test out a suite of resources related to *Lutheran Service Book (LSB)*. As *LSB* has been adopted by more than 90 percent of LCMS congregations, we are optimistic about providing the full set of resources to the whole Synod. The *Words of Worship* resources will be geared for passing along the faith to children ages 0–8 and will release in multiple waves, beginning in 2027.

Providing faithful and accessible resources for children, parents, and other caregivers is also otherwise a high priority at CPH. We are giving attention to the special needs of our time and the particular challenges that families face. Children's picture books on the Nicene Creed and Baptism are recent releases, and an innovative new series called *Bedtime Bible Journeys* aims to help families dig deeply into the Scriptures and recognize both Law and Gospel as they do.

Another major initiative launched this triennium has been the Arch® Book food bank program. CPH sends the books to LCMS congregations and other organizations that sponsor food banks/panttries so that the families they serve can be fed both physically and spiritually. Currently, over 10,000 books are distributed each week through this initiative.

Academic publishing is a further ongoing focus for CPH. We have published 50 volumes of the Concordia Commentary series. We have increased the frequency with which these are released and have also begun supplementing them for congregational usage with the Concordia Commentary Bible Study Series. *Luther's Works* volumes continue to release as well. In the spirit of offering resources by academics but not only for academics, contributions in our new *Apropos* series by the best scholars in the Synod address important but carefully defined topics with clarity and depth. Initial

releases on missions, the two kingdoms, and transgenderism offer a picture of what we hope that series will become.

CPH is unequivocally committed to publishing doctrinally pure resources. The main pillar of this commitment is evaluation of scriptural and confessional fidelity through the Synod's established Doctrinal Review (DR) process. In isolated cases, historically significant works of Lutheran theology have been translated into English and published by CPH without going through DR. These include *Luther's Works*, *Walther's Works*, *Chemnitz's Works*, and Johann Gerhard's *Theological Commonplaces*. While we do not suggest that these authors are incapable of error, we share with the respective seminary professors and Synod entities with whom we partner on these projects the view that the faithful contribution of these works justifies their publication. In the very rare case of modern works of this sort (like Albrecht Peters's *Commentary on Luther's Catechisms* and Hellmut Lieberg's *Office and Ordination in Luther and Melancthon*), we have included a special notice in the books, designating them as study resources and making clear that they have not been submitted to DR. No modern books of this sort have been in any stage of development in the last triennium, nor are any at present, although projects like *Luther's Works* continue.

During the past triennium, CPH invested heavily in a mobile app version of *The Lutheran Study Bible*, now available on both iOS and Android devices. This past January, we launched a Book of Concord website featuring *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* at bookofconcord.cph.org. This is the most widely used edition of the Book of Concord in the LCMS today, and we encourage all congregations to link to it on their websites as an essential component of their faith statements.

CPH is thankful for the rostered church workers throughout the LCMS and prays for them weekly in our chapel services. For many years, we have provided rostered church workers with a 20 percent discount on most products purchased for individual use. During this past triennium, we have begun providing free shipping for these purchases as well.

In response to 2023 Res. 11-03A, CPH has been working in collaboration with the Office of National Mission to prepare a resource on the Synod's ministry and outreach to communities of color. As a result of 223 Res. 12-01A, CPH staff worked closely with LCMS School Ministry to produce and publish Lutheran Academic Standards. Likewise, CPH was represented in the last triennium on the Created Male and Female Task Force, as mandated in 2023 Res. 1-04A, and continues to provide new resources that faithfully address human sexuality.

We also continue to increase our partnership efforts with corporate Synod and her agencies and partners not only in response to convention resolutions but also in the course of our normal service to the Synod. While space constraints prevent a complete listing, here is a representative sampling: We have worked closely with the Office of the President, Office of International Mission, and the International Lutheran Council to get our confessional Lutheran resources into the hands of pastors in our partner churches around the world. CPH created a mini curriculum in support of the *Set Apart to Serve* initiative. And our partnership with Concordia Historical Institute to produce books vital to preserve and communicate the history of our work as a Synod continues with several new volumes completed and planned.

We invite all church workers and lay members of LCMS congregations to visit us at cph.org to view the 8,000-plus books, cur-

ricula, music, church resources, church administration software, and other resources that we offer. Also, in order to help get products into the hands of "LCMS pew-sitters," CPH has started a new Resource Program, which provides discounts and free shipping on orders sent to congregations. We already have 600 congregations signed up. We invite your congregation to sign up as well.

Christ Is Risen Indeed! This unchanging truth reminds us in this changing world that our faith is not in vain, nor is our work to support the faithful proclamation of the Gospel. On your behalf, and with the Lord's guidance, CPH will continue to strive to be the premier publisher and provider of choice for products and services faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. We pray our products help the LCMS continue to boldly proclaim the risen Christ to the world around us.

Jonathan D. Schultz, *President and CEO*

R17

Lutheran Church Extension Fund

"Christ Is Risen Indeed"

Organization Mission Statement

To start, sustain and strengthen LCMS ministries through financial and strategic partnerships.

Our vision of growing ministry opportunities lives through our core values: be faithful, pursue excellence and innovation, inspire belief through partnerships, endure balancing resources and risk, and learn continually.

The Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) remains in a strong financial position and has joyfully fulfilled its commitment to provide the financial resources necessary to support the church in her work. Below is an overview, and more details can be found in the Offering Circular and Ministry and Business Plan, published annually.

Investments

The ladder fixed income portfolio as of June 30, 2025, totaled \$253.1 million with an interest yield of 2.89 percent compared to a yield of 2.71 percent a year ago. The long-term reserve portfolio (consisting of fixed income, equities and other non-correlated investments) totaled \$91.7 million.

Net market value gains for the period ending June 30, 2025, totaled \$20.6 million with ladder fixed income gains of \$11.3 million and long-term portfolio gains of \$9.3 million. Inclusive of the investment income as of June 30, 2025, the total return for the ladder portfolio was 6.75 percent. Within the long-term portfolio, the equity, semiliquid and illiquid portfolios earned a total return gain of 15.7 percent, 8.33 percent, and 6.85 percent, respectively. The total return on the long-term portfolio was a gain of 13.76 percent.

(in 000's)	FYE 2022	FYE 2023	FYE 2024	FYE 2025
Investment Portfolio	\$649,716M	\$452,103M	\$376,723M	\$414,296M
Net Gain (Loss)	(\$59,826M)	(\$1,519M)	\$16,221M	\$20,602M

Loyal investors continued to provide funds to enable LCMS ministries' financial resources that support their efforts to expand God's kingdom.

(in 000's)	FYE 2022	FYE 2023	FYE 2024	FYE 2025
Notes & Support Dollars Payable	\$1,836,641B	\$1,757,332B	\$1,780,812B	\$1,824,056B

LCEF was pleased to share earnings distribution with member districts and the Synod totaling \$9.3 million for the period June 30, 2022, through 2025.

	FYE 2022	FYE 2023	FYE 2024	FYE 2025
Earnings Dist.	\$2,583,165M	\$2,190,876M	\$2,200,738M	\$2,355,702M

Financial Trends

Total assets as of June 30, 2025, amounted to \$2,084.6 billion, an increase of \$58.8 million from June 30, 2024. The increase was due primarily to an increase in notes and support dollars payable.

(in 000's)	FYE 2022	FYE 2023	FYE 2024	FYE 2025
Total Assets	\$2,068,056B	\$1,987,889B	\$2,025,778B	\$2,084,562B

LCEF continues its commitment to a strong capital and liquidity position. Liquidity at June 30, 2025, amounted to 22.7 percent of notes and support dollars payable. Notes and support dollars totaled \$1.824 billion and have increased \$43.2 million since June 30, 2024.

	FYE 2022	FYE 2023	FYE 2024	FYE 2025
Liquidity	35.4%	25.7%	21.2%	22.7%
Notes & Support Dollars Payable	\$1,836,641B	\$1,757,332B	\$1,780,812B	\$1,824,056B

LCEF experienced an operating loss of \$7.3 million for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, compared to operating income of \$888,000 in the prior year. The decline is the result of a contraction in net interest income due to an increase in offering rates during the year and loans lagging the repricing to the increase in cost of funds. Net interest income will improve going forward as annually adjustable loans re-price to the increase in cost of funds and offering rates decline. Net income for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, totaled \$16.2 million compared to net income of \$16.8 million the prior year. The capital to asset ratio was 12.02 percent as of June 30, 2025, compared to 11.63 percent a year ago.

	FYE 2022	FYE 2023	FYE 2024	FYE 2025
Net Interest Income	\$37,929M	\$33,544M	\$30,241M	\$26,461M
Operating Income (Loss)	\$6,900M	\$3,643M	\$888	(\$7,270M)
Net Gain (Loss) on Investments	(\$59,826M)	(\$1,519M)	\$16,221M	\$20,602M
Other Income/Expense	\$12,904M	\$774	(\$287)	\$3,147M
Net Income (Loss)	(\$40,022M)	\$2,898M	\$16,822M	\$16,179M
Capital to Asset Ratio	10.65%	11.11%	11.63%	12.02%

Loans

LCEF supported ministry expansion by closing over \$1.28 billion of loans over the past four years. LCEF continues to track loans in three main categories: congregation lending, national lending (institutions, high schools, colleges and recognized service organizations [RSOs]), and rostered church worker (RCW) housing lending. It should be noted congregation lending, while still robust, continues to decline as an overall percentage of the portfolio.

For fiscal year 2025, congregation lending totaled \$852.7 million or 50 percent of the total loan portfolio. Ten years ago, congregation lending accounted for 75 percent of the total loan portfolio. During the same period, national lending grew from 17 percent of the portfolio to nearly 32 percent, with over \$540 million of total

loans at the end of fiscal year 2025. RCW housing lending has also grown substantially, from 8 percent of the portfolio a decade ago to nearly 18 percent of the portfolio and over \$301 million in total loans today.

In fiscal year 2025, LCEF closed \$329.7 million in new loan commitments. Congregation lending led with \$197.4 million in closings, followed by national lending at \$83.4 million and RCW housing lending at \$48.9 million.

(in 000s)	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025
Total Loans Closed	\$308,975M	\$368,617M	\$340,339M	\$329,714M

Action on Convention Overtures

LCEF addressed the 2023 convention overtures that called the organization to specific areas of work during the triennium.

The 2023 Res. 11-03A encouraged LCEF to support the proclamation of the Gospel across ethnic and linguistic lines. In response, LCEF participated in multiple ethnic ministry gatherings, including the Black Clergy Caucus, the Evangelical Mekane Yesus Lutheran Fellowship in North America, the Multi-Asian Gathering, and the Multiethnic Symposium. These engagements provided opportunities to share information about LCEF services and how they can be used to support the unique ministry needs of these communities.

The 2023 Res. 2-02A and 2-05 directed LCEF to collaborate with and provide resources to the Office of International Mission (OIM). That relationship remained strong throughout the triennium, with expanded opportunities for joint promotion and partnership. Lending to international partners continued and was further strengthened by bylaw changes approved in 2023. LCEF is currently working with the Latin America and Caribbean Region to develop a replicable church planting financial model for use across the region. In addition, a partnership between LCEF and OIM will support the expansion of a seminary facility in Argentina, with additional opportunities in Africa and Asia under exploration.

The 2023 Res. 6-01 directed LCEF and other entities to endorse, advocate for, and engage with *Set Apart to Serve* to recruit, train, and support pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers. In response, LCEF provided funding for the development and deployment of *Set Apart to Serve* school curriculum resources. LCEF teams received training on these resources and intentionally integrated and promoted them across LCEF solutions to support church worker recruitment and ongoing development.

Strategic Plan

Beginning in October 2023, the LCEF Board of Directors engaged in conversations around strengthening and expanding the "financial resources and related services for ministry, witness, and outreach within the Synod" (Bylaw 3.6.4). Those conversations led the board to reconsider the mission, core values, global ends policies, and key performance indicators (KPIs) that anchor this plan in our purpose, while focusing on people, partnerships, platforms, products, and profitability that will frame and focus our work over the coming years. The board believes they, and the organization, have a role and responsibility in growing the Church. That is accomplished through the objectives and duties of the church extension fund within the Synod. Yet those "financial resources and related services" must never become static and stagnant. LCEF must be responsive to the needs and opportunities before the Church as she engages the world with the Gospel.

The new plan is aspirational while tracking quantitative KPIs. The KPIs are aligned to five strategic focus areas, or the “Five P’s” (People, Partnerships, Platforms, Products, and Profitability). We measure what matters. That begins with new global ends policies adopted by the board.

LCEF exists so that financial resources and related services are available within and beyond the Synod. This occurs when investors receive a reasonable rate of return and borrowers pay a reasonable rate of interest; when related services foster ministry, innovation and growth; and when customer satisfaction is a priority.

LCEF exists so that ministries grow through existing and new partnerships. This occurs when collaborative relationships align with our strategic goals.

From these, the rest of the plan aligns, ultimately cascading down through corporate, division, and individual goals that come alive in the annual Ministry and Business Plan.

This plan will direct our work over the next three years. We will align resources to achieve the success the Synod expects from its extension fund. While having a plan is crucial, our promise is even more important. The promise is LCEF will be here today and in the future. We will be here providing faith-driven financial solutions to strengthen ministries and advance mission-driven projects. We will support the growing needs of the Church. As those needs change, so will we—financial and strategic partnerships, together in faith.

Supporting the Work of the Synod

Over the triennium, LCEF continued to find ways to support the mission priorities of the Synod, including the introduction of Real Estate Solutions (RES) as well as the Church Worker Loan Pool (CWLP). LCEF’s RES assists LCMS congregations, schools, districts and RSOs with their real estate strategy to foster ministry by meeting human need and enhancing communities while creating alternative sources of revenue to support ministry. With the exceptional work of the RES team, LCMS land and assets are staying within the LCMS, allowing for further growth and spread of the Gospel.

RES assists congregations, schools, districts and RSOs by creating campus planning strategies, growing ministry through excess real estate while creating alternative sources of revenue, creating school and church expansion feasibility studies, providing owner’s representation and consulting services for construction projects, consulting with highest and best use studies on surplus properties, assisting in developing deferred maintenance plans, and providing site selection and other real estate brokerage services.

At LCEF, we’re committed to supporting those who dedicate their lives to serving the Church. The CWLP provides affordable loans, giving LCMS church workers opportunities like homeownership and debt consolidation while easing financial stress.

Investments and donations are accepted to allow church workers to focus on their calling to preach, teach, and serve with their whole hearts. Together in faith, we’re making a lasting impact on the lives of those who serve Him.

HotChalk, Inc. Litigation Update

On Sept. 19, 2025, LCEF executed a settlement with plaintiff HotChalk, Inc. and other parties by which HotChalk agreed, upon payment of an agreed settlement amount, to execute a release of all claims against LCEF, after which the lawsuit was dismissed. The settlement amount is required to remain confidential, but in the

opinion of LCEF management, the portion paid by LCEF will not materially adversely affect the continued operations of LCEF or its ability, in the ordinary course of its business, to timely meet any of its debts and obligations, including the notes.

Bart Day, *President and CEO*

R18

LCMS Foundation

The LCMS Foundation was created in 1958 by the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to assist Synod members in the creation of charitable estate plans, to accept noncash gifts on behalf of Synod organizations, and to help Synod ministries invest the assets they possess, whether received as estate gifts or through other sources.

We celebrate the generosity of God’s people in supporting the work of His Church and ask the Lord’s continued blessing on our humble efforts that, through His blessing and guidance, the successful performance of our tasks will help bring glory to His name.

Gift Planning

During fiscal years 2023–25, the LCMS Foundation distributed more than 9,200 gifts totaling \$142.5 million to several thousand Synod organizations. These organizations include our congregations and schools, seminaries, districts, and ministries providing missionary support, rural and urban outreach, housing assistance, and much more.

The gifts the Foundation distributes are a result of the joyful response to God’s love found in the hearts of individuals in our Synod community. These are primarily planned gifts such as endowments, donor-advised funds, charitable trusts, etc., administered by the Foundation and distributed to ministry after the donor was called to their heavenly home.

To carry out this work, 20 gift planning counselors are located across the United States. They assist individuals and families in creating comprehensive estate plans to support family and ministry with the very best gifts.

Over the past three years, God truly blessed the work of these 20 gift planning counselors; they helped donors create new gift plans (comprised mostly of future, “planned gifts” to ministry, but also often including immediate gifts as well) totaling more than \$459 million.

Transfer the Blessings

Transfer the Blessings, the Foundation’s gift planning ministry to LCMS congregations, continues to demonstrate its value in assisting LCMS donors in creating their *Lifetime Plan for Giving*. The ministry pairs a Foundation gift planning counselor with a congregation to work directly and intentionally with members in establishing their charitable Christian estate plans. *Transfer the Blessings* builds upon the relationship members have with their congregations to produce a broader approach to giving that provides resources to the church beyond weekly offerings.

Investment Services

Ministries that receive significant gifts from donors or that already possess sizable assets can benefit by working with the Foundation to invest those gifts for future growth. The Foundation presently manages \$1.6 billion in investment and trust assets on behalf of more than 650 Synod organizations.

By managing assets collectively for the church, the Foundation offers access to Synod congregations and ministry organizations to a sophisticated, diversified investment model at a low cost. A variety of investment options are available to help meet ministry needs relating to investment timeline and risk tolerance, and to best help those ministries accomplish their long-term goals.

Leadership and Organization

Mr. David Fiedler has served as president of the LCMS Foundation since 2013. Currently, 68 full-time employees serve the Foundation in various capacities.

Governance

Direct oversight of the Foundation is provided by its board of trustees, which meets quarterly to review and monitor the performance and activity of the organization and to provide strategic direction. The Foundation board is made up of 13 trustees, 8 of whom are elected by the Synod member organizations described below. Two other trustees are elected by the Synod in convention. The remaining two trustees are the Synod President or his representative, and the chairman of the Board for National Mission or his representative. The Chief Financial Officer of the Synod is an ex officio nonvoting member of the board.

The LCMS Foundation is also responsible to 55 member organizations, which represent, directly or indirectly, all the ministries of the church served by the Foundation. These member organizations include the 35 LCMS districts, the member institutions of the Concordia University System, our two seminaries, and auxiliaries such as the Lutheran Women's Missionary League. Once a year delegates from this group meet to elect trustees and vote on other official actions at the Foundation's annual meeting.

Strategic Plan

As the Foundation looks to the future, we seek to grow our impact on the Lutheran Church and its ability to share the Gospel. We continually review the needs of the Church and our Lutheran donors to determine how we can better serve the people and organizations of the Synod. We gather input from our board, our leadership team, our staff, and outside experts to identify areas where we can improve our work in this support of ministry. Thus, we have identified six key areas of focus over the next three years:

- Improve message clarity and understanding.
- Increase awareness of, and preference for, the Foundation's abilities to support ministries.
- Increase retention and realization of revocable gifts.
- Expand the ability of organizations and individuals to use our products and services.
- Lead collaboration across Synod entities.
- Maintain infrastructure vigilance to ensure a balance of purposeful growth and high standards of service.

As we enter the next triennium, the servants at the LCMS Foundation rejoice with the Church in the enormous blessings the Lord has bestowed upon the Synod and its ministries through these efforts. We look forward confidently by God's grace to carrying on our service to the individuals and organizations of the Synod in the future as well.

David Fiedler, *President*

R19

Board of Trustees—Concordia Plans; Board of Directors—Concordia Plan Services

Concordia Plan Services (CPS) manages benefits that improve and support the health and financial wellness of workers at ministries of the Synod so that they can focus on spreading the Word of God. Approximately 6,000 ministries, 29,000 workers, 45,000 retirees and beneficiaries, and 49,000 covered family members count on CPS to help them be well.

A. Responding to Church Worker Needs

A.1. Strengthening Retirement

The Concordia Retirement Plan (CRP) provides eligible workers with a monthly pension income benefit in retirement. On Jan. 1, 2027, the last of three annual CRP contribution increases will become effective. The prior two years of higher contributions have produced the desired impact of improving the CRP's funding, which is on track to reach 100 percent funded status.

In addition, for the year ending Dec. 31, 2025, CRP investments returned 14.6 percent, more than double the CRP's long-term expected rate of return of 7.25 percent. Over the trailing 10-year period, the CRP has returned 9.6 percent, outperforming its investment benchmarks. This outperformance has resulted in more than \$180 million in additional gains above benchmark returns.

A.2. Focus on Worker Wellness

At CPS our mission is "Serve ministries ... care for workers ... so that the Word of God spreads," and we're pleased to collaborate with others in the Synod with those same priorities. At the 2023 Synod convention, Resolution 1-06A was adopted, directing districts and the Council of Presidents to establish strategic plans to care for workers and their families. This resolution directed districts to utilize CPS resources, so we have partnered with 12 districts to do an in-depth analysis of their worker wellness metrics and learn about their district culture and available resources. Through this collaborative effort we've created a customized wellness plan for each partner district.

A.3. Expanded Mental Health Resources

The mental health of our church workers is a significant concern that has only been amplified in recent years. At the 2023 Synod convention, Res. 1-07 was adopted, which encourages rostered church workers to utilize the resources available through CPS.

Those resources include an enhanced Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Through the EAP, Concordia Health Plan (CHP) members have access to expanded mental health care solutions, in person or digitally, to address challenges. In 2025 more than 6,100 EAP sessions helped CHP members as they addressed their mental health challenges.

B. Serving the Synod and Synod Ministries

Our staff continually looks for new and better ways to serve and support ministries and workers. Examples include the following:

- LCMS churches and schools are facing challenges with property and casualty insurance coverage renewals. To help meet these challenges, in 2024 CPS began exploring the cre-

ation of a captive reinsurance company to facilitate the offering of property and casualty insurance coverages to LCMS ministries. In 2025, the Commission on Constitutional Matters confirmed that the LCMS Board of Directors (BOD) can authorize and assign such an activity to CPS. In January 2026, the LCMS BOD approved CPS taking the next steps to commence operation of a captive reinsurance company to be named Concordia Risk Solutions (CRS). CPS expects CRS to receive a license to operate in the spring of 2026, and for CRS to commence operations soon thereafter. Operations are expected to begin with a small number of ministries and grow at a conservative, sustainable pace so CRS remains financially stable as it grows.

- Through years of work to drive better health outcomes, meet CHP members' needs, and limit costs, CPS was able to drive savings that are expected to reduce CHP expenses by more than \$90 million over a three-year span.

C. Conclusion

C.1. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

Strengths

The Concordia Plans are an organizational strength, each caring for Synod workers and their families.

- The combination of the CRP pension and the Concordia Retirement Savings Plan 403(b) offers LCMS ministries and workers a level of financial stability they cannot achieve alone. Through shared participation, ministries pool resources to secure lifetime retirement income for workers, while empowering individual savings for retirement.
- The Concordia Disability and Survivor Plan (CDSP) is a comprehensive protection package, providing income replacement and life insurance benefits that safeguard workers and families. Recent changes have led to a decreased CDSP rate for most ministries.
- Through the collective purchasing power of participating ministries, CPS provides access to health plan options that would be out of reach for most individual employers. We are able to negotiate competitive rates without adding profit margins—delivering greater value to both ministries and workers.

Weaknesses

- The cost of healthcare across the country is rising and subsequently the cost of the CHP is viewed by some ministries as a challenge. CPS is addressing this by balancing cost and health outcomes while focusing on resources to help manage health conditions, renegotiating contracts, managing our vendor partners, and consistently searching for the most effective and efficient way to provide care and support.

Opportunities

- Actions taken by or within any of the three branches of the U.S. government can impact the legal and regulatory outlook for the Concordia Plans and those we serve. Our involvement with the Church Alliance helps CPS advocate on behalf of those we serve and allows CPS to manage those Plans as designed to meet the needs of LCMS ministries and workers, without undue governmental interference.

- In light of economic volatility and uncertainty, CPS works closely with industry-leading consultants and advisors to manage expected investment risk and return dynamics over a long-term horizon while adhering to certain fundamental principles such as diversification, portfolio rebalancing, and liquidity management.
- Investment income for all Concordia Plans Trusts exceeded expectations in 2025 due to favorable market conditions and strong discipline in asset allocation. CRP returns are detailed above. CDSP assets returned +18.5 percent, while CHP assets returned +12.3 percent.

External Threats

- The changing demographics of the Synod and the closure of ministries is a potential threat to the Plans, but recent years have seen stability and growth in plan participation. Over the last triennium hundreds of members have joined the CHP, CRP, and CDSP with ministries adopting or rejoining the Plans after an absence. In addition, retention in the CHP and CRP were both in excess of 99 percent in 2025.

C.2. CPS and the Synod's Objectives and Emphases

CPS serves a critical role in fulfilling the Synod's 10th formation objective: Directly aiding in the care of our church workers and their families. CPS has been charged with managing the Concordia Plans (the employee benefit plans of the LCMS) and providing other ancillary programs, including supplemental insurance and administrative services that serve ministry and church worker needs.

CPS plays an important role in the fifth triennial mission and ministry emphasis by promoting and nurturing the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of pastors and professional church workers. CPS also is seeking to support the first emphasis of sustaining Lutheran churches through the establishment of a captive insurance company that is intended to provide relief to congregations and schools with their property and casualty insurance coverage.

C.3. Goals

As a ministry partner, we want to be viewed as a trusted member of a ministry's team, which brings valuable solutions to employee benefit and ministry business challenges. As a worker advocate, we want to not only be the source and resource for all matters related to the care of church workers and their families, but also to be these workers' physical, emotional, and financial wellness champions.

For more than 60 years, CPS has cared for LCMS workers and ministries through benefits designed specifically for church workers. As times change the Plans remain strong, stable, and sustainable through disciplined stewardship and the collective strength of thousands of participating ministries.

Together, these Plans demonstrate our shared commitment to care for workers, strengthen ministries, and steward resources faithfully—showing that we are truly better together.

James F. (Jim) Sanft, *Chief Executive Officer*

R20

Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty Introduction—LCRL Basics

The mission of the Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty (LCRL),

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s (LCMS) two-kingdom, First Amendment organization in Washington, D.C., is to ignite and *advance a distinctly Lutheran response* to increasing government intrusions into the life of the Church, while *educating, encouraging, and equipping LCMS members and organizations to take informed action* in defense of religious freedom for the sake of the Gospel ministries of our churches, schools, and universities.

Purpose and Services

The Synod, through the LCRL, monitors and protects the church’s First Amendment rights—guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution—in the public square so that our churches, schools, and universities can continue to boldly *preach Christ crucified* as the power of God for salvation *without government coercion or interference*. The LCRL will equip Lutherans and Lutheran organizations to

1. engage federal and state officials through advocacy and defensive legal strategies;
2. educate future generations about serving God through vocations in government, law, and public policy; and
3. connect with Lutherans involved in government affairs. Where the government, the culture, and faith conflict, Lutherans can and must speak up and out in support of religious liberty.

Why This Matters

We are living in a time when Christian values and morals are under attack culturally, legally, and politically, with cultural and political forces throughout society committed to

- aggressively chipping away at Americans’ most basic religious liberties, despite the protections guaranteed by the First Amendment;
- rapidly deconstructing and redefining, through law and litigation, the biblical understanding of marriage and the family, the foundational building block of our culture;
- discarding as inconsequential, despite the defeat of *Roe v. Wade*, the lives of more than 67 million preborn Americans;
- politically and legally targeting Christian schools and pre-schools, in defiance of constitutional protections, because of their biblical teachings on marriage and sexuality; and
- politicizing and demonizing the public expression of the Christian faith, including its central proclamation of “Christ alone crucified,” in an effort to silence any faithful public witness to the whole counsel of God—the very heartbeat of our Lutheran identity and calling.

An evaluation of current faith-based entities and think tanks in Washington, D.C., indicates a plethora of groups and institutions that support the protection of religious liberty. However, none offer the distinctly confessional Lutheran understanding of Luther’s two-kingdom theology:

One is the kingdom of this world. Into it we are born; in it we sustain our bodies and do our work. The other is the Christian Church, in which we have become members by faith. In it we do our spiritual tasks; in it we pray, serve the Church, and do mission-work. This is the purpose for which we have been placed on earth. (Dr. Theodore Graebner, “Christian Citizenship,” essay for the 1937 English District convention)

This void is now filled by the growing and expanding voice of the LCRL for the betterment of the country and in opposition to any movements, views, or legislation that would harm the right of religious freedom in the public square.

The LCRL office offers advantages.

- It maintains a direct presence of the LCMS and like-minded Lutherans in the nation’s capital.
- It enables the LCMS to monitor and communicate impending legislation, infringement on religious liberty, and other matters of concern to LCMS members, congregations, recognized service organizations, and other LCMS institutions.
- It provides a venue and a process through the Champions for Liberty Religious Network to engage, encourage, and equip Lutherans of all ages to exercise their vocations as part of God’s preserving work through government or political engagement.
- It offers proximity to a growing list of partner organizations and offices to help build coalitions, thus strengthening our First Amendment voice in Washington, D.C.

Four Primary Tasks

1. **Advocacy and Encouragement on Capitol Hill:** Through our active presence on Capitol Hill—including advocacy meetings (Values Action Team meetings with Senate and House), direct engagement with members of Congress and the Executive Branch (personal as well as via radio), and our expanding broadcast outreach through The Liberty Action Alert—we work to ensure that the concerns of LCMS churches, schools, and universities are faithfully represented before civil authorities. We also encourage and support those who labor in public office to uphold religious liberty and the God-given rights of the Church.
2. **Education and Assistance**
 - a. **Through its expanding body of resources,** the LCRL equips Synod laity with a faithful understanding of major cultural and legal challenges, the Lutheran doctrine of vocation (especially Christian citizenship), and the theology of the two kingdoms. In this way, believers are prepared to serve their neighbors in the civil realm while supporting and preserving the Church’s Gospel mission.
 - b. **Through trusted partnerships** (with Alliance Defending Freedom [ADF], First Liberty Institute, Liberty Counsel, and the Becket Fund), the LCRL assists Christians and congregations in securing legal support and critical resources when they face opposition, litigation, or government action for confessing and living according to Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.
3. **Advocacy, Training, and Support:** Through our Champions for Liberty Network, the LCRL provides advocacy training, strategic coaching, and ongoing support for Synod congregations, schools, and universities. This work equips laity to live out their Christian vocation in God’s left-hand kingdom with clarity, courage, and confessional faithfulness.
4. **Publication and Communication:** In partnership with like-minded organizations and public leaders, the LCRL communicates an orthodox Lutheran, two-kingdom perspective on cultural, legal, and public policy matters to governing authorities, ensuring that a clear and faithful Lutheran witness is maintained in the public square. Resources in this

regard include the webpage *LCRLFreedom.org*, the *Liberty Action Alert* (podcast), the *Word from the Center*, *Prayer Partner Thursdays*, the *Champions Advocate Weekly*, and *Mom and Pop Papers*.

Alignment with LCMS goals

1. **Mission planting:** This office exists to protect the public voice, the religious liberty of our churches, missions, schools, and universities for the sake of mission.
2. **Theological education:** The LCRL is building a network of churches who are trained and deployed with a “2KG [two-kingdom] Civics” mindset to deal with the issues in culture and politics for the sake of the mission of the Church. This training program, network of influence, and leadership may continue to grow into an academic program, training the next generation of leadership for our church as well.
3. **Collaborate to enhance mission effectiveness:** The LCRL effort will, in all its teachings and literature, emphasize why and how “two-kingdom cultural engagement” is vital to effective missional outreach.

Great Opportunities Seized in 2023–26

- LCRL established a growing LCMS two-kingdom citizenship voice in Washington, D.C., including the following activities.
 - Regular member participation with various advocacy groups, such as the Values Action Team of the House and Senate, the National Right to Life, the March for Life, the Southern Baptist ERLC group, the Religious Liberty Network (RLN), the Religious Freedom Institute (RFI), the Heritage Foundation, and the Weyrich Luncheon, all seeking to undergird religious liberty, the sanctity of life, traditional marriage, and educational freedom.
 - Advocacy visits on the Hill, including visits and interviews with representatives and thought leaders on the Hill.
 - Creating and leading 2KG Roundtable Meetings on the Hill bringing together political leaders, LCMS leaders, and various supporters to enhance our witness on the Hill.
 - Our growing D.C. radio program and LCRL podcast, *The Liberty Action Alert* with Greg Seltz (292 programs and counting), which both advocates for our positions with leaders in the country and informs our congregations about issues, advocacy, and action in interviews with thought leaders on the Hill. Guests include Sen. Cynthia Lummis (LCMS), Sen. Steve Daines, Rep. Robert Aderholt, Sen. James Lankford, Os Guinness (culture), Eric Metaxas (culture), Dr. Victor Davis Hanson, (culture, politics), John Stonestreet (culture), Father Frank Pavone (life), Jeanne Mancini (life), Carrie Campbell Severino (judiciary), Mike Berry (judiciary), Kelly Shackelford (judiciary), Mat Staver (courts, culture), Katharine Gorka (culture), George Barna (culture), Lt. Col. (Ret.) Allen West, Larry Elder, Tim Goeglein (culture), George Tryfiates (education), Jamison Coppola (education), and Dr. Ben Carson (politics, culture, education).
- Partnership with ADF, First Liberty, and Liberty Counsel in various efforts to offer both our two-kingdom voice/training coupled with their legal support to the issues that beset our churches and schools today.
 - **Challenge:** While the LCRL presence has been established, the next phase of development needs to further establish our unique voice in the cultural/political issues of the day. Expanding our role on committees, expanding our radio voice, and becoming a go-to resource for two-kingdom answers to the issues surrounding liberty, life, marriage, and education are the challenges of the next step in advocacy.
- LCRL established and has grown the main LCRL website, *lcrifreedom.org*, the two-kingdom web resource for LCMS churches and schools.
 - Presently the site is populated with timely and easy-to-read resources to inform and instruct our people how “to put their temporal liberties to work for the sake of the eternal liberties of Christ.” These include the weekly *Word from the Center*, *Mom and Pop Two-Kingdom Paper*, *Liberty Action Alert* podcasts, *Prayer Partner Thursdays*, and the *Champions Advocate Weekly*.
 - **Challenge:** The resources, which are many and growing, need to be more known, accessible, and more easily investigated for use and application by our people. We are working to index these.
 - **Challenge:** Social media use is a necessity. We are presently working to put our information on multiple platforms for the sake of our churches and ministries.
- LCRL established a growing Champions for Liberty Network of churches, which are trained not only in two-kingdom engagement of various issues in our culture, but are also trained and equipped to engage this issue in service to the mission of the Church, not as political ideologues. Under the leadership of the Rev. Mark Frith, we have digitally uploaded our information and our lectures and have created a “Champion’s Training Process” that empowers pastors and laity to learn to put one’s “temporal liberties to work in service to the eternal liberties of the Gospel,” without politicizing our mission and witness.
 - Rev. Frith is growing the Champions Network, making it the support organization for our D.C. presence as well as equipping our laity to serve in their home communities.
 - He has digitalized our Champions for Liberty educational process, both lecture and application, to prepare and equip Christians for differentiating God’s preserving and saving work, thus being more effective in the left-hand kingdom work in service to the mission of the Church—without politicizing the Gospel, as many advocacy groups are tempted to do.
 - From 2019 to present, LCRL conducted over 100 Champions for Liberty Weekends with churches and schools to frame and empower pastoral and lay leaders to engage the seminal issues of liberty, life, marriage, and educational freedom with a two-kingdom mind-

set, good both for the culture and the mission of the Church.

- *Challenge:* Continuing to grow and streamline the delivery process of the Champions Network educational process and to ensure its application to the many needs of our congregations and schools.
- *Challenge:* Adding a more definitive legal dimension to the resources that we provide with a church's partnership with us as a Champion Church. Presently, we defer to organizations such as ADF, First Liberty, Liberty Counsel, and the Becket Fund.

Goals for 2026 and Beyond

1. Membership expansion of web resource, radio program/podcasts, vlogs, and cadre of 2KG writers in service to the Church.
2. In D.C., encourage Lutherans on the Hill; expand 2KG Roundtables, and increase personal connections to representatives and thought leaders on the Hill who align with our LCRL values.
3. Expand Card Initiative, Champions Advocate Email, and personal advocacy.
4. Become the go-to public resource on the Hill for two-kingdom perspectives on the issues of the day; assemble an LCMS two-kingdom collection that reflects successful voices like *The Federalist*, *Daily Wire*, etc.
5. Develop a maturing Champions for Liberty Network in service to the LCMS, acknowledged and supported by the various districts of the LCMS—20 new congregations.
 - The educational aspects of the network have been totally digitalized under the leadership of Rev. Mark Frith, who is also tasked to grow the network systematically through events around the country. Champions for Liberty events around the country train the laity for two-kingdom cultural engagement concerning liberty, life, marriage, and education, all in service to the Church's mission.
 - The LCRL is also expanding our *LCRLFreedom.org* web resource, utilizing social media more effectively.
6. LCRL staff-led development growth of financial partners (25 core donors, 10,000+ active regular donors).
7. While God continues to bless us with the support that we need, more effectively meeting the growing opportunities and challenges will require growing staff and support. In order to do the latter, the LCRL is now partnering with Meyer Partners to unlock the potential of our churches and people toward the efforts that the LCRL is making on behalf of us all.

Gregory P. Seltz, *Executive Director*

R21

Atlantic District

The Atlantic District's geographical area encompasses the eastern half of the "Empire State," New York. Over 20 million

people reside in this district that is composed of the vast rural areas in its northern and eastern regions; the sprawling suburban areas throughout its northern, central, and eastern regions; and the bustling metropolitan areas of Albany (in its northern region) and the city of New York (in its central region). The district has an unparalleled cultural diversity and population density, replete with exciting mission opportunities. *The Atlantic District's congregations, workers, and agencies share God's grace in Christ Jesus by nurturing Christians and reaching out to others* (district mission statement) as it is *Making Disciples for Life* (Synod mission emphasis) by *Engaging the World with the Gospel of Hope* (district mission emphasis). Communication, education, and celebration have been "resurrection hallmarks" for this triennium as the saints are abounding in hope that is encapsulated in the refrain "Christ is risen, indeed."

A. Communication

Communicating the confessional commitment of children of the *Augustana* continues in earnest through the district memorandum, through which Scripture, Confessions, a theological meditation, and Synod, district, and other announcements are shared. This underscores the confessional commitment of children of the *Augustana* who affirm *Making Disciples for Life* (district convention resolution [R]4-02) and the Synod's mission priorities (2019 Res. 4-03). "Christ is risen, indeed!" resounds as visitation, support, and resourcing continues for congregations, workers, and agencies.

The Atlantic District Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML) continued to be active and growing during this triennium, communicating *Atrévete en Cristo*, "Dare in Christ," as new local groups were started in the district during this triennium. Simultaneously communicating mission goals and district goals has underscored a delightful relationship with this auxiliary. LWML Atlantic District women have been advocates for *Engaging the World with the Gospel of Hope* as they have been reassessing, reimagining, and re-engaging people in neighborhoods and communities while supporting professional church workers in their vocations. Their cards and gifts for pastors have been welcomed reminders of how they join Saint Mary of Magdala in exclaiming, "Christ is risen, indeed."

B. Education

The annual Festival of Workshops has attracted hundreds of laypeople, commissioned servants, and pastors with the themes *Making Disciples for Life* and *In This Hope, We Were Saved*. Learning opportunities range from scriptural and doctrinal studies, prayer and worship, mercy and witness, parish governance, and much more (R1-01A, R1-02A, R1-03A, R1-05A, R1-08A, R3-01, R3-02A, R3-03A, R3-04A, R5-11, R5-15, R6-03A, R12-05A, R12-06). At the scenic campus of SUNY Maritime, people of the district enjoy reconnecting and encouraging one another during this anticipated and appreciated annual educational tradition.

An emphasis on the care of the wives of pastors (R6-09) has continued the paschal proclamation as retreats and other gathering opportunities foster community. Circuit gatherings and convocations also have provided avenues for wives to connect and encourage one another in the mission field. Pastors' conferences grounded in the resurrection proclamation "Christ is risen" facilitated discussions about worship and evangelism in global contexts (R2-02A, R2-05, R2-07A, R4-04). Circuit winkles continue to provide opportunities for robust theological discussion and mutual encouragement (R6-07A).

The schools of the Atlantic District have received significant

attention during this triennium (R12-01A, R12-03A, R12-04A). Issues including staffing, governance, funding models, and opportunities for witness continue to be analyzed so that the proclamation “Christ is risen, indeed” may be shared with boldness and vigor with students and their families.

C. Celebration

With a dedicated staff, supportive praesidium and circuit visitors, and committed workers, the district has had many reasons to celebrate. The 62nd Regular Convention of the Atlantic District had the theme “In This Hope, We Were Saved” (Rom. 8:24). With the Lord’s work celebrated and a number of resolutions passed, the Atlantic District is committed to nurturing Christians and reaching out to others (R1-03A, R1-05A, R4-06, R6-02A, R6-04, R7-06B, R9-08A, R11-02A, R11-03A, R11-05). Servants of Christ were recognized as individual congregations and schools were celebrated with “mission minutes” throughout the convention. During the convention, Unity Lutheran Church in Albany was received as a congregation, the result of a merger between two other congregations in Albany. Amidst the many baptisms and confirmations in parishes, the ordinations and installations during this triennium have been answers to prayers as pastoral vacancies continue to be filled and navigated.

Church worker wellness continues to be championed (R1-06A, R1-07, R11-01A). Pastors’ conferences with generous scholarships and Chrism masses at which pastors renewed their commitment to service fostered worker wellness. Retired workers were gathered, honored, and encouraged with multiple Veterans of the Cross luncheons. All-workers conferences and retreat opportunities were shared for professional church workers.

The Witness in the Public Square gathering continues to be a grand celebration of the Lord’s amazing grace with the Church’s ongoing refrain “Christ is risen, indeed” as different people were honored for how they have shared the love of Jesus in public settings. It continues to be a magnificent time of communicating, educating, and celebrating Christ crucified and risen as the one true faith continues to be believed, taught, and confessed.

Towards the conclusion of this triennium, the new district office space became fully functional. The meeting spaces for pastors’ conferences, the district board of directors, pastors’ wives’ retreats, and other educational opportunities have been a blessing, facilitating the gathering and encouraging of the faithful in their God-pleasing work. Having not had a permanent home for many years, the Lord’s children have cried aloud, “Christ is risen, indeed,” as new life has been communicated with these reimagined and renovated facilities. As a geographically central locus for educating the saints and celebrating the Lord’s goodness while remembering the past and posturing for the future, the chapel, library, meeting rooms, and offices underscore the ongoing commitment *to vigorously make known the love of Christ by word and in deed* with an evangelical, catholic, and reforming habitus to the praise and glory of God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—as the proclamation resonates throughout and from the Atlantic District, “*Christ is risen, indeed!*”

Dien Ashley Taylor, *President*

R22

California-Nevada-Hawaii District

The California-Nevada-Hawaii District (CNH) encompasses

several unique contexts including the greater Bay Area, an extremely diverse population with over 7 million people. The central valleys of California contain some of the world’s richest farmland and sizeable population centers. The coasts, foothills, and mountains boast majestic vistas, historic cities, and rich culture. Northern Nevada’s important population centers near Lake Tahoe are growing quickly. Foundational communities along I-80 and US 50, though of lesser population, offer stability and infrastructure to the working population there. The islands of Hawaii have 1.5 million residents and almost 10 million visitors yearly. The active military population in Hawaii numbers over 44,000 people. Opportunity abounds.

Recognizing its long history and diverse population, the district met in convention May 15–17, 2025, under the theme *Fruitful Branches, Pruned for Growth*, based upon John 15:1–3. The convention reaffirmed the district’s strategic ministry plan with the overarching goals:

- Increasing Connection and Collaboration
- Expanding Leadership Development
- Sparking Growing Ministries
- Focusing upon Worker Wellness
- Resourcing for Ministry

In addition, the convention accepted the executive summary strengthening the ministry plan’s focus upon the engagement of all congregations’ opportunity to find their place in God’s mission. The convention affirmed the plan to offer greater participation for commissioned ministers at our district convention and urged similar practices for the Synod in convention. A stronger framework for support and supervision between the President’s Office with the regional vice-presidents and circuit visitors was recommended, and the road towards church worker sabbaticals was strengthened. Notable accomplishments this triennium include:

A. Strengthening of Communications

Our e-newsletter process received a significant upgrade for the purpose of effective and timely district connection. Regular planning sessions were implemented. The *Mission Table Podcast* hosted by Rev. Paul Ferguson was begun, striving to bring productive mission and ministry content to our congregations.

B. Partnering for Productive Ministry

- The Mission Training Center, a theological and missiological educational platform intended for lay leadership and operated in partnership with the West Coast districts has strengthened its enrollment under Rev. Jonathan Priest. Foundations of Lutheran Teaching, a curriculum in partnership with able Lutheran educators, offers sound LCMS foundation for non-called teachers in our Lutheran schools.
- Training of new pastors continues in partnership with the Pacific Southwest (PSW) and Northwest districts and in relationship with the Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support director.
- CNH and PSW districts have partnered with the Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF)’s Real Estate Solutions to add an additional staff member, enabling greater sustainability combined with soul impact to our valuable ministry sites which may not be replaced if sold.
- LINC Bay Area, under the leadership of Rev. Aaron Putnam, continues to be a valuable partner in ministry for the district,

working to identify and develop leaders, partner in clarity and coaching, and assist in mission expansion.

C. Notable Executive Staff Support

- Rev. Paul Ferguson has shown expertise in mission leadership, offering an upgraded mission granting system and quality professional coaching. He also facilitates congregational clarity work.
- Mr. Joel Wahlers, our education executive, took the lead in developing our first All Workers' Conference in recent history; he facilitates the accreditation of our schools and has become our governance guru.
- Ms. Denise Lo, operations executive, has consistently assured high fiscal accountability and displays an increasing adaptability as more properties come into the temporary or permanent ownership of the district.
- Rev. Allen Steinbeck provides valuable support and leadership in Transitional Interim Ministry and his special assignments.
- Mr. Matt Molinari, a long-term commissioned worker of the district, has functioned with high relational skills enhancing the LCEF district vice-president role.

Operating under the mission statement of *We strengthen God's people to serve and bear witness to Christ*, the district thanks God for the ongoing growth of our single high school in Carson City, Nev., which just completed a major building addition. We thank God for the continued relief work of our congregations and leaders as well as the generosity of God's people as we reach into our community with the love of Christ during times of disaster, the most destructive disaster of this triennium being the devastating fire in the town of Lahaina on Maui and the loss of many lives. We thank God for faithful partners like LCMS Disaster Relief, Lutheran Church Charities, Orphan Grain Train, and LCEF.

We strive by His grace to live into our mission statement: *We strengthen God's people to serve and bear witness to Christ*.

Michael R. Lange, *President*

R23

Central Illinois District

Christ is risen indeed! The Good News of the crucified and risen Lord echoes through the Central Illinois District (CID)'s 148 congregations, which are spread out among half of the counties in our state.

This Good News is sorely needed in a "bad news" world. On Jan. 28, 2026, CID President Michael Mohr was arrested by federal law enforcement on charges related to child pornography. The present report is being written shortly thereafter. We pray God's hand of justice and mercy will prevail for all affected by this situation and for the whole church. We ask the Lord for His continued grace and wisdom.

In view of the president's incapacity, on Feb. 2, 2026, the CID board of directors designated the undersigned as acting president, to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the presidency. I welcome the prayers not only of the district but also of the larger Synod.

The previous year, 2025, had already been a time of chang-

es in CID's staff. The Rev. Dr. Ken Schurb moved to modified (part-time) service for the district on Sept. 1, continuing to work in evangelism. Taking up his former activities in missions is new staff member Rev. Patrick Gumz, M.B.A., who doubles as the CID office's business manager. Stewardship responsibilities have been assumed by the district's campus pastor at Illinois State University, the Rev. William Jensen. Also, Rev. Charles Olander retired from his position as planned giving counselor at the end of 2025.

Mr. Trip Rodgers continues as assistant to the president for Congregational Life and Education. Mr. Hugh Shown serves as office bookkeeper, as well as in a variety of other ways. Mrs. Amy Holmes works on a deployed basis in district communications. They have provided continuity in our work, along with Mrs. Christine Anderson and Mrs. Susan Short, the staff of the Central Illinois District Church Extension Fund.

CID has also been served by capable volunteer coordinators in several areas: the Rev. Rodney Blomquist in Prison Ministry, Mr. David Ward in Life Ministry, and until recently Mr. Stephen Born and Dr. Cynthia Steinwedel in Disaster Response (LERT). We appreciate their valuable contributions.

In consultation with Ongoing Ambassadors for Christ, CID developed a set of "Witnessing Helps" to assist congregations in teaching the four witnessing skills specified in the Synod's 2023 Res. 1-01A, "To Stimulate Training for Witness": (1) beginning an evangelistic conversation, (2) listening discerningly to unchurched people, (3) making a simple statement of the Gospel, and (4) defending the resurrection. These Witnessing Helps and associated materials may be found online at cidcms.org/outreach-witness-ministry.html.

Since 2022, CID has cooperated with the Southern Illinois District and, specifically, one of its northernmost congregations (Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, Farmersville) in offering a Small Church Summit. It meets twice a year, winter and summer, in various locations in the two districts, offering an opportunity for edification, learning, networking, and mutual encouragement. On two occasions its keynote speaker was from the Synod's Office of National Mission (ONM). This is one way of carrying out 2023 Res. 1-02A, "To Aid Small Congregations and Multi-Congregation Pastors and Parishes."

The CID board of directors has not yet established a wellness plan for workers and their families, per 2023 Res. 1-06A. However, the district was the first to cooperate with Concordia Plan Services, which has made monetary grants available to districts to enhance church worker wellness. As a result, information on the Vitality program is soon to be released within CID, and one person in the district is on the way to certification as a mental health first aid trainer.

CID is honored to have been involved by ONM in field-testing "Beyond the Classroom." This is an adaptation of the existing *re: Vitality* "Connect to Disciple" module specifically designed for congregations that have Lutheran schools—elementary, secondary, or preschool. It helps the congregations reach out to unchurched family members of school pupils. We will be thrilled to see it upon its general release.

Training for Lutheran school administrators, entry-level and ongoing, has been a priority. CID continues to offer increased administrative leadership opportunities through Future Lutheran Administrators Mentoring and Education (FLAME). Since 2023, it has

joined the Northern and Southern Illinois Districts in hosting the summer Illinois Lutheran School Administrative Conference.

Deaf Ministry in CID is in a time of transition. In late 2024, the district's longtime missionary to the deaf, the Rev. Thomas Phillips, accepted a call to Michigan. CID probably cannot afford a full-time replacement, so the search is on to call a sign language-capable pastor who can serve our districtwide deaf parish on a part-time basis. Also, since most of the work with the deaf is now handled through this multipoint parish, with a deaconess in training, the district is attempting to sell the Christ Lutheran Church for the Deaf building in Jacksonville.

Funding the Lord's work as carried out corporately by the district has been a recurring concern for CID. Overall, while offerings received by our congregations have been increasing through the last 25 or so years, what the churches have remitted to the Synod and district has been declining.

In addition to noting this ongoing concern, the 2025 CID convention took two actions in the area of finances. In one of these, the district authorized a \$3 million funding campaign, to provide for repairs and upgrades at district-owned facilities, most of which are mission sites, and to continue building endowments for district missions. It also reaffirmed "A Dollar for Missions," which CID first adopted in 2022 pursuant to the Synod's 2019 Res. 8-02. Our 2025 district convention reaffirmation seems to have been taken seriously. By the end of 2025, CID received more than twice as much in "Dollar for Missions" contributions for that year as the total it had received in either 2023 or 2024.

Since CID's last Synod convention report, Redeemer Lutheran Church in Peru disbanded, and Trinity Lutheran Church, LaRose merged with St. Paul Lutheran Church, Varna. Through the Small Church Summit and other means, our district continues trying to counsel very small congregations about their options.

The challenges of ministry sometimes seem overwhelming. The limitations of us all often frustrate. The perils of our own sins always threaten. Yet, like St. Paul, we can be "as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything" (2 Cor. 6:9–10). For Christ is risen indeed!

Mark R. Eddy, *Acting President*

R24

Eastern District

The 101st Convention of the Eastern District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was held June 20–21, 2025, on the campus of First Trinity Lutheran Church in Tonawanda, N.Y. The convention theme was "Born Again to a Living Hope" drawn from 1 Peter 1:3. The Rev. John L. Pingel, district president, presided. The Rev. Jason Christ served as convention chaplain, the Rev. Ron Bright as election committee chair, the Rev. Sean Walters as credentials committee chair, and Mr. Gordon Tresch, Esq. as convention manager.

The Rev. Christopher Esget, East-Southeast Region vice-president, served as Synod's representative and presented to the convention at several junctures in the convention proceedings. Among those who addressed the convention were Mr. Jon Allen, who chairs the Eastern District board of directors; Dee Gyb, president of the Eastern District LWML; the Rev. Nycholas Grieg, who brought

greetings from Pioneer on the Lake; Deaconess Susan Knowles, who represented Ambassadors of Reconciliation and spoke of her call to serve as director of deaconess formation at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne; and the Rev. Robert Marshall, who spoke on behalf of Lutheran Heritage Foundation.

The Rev. Dr. Chris Wicher and the Rev. Dr. John Brunner, former district presidents, brought greetings to the convention. Rev. Dr. Brunner in his address paid tribute to the late Rev. Dr. David Belasic, who preceded him in the district presidency.

The Rev. Dan Galchutt served as keynote speaker for the convention and presented several times on the subject of invincible hope, based on the convention theme. The Rev. Stephen Gewecke, New Jersey district president, served as banquet speaker. The Servant of Christ award, recognizing exceptional service to Christ and His people, was presented to three recipients: the Rev. Barry Keurulainen; DCE Sue Steege; and Mr. Rick Porter.

The Rev. John L. Pingel was elected to a second term as Eastern district president. The Rev. Jeff Nickel of Buffalo was elected first vice-president; the Rev. Dr. Ed Grimenstein, Pittsburgh Region, was elected second vice-president; the Rev. Robert Wiedmayer of Rochester was elected third vice-president (he subsequently took a call to the Southeastern District and the Rev. William Dorow was appointed to the vacancy); and the Rev. John Zimmerman, Philadelphia Region, was elected fourth vice-president. Circuit visitors for the 11 circuits were elected in circuit caucuses.

The major focus of the convention was the invincible hope (1 Peter 1:3) we have as Christians, based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. President Pingel in his sermon at the opening service spoke to the fact that the church has experienced many a so-called cultural shift across 20 centuries and has not only survived but prospered. God's Word is still true and His Holy Spirit attends the Means of Grace. Congregations large and small have every reason to be confident and hopeful about the future. Rev. Esget affirmed this message in his closing sermon and then presided over the installation of elected officers.

LCEF regional vice-president A.J. Sinisgalli was introduced to the delegates and appreciation was extended to Mr. Rick Porter who held that position for 17 years.

A number of overtures were approved at the convention, among them (the first four being addressed to this Synod convention):

- To Appoint a Task Force to Improve District Representation on Synod Boards, Boards of Regents, and Commissions
- To Address Uses of Artificial Intelligence
- To Bring Resolutions with Strong District Support to the Convention Floor
- Thanksgiving for the Council of Nicaea and the Nicene Creed
- To Approve a Circuit Realignment (Niagara Circuit and Niagara South Circuit)

In his convention address, President Pingel spoke to the accomplishments of the past three years and also cast a vision for the future. Among the accomplishments: Small Church Clarity, facilitated by Revs. Billy Brath and John Glover, has been conducted in all four regions of the district; Regional Listening Sessions, hosted by district staff, conducted in all four regions; increased assistance to small churches and church workers; initiatives aimed at revitalization and rebirthing of existing congregations; increased op-

portunities for continuing education for church workers across the district; and increased efficiency in the call process. Among future endeavors will be the establishing of Lutheran Braille Centers in all four regions; increased stewardship education throughout the district; facilitating partnerships between congregations as a means of continuing Word and Sacrament ministry; the targeting of areas which have potential for future mission establishment; with the addition of a full-time education executive to district staff, increased interaction and support of schools throughout the district with the goal of financial stability, growth in numbers, and support of workers; with increased interaction with congregations, increased financial participation of congregations in support of district endeavors.

Staff serving the Eastern District office, in addition to the district president, include Mr. Bruce Sutherland, executive assistant, Stewardship and Discipleship; Mrs. Ruth Marzano, administrative assistant to the district president; Mr. Kevin Gundell, education executive and assistant to the president; Mr. John Fretthold, business manager; Rev. Peter and Stephanie Johnson, Communications. Mr. A.J. Sinisgalli, regional vice-president, LCEF, maintains an office at district headquarters.

Challenges affecting the Eastern District are similar to those found across the Synod. Cultural winds opposing the Gospel are strong. Many congregations face decreased funding and declining membership. Nevertheless, God's Word and Sacraments remain efficacious. God's Word continues to be proclaimed—grace and peace. People continue to be brought to saving faith in Christ and sustained in that faith through Word and Sacrament ministry.

John L. Pingel, *President*

R25

English District

Living Our Baptized Life in Christ is the mission of the English District. Our non-geographic district is made up of 155 congregations in 22 states across the United States and the Canadian province of Ontario. The district is divided into four regions: Eastern, Lake Erie, Midwest, and Western. The bishop/president, Rev. Jeffrey Miskus, assumed the presidency a year before the convention (where he was elected) when our previous president, Rev. Dr. Jamison Hardy, was called by Concordia University System to lead their ministry.

A. Strengthening the Church in Faith

The English District is committed to conserving and promoting the unity of the one true faith. That objective is pursued as our bishop visits about 60 congregations each year. He also has a one-hour online conversation with every active pastor in our district, encouraging and praying for them.

During his congregational visits our bishop intentionally calls men of all ages to prayerfully consider becoming pastors in our Synod. He also actively distributes the *Set Apart to Serve* brochure highlighting the eight church work vocations in the LCMS, encouraging everyone to consider professional church work.

Our circuit visitors and regional vice-presidents meet two to three times a year with our bishop in regional online meetings to communicate what is happening in the circuits and to review Synod Bylaws and procedures in the Circuit Visitors Manual pertaining to the care and ecclesiastical oversight of the congregations.

A major part of our district's ministry is working together with

the congregations and their call committees to develop call lists. As the number of calling congregations has increased (more than doubled in the past year), we have sought to increase the time and focus of our staff for this critical ministry to our parishes.

B. Mission

Rev. Derek Mathers, mission executive and assistant to the bishop, continues to work with groups in our district who are intentionally and actively open to church planting opportunities. This past year, it was a great joy to welcome a new church plant, Shepherd of the Canyon Lutheran Church in Gold Canyon, Ariz., and her pastor, Rev. Dr. Mark Wood, into our district and officially as a congregation of our Synod.

Our 1-1-1 fundraising program (see 2019 Res. 8-02) continues to provide support for missions. Each year the proceeds are split between a national and an international mission.

The district makes use of the Office of National Mission's *re:Vitality* resources. These encourage congregations to be intentional in their time, energy, and effort for connecting to their communities. We are focused on making strategic use of the Congregational Assessment of Development and/or Decline Study (CADDs) as a preparatory part of the congregational calling process.

We continue to give considerable financial support to the Dominican Republic Lutheran Mission as well as to our campus ministries.

Working through our Canadian congregations, and alongside our Synod's leadership, we have strengthened our relationship with Lutheran Church—Canada, sharing resources and building fellowship.

C. Education

School Ministry Executive Albert Amling visits our 37 schools and their leadership each year to provide counsel and assistance with administrative challenges and growth opportunities. He is actively involved in two new school starts at Fairlawn Lutheran (Fairlawn, Ohio) and the Southern Arizona Lutheran School Association (SALSA) in Tucson, Ariz.

Our district was blessed to receive a \$50,000 grant from the Bolick Foundation to enhance efforts towards campus ministry and Lutheran school starts.

D. Care for Church Workers

The English District Ministerial Health Commission exists to be a resource for all rostered English District workers. The commission is also available to all spouses and children of rostered church workers. The English District website includes a toolbox where our workers can access helpful materials designed to enhance health in every facet of life.

Debt reduction is a real concern for our church workers. The English District provides considerable funding for the educational debts of our workers. For the past two years we also partnered with the Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) and the Lilly Foundation to enhance this aid for our workers.

E. 2025 English District Convention

The 58th Convention of the English District was held June 26–28, 2025, on the campus of Concordia University, Ann Arbor, Mich. Below are some of the resolutions passed at the convention:

Resolution 1-01B: To Encourage the English District of The

Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to Affirm Unequivocally the Practice of First Communion Prior to Confirmation as a God-pleasing Practice so as to Encourage Member Congregations and Pastors of the English District to Recognize the Validity of the Aforementioned Practice and, On That Basis, Commune Visiting Children Who, Though Not Yet Confirmed, Are Nevertheless Communicant Members in Good Standing and Who, Therefore, Should Not Be Denied the Lord's Body and Blood Because They Have Not Yet Been Confirmed

Resolution 1-02B: To State Religious Objection to Government Interference of Parents' Duty

Resolution 1-03S: To Request the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) to Produce a New Document on Race

Resolution 2-01: To Affirm and Retain the Seven Mission Priorities of the LCMS

Resolution 2-03: To Memorialize the Synod to Encourage Congregations in the LCMS to Include in Their Annual Mission Budgets Support for a Regional University of the Synod's Concordia University System

Resolution 4-01A: To Request a Comprehensive Review of the Theological Concerns and Practical Procedures When a Call Is Terminated or Self-Terminated

F. LCEF and Canada Corporation

A corporation was established in 1954 by English District congregations to make loans to our Canadian congregations. As the need for funding grew, and with the blessing of the Canadian congregations of the English District, the LCEF became the sole member of the Canadian corporation. This has resulted in the Canadian Corporation becoming Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Canada. The board of directors includes members of our English District's Canadian congregations. We are excited to see how LCEF—Canada can expand its services to congregations and church workers throughout Canada, including congregations and pastors in Lutheran Church—Canada. This project has taken four years to accomplish, and we are thankful to God for His grace to everyone involved in the process.

G. Endowment Fund

The English District Endowment Fund is currently worth about \$5,000,000 and is bearing fruit each year to support the congregations' efforts towards new missions, human care/disaster relief, campus ministry, church worker debt reduction, and scholarships.

H. Regional Conferences

A highlight of each year is the round of four regional church worker conferences held in September and October. Our church workers, mostly pastors, come together for fellowship, education, worship, and to hear reports from our bishop and district staff. Topics ranging from our Lord's resurrection to the history of the Synod's congregations in Chicago were enjoyed by those in attendance.

I. Living the Baptized Life

The English District joyfully looks to the future for our Lord's appearing, seeking to please Him in all we do for His glorious eternal kingdom.

Jeffrey G. Miskus, *President*

R26

Florida-Georgia District

The Florida-Georgia District has for more than 75 years been known for its focus on the mission of God. This is beautifully summarized in our Bylaws:

Since God's mission and ministry occur through local congregations, and it is our desire that every congregation be a church in mission; and every man and woman a missionary, all working together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, be empowered by His Gospel, to share His Love. Therefore, the Vision of the Florida-Georgia District is: Every member ... Equipped, Empowered, Engaged ... Connecting People to Jesus!

Our district board of directors went through a two-year process of prayer, study, discussion, and visioning for its work ahead. Although we live in a day where the Church is faced with many challenges, the district believes that this is a time for us to remain steadfast and bold in our witness that many more might come to saving faith. The result was a renewed vision and strategy built around four critical ministry targets:

- *Cultivate the Christian Identity of Every Disciple ... as those created, loved, redeemed and sent by God;*
- *Support Church Workers and Leaders in Healthy Ministry Practices;*
- *Help Congregations Engage Their Communities ... moving beyond the church doors and becoming actively involved in their communities; and*
- *Foster a Sense of Shared District Identity around a Culture of Disciple-Making.*

The district is diverse, stretching from the Florida Keys to the mountains of north Georgia. Despite Lutherans being a minority in a sea of denominations and religions, we are joyfully Lutheran, proclaiming the message of God's grace through Christ by faith alone. We are committed to sharing this one true hope with all. We are committed to standing upon God's Holy Word and celebrating the gift of the Sacraments.

We continue to support campus ministries across our district to reach over 690,000 students spread out in our many universities. These students are not only being fed on Word and Sacrament but equipped and sent as witnesses and leaders for Christ. Financially, our district has remained healthy and debt-free.

We are blessed with a wonderful spirit of unity. Pastors joyfully and faithfully gather forwinkel conferences, sharing worship, Bible and Confessions study, and brotherly encouragement. Commissioned workers gather locally and at our annual conferences. As those who are God's redeemed, we are sent to be a blessing. When so many are hurting, struggling, and living outside of God's grace, it is our calling to "share the hope that is within us" (see 1 Peter 3:15). Therefore, we continue to provide opportunities to equip and empower the people of the district to be the leaders that the Church needs and to see each opportunity as a "divine appointment" for outreach and service to the Lord.

Such equipping is accomplished through pastors' conferences, regional gatherings and workshops, convocations, emergent leader training, treasurer workshops, outreach/evangelism training, the Kairos Network, Missionary Pathway Training, and other resources provided through the district and Synod. Others have been en-

couraged and strengthened in their life and ministry through Grace Place Wellness Retreats, DOXOLOGY, Pastoral Leadership Institute, and seminary workshops. We are blessed to support worker wellness through Lutheran Counseling Services, Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support, pastors' wives' retreats and break-outs at our conferences, and working with Synod partner ministries. We are working to further develop our worker and family wellness plans.

During this triennium, our educator conferences, pastors' conferences, circuit convocations, and the President's Equip Conference have all given priority to equipping God's people for outreach and leadership. Attendance at these events has increased, with more than 800 at our pastor and educator conferences and over 1,000 at the President's Equip Conference in 2023. We have seen new ministries start, our schools grow, and an openness to helping "Every Congregation Be a Church Planting Congregation—Start Something New" that will be a bridge to reach new people and connect them to Jesus.

Youth ministry and children's ministry in many of our congregations have reflected much of the change across Synod. However, we remain blessed with great directors of Christian education, deaconesses, and other youth and children's ministry leaders who are working to reach out into their communities. Even with the challenges, we continue to offer excellent district youth gatherings for middle and high school students with more than 500 in attendance, along with annual servant events. Our 59 early learning centers and schools are growing. This growth is a result of the excellence in our programs, parental choice, and a growing population. We have seen two new schools open and others are under consideration. Yet not only do we provide exceptional education, but places where the seeds of faith are planted and nurtured in both students and parents. Over the past three years, we have seen more than 400 baptisms through our school ministries!

Our district convention theme in 2025 was *Compelled*, based upon 2 Cor. 5:14–15:

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. (NIV)

The population of Florida and Georgia continues to grow rapidly (two percent or more a year), now totaling more than 34 million residents. With that growth comes many opportunities and challenges in reaching the diverse, large-growing ethnic population. This includes few bilingual pastors, but also leaders and congregations that will answer the call to send workers into the harvest. We are indeed blessed to have a number of ethnic ministries including Hispanic, Haitian, Korean, and Ethiopian. But there is more to do as we respond to what is before us and the Synod's call to increase mission efforts to immigrants and various cultural groups. One response to these opportunities is our Rev7:9 Project involving 22 congregations in reaching diverse ethnic groups. This project is being supported through a partnership with Mission Nation Publishing and a grant from the Lutheran Women's Missionary League. In addition, we have given more attention to new ethnic church plants and raising individuals to be trained through our seminaries. During this triennium, we have closed two congregations and planted three new congregations.

Today, the Synod and our district are facing an ever-growing and critical need for workers. There are more than 600 congrega-

tions calling for pastors and fewer than 28 percent of our educators across the Synod are rostered. This reality cries out for our daily prayers. The Lord says, "Pray that the Lord would send out workers into the harvest." In our district we urge everyone to daily pray at **10:02** (Luke) for workers to be raised up and Christ's Church to grow.

In response to this need and the incredible opportunities before us, in January the district launched *Compelled ... A Mission Advancement Initiative* to perpetually support three critical practices to the life and mission of the Church: (1) Plant new churches, (2) start new outreach ministries outside the doors of our congregations, and (3) raise up new church workers by providing additional financial aid.

Raising and endowing \$10 million is the goal to provide the resources needed to accomplish these critical objectives now and in the future.

We continue to face approximately a 12 percent pastoral vacancy rate. This number is significantly less than it would be, due to the blessing of the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP), Center for Hispanic Studies, and Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology routes through the seminaries. SMP alone accounts for a little over 10 percent of our pastoral coverage. In addition, we are phenomenally blessed by retired pastors and workers who serve vacant congregations and classrooms faithfully. Yet, the availability of such workers is diminishing. We are doing what we can and working with *Set Apart to Serve* to address the need for existing congregations and church plants going forward. Yet more can be done to address needs as Christ's Body together.

My fervent prayer is that we will continue to be bold in living as Christ's witnesses, proclaiming, "Christ is risen indeed!" Therefore, may we take to heart these words of the psalmist:

Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. (Psalm 105:1–3, NIV)

James H. Rockey, *President*

R27

Indiana District

The Indiana District comprises some 212 congregations, along with their pastors, schools, teachers, and commissioned workers in Indiana and northern Kentucky. By God's grace we are a strong and healthy district with many blessings received with thanksgiving and being used to the glory of His name and for the good of His Church.

Following a period of significant transition within the district office, the past few years have been a time of increasing stability and of growing equilibrium in our week-to-week operations. As the undersigned has settled into his office and role as district president, to which he was reelected in June of 2025, it has become easier to clarify our collective goals, to lay the groundwork for future plans, and to make concerted efforts to advance the faithful and consistent catechesis and confession of our Savior Christ Jesus and His Word.

A persistent focus has been maintained on the following five key priorities, identified by the undersigned in 2022:

- Encouraging, facilitating, and/or providing pastoral care for the pastors of the Indiana District;
- Likewise, supporting and caring for the pastors' families;
- Promoting an active fellowship between brother pastors and sister congregations at the circuit level;
- Increasing the clarity and consistency of the practice of closed Communion throughout all of our congregations; and
- Fostering a more harmonious unity of worship practice across the district, for the sake of our confession of Christ.

Along with regular attention given to each of these concerns, the district president and secretary were able to record a couple of podcasts on the theology and practice of closed Communion and on the benefits to be found through increased harmony of worship practices among the congregations of our church fellowship. Those recordings are readily available on the district website.

In addition to the above concerns, another priority of focus has been on Lutheran education. An investigation of classical Lutheran education, initiated by the 2022 district convention, culminated in a report presented to the board of directors in December 2024 and acknowledged with thanksgiving by the 2025 convention. We were also able to partner with the Consortium for Classical Lutheran Education in sponsoring a number of practicums within the district. Conversations continue and future plans are being pursued with various parishes interested in exploring a classical pedagogy.

Broadening the scope of our considerations and discussions in response to a resolution adopted by the 2025 district convention, we are exploring the theology of Lutheran education and looking for ways to promote and support distinctively Lutheran schools as valuable partners in the Church's overall ministry of the Word. We are well served in those efforts by our new education executive, Mr. Nathan Wingfield, and his capable administrative assistant, Mrs. Martha Peters, both of whom came on board in June of 2025.

Now in 2026 we are preparing for the retirement of our long-time missions executive, Rev. Dr. Geoffrey Robinson, who will have served the district for 19 years as of the end of July. Plans are underway to fill his big shoes with a new executive, who will most likely serve as an assistant to the president with a focus on missions, outreach, mercy, pastoral care, and other duties as needed. We are profoundly grateful for Dr. Robinson's faithful and steady service to the district throughout these past many years.

The district has been especially pleased to continue its significant support of the ongoing mission and mercy work among our Lutheran brothers and sisters in Tanzania, including the training of new pastors, the establishment of a seminary, and the building of much-needed orphanages. The 2022 and 2025 district conventions and the board of directors have been consistent in their support of these and other efforts, and we are grateful to God for the progress, indicative of a commitment to the purity of the Word of God and the clarity of our Lutheran teaching and confession of the faith.

As we have worked with the Office of International Mission and partnered with other Synod districts in supporting the work in Tanzania, so have there also been a variety of efforts over these past several years to partner with the Office of National Mission and the recognized service organizations of the Synod in our district, as we strive to exercise our fellowship in the Gospel for the benefit of our congregations and circuits. Besides our ongoing relationships with Concordia Plan Services, the Lutheran Church Extension Fund, and the LCMS Foundation, we have also worked with various agen-

cies of the Synod in the areas of stewardship, worship, counseling, worker wellness, youth ministry, and the recruitment of future pastors, teachers, deaconesses, church musicians, and other workers. The district is also privileged and pleased to have Concordia Theological Seminary in our midst, with whom we cherish a close working relationship.

In the area of mental health care and counseling, in particular, the past few years have seen the beginning of Concordia Counseling in Seymour, Ind., and Cross Connections of Tippecanoe County in Lafayette, Ind., indicative of the desire and effort to provide theologically sound temporal assistance and support alongside the ongoing spiritual care of the Church and ministry of the Gospel. It is noteworthy that parishes in other parts of the district are likewise exploring the possibility of providing similar counseling services.

Within the life of the district, the undersigned has focused on visitation as a primary means of oversight and pastoral care for the pastors and parishes of Indiana and northern Kentucky. He has thus far been able to worship with roughly 70–75 percent of the congregations and to visit in some capacity as many as 85–90 percent of the parishes. As those efforts continue through this new triennium, a process of more formal visitations will begin, for the sake of providing counsel and encouragement in the ministry and mission of the Church on earth. The president and regional vice-presidents also make regular visits to the circuit pastors' meetings throughout the year, in order to maintain communication and close connections with the pastors and their labors in the Lord on the front lines of the Church and in the trenches of this life under the cross. The circuit visitors are likewise instrumental in this exercise of care and oversight for the congregations, all the more so because of their close proximity to and familiarity with the parishes of their circuits. Similarly, our education executive is making regular visits to schools and principals, in order to know them and the challenges they face, and to serve and support them in their work.

There are challenges, of course, facing not only the schools but the congregations of the district in general as well. The Synod's *Set Apart to Serve* initiative has helped to spread awareness of the urgent and growing need for more theologically trained teachers and pastors for the present and future generations of the Church. As more pastors are reaching the point of retirement, the number of vacancies increases, some of which are harder to fill. At the same time, demographic declines have contributed to the struggles of our small congregations. We look to the Lord for wisdom, even as we pray that He will continue to provide what is needed for His Church. We know and trust that all things depend upon His faithful Word!

D. Richard Stuckwisch Jr., *President*

R28

Iowa District East

The congregations of Iowa District East remain a pasture where the pure Word of God and the Holy Sacraments are delivered to the sheep of each flock. As such, the sheep are well fed and able to stand firm in the Christian faith amidst an ever-increasing anti-faith culture. Our pastors are well trained and dedicated to tending their congregations with fidelity to the correct exposition of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

The schools of our district are experiencing growth, for which we give thanks and praise to our Lord. Each school is led by qual-

ified and wise administrators who lead competent and caring faculties. The directors of Christian education and deaconesses fulfill their calling with determination and commitment to Holy Writ so that our children and young adults may be equipped to withstand Satan's assaults and give a clear testimony to the world of who Jesus is and the salvation that He has earned for us.

The rural areas of Iowa are continuing to decline in population. Our rural congregations are valiantly remaining committed to reaching out to those who yet may live nearby. Adjustments and arrangements with sister congregations to share a pastor are difficult considerations. Yet they bravely make decisions they need to so they may continue to be present in their local communities.

Concerted efforts at church worker recruitment are bearing fruit. Partnering with the Synod office supplying us with materials and resources, we have seen an increase in students going to our Concordia universities as well as young men heading off to one of our two seminaries. As was said above, we can only give thanks and praise to the Lord of the Church for answering our prayers to send more workers into the harvest field.

In convention this past year, the Rev. Dr. Joel Biermann guided the assembly with a wonderful presentation on the topic "The Word of God Leads Us Through Life." It was a time of worship, study, reports, and reflection on what we have been given in the Church and how each congregation and membership can communicate that message to the communities we live in. We have the holy treasures of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our pastors preach "Christ Jesus and Him Crucified" with clarity. Our schools prepare our children rightly. We have everything Pentecost has given the Church in every era. We have work to do, and by God's grace and strength we will do it. God help us all and bless us with the promise of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Brian S. Saunders, *President*

R29

Iowa District West

One hundred sixty-five congregations comprise Iowa District West. Interstate 35, with a few exceptions, serves as our eastern border.

Our 2025 district convention convened under the theme "One generation commends Your works to another" (Psalm 145). LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison preached during our opening Divine Service, "The Word of God is living and active!"

District President Rev. Dr. Steve Turner expressed gratitude and love for the delegates and for the opportunity to serve as the district president for 10 years. He spoke of the strides our district has made in ethnic ministries, in partnerships between congregations, and in support for God's mission. "Our strength does not lie in us, but in the grace and peace that comes from Jesus Christ."

Our convention essayist, the Rev. Dr. Brian Friedrich of Concordia University, St. Paul, spoke of the changing of generations. President Friedrich told the story of his family's history in the district. "While times are changing, our theology and confession do not change."

The Rev. Paul Egger was elected president of Iowa West District on the first ballot. The Rev. Jonathan Riggert was elected first vice-president and the Rev. Benjamin Dose, second vice-president, also on first ballots.

During this triennium, we have been acting upon Synod and district convention resolutions concerning reaching out into our communities with Jesus' love, church worker wellness, promoting a culture of life, encouraging and recruiting pastors and other professional church workers, and more.

How are we reaching out into our communities? Rev. Dr. B. Keith Haney conducts "Art of Neighboring" workshops and visioning workshops to help individuals and congregations see how they can be neighbors in their communities and bring people to hear the Word of God in our churches. Mrs. Julie Mann assists congregations in establishing Swaddling Clothes ministries as well as Lutheran Early Response Teams (LERT). The district reaches out to hurting families and congregations with our LERT training and volunteers and has recently served homes and churches in our district impacted by tornados and flooding. LERT volunteers also traveled to Concordia Seminary to help clear trees and debris following a tornado. Our district also supports Orphan Grain Train.

What about church worker wellness and mental health issues? In addition to our two annual professional church worker conferences, we have begun an annual Mutual Consolation of the Brethren gathering initiated and led by Rev. Chad Dietrich. We are renewing our emphasis among pastors on regularly attending our monthly circuit winks. We host an annual pastors' wives' retreat at Camp Okoboji. We passed a resolution to encourage every congregation to enact sexual abuse prevention strategies. We've devoted 3 percent of our entire district budget to expand staff and resources of Lutheran Family Service under the care and direction of Rev. Max Phillips and Ms. Wanda Pritzel. Rev. Phillips shares that Lutheran Family Service is the oldest service organization in Iowa, having been organized in 1901. Its mission includes bringing comfort to those who have had an abortion, those who are unexpectedly pregnant, those suffering mental health challenges, and others in need. Rev. Jonathan Conner leads seminars encouraging appropriate use of social media. Also, we have begun regular circuit visitor Zoom meetings followed by in-person meetings to discuss opportunities and issues as we walk together, because Christ is risen indeed!

What about promoting a culture of life? Our district convention passed a resolution supporting and encouraging adoptions. Pastors travel to our state capital to discuss life issues and legislation with state government officials at lunch and learns and also Pastors Day on the Hill. Revs. Cory Kroonblawd and Paul Schulz are actively planning activities prior to and alongside the annual Iowa March for Life.

How are we encouraging and recruiting pastors and other professional church workers? Our 35 preschools serve over 1,400 children. Our eight Lutheran schools are each increasing in enrollment. By God's grace, with our schools bringing Jesus Christ to God's dear children, He may lead more into professional church work. The district has distributed over \$250,000 in aid again this year to 18 district students attending our Concordia universities and seminaries. Also, our district provides a generous fund available for church workers to help with debt reduction. How about music among God's children? David's Harp is a recognized service organization of the Synod that is helping raise the next generation of church musicians in local congregations. It began in the district, at St. Paul, Council Bluffs, several years ago.

Our district office has recently experienced major transitions in staffing. From those retiring: District President Steve Turner (after 10 years) to Paul Egger; Administrative Assistant Mrs. Sue Light (46) to Mrs. Emilie Jensen; District President Administrative Assis-

tant Mrs. Jill Davis (15) to Mrs. Michelle Hammersland; Lutheran Church Extension Fund Vice-President Mrs. Carole White Manderbach (26) to Mr. Josh Remington; and Gift Planning Coordinator Mr. Jim Schroeder (36) to Mr. Leon Shoenfeld.

With so many rookies and much to learn, we thank God for our continuing experience in the district office of (in decreasing order of years of experience): Business Manager Roger Curtis, Executive Assistants Ms. Rhonda Mohr and Rev. Dr. B. Keith Haney, Missionary-at-Large Rev. Pedro Lopez, and IOWAY Director Mrs. Julie Mann.

What about missions here and around the world? Rev. Lopez has been expanding ministry opportunities with Hispanic communities all around the district. Rev. Daniel Mapur has been working with the Sudanese congregation at Grace, Le Mars. There are possibilities for additional Sudanese ministries in Denison, Storm Lake, and Des Moines.

In the middle of the district, Mission Central, under the leadership of Mr. Gary Theis and Rev. Steve Schulz, promotes mission awareness and support for missionaries sent around God's earth. Our Lutheran Women's Missionary League with mites and prayers supports district, Synod, and worldwide outreach. Our district sends 40 percent of our receipts on to the Synod for the Synod's work.

Another blessing: More of our district congregations are returning to our biblical, confessional, historical practice of every Sunday Communion: the Lord's Supper for the Lord's people each Lord's day, answering the question "How often would Jesus like to meet at His table with hurting souls and care for them?"

We in the district look forward to our Lord's work under His blessing as we gather for our 2026 Synod convention, celebrating *Christ Is Risen Indeed!* We live in this reality now and into days eternal by His grace. And we anticipate His return, crying out with all His faithful, "Come, Lord Jesus! Come quickly!"

Paul D. Egger, *President*

R30

Kansas District

Our work in the Kansas District is aptly reflected in the theme of our 2025 convention: "Abiding in the Word" (John 8:31–32). The baptized "abide in the word" as we are gathered at the pulpit, font, and altar to receive the gifts of Christ in Word and Sacrament. This is real, life-sustaining food. Receiving these gifts gives you a good conscience before Christ (Heb. 10:22; 1 Tim. 1:5). With sins forgiven and faith in Christ strengthened, we are set on the path to serve the living God. We have the privilege of supporting and encouraging the members of the district—155 congregations, 14 elementary schools, 1 high school, 35 preschools, and nearly 400 workers—in carrying out the mission Christ has given His Church. We're also thankful for the opportunities we've had to maintain and enhance our work with other valued partners, including the Synod, recognized service organizations, auxiliaries, and related agencies.

Goals

If you click on "About Us" on the home page of our website, you'll see the phrase "Synod in this Place." It's a nod to Bylaw 4.1.1.1. Our "common work" in the district—captured in our mission statement, goals, and priorities—strongly aligns with the Synod's constitutional objectives, bylaw purpose, and convention priorities while also taking into account directives from our district

convention.

Following is a brief summary of progress on the major directives and priorities that have guided our work since the last Synod convention:

District Resolutions

2022 Res. 22-01-03, To Encourage Kansas District Congregations to Seek Opportunities to Collaborate and Partner to Enhance Mission and Ministry in the Kansas District: The Partnership Project was launched in 2020. District congregations, schools, and circuits are encouraged to consider ways in which they can be "better together" for the sake of advancing the Gospel in their location, and that the district identify, refine, and develop resources as needed to support the Partnership Project and encourage use of these resources.

2022 Res. 22-02-02, To Recommend and Implement a Rigorous Program of Study in Circuit Winkels: The district president provided to all circuit visitors and pastors of the district a template for the Traditional Synodical Conference Winkel Model, which provides, on a monthly basis, for significant and adequate time devoted to (a) the regular, formal study of God's Word in the original languages led by a circuit pastor; (b) the regular, formal study of our blessed Confession and/or the Lutheran dogmatic tradition led by a circuit pastor; (c) the regular, formal study of an historical, pastoral-theological, or polemical topic led by a circuit pastor; and (d) regular, formal pastor-led critique of the winkel preacher's sermon.

2022 Res. 22-03-01, To Encourage the Implementation of the Church Worker Care Manual in LCMS Kansas District Congregations: The lay leaders of district congregations are encouraged to implement the Church Worker Care Manual with their pastor(s) and other professional church workers (if applicable) within the 2022–25 triennium; and that church worker care teams or other appropriate boards or individuals within the congregation would focus their efforts on praying for, encouraging, and offering respite opportunities for church workers, promoting and supporting financially the continuing education of their called workers, and providing compensation for church workers that meets or exceeds established guidelines in the district.

Synod Priorities

Bylaw 4.4.4, Visitation: We conducted 31 "official" visitations in the district since the last convention. The visits were intentionally based on Constitution Article III and Bylaw 4.4.4 (e). Visitation in this triennium will also be centered on the same focus.

2023 Res. 1-01A, "To Stimulate Training for Witness": We are using and actively encouraging the use of all *re:Vitality* resources.

2023 Res. 1-03A, "To Plant More Churches": Church Planting Simplified is currently being used with two new church plants.

2023 Res. 6-01, "To Affirm and Strengthen Set Apart to Serve in Word and Action": The district is actively supporting this church worker recruitment initiative with prayer and active engagement.

2023 Res. 6-09, "To Recognize and Honor the Pastor's Wife": We recognized all church workers and their anniversaries with dessert following the convention Divine Service.

Performance Assessment

We strive to be good stewards of the gifts entrusted to our care. Here are a few ways the district staff and the board of directors have

sought to advance the mission and vision of the district, strengthening our partnership with the Synod and other organizations since the last convention.

- Annual visits by the district president (DP) and assistant to the DP for congregational and school services to monthly circuit conferences for pastors, DCE clusters, and schools.
- Congregational treasurers' workshops
- Church planting and church revitalization
- District disaster response efforts through district disaster response coordinator and Lutheran Early Response Teams
- Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support for pastors in first three years of ministry
- "Church Worker Care Manual" and the implementation of Church Worker Care Teams across the district
- Partnership with the LCMS Foundation for planned giving services

Looking Ahead

Our strategic plan to guide our work as we "Abide in the Word" in the coming triennium, involves these key aims:

1. "Abiding in the Word" as a mission and ministry focus
2. Cultivating a culture of life in our congregations and schools
3. Encouraging National Lutheran School Accreditation
4. Planting schools, Lutheran early childhood centers, and churches
5. Promoting partnership in the Gospel
6. Actively engaging in training for witness and outreach

We have His charge to live as His baptized priests, confessing His Word and living it out in word and deed to all whom we come into contact with, so that they may know that "Christ is risen indeed!"

Justin A. Panzer, *President*

R31

Michigan District

As *People of Hope*, vigorously making known the love of Christ, the Michigan District addresses four critical targets: (1) Great Commission Ministry, (2) Great Compassion Ministry, (3) Healthy Congregations, and (4) Healthy Church Workers.

We seek above all things, through our congregations, workers, laity, as well as every program and activity, to fix people's eyes on Jesus. For *Christ is risen. Indeed.*

The district is comprised of 146,295 baptized members, 334 congregations, 2 missions, 5 high schools, 66 elementary schools, and 122 early childhood centers.

A. Concordia University Ann Arbor

The most bitter experience in the district in this triennium was the closure of the Concordia University main campus in Ann Arbor. Although experiencing record-setting enrollment, a vibrant and positive campus life, and generous emergency financial support pledged from many within and outside of the district, the administration of Concordia University Wisconsin moved ahead with

dismantling the main campus ministry and restricted the remnant of the school to an auxiliary nearby university-owned facility. The 2025 district convention was bittersweet, as our delegates realized it would be our last convention held on the beloved campus on the Huron River. As a whole, the district has experienced disappointment in life together in the Synod.

B. Addressing Synod Priorities

District congregations supported a strong program of mental health and care for district church workers (Res. 1-07, Res. 1-06A). The district employs a mental health case manager, an experienced deaconess who helps church workers find the care they need in times of personal crisis. The Committee for Church Worker Care is very active in support of new church workers (Res. 6-06A, Res. 6-02A) and encouraging and guiding those entering church work training. The district also provides a regular conference for new workers in the district. In addition, the district provides support for the wives and families of pastors (Res. 6-09) through an annual wives' conference (The Katie Conference) and retreats at Camp Arcadia.

Our circuit visitors report strong participation in circuit life (Res. 6-07A, Res. 4-03), where our pastors are built up together and continue to learn from one another. Some of our circuits have formed subcommittees for church planting (Res. 1-01A, Res. 1-05A) as part of a Harvest Partner Network, and some are becoming connected directly to International Mission through a FORO (Res. 2-07A) or other means. In addition, the district provides on-line training in personal witness, as well as conferences ("Beyond the Breakwater") designed to train individuals and congregations in outreach to their communities. During the last triennium we held 26 circuit convocations (Bylaw section 5.4) focused on mission outreach.

In addition to our circuit visitors, the district provides regional facilitators who guide, resource, and encourage congregations, especially smaller and multi-point ministries (Res. 1-02A).

C. Mission/Ministry Initiatives

In an effort to move ahead in college-age ministry without the presence of Concordia, the district is dedicating resources to network and expand campus ministries at colleges around the state. We have also begun work on a vocational education ministry. We have built a robust granting program to support the initiation of new community-focused ministries through existing congregations. We have seen growth in key urban and ethnic ministries that are focused on neighborhood engagement. Expansion of homeschool support has grown alongside the growth of many of our day schools and high schools.

D. Michigan District Convention

Our convention theme was *Nourished for the Journey: Remember, Renew, Return*. Rev. Dr. Joel Biermann served as keynote speaker. President Matthew C. Harrison gave a report for the Synod and a review of the Augsburg Confession. Rev. Dr. Jeff Schrank assisted various congregations to provide food and hospitality. The convention adopted resolutions expressing dismay over the handling of Concordia Ann Arbor, a request for the publication of the Council of Presidents Manual, a commitment to an every-congregation visitation, questions about the term *Lutheran Identity*, a call for clarity on the prior approval process, encouragement for personal witness, and an affirmation of our deacon training program.

The convention reelected David Davis to a second term of office; Darryl Anrzejewski, Erik Cloeter, Craig Bickel, and Drew Gruenhagen were elected first–fourth vice-presidents, respectively.

E. Michigan District—Church Extension Fund

Our Church Extension Fund (CEF) continues to be a strong partner with our district. CEF annually provides over \$1 million in support through sponsorship, grants, and other support. CEF continues to provide low-cost loans to congregations for building, renovation, and church worker housing, and competitive investment instruments to all our members. This next year our CEF is celebrating its 125th year of ministry as an independent extension fund in the district.

F. Concerns across the District

Filling pulpits and classrooms continues to be a great challenge. We have been blessed by the training of dozens of specific ministry pastors. We continue to find public school teachers who are interested in serving in our schools, but we find the colloquy process, especially for teachers, more difficult to access than we think necessary.

Like many other areas across the country, we have closed many congregations. We work with distressed congregations to build relationships with other stronger congregations to enhance ministry to their communities so as to limit the loss of our presence in the community.

G. Building Christian Character

During this triennium, the district continued to advocate for more disciplined Bible reading that we might always build on Scripture alone. We have accented stronger personal relationships with pastors and lay leaders through coordinated efforts in visits, phone calls, and other contacts. Through balanced conferences and communications, we refuse to succumb to internecine conflict. We are committed to being *People of Hope: Vigorously Making Known the Love of Christ*. For Christ is risen. Indeed!

David A. Davis, *President*

R32

Mid-South District

The continuation and expansion of the mission and ministry of the Mid-South District remains expressed in the words of our mission statement: *As an alliance of congregations and schools, the Mid-South District provides leadership, resources, and encouragement for reaching the lost for Christ's kingdom and equipping the found for service in our churches, community, and in the world.*

As the theme for the 2025 district convention we chose *Christ the Church's One Foundation*. The theme inspired the convention and member congregations and schools to encourage our members to be equipped as the priesthood of believers and to make significant strides to touch the lives of those in the communities in which we live. The district was founded on the principles of mission and outreach to the lost within the geographical area we serve. The last three district conventions encouraged delegates to focus upon the Gospel of Christ and consider how they can touch the lives of those who are unchurched or de-churched here and around the world.

In the last three years, the board of directors and executive staff have diligently worked to build an awareness of the tools needed

to provide the necessary resources to strengthen congregations and schools to assist them in the fullest use of precious resources of the Gospel and all God's gifts. A strong emphasis has been placed on assisting congregations to be faithful stewards of the gifts God offers so that they may help their members profoundly impact their communities with the Good News of Christ crucified and risen. Through the district's IMPACT efforts, we have continued to raise dollars to fund and support missions and ministries throughout the district. IMPACT has raised over \$3 million to continue to support the missions and activities of the district.

Cooperative arrangements have been developed to assist smaller congregations in exploring collaborative efforts for ministry. At least two examples of this collaboration have been introduced into a "hub-and-spoke" type of relationship. Another model encourages two or more congregations to share services to build ministry effectiveness together. The district has launched a "Grow-Grant" process that allows all congregations, schools, and agencies to apply for start-up dollars to bring new mission and ministry initiatives. Additionally, there has been one new mission plant in the Nashville area as well as three other locations for more mission church plants. The Mission and Ministry committee will be reviewing potential sites for microschools and homeschool co-ops.

The district continues its church planting efforts through a relationship with the Synod and its Church Planting Simplified project. Three additional potential church plant sites are being developed along with several replants and a number of revitalization efforts of the Mission and Ministry subcommittee of the board of directors. On the international scale, the continuation of our support for international and national missions includes convention support for the South East of Lake Victoria Diocese (SELVD) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania, Trinity HOPE in Haiti, and the Lutheran Institute of Managerial Enterprise (LIME) with the Malagasy Lutheran Church. The district also provided one-time assistance to St Martin's Lutheran Church in Ghana for its expanding ministry.

The Congregational Assessment Resource (CAR) and COMPASS continue to flourish, with over 12 other districts and over 100 congregations and schools using the CAR tool pioneered by the district and implementing the process offered by the district's COMPASS program to help them find a new direction for their ministry and mission outreach. These resources have been shared with the Council of Presidents, Synod leadership, Concordia Plan Services, and the Lutheran Church Extension Fund. The district will continue to provide leadership, resources, and encouragement for congregations, schools, and church workers on their focus for mission and ministry.

The district established a *Set Apart to Serve* task force to identify, encourage, support, and recruit church workers for Christ's kingdom. Through town hall meetings, individual visits to congregations and schools, and regular newsletters, these efforts are showing tremendous results here and throughout the Synod. During academic years 2025 and 2026, the district had 11 and 13 men respectively in one of the several seminary tracks toward ordination—a ratio of one seminarian for every 1,750 confirmed members of the district's membership. Thanks be to God!

The 2025 district convention adopted resolutions that focus on the mission and ministry that is entrusted to our stewardship of the Gospel of Christ. The district continues to conduct extensive evaluation of the viability and optimization of our ministries across the district, including:

- Reaffirming Church Planting
- Continuation of Our Relationship with the SELVD in Tanzania
- Commending Support of Trinity HOPE in Haiti
- Maintaining Accountability and Transparency of Financial Gifts from God's Stewards
- Encouraging Financial Support for Professional Church Workers
- Establishing *Locum Tenens* Ministries for the District
- Establishing an LCMS Men's Ministry
- To Shape the Faith Formation Paradigm for Generation to Generation
- To Encourage Generational Ministry
- To Evaluate, Study, and Use Biblically-Based Stewardship Services
- To Encourage and Facilitate Personal Evangelism
- To Encourage Further Consideration of Successful Completion of Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) Coursework before Ordination and Placement
- Regularizing SMP Classification
- To Extend Overture to the 2026 Synod Convention Concerning Specific Ministry Pastoral Training
- To Direct Offices of National and International Mission to Decline Applications of Recognized Service Organization Status from Organizations Currently Supporting, Advocating, or Otherwise Promoting LGBTQIA+ Agenda and Lifestyle and To Direct Offices of National and International Mission to Revoke RSO Status of the Same
- To Participate in Building a Culture of Church Work Formation and Recruitment

While we recognize an overall trend of declining congregational membership and support for congregations and the church at large, the district has focused attention on the many external factors that impact our vitality and effectiveness. The large geographic size of our district and our relatively small number of congregations requires us to be strategic in the services we provide to our congregations, schools, early childhood centers, and church workers. As a result, our strategic initiatives will include the following goals:

- Reestablish the Small and Rural Congregation Council
- Continue the Education, Family, and Youth Ministry Executive position
- Develop efficiencies and accountability in church planting to maximize use of limited and valuable resources under the church planting covenant
- Continue to expand the fundraising efforts to support the essential services of the district to its membership
- Continue and encourage participation in the pastors' wives' retreats
- Celebrate the district's 60th anniversary

Following the 2025 district convention, we are committed more than ever to increase our size, abilities, and resources in the ongoing privilege of serving our member congregations, church work-

ers, and the kingdom of God with the Good News of the Gospel.

Roger C. Paavola, *President*

R33

Minnesota North District

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

Strengthened in Christ. Faithful. Visitations.

Each week in the Minnesota North District, 194 congregations proclaim the crucified and risen Lord Jesus, forgive and retain sins, and mercifully serve their communities in His name. Every school day, our 7 elementary schools, 1 high school, and 17 preschools declare the truth of Christ to our young people and instruct them in His ways. I am deeply humbled by the commitment and steadfast faith of our workers, our congregational leaders, and all the baptized who abound in the mercy of Christ.

The purpose of our district is to preserve and promote unity in the one true faith (1 Cor. 1:10). We pay careful attention to what we believe, teach, and confess because salvation is at stake (1 Tim. 4:16). One of our central goals is to ensure that our confession of faith remains the same for generations to come. More than 70 percent of our congregations are over 100 years old. We pray that 100 years from now, our ministries will still confess the same inerrant Scriptures, the same bloodied and resurrected Christ as Lord, the same Small Catechism, and will trust the same Holy Spirit to grow the Church through His Word. The Lord grant it by His grace.

To remain steadfast in Christ, we continue to prioritize visitations. Our office is lean, only three full-time staff, and ready to serve. Since 2022, we have visited 191 of our 194 congregations and are scheduled to complete visits to every ministry by the end of August 2026. Our ongoing goal is to visit each ministry at least once every triennium through the district president, vice-presidents, and circuit visitors. Each visit centers on prayer, building up the Body of Christ, encouraging our workers, and exhorting one another to holy living.

We thank the Lord for the opportunities to uphold the sanctity of human life by two congregations, Redeemer Aurora and Faith in Silver Bay, extending mercy through their Swaddling Clothes ministries. As pastoral vacancies continue to increase (currently 55 of our congregations are without a called pastor), more than 160 men attended an elders retreat to strengthen their spiritual leadership and assistance in their congregations. The importance of teaching the faith in the home is being actively promoted through circuit seminars and various district initiatives.

While many changes occur each day, we cling to the same promises of our Savior. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8).

Brady L. Finner, *President*

R34

Minnesota South District

In 2022, the 79th convention of the Minnesota South District was convened under the theme of "Everything in the Name of Jesus." Delegates gathered together to partner in the district's mission to "cultivate leaders intentionally engaged in the mission of God."

During the convention, President Woodford announced the *Go First* initiative as the framework that would guide the mission and ministry of the district for the next triennium. He explained that history shows that culture-changing movements are often led by those willing to go first. That, of course, was the foundation of the New Testament Church. It was made up of those who were willing to go first. However, they were simply the first to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, who Himself was always ready to go first. Jesus goes first. That's who He is. His was a life and ministry of going first. He went first from eternity in heaven to time here on earth. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin, so He could save us. To rescue sinners, Jesus goes first. The *Go First* initiative is based upon the Gospel joy that since Jesus goes first to the cross to win for us forgiveness, life, and salvation, we can trust Him. And because we trust Him, He inspires us to go first and inspire others in His name. The ministries of the district were encouraged throughout the triennium to *Go First* around four ministry areas: Life Together, Soul Care, Collaboration, and Outreach. What follows is the work of this district initiative outlined by the seven mission priorities of the Synod.

1. Plant, Sustain, and Revitalize Lutheran Churches

Guided by the Christ-centered *Go First* initiative, the district has intentionally sought to plant, sustain, and revitalize congregations by trusting Jesus, who always goes first, to inspire faithful action. Even amid cultural transition, declining attendance, and financial strain, the district received three new congregations during the triennium, including multiethnic and immigrant church plants, while also supporting an additional Ethiopian mission through the New Church Incubator Fund. At the same time, the district has soberly addressed the reality of congregation closures, recognizing both the grief such moments bring and the necessity of proactive intervention. Through diagnostic tools, early engagement, and encouragement of mergers, partnerships, restarts, and revitalization efforts, the district continues to stress Gospel-centered collaboration over competition, seeking to bless rather than impress, grow rather than show, and intervene early so that congregations may flourish in their God-given mission.

2. Support and Expand Theological Education

The district has prioritized robust theological education rooted in Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, recognizing that faithful doctrine is not opposed to mission but essential to it. Through theological convocations addressing ecclesiology, worship, the Office of the Ministry, and the Lord's Supper, pastors were invited into collegial, fraternal dialogue marked by clarity, charity, and conviction. These gatherings intentionally distinguished between preferences, convictions, and binding absolutes, fostering greater unity while allowing appropriate latitude. In a cultural "gray zone" marked by moral confusion and uncertainty, such theological formation equips pastors, teachers, and other church workers to speak the Law and Gospel with confidence, maintain a non-anxious presence, and proclaim Christ boldly for the sake of the lost and the found.

3. Perform Human Care in Close Proximity to Word and Sacrament Ministries

Human care within the district has been deliberately grounded in Christ's own compassion, expressed through Word and Sacrament. Soul care remains central to the district's mission, recognizing that

Jesus goes first to heal, forgive, and restore broken sinners. The district president and staff have devoted significant time to caring for pastors, church workers, congregations, and families experiencing conflict, crisis, burnout, or moral failure. This care acknowledges both guilt and shame, offering the forgiveness of sins won by Christ and delivered through the Means of Grace. Whether through visitation, mediation, counseling, or encouragement, the district continues to emphasize that authentic human care flows from the Gospel itself and is vital in a world marked by brokenness and inhumanity.

4. Collaborate with LCMS Members and Partners to Enhance Mission Effectiveness

Collaboration has been intentionally emphasized as a defining characteristic of district life, reflecting the conviction that the church is called to complete rather than compete with one another. Through shared resources, networking, and cooperative ministry, congregations and leaders have worked together to unleash their collective potential for the sake of God's kingdom. This collaborative spirit is evident in mission partnerships, multiethnic outreach, theological convocations, and the strengthening of relationships with recognized service organizations and Synod partners. By fostering a culture of "trust and inspire" rather than "command and control," the district continues to seek creative and faithful ways to engage together in mission, asking not merely what we can do for one another but what we can do together for the glory of Christ. As part of the *Go First* initiative, a Go First Conference was held in a Best Practices format that allowed the various ministries of the district an opportunity to share and encourage one another in joyfully serving together in making disciples of Jesus Christ.

5. Promote and Nurture the Well-Being of Pastors and Professional Church Workers

Recognizing that pastors and church workers need pastors, the district has placed strong emphasis on spiritual, emotional, and vocational well-being. The district president, executive assistants, and circuit visitors have provided intentional pastoral care through visits, communication, mediation, and mutual consolation. Worker wellness initiatives, conflict resolution efforts, and ongoing support during times of hardship reflect the conviction that healthy servants are essential for healthy congregations. In an era of increasing demands, cultural hostility, and workforce shortages, the district continues to advocate for care that strengthens resilience, guards against burnout, and sustains church workers in joyful service under Christ. In that spirit, the district wishes to express its thanks to the many partners that help make this care possible, especially: Concordia Plan Services, Shepherd's Canyon, DOXOLOGY, Grace Place, Christian Family Solutions, and many local Christian counselors.

6. Enhance Early Childhood, Elementary, Secondary Education, and Youth Ministry

The district remains deeply committed to Lutheran education as a vital expression of mission and catechesis. Through strong support of Lutheran early childhood centers, day schools, and high schools, the district continues to nurture young people in the faith while serving families and communities. Leadership in education, in accreditation support, and in encouragement of commissioned workers has been central to this effort. In response to teacher shortages, the district has supported pathways for public school teachers to transition into Lutheran education through colloquy programs,

while also encouraging youth to consider church work vocations. These efforts reflect the conviction that Lutheran schools are strategic mission fields, forming faithful disciples and future leaders in a rapidly changing world.

7. Strengthen and Support the Lutheran Family in Living Out God's Design

Amid cultural upheaval and challenges to marriage, family, and human identity, the district has clearly articulated what it stands for: the preciousness of human life, faithful marriages, active families, and robust vocational living grounded in God's Word. Through teaching, public policy engagement, education, and congregational life, the district has sought to strengthen Lutheran families as they live out God's design in home, church, and community. Rather than retreating in uncertainty, the district continues to speak with confidence and compassion, proclaiming the Gospel, caring for neighbors, and equipping families to live faithfully in a gray-zone world. With Christ as Lord and His Word as guide, the district moves forward unashamed, hopeful, and united in love for God and neighbor.

Lucas V. Woodford, *President*

R35

Missouri District

The Missouri District is comprised of 286 congregations, with 106,686 baptized and approximately 84,214 communicant members. Its 99 educational ministries serve approximately 13,710 enrolled students from early childhood through high school. There are also 1,704 rostered church workers serving in congregations, schools, recognized service organizations, and Synod entities. District missions focus on church planting; multiethnic, urban, rural, and small-town missions; campus ministries; and military outreach as our congregations seek to reach our mission field of more than three million people.

A. Missouri District 22nd Convention

The district held its 22nd regular convention under the theme "Bold Hope in Christ," drawn from 2 Cor. 3:12. The convention essayist was Rev. Dr. Kevin Golden, associate professor of exegetical theology, dean of theological research and publication, and director of resident field education at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. Special guests included LCMS First Vice-President Rev. Peter K. Lange, who served as preacher at the opening Divine Service and gave a report highlighting key ministry efforts across the Synod with a video from President Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, and LCMS Second Vice-President Rev. Benjamin T. Ball, who assisted in the opening service and report by responding to questions on a variety of topics related to church life and mission.

In his report to the convention, District President Rev. Dr. R. Lee Hagan highlighted four critical targets for the 2025–28 triennium: Church Worker Recruitment and Retention, Discipleship in the Home, Mission Field: Missouri, and Leadership Development, all rooted in the overarching theme of "Bold Hope in Christ."

The convention included a series of videos, including one shown during Hagan's report, as well as videos on campus ministry, multiethnic ministry, *SHINE!*, our seminaries, Lutheran schools, and family ministry. Delegates adopted Res. 4-01, which realigned circuits across the district in an effort to bring circuits into conformity with the Synod requirements for electoral circuits. The convention

also adopted Res. 3-01, celebrating the upcoming 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's Small Catechism (2029) by encouraging congregations, and especially heads of households, to teach the faith in the home. The resolution affirms the Small Catechism's vital role in faith formation and commends its use as part of the Church's ongoing educational mission. Res. 1-03 encouraged and celebrated multiethnic ministry by recognizing Missouri's historic legacy of outreach to diverse communities and by calling congregations to renew their commitment to reaching people of all backgrounds with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Delegates also adopted Res. 3-06, which publicly opposed Missouri Constitutional Amendment 3, which legalizes abortion up to fetal viability. The resolution affirms the LCMS' long-standing stance in defense of the unborn and urges congregations to advocate for life in faithful, peaceful, and proactive ways within their communities. Finally, Res. 2-01 approved the district's Strategic Plan Critical Targets for the 2025–28 triennium, providing a road map for ministry priorities and mission focus across congregations, schools, and ministries in the district.

The convention reelected Rev. Dr. R. Lee Hagan to his fourth term as district president. Also elected were Rev. Craig Otto as first vice-president, Rev. Randy Asbury as second vice-president, Rev. Samuel Powell as third vice-president, and Rev. Rick Cody as fourth vice-president.

B. Strategic Plan

The district's strategic plan for the 2025–28 triennium has four critical targets:

1. Church Worker Recruitment and Retention—The congregations and schools of the district have been richly blessed with faithful pastors, teachers, and other servants. As we look together at the challenges facing the Church, we recognize the need to be intentional about recruiting servants for the future and providing support to care for those who serve. This target remains a top priority for the district.
2. Discipleship in the Home—The Scriptures and the Confessions teach that the home is the primary place of faith formation. The district will continue this emphasis by working with congregations, schools, pastors, and school administrators to provide training and resources, so that each home can be a place where Christ is at the center and families are growing through learning God's Word and the Small Catechism.
3. Mission Field: Missouri—We live in a mission field of more than three million people who are not connected to any church. This critical target establishes the priority of providing resources and training for congregations to collaborate in reaching the lost with the Gospel.
4. Leadership Development—Congregations and schools are in need of leadership training for both staff and lay leaders. Governance models of the past are not serving our existing structures well. The district will provide training and support related to governance models and for various leadership roles in congregations and schools for both rostered workers and laity.

C. Key Initiatives

Supporting these four critical targets, the district has several key initiatives in the works. The *Tomorrow's Teachers and Preachers* initiative focuses on building the district's church worker endowment fund to support the education of aspiring church workers in

Missouri. Training workshops for elders and other congregational leaders will be held throughout the district during the triennium. *Mission Field: Missouri* training workshops will also be offered to congregations to support their efforts in reaching out to their communities. A “Tell the Next Generation” Conference was held in November 2025 to support family discipleship.

D. Changes to District Staff

The district executive staff had two significant additions since its last convention. Joshua Swartz began serving as the director of schools on July 1, 2022. His leadership and support of Lutheran schools and the introduction of MOScholars has been particularly important. Peter Kirby joined the staff as the executive director of congregational services in January 2023, overseeing support for congregations and the survey process of calling congregations. The district is blessed with the leadership of veteran staff members who are dedicated to the support of the congregations, schools, and church workers they are called to serve.

The district has been operating without the leadership of its elected president, R. Lee Hagan, since his stroke in July 2025. Craig Otto, the elected first vice-president of the district, has been serving as interim president for most of the triennium so far. We continue to pray for President Hagan’s recovery and return to his position when he is ready.

R. Lee Hagan, *President*
Craig D. Otto, *Interim President*

R36

Montana District

With prayer and thanksgiving to God for His great mercy, the Montana District began its work for the 2023–26 Synod triennium under the theme “*Your word is a lamp to my feet*” (Psalm 119:105).

A. Presidential Activities

During the triennium, the president of the district visited every congregation during a worship service, encouraging fidelity to God’s Word as our lamp in the darkness of this world. He also met with the elders of each congregation, using the same theme to teach how elders may support their pastors.

In addition, he met with the pastors of the district to hear their joys and sorrows and to review their Pastor’s Information Forms, offering encouragement in their ministry. Finally, he visited the schools of the district, making similar presentations and providing encouragement and support.

B. Goals Being Met

The district has made progress in implementing resolutions of the 2023 Synod convention. Several highlights follow:

District congregations, schools, and church workers have been encouraged to engage zealously in the *Set Apart to Serve (SAS)* initiative (Res. 6-01). A district SAS committee was established and remains active. Renewed conversations with young men and women about church work vocations have borne fruit, and the number of full-time church work students from our congregations has increased.

The district convention directed up to 5 percent of yearly congregational giving to the Joint Seminary Fund in continued support of “proper pastoral formation through our Synod’s Seminaries”

(Res. 6-02A). Scholarships for men and women enrolled in church work programs at our Concordia universities and seminaries have increased (Res. 7-06B). In addition, the district board of directors has expanded student-loan repayment assistance for ordained and commissioned ministers (Res. 12-03A).

The majority of district congregations average fewer than 50 worshipers on a weekend and more than 70 percent are in multi-parish relationships. These congregations care deeply for one another and actively seek ways to provide mutual support. The district continues to work with the Office of National Mission to “aid small congregations and multi-congregation pastors and parishes” (Res. 1-02A).

The district has a rich heritage of supporting life as a gift of God from cradle to grave. Congregations continue to support Lutherans For Life groups, local crisis pregnancy centers, and efforts to “promote a culture of life” throughout the district (Res. 3-01).

We also give thanks for our Lutheran schools (Res. 12-04A). Though the district has only six K–8 schools due to the number of small congregations, these schools receive strong support. During his visits, the president consistently encouraged support for Lutheran schools and teachers, as well as strong catechetical instruction—especially in the home (Res. 12-05A)—with the goal of fostering a next generation of Lutherans who know and live the faith.

During the triennium, the district board of directors developed a new tool to assist in evaluating the district’s four subsidized congregations. The board seeks to be faithful stewards of the Lord’s gifts while identifying additional opportunities for Gospel proclamation.

The new district triennium (2025–28) began with the theme “*I am not ashamed of the gospel*” (Rom. 1:16). We gave thanks to God for the faithful service and 19-year presidency of Rev. Terry Forke. The district elected and welcomed the Rev. Ryan D. Wendt as its ninth president.

C. Strengths

The district remains remarkably homogenous and evangelical in its dedication to the truth of God’s Word and the Lutheran Confessions. The ministerium demonstrates genuine love and care for one another, and the people of God are generous with their time and gifts. Congregational offerings to the district continue to increase, schools are growing, and the lamp is not hidden under a bushel in Montana.

D. Weaknesses

While the congregations of the district are predominantly small, they are also widely dispersed geographically. Pastors in the district cover extensive territory, and many serve in relative isolation. Increasingly, it seems that pastors are reluctant to serve in multi-parish settings or to heed the Lord’s call to serve congregations many hundreds of miles from home and family.

Some 50 percent of the active pastors in the district are already at retirement age or will reach it within the next five years. Although several younger pastors were welcomed into the district during the past triennium, some proved unable to serve faithfully and were removed from office. Filling pastoral and teaching vacancies has become increasingly difficult. Some 46 percent of retired pastors on the district roster continue to serve vacancies, many of them traveling hundreds of miles over a weekend.

The need for more seminary-trained capable pastors and certified Lutheran teachers who are eager and willing to serve is a pressing and ongoing concern for the district.

E. Opportunities

Because God has promised that He will provide workers for His harvest field and has assured us that His Word does not return to Him void, we see many opportunities for ministry in the district. The strength and competence of our well-educated clergy are respected within our communities. As Montana's larger cities continue to grow, younger people are seeking an unchanging truth amid a world of constant change and uncertainty. We have what they need, and we are "*not ashamed of the Gospel*" for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

Ryan D. Wendt, *President*

R37

Nebraska District

Christ Is Risen Indeed and He lives in us and works through us! God is at work drawing us into Himself, building each one of us, growing us together, and reaching out through us that others, too, might believe. Amid our brokenness, God has chosen you and me as members of His Body to perform His gracious work. Following the seven mission priorities of the Synod, the Nebraska District congregations and staff are working to:

1. Plant, Sustain, and Revitalize Lutheran Churches

The work of the district is fundamentally the work of each congregation serving the Body of Christ with Word and Sacrament and sending people out into their vocations as witnesses of the Savior. Parents, grandparents, and guardians are called to make disciples of the children God has placed in their life. Ministry opportunities like Vacation Bible School, daycares, preschools, schools, youth ministry, and small groups are used to develop relationships and foster discipleship, service, and outreach. Vocations of neighbor and coworker give us the opportunity to reach out with Christ's compassion and Gospel. We have had the joy of planting several congregations, with plans to plant at least three more in the near future. We have outlined a clear process to help congregations evaluate their current culture and assess next steps for ministry. As district president, assisting in the call process is my highest priority. Visitation and evaluation to encourage congregations are also critical priorities.

2. Support and Expand Theological Education

Our seminaries receive great support from individuals, congregations, and the district. While seminaries have responsibility for preparing our pastors, theological education and formation begins in the home and congregation. Conferences, circuits, and leadership development focus on lifelong formation of our pastors.

3. Perform Human Care in Close Proximity to Word and Sacrament Ministries

Human care is the work of every congregation as we live out the compassion of the Lord. Nebraska is also the proud home of many service organizations, including Orphan Grain Train, GracePoint Institute for Relational Health, Jesus Our Savior Lutheran Outreach and School, Lutheran Family Services, Our Place After School Care, and Homestead Refuge. Nebraska also has very active Lutheran Early Response Teams.

4. Collaborate with the Synod's Members and Partners to Enhance Mission Effectiveness

Individuals, congregations, and the district have a strong partnership with Mission Central, but God's mission is also right here. *Every One is His Witness*. We are currently developing a Lay Formation Initiative to help our laity live out their vocations in Christ.

5. Promote and Nurture the Spiritual, Emotional, Financial, and Physical Well-Being of Pastors and Professional Church Workers

Our personal lives and relationships are our loudest Gospel message. God calls us to live in and live out that Gospel, first to those closest to us, which in turn speaks to those around us. Conferences, trainings, intentional communication, and individual interactions seek to promote an engaged faith integrated in all of life. We are working to bless workers' spiritual relationship with our Triune God. We are working to nurture cognitive, emotional, physical, and financial health. We are working to build strong bonds in marriage, family, and close friends. Enhancing the relational health of our workers strengthens our work to reach out to the lost with a heart for the hurting.

6. Enhance Early Childhood Education, Elementary and Secondary Education, and Youth Ministry

As of this writing, we host 26 freestanding early childhood centers, 31 elementary schools, and 6 high schools. Several of these have been established in the last triennium, and several more are in the planning stages. We sent 1,280 participants to the LCMS Youth Gathering and hundreds more to Higher Things. Some 600 youth attended our most recent annual Middle School Youth Gathering.

7. Strengthen and Support the Lutheran Family in Living Out God's Design

It is a joy to see Concordia University, Nebraska, renewing its Masters in Family Life Education and to see the developing partnership of Concordia Center for the Family and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in strengthening congregations to help parents as the primary faith-shapers for our children. We are excited to financially support our members in attending these trainings and working to strengthen family ministry.

Koinonia

We cannot walk together if we do not talk together. We cannot talk together if we do not meet together. As leaders, we seek to care for one another, foster unity, and build trust in our work together of forwarding the Gospel message. We need one another. A healthy Synod must have healthy relationships. God calls us to work together. As a Synod, we have committed to walk together. Pastors communicating, congregations cooperating, and reconciliation happening are signs of a healthy Church. Visitation is an element that benefits this unity. We also tried a more extensive effort for *Koinonia* in the areas of closed Communion, differing worship styles, and online technology. We meet together around Scripture and our Confessions to transparently and fraternally discuss issues of doctrine and practice, to build relationships, to foster trust, and to seek better practice and understanding. To God be the glory.

Richard L. Snow, *President*

New England District

The New England district was created out of the Atlantic District by the 1971 Synod convention. It encompasses six states: Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. Some of our congregations are in the fairly large cities of Boston, Mass.; Providence, R.I.; and Nashua, N.H. Most, however, are suburban or rural congregations which are fairly small and are at a significant distance from one another. For this reason, the district is divided into only five circuits, with five circuit visitors and three elected vice-presidents assisting the district president with his work.

When the numbers of congregations and parishioners are tallied, New England is a small district: 65 congregations with around 9,300 confirmed members. There are certainly disadvantages in this, one being the small district staff. Only the president is full-time; the business manager is half-time (and also serves as the Lutheran Church Extension Fund [LCEF] regional district vice-president half-time), a deaconess serves part-time, and the president's administrative assistant is part-time. All other district workers serve as volunteers. One significant advantage of being small, however, is that the pastors and other church workers of the district know one another well and are very supportive of one another. The district president visits every congregation of the district at least once (and some, several times) over the triennium. During the 2022–25 triennium, those visits were to evaluate and encourage the pastors and other church workers of the district. During the 2025–28 triennium, the congregation members, and especially their leaders, will hear their district president preach and teach on *Church and Ministry*, using Dr. Walther's theses as a basis for discussion. Our business manager is also a great resource to our congregations, providing help and guidance with LCEF resources and especially with financial and tax issues.

Most of the pastors of the district faithfully attend their circuit winks, which provide opportunities for worship together as well as in-depth discussion of matters of doctrine and practice. Discussion is robust and fraternal. They also faithfully attend the pastoral conferences which the district provides twice a year. Commissioned workers are also welcomed at these winks and conferences. Wonderful fellowship and learning opportunities are fostered at these gatherings.

The district also has several deaconesses serving within it, with one having completed her training this spring and now serving the district as a called worker. Her focus is especially upon the families of church workers, whom she checks in on regularly. Another deaconess started and runs a recognized service organization in Bangor, Maine, called Hope for Healing. She uses horses to connect with military veterans who are dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder, and then to minister to them with God's Word of healing and comfort in Christ.

A. Congregations

Most of the 65 congregations in the district have fewer than 200 members, and over half of the congregations average fewer than 50 in worship on any given Sunday. This makes it difficult to support a pastor or other church worker. Currently, 10 percent of our congregations are being served by visiting pastors, as available, as they cannot support a pastor of their own. Another 10 percent are, or were recently, vacant and involved in the call process.

Fifty-five pastors serve our congregations, mostly full-time, but some part-time. Of these, 17 have been in their congregation less than 10 years. So, although there have been many new pastors in the district, many more have enjoyed lengthy ministries in their current congregations. We also have five specific ministry pastors serving congregations and several retired pastors who are still regularly serving. We are blessed with faithful pastoral leadership!

Liturgical worship, using the liturgies in our hymnals (mostly *Lutheran Service Book*), is also what is taking place in most of our congregations on Sundays (and other days). The Word of God's salvation in Christ is being clearly proclaimed and also given out sacramentally. The weekly reception of the Lord's Supper is standard in the majority of New England congregations.

B. Schools

There are three elementary schools in New England: Immanuel Lutheran School in Danbury, Conn.; Immanuel Lutheran School in Bristol, Conn.; and Trinity Christian School in Keene, N.H. The schools are visited annually by District President Beinke and Business Manager Brenda Bacon, with classrooms visited and a lunch for the teachers and staff provided. The district also hosts the principals of the schools at the district office quarterly, providing an opportunity for mutual help and support. Finally, the district also provides for ongoing training and support for the teachers at an annual training day, which is held at one of the schools.

There are also 16 preschools and early childhood centers that are run by congregations in the district. They serve as a service to and outreach into their communities and provide a wonderful opportunity for bringing the Gospel of Christ to children and their families.

C. Missions

For several years now there has been a congregation in the Boston area that is reaching out to and serving immigrants from Ethiopia. Bethel Oromo Lutheran Church is a small congregation and is currently without a pastor, but it has been receiving assistance from LCMS Oromo pastors and church leaders from throughout the Synod to help them during this vacancy. This help from our brothers and sisters across the Synod is much appreciated, as there are currently no Oromo-speaking pastors in New England.

First Lutheran in Boston has for years had an outreach to the many college students attending the schools in the Boston area. This has resulted in many students embracing Christ and our Lutheran teaching of His Gospel and also joining the congregation. It is a vibrant congregation with people of many different cultures and language groups ... and foods, which are often shared together on their patio! If you're visiting the Boston area, plan to attend on a Sunday and rejoice together in the Gospel and fellowship!

North of Boston, Messiah Lutheran in Lynnfield, Mass., has an outreach to people of Portuguese heritage, of whom there are many. The pastor has learned the Portuguese language and offers a service in that language, yet also each month joins together in worship the English- and Portuguese-speaking members of the congregation.

St. Paul's Lutheran in Providence, R.I., is a congregation that is made up primarily of Liberian people who have emigrated to the U.S. One of their members is now enrolled in the seminary and is preparing for service to them. They also support mission work among the Gbarnga people of Liberia.

In the Lakes region of central New Hampshire is Lakes Region

Lutheran Church, the most recent mission start in New England. This group of dedicated believers is supported as a campus of Grace Lutheran in Nashua, N.H., and worships in Moultonborough, N.H. The surrounding populace is 70 percent unchurched, so the need for the Gospel in that region is great!

In Connecticut, Our Savior in South Windsor has an outreach to the Asian Indian community, with a member just having finished his seminary studies and been ordained and installed in the congregation for service to that community.

Service to our neighbors for their bodily needs is also taking place through our congregations. St. Paul's in New Hartford, Conn., supports Hands of Grace, a food and clothing bank that is led by a specific ministry pastor from the congregation who also brings the Gospel to those who are served. Two other congregations in Connecticut support similar ministries: Our Savior in South Windsor with The Bridge and Christ in Amston with Caring Shepherds.

New England is a challenging area of the country for proclaiming Christ, as the states of New England rank as having the highest percentage of unchurched people in the country. The people also tend to be well educated and very liberal in their thinking. Even so, serving my entire ministry in New England—beginning with serving as a vicar at St. Luke's in Dedham, Mass., in 1984–85—has been a joy. Serving since March 2021 as district president has been an honor and a privilege. To our heavenly Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, be the glory; and by the work of the Holy Spirit, may His blessing rest upon us!

Robert D. Beinke, *President*

R39

New Jersey District

Ministry Situation and Challenges

From the Jersey Shore to the Appalachian Highlands, from the New York suburbs to the Philadelphia suburbs, from the sandy Pine Barrens to the fertile dairy lands, New Jersey is a wonderfully diverse place to live and proclaim the Good News that *Christ Is Risen Indeed!* Yet, the geography only points to an even more diverse demographic. New Jersey is the home to more scientists and engineers per square mile than any other area of the world. Religiously and ethnically, it is host to the second-largest population in the U.S. of Jews, Muslims, and Cubans, the largest population of Peruvians, as well as high numbers of Portuguese, Brazilians, Hispanics, Arabs, African Americans, Asians, Chinese, and Italians. In fact, 23.4 percent of its residents were born outside of the U.S.! This great diversity of people of over 9.5 million and growing is all gathered together into 8,721 square miles, making New Jersey the most densely populated state in the U.S. Yet there are only four cities with a population greater than 100,000! That means the population is spread out over a multitude of smaller cities and municipalities.

The challenges of culture, language, religion, thought, and worldview are readily evident within this environment. The question is how does a well-established, relatively long-term resident, primarily of a northern European descent, church share the Gospel of the risen Christ with such a diverse population? The good news is that this is happening and with God's blessing will accelerate in the coming days. Both our prayers and our work aim at reaching all the people of New Jersey in their great diversity one person at a time.

Ironically, the dense population of New Jersey is, in some ways,

an advantage. It means that, while the district is the smallest of districts in terms of churches and geography, we are close. First, we are close in distance, meaning that circuits are small and sister congregations are nearby. As our congregations struggle with the high cost of living and housing, they are finding it ever more advantageous to build relationships with nearby congregations and share a pastor and ministry. Our close proximity makes this easier to do. Second, we are close in relationship. Our close proximity enables us to gather more easily for circuit meetings, district meetings, training, and fellowship. We enjoy a high level of collegiality and friendship, which fosters the care and well-being of our pastors and church workers. Third, district president visitation is facilitated as most congregations are within an hour's drive of the president's home and all are within two hours. To that end, all the district congregations received a presidential visit in the first 16 months of the new district president taking office in September 2021 and most a second "official visit" by June 2025. Some, for various reasons, have received additional visits.

Synod Focuses

The district has sought to respond to the resolutions of the 2023 Synod convention. The following is a brief report of the work accomplished according to the resolutions directed to districts:

- 1-03A Plant churches – Strategic Plan, Target 3
- 1-07A Care of workers – Strategic Plan, Target 2
- 2-07A Support International Missions – FORO exploration trip to the Dominican Republic
- 3-01 Life Ministries – Participation in New Jersey March for Life
- 3-04A Disaster Relief – Disaster Relief Team training
- 4-01A Koinonia – Participated in SMP Koinonia
- 5-13A Online Technology – Subject at Pastor Conferences
- 6-02A, 6-03A Pastoral Formation – Subject at Pastor Conferences / Discussions with pastoral candidates
- 6-04 Service of Laity – Presidential missive
- 6-06A PALS – Work with area districts to form a group
- 6-09 Provide for pastors' families – Strategic Plan, Target 2
- 7-06B Support Universities – District Scholarships

The seven mission priorities dating back to the 2016 Synod convention continue in the background, helping to shape the district's ministry response to its mission and challenges.

Ministry and Strategic Plans

Back in 2021, it was determined that a ministry plan was needed to help stabilize congregations and move them forward in ministry. The result was the Initiative for Ministry Development (IMD). Working in conjunction with the Lutheran Church Extension Fund's Ministry Solutions unit, the district has developed a long-term, ongoing plan to help congregations develop and implement ministry plans. The plan had three phases:

- Small Church Clarity (SCC) helps smaller congregations develop and implement a manageable and effective annual ministry plan. The plan includes a simple guiding statement, goals and action steps in the areas of worship, study of the Word, fellowship, service (outreach), and a printed brochure presenting the ministry of the congregation for distribution

to visitors and at outreach events. Campus and financial planning are also included in the plan.

- New Jersey District University (NJDU) is a fuller, more in-depth version of SCC for more mature congregations. Since these are larger congregations, their plans will encompass more areas of ministry, in a more sophisticated way. NJDU is a seven-session, seven-month process compared to SCC's four-session, four-month process.
- Advanced Development. Congregations that have completed either SCC or NJDU are eligible to enroll in Advanced Development sessions that will cover a host of topics to train and equip congregational leaders to better lead and serve their congregations and communities.

More than half of the district congregations have participated in IMD, and that number continues to grow!

In addition to this ministry focus, the district unveiled its new strategic plan at the 2025 district convention. This plan features four strategic targets:

- Healthy Congregations
- Healthy Workers
- Expanded Ethnic Ministry
- Financial Development

For each of these target areas there is an assigned task force that works on developing the strategic plan with goals and action steps to be shared with congregations and pastors.

While there are too many aspects of each of the targets to be mentioned here, the task forces, in conjunction with the direction of the district president, are prioritizing goals and developing action steps for district and congregational implementation. Some of them correlate to Synod resolutions (see above), and others are of local priority.

Filling the pastoral office of our congregations continues to be a priority and challenge for the district. One answer has been the increasing number of congregations that have chosen to enter into a shared ministry. This enables congregations to have another chapter in life and the opportunity to write an alternative to closing. Our prayer is that with involvement in Small Church Clarity they can have a brighter future. Another answer is for congregations to engage in the specific ministry pastor program. The district now has six specific ministry pastors and another three in training. These men are proving to be a great blessing to our congregations and district. We encourage our Synod to embrace our history when we had both a practical and theoretical path to ordination and use this concept in the present.

Our prayer is that the risen Christ would bless the humble efforts of the district toward healthy congregations, healthy workers, and vibrant outreach to the glory and honor of God, the edification of His Church, and the salvation of the world.

Stephen A. Gewecke, *President*

R40

North Dakota District

The North Dakota District met in convention in January 2025 under the banner "Clothed in Christ's Righteousness." Our Lord, who has clothed you in His righteousness in Baptism, who robed

you in His own holiness, hung naked, bare, and exposed. He hung on the cross dressed only in your sins and the sins of the entire world. He's covered in your sin, and you are covered in His righteousness.

Despite various challenges, the district has been exceedingly blessed by our gracious Lord. The pastorate is dedicated to proclaiming the Gospel, despite the hardships they may face. Several of the pastors travel over 200 miles to serve a vacancy. Among the 77 congregations in North Dakota, there are 10 dual parishes, 7 tri-parishes, and 2 quad-parishes. Many other congregations share a pastor but are not in an official parish arrangement. These congregations are being served, at the time of this writing, by 44 active pastors. I have never heard any of the pastors complain or give thought to pulling back.

The challenges that the district faces are shared by many others. The demographic shift away from rural communities has made it difficult in many areas of North Dakota. Rural churches are growing smaller, putting at risk the proclamation of the Gospel in congregations that used to flourish. Apathy toward God's Word, financial stress, and overall rural congregational sustainability are problems that our people face.

To address these issues, I have put before the district a threefold emphasis: catechesis, rural ministry, and preaching stations.

A. Catechesis

The treasures of our Lutheran heritage are great and abundant, wide and deep. This marvelous confession of faith, drawn from the sacred Scriptures, has been passed down by the faithful who have come before us. As a cherished heirloom is bequeathed down the generations, so, too, have we received this confession of Christ and His redeeming work from our forefathers in the faith. We do not hold the Lutheran Confessions on par with Scripture; we do not say that the Confessions are infallible, but we do say that our confession has not erred or failed.

The goal for the district is for there to be a Confessions study in every circuit and parish. These Lutheran treasures are not just for eggheaded clergy but are a gift bequeathed from our Lutheran forefathers to all of us today.

B. Rural Ministry

Rural ministry is of great concern for our district. The goal is to help as many struggling congregations as possible. To that end, a Rural Ministry Task Force has been established to discuss ideas to serve struggling rural congregations. There are several ideas that have been discussed.

1. Hub-and-Spoke Models, also called the Cathedral Model. A larger, multi-staff congregation deploys her pastors to serve smaller congregations in the area.
2. *Reiseprediger*, i.e., traveling preacher. A man travels a larger area, bringing the gifts of God to the people.
3. Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program. The SMP is, in my opinion, an exception that is to be made only in rare circumstances. Thus, for an SMP candidate to serve, the situation must be a rural parish that makes it improbable for them to be served in any other way.
4. Congregations entering into parish agreements. Some of these models require a congregation to be gathered by the Holy Spirit to receive the gifts of God at a time other than

Sunday morning. In my congregational visits, I teach the people that Sunday morning is not a divinely mandated time to receive the Lord's gifts. If they receive the gifts on Sunday afternoon or Tuesday evening, give praise to God for sending them.

In addition, 2025 district convention Res. 3-04A, "To Create a District Fund for Sudden Financial Hardships," has been implemented. There has been a fund and an application process created for struggling congregations to apply for funds in case of an acute need, usually maintenance related. Also, the idea has been put forth that, as Paul collected funds from churches for the saints in Jerusalem, a fund be set up for more chronic needs of struggling congregations. The working title of this initiative is "Collection for the Saints."

C. Preaching Stations

As we are thinking of ways to assist the rural congregations of the district, we also keep an eye on opportunities for church planting as well. Currently, there are two preaching stations in the district and several others have been identified as good candidates. In my view, preaching stations are preferable to the district calling a man as a mission planter for several reasons.

1. It locates the primary work of missions in the local congregation, with the district in a supportive role.
2. Preaching stations are significantly less of a financial burden.
3. The pastor already has a call to an altar and pulpit. He, essentially, takes the pulpit to which he has been called to another location. A mission planter who has been called by the district is called neither to an altar nor a pulpit.

If 10 preaching stations are started and one flourishes into a congregation, God be praised; the work of growth is granted by our Lord who works through His Word.

The district also participates in international mission work. *Project 24* and *Christ Care for Children Kenya* have been enthusiastically supported by convention delegates for many years. The district has partnered with and supported the Lutheran Church in Chile.

The saints in North Dakota, who have shirked their own righteousness before God and have received the robe of Christ's righteousness, continue faithfully to hear and receive. Our pastors continue to bring God's Word to the people, despite the many challenges. The district continues to strive to be faithful to our Lord's Word and cherish that which we have received from the saints who have come before us.

Mark A. Chepulis, *President*

R41

North Wisconsin District

Jesus appeared to His disciples behind locked doors. They were afraid. He said, "Peace be with you." What next? He showed them His hands. There's the peace! The work of the North Wisconsin District reflects our 2026 Synod convention theme: *Christ Is Risen Indeed!* It is my honor, on behalf of 80,000 baptized children of God in northern Wisconsin and upper Michigan, to report on His work in our midst.

God's Work in the District Through the Rev. Dr. Dwayne Lueck, President

In June of 2025, upon the completion of his 13th year as district president and his 38th year of service in the district, the Rev. Dr. Dwayne Lueck retired from his call. God used him in the district to support Lutheran schools, presently numbering 20 elementary schools, 3 high schools, and 25 preschool childhood centers; to allocate support for candidates desiring to colloquize into LCMS ministry; to begin and sustain support for missions work in Peru; to launch the support of missions grants to congregations across the district; to sponsor two additional full-time LCMS pastors, one at Peace Campus Center at UW Stevens Point and the other a chaplain for the Veterans' Home at King serving 300 residents; to establish and complete a two-year \$1,000,000 campaign to reduce the educational debt of individual professional church workers; and to commit support for smaller congregations to benefit from revitalization efforts by participating in Small Church Clarity cohorts led by the Rev. Kennaugh through the Lutheran Church Extension Fund.

In keeping with the resolutions of the 2023 Synod convention, President Lueck applied district resources advocating for *Set Apart to Serve*, disaster response and Lutheran Early Response Team training, Worker Wellness, Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support, and Concordia University System scholarships.

President Lueck prioritized the work of the Synod by serving the district with a streamlined staff including two full-time workers, Executive Assistant Lori Kavajecz and Education Executive DJ Schult. He relied upon their skill to meet district ministry needs and directed a larger portion of district offerings for the Synod to allocate.

Camp Luther's 80th Anniversary

The Lord continues to use Camp Luther to bring Christ and His Word to people, to draw them closer to Him by His grace, and to plant seeds in the hearts of many for serving Him in professional church work. Camp Luther is planning an 80th anniversary celebration for 2026 with the theme "Unchanging" based upon Heb. 13:8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." The district gives thanks to God for our camp and takes pride in supporting it.

A New Mission Statement and Initiatives

Upon Lueck's retirement and my election June 1, 2025, and official start July 1, work began to review the breadth of district ministry and expand it. *We Bring Christ and His Word to People* is the new district mission statement, under which five initiatives are being introduced, each guided by an action team or committee:

Fostering Lutheran Education

Much of our American culture is ungodly, and Lutheran education matters. We will support traditional Lutheran grade schools, high schools, and universities and expand our efforts to support homeschool families, classical schools, and children and families of public schools.

Building Families and Children of Faith and Character

Family ministry will focus on building strong marriages and on training fathers to shape the faith of their children in their homes. The Rev. Matthew Baye is leading this committee and will draw upon work from his D.Min. studies and from the Rev. Dr. Todd Biermann of Concordia Center for the Family to help build up Christian families.

Freeing Them to Live in God's Image—to Serve

We know God is the one who serves, protects, provides, sacrifices, and saves. We know He created us in His image. The stewardship initiative will work to set people free through the Gospel to reflect God's image at home, at work, and in their communities and congregations. We plan to host workshops and introduce simple material accessible by social media.

Revitalizing Congregations

Ninety-nine district congregations have fewer than 50 people in worship each week. Church Clarity is a ministry tool to help congregations reclaim their purpose, identify their current ministry actions and needs, assess facility and financial limitations and capabilities, and establish a ministry plan for the sake of the Gospel. We believe a number of district congregations, by God's blessing, can grow in faith and accomplish more with a plan in place.

Expanding Our Missions Footprint

The district participates in a FORO in Peru and supports French African Missions, and a number of congregations support missionaries directly. The goal is to expand the missions impact the district is making across our district and to facilitate personal, congregational, and district participation in our Synod's national and international missions. One avenue will be the sending of one or more people from this committee to a FORO.

It is my honor for the district to have elected me to serve as president. It is my prayer that He will well use us working together to bring Christ and His Word to people every day. The One who showed them His hands and side is the One who claims us, forgives us, and promises never to lose us, for *He is risen indeed!*

Timothy J. Shoup, *President*

R42

Northern Illinois District

"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." (1 Cor. 15:58)

By the mercy of our God, all that we have been given to do in the Northern Illinois District is empowered and guided by the fact that *Christ Is Risen Indeed!* Or said differently, "Jesus wins." He shares His victory with us as His baptized people. He shares that victory with His beloved Church! What He gives in both Law and Gospel is what we are privileged to share, as we witness to our neighbors and our increasingly secular society. The district covers the northern third of Illinois:

- 196 active congregations
- 40 elementary schools
- 2 high schools
- 25 stand-alone preschools/childcare centers
- 1 university, Concordia University Chicago (CUC)
- 1 camp—Walcamp Outdoor Ministry and Retreat Center
- 2 new congregations
- 5 closed congregations

Sadly, this represents some decline since the last reporting to the Synod convention in 2023. That does not mean that our congregations, schools, and ministries are not hard at work, because they are!

We rejoice that the Word of God works and the Gospel is the power of God to salvation! Our congregations are rich in a life of Word and Sacrament!

We are grateful for our called church workers in the district; men and women who are coworkers for the kingdom of God (Col. 4:17–17). At its 2025 convention, the district reaffirmed its focus on God's *Word, Wellness* of workers and ministries, and *Witness* to the Gospel inside and outside the Church. In this work, we have:

- 216 active pastors
- 285 active commissioned workers
- 809 active non-rostered workers
- 98 ordained pastors emeriti
- 324 commissioned workers emeriti

Next Gen: The district is actively involved in the LCMS initiative *Set Apart to Serve*, with its desire to raise up the next generation of called church workers under the blessing of the Holy Spirit. We also are deeply grateful for the leadership and participation of Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support in the district, which works with each new pastor and their spouse during the first three years of called ministry. The district is grateful that its support for students preparing for church work has increased by over 160 percent since 2023. The district's initiative is called *Workers of the Word*.

Priesthood of the Baptized: This includes the lay women and men in our congregations, schools, and ministries who serve in response to the Gospel and are empowered by the Holy Spirit. We thank God for the *thousands upon thousands* of faithful Christians who serve in the Church and in the community. As district president, it has been an honor to meet committed, prayerful, thoughtful, generous women and men in every part of the district.

Lay Leadership: In response to the question of a lay leader in one of our congregations, we initiated a "Lay Leadership Summit" in August 2024 at Walther Christian Academy in Melrose Park. This event included worship and Bible study, singing (very much appreciated by those gathered), and workshops on topics of interest to lay leaders serving on the frontlines of ministry in congregations and the community. This event reached maximum capacity, with over 350 attending. Future summits are planned.

Partnership Gatherings: Several times a year, district staff and circuit visitors gather at individual circuit or circuits together. These gatherings include the pastor, chair and vice-chair, elders, treasurers, and other interested lay leaders. It is a joy for people to meet their neighbors, gather around Word and prayer, talk about opportunities and challenges, and more fully understand the blessings of the district and the Synod. From this type of gathering comes encouragement, relationships, new ministry and service, mergers, and new congregational partnerships. We hear many comments like, "We are not alone," and "When can we do this again?"

Back to School: For the last several years, the district has sponsored a "Back to School Worship" gathering in one of our larger churches to accommodate the hundreds (350–400) who serve in our Lutheran schools as the school year approaches. After Word, prayer, and song, a plenary speaker engages and edifies those preparing for their important work of teaching in our schools and especially communicating the Good News of Jesus. These speakers have come from our Concordia Universities.

Belize Mission: In partnership with the LCMS missionaries

in Belize and the Belize Mission Society, the district is actively working in this Central American nation for the proclamation of the Gospel, the care of those in need, and the planting of Lutheran congregations. To encourage involvement in the mission of Jesus, the district has sponsored mission trips that include members of various district congregations serving together. Of great excitement was the building and dedication of a playground in Siene Beight, near Christ Lutheran Church, in October 2025 through the Hearts for Jesus offering from our district schools, congregations, and individuals. Hearts for Jesus has been around for decades in the LCMS, supporting Lutheran mission and human care, especially through Lutheran schools.

Location: The district offices have been located on the campus of CUC since August 2022. We have partnered in education, conferences, and various church gatherings. Each year the district office has had students who serve as student workers. These workers see the work of the church at large and are very helpful. Together with CUC, we hosted the November 2024 meeting of the LCMS Council of Presidents.

Wellness: We have a church work care team that assists our workers, on a non-professional basis, with the challenges our church workers are facing. Healthy church workers help create healthier ministries, along with healthy lay leadership. We desire to retain and strengthen the workers we have. The district is grateful to be partnering with Concordia Plan Services for the addition of a part-time staff position, a wellness officer.

Visitation: Since the front line of our work in the district happens in congregations, schools, and ministries, the staff spends much time and many resources visiting, listening, encouraging, and assisting in the joys and challenges of church life. Circuit visitors and vice-presidents of the district are also involved in visitation. How blessed we are to be a church rich in the Word of God, committed to our Lutheran Confessions, and giving thanks for opportunities to impact our communities with the power and presence of Jesus and His Holy Gospel. Lord, keep the devil far from us and keep us humble!

Urban Ministry: In 2026, the district is engaged with the Lutheran Church Extension Fund as we embark with a Ministry Clarity Process in our East Region. This region of the district consists of Chicago and the collar counties. It has been noted that in the last 20 years, we have seen much decline in attendance in this region, and many of the congregations in the East Region have or could close. This is especially concerning because this is where most of the people are in our district, and most of them are living and dying without Christ. The goal is to engage and encourage our existing congregations to look for new ministry opportunities and partnerships and to find Spirit-given renewal. The district seeks a strategy and more comprehensive plan for Chicago ministry and mission.

2025 Convention: March 7–8, 2025, was the 61st Convention of the district. The theme was *Stronger Together: Co-Workers for the Kingdom of God* (Col. 4:7–17). Our relationships in the Body of Christ, regardless of our roles and titles, are significant as confessional Lutherans who are committed to the mission of Jesus. It is the kingdom of God, not our personal kingdoms. The Lord sets the agenda for the Church, and He graciously puts us together in our roles for His purpose and glory. The kingdom centers on Jesus and His work and Word!

At the convention, we were honored to serve as hosts and hear from President Matthew Harrison, various district presidents, listen to a presentation by a seasoned pastor and teacher and a new pastor

and teacher, and hear students from several Lutheran schools and Walther Christian Academy sing for worship.

Convention actions included a few significant resolutions:

- To State Religious Objection to Governmental Interference of Parents' Duty
- To Ask the Commission on Theology and Church Relations to Study and Publish a Report on Christian Nationalism
- To Encourage Congregations to Seek Wellness for Their Church Workers
- To Offer Thanks for Congregations and Individuals Who Support with Financial Gifts the Work of the District and the LCMS
- To Give Thanks for 150 Years of Black Ministry in the LCMS in 2027

Installation Services: Services of Installation were held at Immanuel Lutheran Church, East Dundee, and Bethany Lutheran Church, Naperville, on May 18, 2025. President Matthew Harrison installed Rev. Dr. Allan Buss to his third term as district president; he, in turn, installed the newly elected and reelected officers. Rev. Dr. Lawrence Rast, president emeritus of Concordia Theological Seminary, delivered a historically rich, Christ-centered message. The offering provided resources for future church workers supported by the district through the *Workers of the Word* initiative.

It's been said, "It's a great time to be the Church!" This is our time to be the Church, and for us that means in Northern Illinois ... and beyond. The Lord of the Church is at work ... sometimes in spite of us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Allan R. Buss, *President*

R43

Northwest District

The apostle Paul spoke of the dismal state the Church would be in "if Christ has not been raised," saying, "then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain" (1 Cor. 15:14). However, we are not only a people united in Baptism to the death of Jesus. "If we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom. 6:6). This is true since "indeed Christ has been raised" (1 Cor. 15:20), and in Baptism, so are we. *Christ Is Risen Indeed*. Therefore, we who live "no longer live for [ourselves] but for him who for [our] sake died and was raised" (2 Cor. 5:15). Grateful that our abbreviation among the LCMS districts is *NOW*, raising up servant leaders to live for the risen Christ is a task we find immediately before us, "now."

A. Raising Up and Equipping Leaders

A.1. NOW Leadership Initiative (NOW LI)

Our Leadership Initiative (NOW LI) began in 2021 to invite ministries across the district to identify servant leadership characteristics and behaviors, naming them in people and saying, "I see in you," so that those individuals are encouraged to step into new roles of leadership. Bible studies, accompanying podcasts, and videos provide resources for congregations to engage in NOW LI.

A.2. Youth Leadership Initiative (YLI)

We are now well into the next phase of Youth Leadership Initiative (YLI). Our YLI effort studied church workers across the

district, finding that there were three key behaviors exhibited by trusted adults in their lives that made a significant impact on their choice to enter a church work vocation. First, the adult showed up non-judgmentally and got to know them. Second, that trusted adult saw something in them. Third, that trusted adult found creative ways to say yes to that youth's ideas for serving in the church. Our YLI is all about encouraging and tracking these key behaviors throughout our ministries: (1) know the youth, (2) name the gift, and (3) find the next yes.

A.3. *Invest* School Leadership

Invest is a leadership development process in our school ministries that prepares educators for administrative levels of leadership in school organizations. Administrators identify teachers and staff members with the potential to be servant leaders at the administrative level and begin pouring into them as mentors through the district *Invest* program. *Invest* offers cohort-based curriculum specifically targeted to school leadership. This also becomes an avenue for colloquy conversations for non-rostered teachers and opens a pathway to a formal church work vocation.

A.4. Mission Training Center (MTC)

Lay leaders in congregations have need for training and equipping too. The long history of lay training in the district led to the establishment of Mission Training Center (MTC). MTC is an online training opportunity that offers courses and webinars in worship planning, devotional leading, community outreach, Christian doctrine, spiritual care, and much more. Once operated in partnership with Concordia University, Portland, the district currently partners with the California-Nevada-Hawaii and Pacific Southwest Districts to offer MTC through Concordia University, Irvine. Districts across the Synod access and utilize this valuable lay training resource.

A.5. *Set Apart to Serve*

These four prior key leadership emphases have enabled us very naturally to engage in fulfilling 2023 Res. 6-01, "To Affirm and Strengthen *Set Apart to Serve* in Word and Action." Our leadership initiatives—NOW LI, YLI, *Invest*, and MTC—provide a broad funnel from which people engage *Set Apart to Serve* resources and consider at a deeper level a life of service in vocational church work.

B. District Grant Programs

The district offers Catalyst grants, Faith in Community grants, and Community Care grants to encourage new ministries—and new bridges into our communities—through congregations. Ministry entities are given the opportunity to request time-limited grants that are designed to help them start something new in their scope of influence.

C. All Peoples Commission

The district recognizes that the Gospel is for all nations, tribes, peoples, and languages whom we will one day join with as redeemed believers in Jesus from all over the world around the throne of God (Rev. 7:9). We also realize, as 2023 Res. 11-03A, "To Love and Disciple Peoples of All Ethnicities, Languages, and Skin Colors," well noted, that our nation is increasingly home to people from all regions of the world, giving us a unique opportunity to engage the mission of the Church right here. We view this as an opportunity to learn from and invest in leaders from a variety of ethnic backgrounds who share our confession of Jesus Christ as LCMS Lutheran Christians. Our district's All Peoples Commission is encouraging ministries to engage in Gospel-focused ministry to partner with, to invest in, and

to invite the leadership of believers from all ethnicities.

D. Supporting LCMS Pastoral Formation

In light of the continual challenge to provide pastors for our congregations (we face vacancy rates of 25–30 percent, which is 10–15 percent higher than the Synod average) and in keeping with 2023 Res. 6-02A, "To Encourage Proper Pastoral Formation through Our Synod's Seminaries," our district has invested in the distance education pastoral formation programs of our Synod seminaries. Even as we continue to send men to residential study at our Synod seminaries, we have made a commitment to fund tuition grants for students entering Center for Hispanic Studies, Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology, Specific Ministry Pastor, and Cross-Cultural Ministry Center because we recognize that the congregations utilizing these avenues to provide for pastoral ministry are often the congregations least in position to afford calling a full-time pastor to fill that need. We have found these distance avenues for pastoral formation to be a tremendous blessing for the district and for our Synod.

E. Summary

These are simply a few of our initiatives. As all LCMS districts do, we are continually seeking to resource and support our congregations, schools, and church workers. We have 240 congregations, 22 elementary schools, 4 high schools, and 85 early childhood programs across the district, which includes four states (Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Alaska) and a church in Hong Kong. With the largest geographic reach of any LCMS district, and being the fifth most ministries, we have a variety of challenges and endless opportunities as we carry the good news that *Christ is risen; He is risen indeed*.

Michael T. Von Behren, *President*

R44

Ohio District

Scripture Alone was the theme of the Ohio District's 2025 convention, based on 1 Thess. 2:13. Drawing from our Reformation heritage, the theme speaks to our continuing confession that Scripture is the sole source and norm of Christian faith and life.

Since the purpose of Scripture is to reveal Jesus' work of justification, the district celebrates the 2026 Synod convention theme, *Christ Is Risen Indeed*. The theme itself is based on 1 Cor. 15:20–22.

Ohio District Planning

District president visitation in 2022–23 found district churches remaining steadfast in confessional Lutheran doctrine and practice. However, an inordinate number of congregations were struggling with mission and ministry coming out of the pandemic. Congregational leaders were unsure how to bring back members who left during the pandemic and how to reach unchurched and spiritually lost people in their communities.

To learn the congregational and school needs and opportunities, the district partnered with the Lutheran Church Extension Fund to create a district planning process. The process started by gathering church and school leaders in regional discovery sessions. After sharing the needs and opportunities of their congregations, the leaders were sent home to share what they learned from fellow church leaders. The process also sought feedback from school ad-

ministrators and district staff. In the end, three areas of special focus became apparent for the next triennium: Equip and train congregation and school leaders in their areas of service; deepen and broaden our knowledge and understanding of Scripture and the Confessions; launch and develop new Gospel outreach ministries.

The district plan was the tipping point for decisions concerning staffing. Rev. John Greig was called to serve as executive director of Mission and Ministry. Nicole Levy was called to serve as education executive and superintendent of Ohio Lutheran Schools. Together with Karen Dutton, director of Youth and Family Life Ministry, these mission and ministry staff are leading the implementation of the ministry plan.

To address these needs, the district's mission and ministry staff created three themes for the next triennium. Each theme flows from Eph. 4:15–16:

Connected reflects God's design and call for His people to walk and grow together in Christ as one Body held together in His love.

Equipped reflects God's ongoing care for His people, providing what we need to grow in Christ and serve faithfully as each part of His Body works together in love.

Sent describes the natural overflow of a church connected and equipped in Christ, moving outward to share the Gospel while caring for and loving their neighbor.

Actions on Convention Resolutions

2022 Ohio District convention Resolution 4 called on the convention to support the strengthening of the faith and biblical worldview of district church members. The resolution was approved by the convention.

The Resolution 4 Task Force was formed to implement the resolution, chaired by Rev. Dr. Eric Tritten (Gloria Dei Hudson, Ohio). After researching the topic, the task force determined that God's Word is the key for strengthening the faith on a daily basis. The task force put together two primary resources for congregations to use to engage members in the Word of God daily. The first is a collation of resources used by our congregations. The second is a series of videos to provide *on-ramps* for God's people to study Scripture. An additional series of *on-ramps* are being produced.

2023 Res. 1-06A called on the Synod and its districts to create a strategic plan for worker wellness. The Synod used the annual LCMS Ministerial Care Coalitions meeting to start planning. The meeting was held in March in Orlando, Fla. Rev. Chris Eldridge, the Ministerial Health Commission chairman, and I participated in the meeting.

The district addressed 2023 Res. 1-07, "To Address Mental Health among Pastors and Other Professional Church Workers," in three ways. First, the district affirmed the positions of care partners, who provide a confidential "listening ear" for any church worker or church worker family member in the district. The district's Commission for Ministerial Health produced resources supporting sabbaticals for church workers, identifying resources for church worker wellness and guidance for congregational leaders in order to care for church workers. Finally, the 2025 Fall Professional Church Worker Conference was led by DOXOLOGY.

Church Workers

In the past triennium, 27 pastors accepted calls into the district. This includes 10 candidates from the seminaries. Meanwhile, 15 pastors took calls to congregations outside the district, and 21 pastors

moved from active to emeritus status. The district also had 4 transitional interim pastors accept calls to serve district congregations.

In the past triennium, 37 commissioned ministers accepted calls to the district schools and churches. A total of 17 commissioned ministers transferred out of the district.

Sanctity of Human Life

In 2023, the state of Ohio proposed a constitutional amendment to legalize abortion. District congregations and church workers received a pastoral letter concerning the proposed amendment, urging members to vote against the proposed amendment. Churches and church workers also received legal guidance from the district with parameters for addressing such issues of public policy. In addition, statements outlining the LCMS biblical stance on abortion were provided to state and national news outlets.

To provide further support for the sanctity of human life, the district participated in the March for Life in Washington, D.C., in January. LCMS participation was led by the LCMS Life Ministry and supported by all 35 LCMS districts.

Kevin A. Wilson, *President*

R45

Oklahoma District

The 78 congregations of the Oklahoma District met at its 51st convention June 13–14, 2025, under the theme *Praying to the Lord of the Harvest*, based on Luke 10:2. Our main focus was the LCMS *Set Apart to Serve* initiative to raise up church workers from our congregations. The district is a fellowship of congregations committed to caring, sharing, teaching, preaching, and reaching people. Through God's Divine Service in Word and Sacrament, the Holy Spirit brings them into a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

On May 19, 2024, the district celebrated its 100th anniversary at St. John's Lutheran Church in Okarche. Some of the participants in the Oklahoma Land Rush of 1889 were members of the Lutheran Church. They helped establish a foothold for the church in the Oklahoma Territory. Many had migrated to Oklahoma from Kansas. Lutheran pioneers also came from Nebraska, Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, and the northern states. In 1922, the Kansas District petitioned the Synod to create an independent Oklahoma District.

The district is able to designate three-fourths of its budget for mission work, with the remaining budget used for administration, professional growth, and ministerial wellness. The district board of directors also steadfastly pledges one-fourth of its budget as a financial commitment to the Synod.

Several communities in our Central Region are good spots to plant new churches. These include Piedmont, Yukon, and Tuttle. Piedmont is the fastest growing zip code in the U.S. The Yukon and Mustang areas are not far behind. Tuttle is also experiencing exponential growth. Currently, Piedmont, Yukon, and Tuttle have no LCMS presence. We are working with the Office of National Mission to plant a new church there.

The district educates children from infants to twelfth grade. We currently have 17 early childhood programs and 8 elementary/middle schools across the state. Our oldest school, established in 1926, is St. Paul in Enid. Immanuel in Broken Arrow (Tulsa area) is home to our only Lutheran high school.

In the **Western Region**, which includes the Enid, Kingfisher, and Panhandle circuits, outreach continues among the Burmese Karen people. The result includes multiple baptisms and confirmations. Lutherhaven Retreat Center is located near Knowles and offers wilderness and waterfront experiences. Youth retreats are held in the summer. Continuing education courses are also hosted for church workers. Various seminary professors have taught there and discovered the open spaces of the Oklahoma Panhandle.

In the **Central Region**, which includes the Oklahoma City, Lawton, and Norman circuits, the Hispanic ministry continues. The future growth of these ministries offers exciting potential. We support pastors and missionaries from this region who now serve at the new seminary in Shinyanga, Tanzania. We also assist in church planting in Italy and Latvia. One teaches systematics and also assists in pastoral formation. Ministry to the armed forces has continued at the U.S. Army Training Center at Ft. Sill. Local pastors have conducted the Divine Service on the military base for the soldiers who are serving our country.

In the **Eastern Region**, which includes the Tulsa, Miami, and Ponca City circuits, spiritual doors have opened for outreach among Hispanic people. Also, our Camp Lutheroma resides on 120 acres in beautiful eastern Oklahoma, located along the Illinois River just east of Tahlequah. The mission of the camp is to nurture discipleship in Jesus Christ in outdoor settings. It ministers to hundreds of youth during summer and winter programs. They learn how to share the love of Christ to the world. The camp also offers its beautiful facilities as retreat settings for groups, congregations, and families.

When a tornado went directly through Camp Lutheroma in June of 2025, we worked together with district volunteers, the Lutheran Early Response Team, and Ross Johnson from LCMS Disaster Response to begin the extensive recovery and clean-up work. By the grace of God, no one was seriously injured, even though the camp was filled with youth campers. It was a joint effort that brought together dedicated and joyful service in the midst of a stressful event. God be praised!

Three campus ministries are active in Norman (University of Oklahoma), Stillwater (Oklahoma State University), and Tulsa (The University of Tulsa). The impact from these ministries has included baptisms, confirmations, and marriages. Students have been directed into various church vocations of deaconess, teacher, director of Christian education, and pastor. Pastoral supervised vicars and student peer ministers have served in these campus ministries. English-as-a-Second-Language programming and international student ministries on campus have also brought the Gospel to various cultural and people groups.

The saints of Oklahoma continue to carry out the Great Commission. *Christ Is Risen Indeed* is what we proclaim in the southwest part of our country and throughout the world. "In fact Christ has been raised from the dead. . . . By a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. . . . In Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:20, 21, 22).

The dedicated, sanctified service of our congregations is exceptional. We are friendly people. We are faithful to the Word of God. We are family oriented.

We rejoice in sacred spaces, sacred words, sacred music, sacred ways of acting and speaking. We are shaped by God's Word, and not by the world. We understand that in today's world, the old things have become new. The Gospel is best delivered to people by

using the tools we have always had in the LCMS.

We treasure the Bible, the *Book of Concord*, and the hymnal. The ordinary elements of water, bread, and wine become extraordinary when connected to the Word of God. What amazing power comes into the lives of people through preaching, teaching, baptizing, absolving, and communing around the altar!

May the Lord Jesus continue to work mightily through our faithful commitment to make disciples of all nations through His Means of Grace. He will guide the next generations of our children and grandchildren in this place we call home, the LCMS Oklahoma District!

David R. Nehrenz, *President*

R46

Pacific Southwest District

The Pacific Southwest District is honored to welcome the Synod to our district as the 2026 Synod convention gathers in Phoenix around the theme *Christ Is Risen Indeed*. The mission of the district is to effectively resource congregations and schools for transforming lives and making the Great Commission REAL! Here are 10 highlighted ways that this mission is being fulfilled as we partner together to proclaim the risen Christ. (References to applicable 2023 Synod convention resolutions are included at the bottom of each section.)

The 47th Convention of the Pacific Southwest District gathered under the theme *Redeemed to Tell*, inspired by Psalm 107:2: "Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story." The convention, held June 25–27, 2025, at the beautiful La Quinta Resort in the desert of Southern California, reflected the hope and joy in which 265 congregations and 136 schools came together to tell the stories of God's abundant faithfulness to the 36 million people who live within the district.

Evangelism, Mission, and Church Planting

The district continues to pursue the creation of 100 new Gospel-proclaiming ministries by 2031, the 100th anniversary of the district. To date, over 50 intentional Gospel-proclaiming ministries have begun. The Lutheran Mission Society of San Diego, under the guidance of Mission Director Rev. Dr. Tardelli Voss, is working with over 50 lay evangelists who come from many different cultures and are individually connected to local San Diego County congregations. Many of these individuals are now pursuing LCMS pathways into rostered church work. The Coastal Mission Society has become a guiding force for church planting in the district. Rev. John Alwood, a career church planter who recently colloquized into the LCMS, leads this equipping and planting effort that has already launched 13 new locations that will soon qualify as "new church starts." On Sept. 30, 2025, the district, in partnership with the LCMS Office of International Ministry, hosted a FORO in San Diego that introduced mission opportunities on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. President Omar Garza of the Lutheran Synod of Mexico participated. (Res. 1-03A, "To Plant More Churches"; Res. 11-03A, "To Love and Disciple Peoples of All Ethnicities, Languages, and Skin Colors"; Res. 1-05A, "To Increase Mission Efforts to Immigrants and Various Cultural Groups in North America"; Res. 2-07A, "To Commend Use and Attendance of FOROs")

A Next Generation of Church Workers

Recruiting future church workers is a top priority in the district. The recruitment committee works tirelessly to foster growth for these vocations. Concordia University, Irvine (CUI) has seen encouraging growth in church work students, with a steady rise in district enrollees. Working in partnership with *Set Apart to Serve*, congregations and schools are encouraged to invite young and old to serve in professional church work. We are pleased to report that in the 2025–26 academic year, 49 men from our district are participants in the various pastoral formation pathways offered by our Synod. The recent triennium has seen a growing partnership between the Synod's Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support (PALS) and the West Coast districts' Ministry Applied Practice. Rev. Jonathan Manor, director of PALS, is an annual presenter and participant. The exchange of resources and practices is a blessing to both. (Res. 6-01, "To Affirm and Strengthen *Set Apart to Serve* in Word and Action"; Res. 1-06A, "To Direct Districts and Council of Presidents to Provide a Strategic Plan for Addressing the Well-being of Church Workers"; Res. 6-06A, "To Support and Participate in Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support and *Preach the Word*")

Celebrating Our Schools

The district's 136 schools continue to be a cornerstone of Gospel ministry, reaching over 19,000 students and their families. We have embraced a bold vision to become the private schools of choice in the Southwestern U.S. District schools have established several artificial intelligence (AI) lab classrooms to learn how to appropriately integrate AI educational technology into Lutheran school classrooms. 2025 marked a leadership transition as we said goodbye to Executive Director of Schools Rachel Klitzing after 28 years of service to the district and the Synod. At the same time, we welcomed Executive Director of School Administration Xavria Schwarz, who serves alongside fellow Education Executive Superintendent of School Innovation Eun Chu Kim. We are pleased to report that Eun Chu Kim participated in the effort to produce uniform Lutheran Academic Standards for Synod schools. (Res. 12-04A, "To Commend and Give Thanks for Lutheran Schools"; Res. 12-01A, "To Produce a Uniform Set of Lutheran Academic Standards for Our Schools")

Equipping the Saints

The Mission Training Center (MTC) has blossomed into a vibrant platform, offering ministry training to laypeople so that they can better serve alongside their pastors. MTC is a partnership of the Northwest, California-Nevada-Hawaii, and Pacific Southwest districts and CUI. Seventeen online courses are now available, making quality instruction accessible and affordable. *Foundations of Lutheran Teaching (FLT)*, offered through MTC, helps non-Lutheran educators in our schools learn what is Lutheran about Lutheran education and deepen unity in doctrine and mission. We pray that *FLT* will lead to more teacher colloquy and rostered educator status. (Res. 6-04, "To Affirm and Provide Guidance for the Service of the Laity")

Small and Multi-Congregation Parishes

With a growing number of smaller congregations, many of which can no longer afford a pastor, the district works closely with small congregations and multi-congregation parishes. Congregations are personally engaged through the work of District Ministry Executive Rev. Jim Henkell, who brings local and shared resources

available through Office of National Ministry to assist congregations in finding a path in a changing season of ministry. (Res. 1-02A, "To Aid Small Congregations and Multi-Congregation Pastors and Parishes")

Koinonia Project

The district hosted a *Koinonia* Project to discuss pathways for pastoral formation. The gathering was held in Las Vegas Jan. 7–8, 2026. One hundred and twenty individuals representing twenty LCMS districts participated. The Synod resources created by the sainted Rev. Dr. Herbert Mueller were used to shape the event and guide the conversations. Seven brief presentations primed the pump for significant times of table discussion and captured content. A report is available on the district website. (Res. 4-01A, "To Commend and Encourage Continued Use of the *Koinonia* Project and Give Thanks to God for the Sainted Rev. Dr. Herbert C. Mueller, Jr.")

Disaster Response—LA Fires

From Jan. 7 to 31, 2025, wildfires devastated parts of the Los Angeles area, with Santa Ana winds blowing up to 100 miles per hour. Over 200,000 people were evacuated, with fire destroying more than 18,000 homes and structures. The communities of Altadena and the Palisades were significantly impacted, including numerous members of district congregations who lost everything. The response to the disaster from within the district and across the Synod was amazing. Special thanks to Rev. Dr. Ross Johnson and LCMS Disaster Response for their guidance and resources. A year later, Rev. Chris Schaar of Historic First Lutheran, Pasadena, and Rev. Dr. Martin Lee of Holy Cross Lutheran, Palisades, continue to provide outstanding ministry to their members and community. The resources received by the district enable these congregations to provide both the spiritual and financial support necessary for many years of rebuilding. Thank you to all in the LCMS who provided support in this crisis. (Res. 3-04A, "To Commend and Give Thanks for Synod Work regarding Disaster Response")

Rejecting Racism

The district is greatly blessed by its racial and cultural diversity. To ensure our continued unity, a video and discussion resource was created for use during the 2025 district convention as an effort to reject racism, rectify past wrongs of commission and omission within the district, and focus on future opportunities in ministry within our communities. This resource is available for circuits and congregations to use as they walk together. (Res. 11-02A, "To Reject All Forms of Racism and Affirm Our Witness to All People")

Innovative Stewardship—Real Estate Solutions

The district is working in partnership with Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) and the Real Estate Solutions team to help congregations strategically repurpose property for ministry sustainability. Proposed district projects exemplify this effort to build new housing, community spaces designed to support mission, housing for workers, and to generate sustainable ministry income. The district is grateful for the outstanding leadership and trusted partnership of LCEF.

A New Home for District Ministry

In September 2024, the district moved its office to CUI's Spectrum campus. The relocation was possible thanks to a close part-

nership with CUI and an agreement to “swap” the previous district office building (located on the main campus) for a new space on the third floor of the Spectrum campus building. The district is grateful to CUI for building out this welcoming and effective space. The new facility is tailored for 21st-century ministry support, featuring a 70-person high-tech conference center, breakout rooms, an area for catering and receptions, and collaborative workspaces that better serve district congregations and schools.

It is with gratitude and humility that we give thanks to God for the congregations, schools, church workers, laypeople, district staff, and others who have served faithfully during the past triennium. We look with excitement to future ways that the churches and schools of the district will be used by God to proclaim the risen Christ!

Soli Deo Gloria.

Michael E. Gibson, *President*

R47

Rocky Mountain District

Christ Is Risen! Indeed, as the largest contiguous district of the LCMS, with 164 congregations, 47 preschools, 28 elementary schools, and 2 high school across the states of Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Texas, Arizona, and Nebraska, we pray daily for faith to move mountains as we seek to remain confessionally faithful amidst our western frontier, proclaiming to the ends of the earth, *Christ Is Risen!*

Indeed, the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. In all our visitation, a lot of discussions happen regarding both recruitment and retention of our workers. How congregations, schools, and other ministries treat and care for their current workers directly impacts the perception future workers have toward this work: Will it be a joy or a burden (Heb. 13:17)? Thus, in our walk together, we prioritize worker care so that our youth or any others led to aspire to this service may see those who labor in the harvest field going joyfully to their work and singing out the Easter proclamation, *Christ Is Risen!*

Indeed, we have a vast amount of work to do both in the planting of new congregations and ministries as well as strengthening established ones. Strategic conversations happen on a regular basis to ensure that ministry can continue in our cities, mountain towns, and rural settings with varying levels of congregational partnerships. The Office of National Mission continues to be a huge blessing, especially as we have begun to take purposeful steps to further our mission presence in Utah, which in many ways for us is “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). As droves continue to leave Mormonism, Lord willing, we will baptize and teach them to say, *Christ Is Risen!*

Indeed, as a district with cultures and age demographics as diverse as our climate and topography, being our Lord’s witnesses to the ends of the earth to us means confessing Christ to *all* people. As we have seen white supremacy surfacing anew across our country, we in district convention reminded ourselves that in Christ, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female” (Gal. 3:28). And be they in the womb or blessed with years, be they rich or poor, be they of many and various ancestry, our Lord “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). The truth that *Christ Is Risen!*

Indeed, I am confident that even amid our challenges, the Lord will be faithful. After all, He excels in redemption and resurrection! *Christ Is Risen!*

Christ Is Risen, Indeed. Alleluia!

James B. Maxwell, *President*

R48

SELC District

“For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have made you a light for the nations, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth’” (Acts 13:47).

The Christian Church is a missionary endeavor. Our Lord equips his Church with Word and Sacrament and sends His apostles out, baptizing and teaching (Matt. 28:19–28). Jesus promises His Holy Spirit to empower the mission of the Church to the “ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The apostles and early Christians, overcome by the Good News of freedom, forgiveness and new life in Christ, could not “stop speaking about what they had seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). In our district theme verse, Acts 13:47, the apostle Paul reminds us of God’s divine appointment: we are called to be a “light to the nations.” This image of light carries profound implications for how we live our daily lives and engage with those around us. In a world often shrouded in darkness—filled with uncertainty, confusion, and despair—our calling is to shine brightly. Just as a lighthouse guides ships safely to harbor, we are to reflect the love and grace of Jesus, guiding others toward Christ. The purpose of the light is clear: to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. This calling transcends geographical boundaries—it is a global mission. We are a “district without borders.” We are reminded that our faith is not merely for personal comfort or assurance but is meant to be shared. It is essential to remember that we do not shine by our own strength; it is the Holy Spirit who guides and empowers the witness of the Church. “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17).

Ministry Context

The district carries out its mission in a challenging environment. Across North America, congregations face declining membership, aging demographics, pastoral shortages, and financial pressures. Fewer candidates are available for calls, leading to longer vacancies and increased reliance on part-time or multi-congregational ministries. Yet these realities have not led to retreat. Instead, they have sharpened our focus. Trusting that “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ,” the district continues to center its work on proclaiming Christ crucified and risen for the forgiveness of sins.

Church planting and congregational revitalization remain central priorities for our district. In recent years, the district has worked to strengthen existing congregations while developing new mission opportunities in communities where Gospel witness is urgently needed. In the United States and Canada, this includes revitalization efforts in New Jersey, “rebirthing” a dying congregation, ongoing multicultural outreach in Montreal, and new mission congregations in the South. The district has planted the first Hispanic mission in the St. Louis area. There, our missionary has begun conducting the Divine Service in Spanish. He also provides Bible studies, pastoral care, and English-as-a-Second-Language instruction, expanding Gospel outreach to underserved populations.

To support our mission efforts, the district has strengthened its infrastructure for church planting by providing pastoral and administrative support for mission leaders. Our goal is clear: that every

congregation would see itself as a mission-planting congregation.

The district's commitment to being a "district without borders" is especially evident in its support of mission work in India. Despite persecution and hardship, the Gospel continues to bear fruit in the northern part of the country. Congregations throughout the district participate directly through prayer and designated gifts supporting church construction and leadership development in these emerging mission fields.

Care for Church Workers

Recognizing the growing demands placed upon pastors, teachers, and church workers, the district is prioritizing worker wellness. Healthy church workers are essential for healthy congregations. The district has engaged additional staff in an effort to support systems for pastors and church workers, encourage the use of Synod resources, and promote practices that sustain long-term ministry. Investment in worker care is both pastoral and strategic, strengthening congregational life and Gospel proclamation.

For over 50 years, the district has operated largely through volunteer leadership, with administrative costs underwritten primarily by local congregations. In this season of expanding mission and increasing responsibility, the district continues to evaluate its governance and staffing structures to ensure faithful stewardship, effective administration, and sustainable growth. Plans are underway to explore a capital campaign to support ongoing mission expansion and infrastructure needs.

While mindful of demographic and cultural challenges, the district stands confident in the Lord, who sends His Church. Anchored in Holy Scripture, united in confession, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we press forward in our calling to be a light to the nations. Trusting the promise of Acts 13:47, we move ahead together—bringing the saving light of Christ to the ends of the earth until He comes again in glory.

Waldemar R. Vinovskis, *President*

R49

South Dakota District

The 2026 Synod convention theme, *Christ Is Risen, Indeed*, is a powerful promise of hope couched in the reality that death, the devil, and sin are defeated by God's own Son, our Savior. This reality guides our congregations forward in a sure and certain hope, which results in love of God and service to those around us.

A. Hope, to Support Immigrant, Native, Deaf, and School Ministry

Our congregations continue to support many ethnic ministries. Pastors trained through the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology preach primarily in English, but they also use Swahili, Luba-kasi, French Amharic, Oromo, and Kunama. Native American ministry remains active on the Rosebud and Pine Ridge Reservations. Deaf ministry is offered through a Sioux Falls congregation, and the pastor travels to give the gifts of Christ to those in other communities.

The district has 18 preschools, 5 elementary schools, and 1 high school. Sioux Falls Lutheran School is our most comprehensive school, nurturing faith in students from infants to twelfth graders in the sure and certain hope that *Christ is risen, indeed!*

Trusting in God's provision, the district is placing a strong emphasis on starting micro-schools.

B. Hope, to Support Others in the Kingdom

God's people, living in resurrection hope, are generous with their gifts to further the kingdom of God. The district in convention chose three LCMS missionaries to support with *Together In Mission* funds. Last year, funds received were over double what was pledged! God's people generously share His gifts and offerings to help support our seminary students and church work students at our Concordias.

Out of the generosity of God's people, grants are given to church workers to help reduce their educational debt. The district president has a modest fund for Mercy Grants. The fund is grown through a sure and certain hope that results in God's people being very generous with what God has blessed them with. Mercy Grants are given when a worker has unexpected financial challenges. We are developing a FORO with Spain and Romania to further the resurrection hope given for all people.

C. Hope, to Be Healthier

Healthy Church Workers, Healthy Church Worker Families, and Healthy Congregations is a strong emphasis in the 105 congregations of the district. It is imperative that the district work to identify obstacles that result in poor mental and physical health for church workers and congregations. That begins with district president visitation. Personal conversations with the worker and family often reveal areas where the district can provide resources for help and hope. The district's partnership with Lutheran Family Service of Iowa has been instrumental in helping church workers, as well as congregation and community members, work through challenging issues while being grounded in our identity in Christ and His gifts to each of us.

Encouraging work-life balance for all our church workers is an ongoing challenge. Church workers love to serve, sometimes to the detriment of their family and their health. The district is encouraging congregations to offer sabbatical leave more frequently to give pastors time to decompress and be refreshed in rest from their labors. Pastors are encouraged to find a father confessor, attend DOXOLOGY, and make frequent use of continuing education opportunities. Congregations are strongly encouraged to be generous with vacation time and to help pastors protect their days off. We are in the process of developing district chaplains for our pastors. Soul care for the ones who care for souls is desperately needed to keep the pastor and his family grounded in the forgiveness of sins and the encouragement of *Christ is risen, indeed*.

The district has implemented *Small Church Clarity*. It is an initiative facilitated by LCEF to help small churches evaluate threats and obstacles and develop healthy Christ-centered momentum moving forward.

D. Hope, as God Continues to Lead His People

President Scott Sailer chose to retire and did not let his name stand for reelection at the February 2025 District convention. The Rev. Randy Sturzenbecher was elected district president on the first ballot. Julie Pike, the district president's administrative assistant, also chose to retire. We thank them for all the years of faithful service to our Lord and His redeemed people.

E. Hope, Despite the Challenges

Christ is risen, indeed! Because of His eternal victory over every enemy we have, we continue in hope despite the challenges.

Our greatest challenge is the declining population in the rural areas. Many of our congregations are the last church in town, still gathering in worship. As families in these rural areas age and move, main street businesses close, leaving the communities without any services. As our small communities get smaller, the number of vacancies and retirements stretch our already hard-working pastors even thinner.

There are many challenges in the district. The challenges pale in comparison with the reality that *Christ is risen, indeed!* As we enter this new triennium, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful” (Heb. 10:23). That is our eternal, unchanging hope!

Randy R. Sturzenbecher, *President*

R50

South Wisconsin District

The South Wisconsin District consists of 199 congregations in the southern half of the state. These congregations are a mix of urban and suburban areas around population centers like Milwaukee, Racine, Kenosha, Madison, and Sheboygan and rural congregations that serve as the very heart of America’s dairy land.

Many of these congregations have roots in the very earliest days of the Synod. Others were planted in the halcyon days of the postwar boom. Others are newly birthed and serve growing Hispanic, Hmong, and French-African communities.

This triennium has not been without its challenges. With the Lord calling home our long-time District President Rev. John C. Wille in June 2024, the service of President Eric Skovgaard, and my election, there has been a great deal of turnover. But the effort of *Confessing Christ for the Next Generation* has continued because the Lord of the Church has been in the lead the whole time!

The confessing of Christ has centered on four mission priorities:

1. Being distinctly Lutheran
2. Planting new congregations and schools
3. Honoring our Christ-centered vocations
4. Embracing our communities

First, the district is at its very heart *distinctly Lutheran*. Our congregations have an abiding commitment to proper distinction of Law and Gospel as it is lived out in faithful Word and Sacrament ministry rooted in font, altar, and pulpit. This radiates out to day school classrooms and outreach efforts that seek to faithfully steward the Gospel entrusted to us. Whether the congregation is numbered in the hundreds or tens, it is the Gospel that defines our distinct Lutheran identity that is desperately needed in our communities and our world!

Second, over this past triennium we have been active in *planting new congregations and schools*. In conjunction with 2023 Res. 1-03A, the district has utilized the Office of National Mission’s *Church Planting Simplified* to assist in the planting of two mission starts in Monroe and Viroqua. These plants have used the method and the associated grants so that we now have two church

planters in place seeking to move them to charter. One other church plant is underway in Slinger, but has not yet reached critical mass. We continue to have our target list for at least 10 new starts in the coming years.

Our *Lutheran Neighborhood Schools Initiative* that was launched in 2023 has continued to grow. A new partnership with WeTeachTruth schools in the Milwaukee area seeks to broaden the base of this effort as well as export the microschoool model out to our district in an attempt to help smaller schools remain viable so that they are able to use education in the process of faithful stewardship of the Gospel.

Third, the district has *honored our Christ-centered vocations*. Seeking to confess Christ using our hands and feet, district congregations have stepped up in the number of Lutheran Early Response Team (LERT) deployments. This included one deployment in the Milwaukee area that was the result of a rainstorm that dumped a foot of rain in 11 hours. The response from our congregations and members was remarkable. We were able to physically assist 65 households in cleanup. In addition, with the assistance of LCMS Disaster Response, we were able to make grants available to a total of \$300,000 for congregations and households to assist with damage not covered by insurance.

Fourth, the district has *embraced its community*. Through our urban ministry we have started to “close the circle in mission.” Social ministry that feeds, clothes, and houses people but is not directly connected to Word and Sacrament ministry is not mission. Using strategies to gather contact information as well as strategic microgrants from the district have enabled these ministries to engage difficult neighborhoods with the Gospel. This has led to baptisms, new members, and even more opportunities for engagement.

Over the coming triennium the district will be launching an effort called *MissionField Milwaukee*. This will be a collaborative effort between Milwaukee congregations, district Mission and Mercy, and LCEF’s Ministry Solutions to help redefine the ministry focus of our congregations from survival to faithful stewardship of the Gospel. Congregations will assess their Lutheran identity, financial health, and neighborhood connections while seeking to live out 2023 Res. 1-02A in establishing partnerships that will embolden our stewardship of the Gospel. These partnerships will include congregations, recognized service organizations, and individual efforts to *Confess Christ for the Next Generation*.

These efforts and others that the Lord will open to us will only come as we faithfully proclaim, “Christ is risen indeed!”

Nathan M. Meador, *President*

R51

Southeastern District

Greetings from your sisters and brothers in Christ in the Southeastern District, where we connect people with Jesus so that lives are transformed, and God’s kingdom grows. With you, we preach Christ crucified and risen from the dead. May His grace and mercy be extended to all people so that “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:10–11).

A. Wellness and Witness

A.1. Wellness

A central aspect of the district's work is the health of our mission stations and workers. Healthy workers make for healthy churches. Healthy churches make for a healthy and strong witness. The district is promoting worker wellness teams in every congregation. Teams are encouraged to engage the workers and to inquire about their spiritual, physical, emotional, and financial well-being. As worker wellness teams are created, the district will offer grants, partially matched by the congregation, that may be used to support workers' health.

A.2. Witness

The district includes seven states and the District of Columbia. The specific context of mission and ministry varies greatly across this geographical region. Context is celebrated and respected as we seek to share the Gospel with the people God has placed before us and expand the reach of the LCMS by planting new starts.

The district is committed to 21 new starts in this current district triennium. This is a grassroots effort from congregations and their members, supported by a partnership with the district and the Synod's church-planting efforts.

The district will support 10 renewal efforts. These include ministries in areas where maintaining a Lutheran presence is essential to serving the community and proclaiming the Gospel. Renewal efforts will work in partnership with the district to develop a plan of action that creates new paths of service for the sake of the people God has placed before that ministry.

B. Scholarships and Debt Reduction

Vacancies remain a significant challenge as congregations seek pastoral leadership and care. The district in convention affirmed all routes to ordination and the expansion of routes to ensure that pastoral leadership will be offered to congregations and mission starts, and to provide opportunities for people in various contexts and life situations to receive quality education for service to the Lord and His Church.

The district is honored to be part of *Set Apart to Serve*, in which several congregations and workers are serving as pilot congregations and cohort members. The district in convention elected to commit to raising up future workers in each congregation.

B.1. Scholarships

In an effort to support students seeking theological education and church service, the district will increase scholarship dollars. These scholarships include undergraduate education and all routes through seminary to meet the growing needs of our congregations and mission stations, and the unique context they serve.

B.2. Debt Reduction

The district is committed to assisting church workers with student debt accrued while in undergraduate and seminary programs leading to service in the Church. The district in convention voted to increase grants to help lower debt, thereby relieving the financial burdens on our workers so they may focus on their callings and their vocations to their families.

C. Leadership Initiatives

The district is committed to providing meaningful opportunities

for rostered workers and lay leaders to grow in faith, further develop their God-given gifts, and strengthen their leadership for the glory and praise of our Lord and King. Men and women, young and old, rostered and lay alike, are equipped by God for service to His Church and for witness within the communities in which they live.

We envision dynamic learning and growth where church workers and lay leaders are equipped to lead with confidence, courage, and compassion. Through conferences, webinars, regional gatherings, the Lay Deacon Program, and wellness and witness cohorts, the district seeks to cultivate leaders who are spiritually grounded, mission-driven, and prepared to navigate the challenges of modern ministry. By fostering collaboration, innovation, and personal growth, we aim to raise up servant leaders who will inspire transformation in their communities and congregations for the sake of the Gospel.

D. Visitations and Engagement

As we continue to walk together as the Church, being present within each ministry context allows us to understand both the unique aspects of each community and the people they are called to serve. To support this work, we have developed a model of engagement for our own use and as a resource for the wider Church, helping us faithfully carry out God's command to love our neighbors. This model includes:

- *Rejoice*: We rejoice in a God who does immeasurably more through the saving power of Jesus Christ. This rejoicing is our inspiration and foundation as we connect people with Jesus.
- *Engage*: We engage with our partners by listening, celebrating who they are, understanding their context, affirming their value, and building lasting relationships.
- *Encourage*: We walk alongside our partners to create an environment of possibility, rooted in the power of the Gospel, encouraging them in their unique callings.
- *Serve*: We love and serve our partners by supporting their callings as they connect people with Jesus—so that lives are transformed, and God's kingdom grows.

E. Rejoice!

We preach Christ crucified! Through His death and resurrection, we are set free from sin, made heirs of salvation, reconciled with God, and live with the promise of eternity. This is the good news for which we rejoice. "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen" (Eph. 3:20–21 NIV).

William A. Harmon, *President*

R52

Southern District

The Southern District covers Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and the Panhandle of Florida. From the farthest east in Mexico Beach, Fla., to the farthest west in Shreveport, Miss., is 1,000 miles as the crow flies. Within this large geographic area we have 149 congregations.

I attempt to visit every congregation in the district at least once

a triennium. I am out in the district almost every Sunday preaching, teaching, ordaining, installing, and connecting with pastors and congregations.

A. Congregations

The district has 149 congregations with 28,000 baptized members. Our average congregation worships with fewer than 50 people in attendance. Of the 22 historic Black congregations in the district, 12 cannot afford a full-time pastor and are in danger of closing. Circuit 12, centered in Selma, Ala., has 7 historic Black congregations being served by 2 pastors. The challenges are great, but so is our God.

B. Schools

The district has 18 early childhood development centers, 9 K–8 schools, and 1 high school.

C. Missions

There is more work to do in mission than we have money or trained people to support. We are currently working to train 500 lay missionaries that will help revitalize the ministry and mission of their home congregations as well as act as core groups for future church plants. Our newest church plant is happening in Helena, Ala., just outside of Birmingham.

We are also seeing congregations begin to grow with new families from their area. We are also seeing young men in their 20s beginning to seek out our churches and pastors, desiring greater theological, biblical, confessional, and liturgical depth. One common denominator, though, is the pastor and congregation being welcoming of new people.

To God alone belongs all glory, honor, dominion, and kingdom in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

Eric C. Johnson, *President*

R53

Southern Illinois District

Since 1907, the Southern Illinois District has served and encouraged workers, ministries, and members of the LCMS across the southern third of Illinois. Today the district includes 91 congregations, 20 K–8 schools, 2 high schools, 7 stand-alone preschools, more than 300 professional church workers, and more than 33,000 baptized members.

The district exists to serve and support these local ministries by planning, coordinating, and executing our joint *Ministry, Mission, and Mercy*.

Ministry is what the Church does for her members. We make disciples: we baptize, teach, feed, and support our people. The end goal of ministry is a stronger Lutheran.

Mission is the task of reaching out and inviting new people to become disciples. The end goal of mission work is a new Lutheran who faithfully attends one of our congregations.

Mercy work is kindness done in Jesus' name. Mercy work in the Church is always done in support of and in connection to ministry and/or mission.

The district's plan for *Mission, Ministry, and Mercy* focuses on five critical initiatives:

Initiative 1: Focused Outreach Activity

Our Lord Jesus has called us to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19–20). This hard work requires vision, leadership, training, and the calling of new laborers for the Lord's harvest (Matt. 9:38). We are pursuing this by:

- developing plans and funds to call district missionaries in partnership with congregations/circuits (several profiles: circuit rider, church planter, outreach pastor, etc.);
- utilizing the Synod's Church Planting office to assist us with research and planning;
- creating an ongoing, district-wide outreach program, *Come Home for Christmas*; and
- issuing Outreach Grants to congregations to inspire and fund outreach efforts on the front lines of ministry (applications for 2026 are now live for \$30,000 in grants!).

Initiative 2: Matrix of Support for Lutheran Schools

With one school for every three parishes, the district is at the forefront of Synod districts when it comes to Christian education. The Synod operates the largest network of Protestant schools in America and the district has more students in its schools (3,600+) than do many public school districts. Our schools today face numerous challenges, and the district is addressing these needs by:

- developing training, support, and mentoring for teachers who need to step into the role of administrator (a pilot program has already begun in one location);
- partnering with congregations and teachers to get more teachers trained and rostered as certified Lutheran teachers through colloquy (five approved applications for colloquy grants already);
- ongoing support for accreditation procedures;
- assisting in debt relief for church workers;
- promoting competitive salaries and benefits for Lutheran school teachers;
- working with the Faith Coalition to advocate and lobby for Christian schools in Illinois; and
- participating in *Set Apart to Serve* to recruit more teachers.

Initiative 3: Spiritual Care of Remote Congregations

All across the district, and especially outside the Metro East, there are smaller congregations in need of full-time, ordained pastoral care. Many of these churches are in rural areas that have limited financial resources because they are small in size, but their love of God is anything but small. Indeed, they are on the forefront of mission precisely because they are located in areas without a large Lutheran presence. The district is focused on providing these congregations with a dependable means of receiving Word and Sacrament ministry by:

- walking alongside congregations as they explore forming multi-point parishes (three new partnerships were piloted this year);

- establishing dedicated circuit riders to minister to truly remote congregations (working on funding and calling a district circuit rider/church planter by the end of 2027);
- maintaining a list of emeritus pastors who can help across the district; and
- supporting circuit visitors as they assist vacant congregations in their circuits.

Initiative 4: Expansion of Campus Ministry

The district partners with two congregations to support successful campus ministries at the flagship universities within our geographical boundaries (Southern Illinois University and Southern Illinois University Edwardsville). We can and should multiply this ministry across the 30+ institutions of higher learning within southern Illinois. We know that the transition from high school to whatever comes next (college, armed forces, trade school, workforce) is a critical time in a young person's journey of faith. The district seeks to serve our members and reach out on campus by:

- encouraging each congregation with a campus in their backyard to establish campus ministry (working on plans to use the same funding model we use so successfully for prison ministry);
- gathering pastors and lay leaders to learn from our flagship campus ministries at a Campus Ministry Summit;
- connecting pastors and lay leaders with LCMS U;
- specifically targeting and prioritizing large community college campuses (Southwestern Illinois, Lewis and Clark, Kas-kaskia, etc.); and
- providing "connection to church" assistance for students entering trade school, the workforce, and the armed forces.

Initiative 5: Extension of Current Ministry, Mission, and Mercy

To one extent or another, all the above initiatives represent newly developed or developing work. The district has other long-standing, vital, and successful efforts that remain as touchstones of our shared *Ministry, Mission, and Mercy*. We will continue to support and extend these efforts by:

- providing funding, assistance, and coordination with our district mission school at Unity Lutheran Christian Elementary School in East St. Louis;
- supporting prison ministry across southern Illinois;
- working with our foreign mission partner, *Seminario Concordia El Reformador* in the Dominican Republic;
- directing efforts in youth ministry, older adult ministry, and church worker scholarships; and
- serving congregations, schools, and workers with the professional services, organization, leadership, and support expected of all districts.

The people of southern Illinois are excited to work together in God's kingdom toward these goals! May the Lord grant us His grace and wisdom as we seek to respond to His mercy shown to us in the cross of His Son!

Heath R. Curtis, *President*

R54

Texas District

Christ is risen indeed! This triumphant proclamation, grounded in 1 Cor. 15:20–22, where Paul declares Christ as “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep,” echoes throughout the Texas District as we rejoice in the hope of the resurrection that transforms death into life and despair into victory. The mission of the district is to strengthen congregations to reach the lost, disciple the saved, and care for people locally and globally. To accomplish this mission, the district partners with nearly 400 congregations and mission stations, as well as nearly 120 Lutheran schools and early childhood centers, to catalyze an exponential mission movement. As we share the Gospel of the risen Christ, we join to equip, send, and support church workers, church planters, educators, commissioned ministers, and laypeople to share the Good News of Jesus, to show His love. Because Christ is risen indeed, we press forward in faith, knowing that our labor in the name of the Lord is not in vain.

In its vibrant ministry, the district has been blessed to act upon the following resolutions from the 2023 Synod convention.

Res. 1-01A: Expanded a robust evangelist program that trains and equips members to share the Gospel. Training is available in English, Spanish, and American Sign Language. A total of 223 laypeople and church workers completed the program in 2023–25 and were sent to witness to others.

Res. 1-02A: Aided small congregations by ongoing efforts in Texas through a variety of planning, support, and training initiatives.

Res. 1-03A: Encouraged and supported church planting in Texas, resulting in 27 new Word and Sacrament ministries, 2023–25. Approximately \$3.7 million was spent on church multiplication in the district.

Res. 1-05A: Strengthened multiethnic outreach by providing resources for pastoral training and outreach for new ethnic missionaries and church planters in Texas. A Hispanic Ministry Retreat was launched in 2023 and serves as an annual gathering for reflection, learning, and spiritual renewal. Nineteen multiethnic Word and Sacrament ministries were planted in this triennium.

Res. 1-06A: Supported workers and families through systems of care, counseling, and coaching. Fifty-seven coaching and care relationships were established to provide individualized care to workers and their families. Additionally, the district counseling team served dozens of workers and families.

Res. 1-07: Fosters positive mental well-being for all our church workers, having a Care and Coaching Team focused on this work as a free resource to workers and their families. The district spent more than \$225,000 in the triennium on dedicated counseling for our workers. A trained pastor was appointed to serve as a mental health advocate for church workers, providing confidential support, resources, and guidance to pastors and professional church workers facing mental health challenges.

Res. 1-08A: Promoted and commended the Synod's digital and online resources, incorporating them into district communications, sharing them with congregations, leaders, and ministry partners as appropriate.

Res. 2-01 and 2-02A: Continued to support the Alliance Missionary Program with significant financial gifts.

Res. 2-05: Made ongoing referrals of congregations to the Of-

fice of International Mission as they are investigating international mission work.

Res. 2-07A: District and district congregations actively support and participate in the Lutheran Synod of Mexico FORO, advocating for and contributing to key projects.

Res. 3-01: Actively encouraged congregational involvement in life ministry through resources and training opportunities to equip them to proclaim and promote a culture of life in their communities.

Res. 4-02: *Making Disciples for Life* emphases continue to be implemented and publicized throughout the district.

Res. 4-03: Mission priorities continue to be emphasized and implemented in the district.

Res. 4-04: Promoted the use of *Himnario Luterano* among Spanish-language congregations and missions, providing resources and encouragement for its implementation in worship and congregational life.

Res. 5-08A: The district president worked with local pastors, congregations, and circuit visitors to affirm and encourage in-person Communion.

Res. 5-09: Engaged in conversation and study on guidance on admission to the Lord's Supper with circuit visitors who then share with their circuits.

Res. 6-01: Encouraged congregation support and participation in *Set Apart to Serve*.

Res. 6-02A: Provided more than \$350,000 annually in financial aid to support students from Texas in pastoral formation at our seminaries. Hosted annual barbecue at both seminaries to encourage residential students from Texas. Directed and supported 25 men into the traditional residential pastoral routes at our beloved seminaries. Disbursed more than \$1 million in financial aid to support men and women pursuing ministry training.

Res. 6-04: Affirms the proper and full service of laity in the Church while upholding the distinctive nature of the pastoral office. Established lead trainers in district areas to provide training in outreach and encourage evangelism to the unchurched. Spent more than \$700,000 in support of evangelist development.

Res. 6-06A: Maintained a vibrant participation in Post-seminary Applied Learning and Support and encouraged use of *Preach the Word* at the local circuit level.

Res. 6-07A: Provided circuit visitor training according to the *Circuit Visitors' Manual* and provided material at circuit visitors' meetings for use at circuit gatherings.

Res. 6-09: Supports the annual gathering of pastors' wives through resources, including financial support, to enable them to enjoy a time of relaxation and rejuvenation. Special recognition is given to these women for their vital role in pastors' lives at the district convention.

Res. 7-03: With respect to Concordia University Texas, implemented ongoing discussions, visits, exhortation, and appropriate ecclesiastical discipline.

Res. 7-06B: Encouraged Concordia University System colleges and universities to attend district conventions and conferences, fostering collaboration and partnership, and to increase awareness of educational opportunities.

Res. 9-08A: Continues to maximize nonvoting advisory participation at conventions with recruitment and funding.

Res. 12-04A: Provided support to Lutheran schools in Texas through faculty development, training, encouragement, and assistance with establishing new schools.

We thank God for all the church workers in the district who daily proclaim the Gospel and serve Christ's people. Since the 2023 Synod convention, the Texas District has experienced transitions and powerful expressions of Christ's love among us. At our 2025 district convention, we bid farewell to Rev. Michael Newman, who retired after faithful service as district president. When the tragic July 4th flood of 2025 devastated communities in Central Texas, the Body of Christ responded with generosity, raising more than \$1 million to support those affected by this natural disaster. We are grateful for our Texas District Church Extension Fund, which disbursed \$42 million in loans to assist 39 churches in their kingdom work. Because Christ is risen indeed, we rejoice in the countless lives touched by His grace in our congregations and schools. May He continue to strengthen us for the work ahead as we proclaim the Good News of the risen Savior to all.

Jon M. Braunersreuther, *President*

R55

Wyoming District

"Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery." (Heb. 2:14–15)

In this great passage on the incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus performs two works: the destruction of the devil with all his works and ways, and our liberation from the fear of death. The devil is our enemy, but he is destroyed, together with the power of death. Our fear of death enslaved us, but we have been delivered from that fear. Christ is risen! We live in the victory of Christ's resurrection as the free children of God.

The Wyoming District is composed of 60 congregations in Wyoming and the Nebraska Panhandle and 1 congregation in Colorado. These congregations are organized into 44 parishes and 6 visitation circuits. Each congregation was formally visited in the past triennium.

With thanksgiving to God, I report that the Word of God and the administration of the Holy Sacraments has been preserved in all our congregations in truth and purity. Furthermore, despite the challenges of our aging and shrinking demographics in many places, our congregations continue to thrive. No district congregation has closed in more than a decade.

The district places a high priority on Christian education and formation. District congregations have five classical Lutheran elementary (K–8) schools, two of which also include high school. The district offers an annual classical homeschool conference to support and encourage the homeschooling members of our congregations.

The two district congregations in Casper, Wyo., have coordinated with congregations, pastors, and laymen across the Synod to establish and support Luther Classical College in Casper. The college opened in the fall semester of 2025 with 38 students. The district in convention has asked the district president to exercise ecclesiastical supervision over the college and has asked the Synod in convention to create a pathway to ecclesiastical recognition by the Synod.

The district supports a robust campus ministry in Laramie, Wyo., through St. Andrew's Lutheran Church and Campus Center. Our congregations also reach out and serve students at their local community colleges.

In the fallout of government pressures on the Wind River Reservation, the district suspended its Wind River Lutheran Mission in 2023. Local congregations continue to serve our members from the reservation and have recently begun a renewed effort at outreach and catechesis.

The district provides theologically rich pastoral conferences and continuing education opportunities for our pastors. Winkel attendance is very high, and our circuit pastors regularly study Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and pastoral application and casuistry. We enjoy 100 percent participation in the Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support program for our new pastors. The district sponsors an annual Pastors' Wives Retreat to support and thank our pastors' wives.

The Synod's *Set Apart to Serve* initiative is reflected in the educational formation and recruitment of our youth in our congregations, schools, and district activities. We actively recruit church work students for studies at our Concordia universities, at Luther Classical College, and at the seminaries, and we provide generous financial support to these students. The district helps with debt reduction for its former students and present church workers.

Our pastors and laymen enjoy an extraordinary unity in doctrine and practice, which also bears the fruit of love and friendship across the many miles. Attendance at our annual evangelism convocation is very strong and includes many youth and young adults. Our annual camp for children and youth strengthens their love of Lutheran worship and hymnody, Lutheran doctrine, and the bonds of friendship. An annual Fathers and Sons Retreat aims at strengthening the fathers of our households in their vocations as Christian men.

Under the leadership of its Marriage, Life, and Family facilitator, the district has grown in its engagement with state government and local communities. Some of our pastors have also served as teachers in the foreign mission field.

The district is active in fostering a culture of Lutheran faith and piety, sound worship and bold confession, marriage and family, and love of church work and church workers. God grant that our labors bear fruit in our midst and throughout the Church!

John E. Hill, *President*

R56

International Lutheran Laymen's League (Lutheran Hour Ministries)

The International Lutheran Laymen's League/Lutheran Hour Ministries serves as a grassroots auxiliary of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and Lutheran Church—Canada and is proud to extend the mission and ministry of these two church bodies by focusing our energies on a mission of *Bringing Christ to the Nations®—and the Nations to the Church*. The International Lutheran Laymen's League (Int'l LLL) is the corporate name under which the organization does business; Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM) is the public identity under which we conduct global Gospel outreach. In fulfilling this year's convention theme of *Christ Is Risen Indeed*, LHM is a trusted resource in Gospel proclamation

with a global network of partners. We work in areas where other Christian organizations are often not present and use local staff and volunteers who know the language and culture to create contextually relevant programs that most effectively share the Good News with individuals living in these regions.

God's Blessings Upon LHM's Outreach in the Past Triennium

As we build upon LHM's nearly 110-year history and move forward into the mission field, great opportunities abound:

- Five billion people have yet to hear the saving message of Christ.
- Technology allows us to engage with each other more efficiently and effectively than at any other time in history, especially as people crave a relationship with God and each other.
- We can use our gifts to make a real difference right where we are, among people we know and see every day. Our faith, put into action on a local level, can make an immediate and personal impact in our neighborhoods and beyond.

The following strategic priorities support our vision for the future and Christ's call to reach the world with the Gospel.

Impacting People Globally

Around the world, people long to hear the Good News in a way that speaks to their own lives. LHM stands apart from most global media ministries through the implementation of a ministry model that goes far beyond translation to transformation through the Holy Spirit. Our **ministry model** identifies and equips local leaders who understand the language, customs, and daily realities of their communities. These cultural insiders are uniquely positioned to share Christ's love in ways that connect with people, meeting them where they are and addressing the needs they face every day. Through locally developed programs, resources, and media in native languages, LHM proclaims the hope of the Gospel in ways that build trust and open doors for lasting relationships. This personal connection draws people into fellowship and strengthens local Christian communities across the globe.

Our establishment of a **multidivisional global mission** rooted in localized regional leadership moved forward with the hiring of a president of Asia Ministries based in Singapore, LHM's first regional president living outside of the United States. By shifting leadership to regional presidents who are located closer to where ministry is happening, LHM can ensure that our mission is tailored to the unique needs of specific areas.

Over the past couple of years, LHM has opened **six new mission fields** that uplift the next generation of Christian leaders to begin new ministries in partnership with existing ministry centers. Teams in Peru, Nepal, Kyrgyzstan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Bolivia are now sharing the Gospel in their home countries through teams of three local people focused on children and youth ministry, digital outreach through social media, and multimedia content creation. In addition, LHM—Kenya started airing evangelistic radio spots in a new area—in neighboring Tanzania. By working with local Lutherans from Tanzania, the inspiring Gospel messages are advertising LHM's popular Bible Correspondence Courses via radio.

LHM continues to partner with **SAT-7**, the largest Middle East and North African Christian satellite network, to make God's love visible to millions of people in more than 20 countries throughout

the region. In addition to a newly launched seventh season of Arabic programming that explores themes common to young adults from a biblical perspective, a multi-language project called *Reconnecting the MENA to Hope* uses selected topical content from LHM booklets to offer hope in Jesus through unique satellite broadcasts, digital and social media, and direct follow-up. Programs air on three channels: SAT-7 ARABIC, SAT-7 PARS (for Persian speakers), and SAT-7 TÜRK (for Turkish speakers). Each channel's programming is tailored to the unique language, culture, and felt needs of its audience, and points viewers to additional resources to help them further explore the topics covered.

Holistic outreach is an effective way of demonstrating to people the love of Christ. These programs have a comprehensive impact in reaching both body and soul as a ministry to the unchurched in word and deed where both physical and spiritual needs are addressed. In African nations like Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, and Liberia, our successful holistic programs continue to reach at-risk young adults, especially women, through medical camps, prison ministry, vocational training, and spiritual guidance and fellowship.

Impacting People through Digital Engagement

In today's digital age, more people than ever are searching online for guidance on topics like stress, anxiety, depression, fear, guilt, toxic relationships, and other relevant issues. *Vivenciar.net* continues to be an instrumental platform for reaching Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking individuals worldwide, including an increased focus on connecting with Hispanics living in the United States. *Vivenciar.net* assists these individuals through live chats, blog posts, articles, e-books, and courses. It also offers a safe space where trained volunteers can listen to what people have to say about specific situations in their lives and accompany them in these moments with biblically based support and guidance.

Our “by Hispanics, for Hispanics” approach to creating content continues to resonate with a growing digital-first Hispanic audience that is hungry for ministry resources that share the hope of the Gospel. The *Sentido Latino* podcast is now available on YouTube, an additional platform to reach out with our Hispanic ministry messages and resources to new communities in the United States and beyond. In less than a year, our YouTube channel has more than 50,000 subscribers. *Sentido Latino* also has more than 1 million views across all platforms.

Thred continues to create content to equip Christians for sharing their faith in the digital world. Our newest downloadable resources were created to help individuals tell their story. *The Search for Self* reminds users that as Christ-followers we identify as children of God, which in this image-oriented world we live in is not always easy to remember. *Not My Job* encourages people to see their place in the Gospel narrative and inspires them to talk about what God has done and is doing in their lives. In addition, Thred's weekly email series delivers content to more than 21,000 subscribers and offers a way for subscribers to join the conversation through polls or specific feedback prompts followed by comment boxes.

Our annual **Gospel Adventures™** program reaches around 40,000 elementary and middle school students each year. This interactive virtual experience includes a five-day curriculum, videos, theme music, hands-on activities, and more—all working together to provide participants with a deeper understanding of the work of the Gospel in their own lives and how God is at work in people's lives in another part of the world. The 2026 program explores

Mongolia.

“**The Lutheran Hour®**” continues to expand its reach through digital means beyond traditional radio stations in North America. While it currently airs each week on around 1,700 stations as well as the American Forces Network, the program is also available online, as a podcast, and on media platforms like Amazon Alexa, Spotify, iHeartRadio, Google Home, and Sirius XM satellite radio.

The “**Connected by LHM**” app allows people to get many LHM resources in one place on their Android devices or iPhones. In addition to being able to read and listen to LHM's *Daily Devotions*, users can also access The Lutheran Hour sermons, topical booklets, Bible studies, and more.

Impacting People Right Where They Are

Growing diversity, cultural shifts, and spiritual hunger are reshaping North America—opening new doors to share the unchanging hope of Jesus. The mission field is no longer far away; it is right outside our doors.

God has called all laypeople to be powerful witnesses for Christ with their families and communities. LHM continues to produce timely resources that offer convenient ways for people to connect with Jesus and share their faith with others. From the popular **Project Connect** booklet ministry with more than 50 titles to dozens of online **LHM Learn** courses under five faith-strengthening categories, and from **daily** and **seasonal devotions** to online **video Bible studies**, LHM has numerous offerings to connect with people at any stage of their individual faith journeys.

Several years ago, LHM began a partnership with **Barna Group**, a world-renowned, premier Christian research firm. The resulting research findings have allowed LHM to provide timely and relevant resources that meet people where they are by equipping individuals and churches to engage in fruitful spiritual conversations, deepen faith in households, impact neighborhoods with the Good News of Jesus Christ, and develop their God-given talents. They enable us to gain a hearing for the Gospel in an inviting and contextual way—guiding those who seek toward faith.

Spiritual Conversations: Sharing Life, Faith, and Jesus with Friends is a seven-lesson curriculum to encourage high schoolers to engage their peers with the Gospel by helping them recognize and respond to opportunities to have spiritual conversations. Combining insights from Barna Group research and LHM's commitment to equipping people for sharing the Gospel, this course includes interactive group activities, videos, data to consider, opportunities for discussions on Scripture and faith-sharing conversations, and more. Schools, Sunday school classes, small groups, and youth groups are already benefiting from this easy-to-implement—and fun—resource.

The Hopeful Neighborhood Project™ from LHM is moving forward as a collaborative network committed to improving neighborhood well-being around the world. The program's resources and online network equip and encourage neighbors to work together, using their gifts and the gifts of their community, to pursue the common good of their neighborhood. One of its partner programs, Missouri Good Neighbor Week, was recognized as the Best Neighborhood Program of the Year during the 2023 Neighborhoods USA conference.

As a self-funded project of our Southern California District of the Lutheran Laymen's League, the **Lutheran Hour Ministries float** continues to reach millions as the only Christian float in the

annual Rose Parade. The 2026 float celebrated 75 years of Gospel proclamation through the parade with an entry titled “Bringing Christ to the Nations” that honored the diverse vocations through which God builds His Church. The float’s message was simple yet profound: every person has a place and a purpose in sharing Christ’s love, and together we can bring that hope to the world.

The Results of God’s Blessings

- By God’s grace, LHM’s programs and resources reach people around the world with the Gospel nearly 275 million times each week.
- Outreach through LHM’s global ministry programs has, by the power of the Holy Spirit, netted almost two 2 million responses and more than 405,000 individuals referred to churches and Christian communities this past year.
- Individuals were equipped to more effectively share their faith around 455,000 times last year.
- Around 390,000 constituents are currently engaged with our global ministry efforts through giving, volunteering, or using our resources.

Vision for the Future

With billions still waiting to hear the saving message of Jesus Christ, LHM continues to move forward under the following vision:

- Every person has the opportunity to hear the Gospel in an understandable way.
- Those seeking are connected to a healthy Christian community where they can grow in their faith.
- Every Christian is equipped to share the Gospel in word and deed.
- Engaged Christians advance this common mission as a global community.

We are called to act now! LHM stands ready to embrace this exciting future of global ministry as a strong, emergent, future-focused ministry that harnesses new opportunities, research, and resources to fulfill our mission of *Bringing Christ to the Nations®—and the Nations to the Church*. Together, we can work to grow the Body of Christ—one life at a time—all for the glory of God.

On behalf of all of us at LHM, thank you for your service. May God richly bless your work in the name and for the sake of Jesus!

Kurt S. Buchholz, *Global CEO*

R57

Lutheran Women’s Missionary League

The Lutheran Women’s Missionary League (LWML), also known as Lutheran Women in Mission, is an official auxiliary of the Synod. We joyfully proclaim Christ, support missions, and equip women to honor God by serving others.

The LWML exceeded its \$2,350,000 mission goal for the 2023–25 biennium, funding 31 mission grants, and set a new mission goal of \$2,622,270 to fully fund 33 mission grants in the 2025–27 biennium. Mission grants are also funded by the 40 LWML districts. Lutheran Women in Mission across the country supports mission organizations locally, regionally, and globally in prayer, with monetary donations, and in selfless volunteer service.

We continue to plan according to these primary focus areas:

- **Proclaiming Christ**
Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! (Psalm 96:3)
- **Supporting Missions**
And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.” (Mark 16:15)
- **Equipping Women**
Now may the God of peace ... equip you with everything good that you may do his will. (Heb. 13:20–21)
- **Serving Others**
As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another. (1 Peter 4:10a)

Lutheran Women in Mission has developed a vast selection of doctrinally reviewed resources and programs to support our women and church workers as they serve the Lord. New in 2025 were object Scripture lesson plans for intellectually challenged adults and a limited selection of American Sign Language–interpreted *Mustard Seed* devotions. Most resources are free to download and can be found on the LWML website at lwml.org. Additionally, the *Lutheran Woman’s Quarterly* continues to be a premier magazine with the purpose of “Knowing Christ and Making Him Known.”

The 41st Biennial LWML Convention was held in Omaha, Neb., June 26–29, 2025, with over 3,600 in attendance. Planning is underway for the 42nd Biennial LWML Convention in Oklahoma City, Okla., July 8–11, 2027. Pre-convention activities include training sessions and networking and service opportunities. During convention, we conduct the business of our organization, participate in Bible studies and Divine Services, and are inspired by mission speakers. The schedule is interspersed with singing, fellowship, special events, and laughter.

Lutheran Women in Mission serves, gives, prays, and meets in response to our Savior’s mercy and grace. We boldly share the Gospel message of Christ. “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!”

LWML will, by God’s grace, continue to be Christ-centered, proclaiming His love, supporting His mission, and equipping His children to serve joyfully.

Eden Keefe, *President*

R58

Task Force on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (2023 Res. 1-04A)

The 2019 Synod convention charged the Office of National Mission (ONM), among others, with the creation of resources that might “confess the truth boldly and minister compassionately both to those who experience sexual orientation and gender identity issues and those who care for them” (Res. 11-03A). As a result, the ONM formed the Created Male and Female Task Force (originally named Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Task Force) during the 2019–23 extended triennium. The 2023 Synod convention voted to continue the task force; its Res. 1-04A also directed it to expand its membership, to consider conducting field research in the area of sexual orientation and gender identity, and to “recommend and advocate for strategies and structural approaches to serve the Church better and address the challenges posed by contemporary

sexual ethics, recommend and coordinate implementation with Synod entities and organizations that will best deliver resources to the Church, and encourage congregations to raise awareness of media propaganda, cultural intimidation, and mounting pressures upon all people to affirm viewpoints contrary to clear teaching in Holy Scripture, responding to those influences by the study of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions (particularly the Small Catechism).” The resolution finally asked the task force to report on its work and make further recommendations to the 2026 convention.

The 2023–26 task force returned all regular members from the previous triennium, including the Rev. Christopher Esget (LCMS Fifth Vice-President, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Alexandria, Va.); Deaconess Dr. Tiffany Manor (ONM); Dr. Mark Rockenbach (faculty member, Concordia Seminary); the Rev. Kevin Robson (St. Louis, Mo.); Rev. Dr. Gifford Grobien (faculty member, Concordia Theological Seminary); the Rev. Kevin Karner (Immanuel Lutheran Church, Bristol, Conn.); the Rev. Jonathan Lange (St. Paul Lutheran Church, Kemmerer, Wyo., and Our Saviour Lutheran Church, Evanston, Wyo.); the Rev. Brian Barlow (Grace Lutheran Church, Banning, Calif.); and the Rev. Jared Melius (Mt. Zion Lutheran Church, Denver, Colo.). In addition, at the direction of 2023 Res. 1-04A, it added the following representatives of other Synod entities: the Rev. Roy S. Askins (Managing Director of Editorial, LCMS Communications); the Rev. Dr. Jacob Corzine (Vice-President of Publishing, Concordia Publishing House); the Rev. Dr. Richard J. Serina Jr. (Associate Executive Director, Commission on Theology and Church Relations [CTCR]); and the Rev. Dr. Scott Stiegemeier (Associate Professor of Theology, Concordia University Irvine). Pastor Esget served as chair, Dr. Serina served as vice-chair, and Pastor Karner served as secretary.

The task force met four times during the triennium: June 13–14, 2024; Aug. 21–22, 2024; Aug. 6–7, 2025; and Nov. 4–5, 2025. In order to accomplish its work more effectively, the members divided themselves into two separate working groups that also met virtually to complete various projects. To fulfill the mandate to conduct field research, a research-focused working group developed multiple digital surveys concerning attitudes toward sexual orientation and gender identity, which it shared with LCMS commissioned ministers and ordained ministers, as well as further qualitative study of select individuals and families. The nearly 1,500 respondents showed a remarkable unity of doctrine regarding human sexuality and gender identity issues. Furthermore, almost all survey respondents knew personal acquaintances or households in the school or church either struggling with sexual identity issues or family members struggling with them (see the attached appendix to this report for particular areas where church workers felt less than prepared to respond to such situations). To fulfill the mandate related to the production of resources, a content-focused working group assessed existing publications and digital materials, identified specific materials to commend to the Synod, and identified other materials that are still needed. It compiled a list of recommended resources with annotations for distribution by ONM. In addition to its task force-specific work, individual members collaborated with the ONM for Created Male and Female programming and resource creation, helped lead multiple retreats for families affected personally by homosexuality and transgenderism, offered educational opportunities at the LCMS Youth Gathering, and recorded videos and podcasts to address related topics. The ONM now hosts a website that will include recommendations of literature, links to online resources, and other pertinent information (*createdmaleandfemale.org*).

In concluding its work and submitting its report to the convention, the task force wishes to recommend several courses of action to the Synod and its entities to further address pressing issues of sexual orientation and gender identity and to help the members of our congregations understand those issues, respond to them, and care for and protect those struggling with them.

- **To continue and expand Created Male and Female retreats:** Members of the task force organized and led two retreats at Shepherd’s Canyon Retreat Center for families affected by these issues. It is the recommendation of the task force that the ONM continue these retreats, and, additionally, seek to recruit and train potential facilitators (specifically those with counseling experience, theological competence, and pastoral sensitivity) so that such retreats might be expanded in number and to different locations.
- **To cultivate lists of recommended counselors in every district:** District presidents advised the task force that more personnel was needed to care for those struggling with sexual orientation and gender identity confusion and temptations. A request for theologically trustworthy counselors was expressly stated. To that end, it is recommended that the Council of Presidents ask each district (possibly in conjunction with other contiguous districts) to develop lists of LCMS counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists who specialize in this area and whose understanding of marriage and sexuality reflects biblical positions. Relatedly, the task force also encourages member colleges of the Concordia University System to develop and promote counseling programs to help meet the growing demand for biblically competent, theologically trustworthy Lutheran counselors who specialize in sexual orientation and gender identity.
- **To encourage synodwide conversation:** The survey data referenced in this report conducted by LCMS Research Services shows remarkable unity on matters of sexual orientation and gender identity within the Synod. Those findings should receive more attention and foster discussion within the Synod, particularly related to matters of pastoral care. The task force encourages the districts and circuits of the Synod to study the findings in their conferences and meetings over the course of the next triennium. It encourages the use of the recommended resources available on the Created Male and Female website. It also encourages the Synod to make use of the resources commissioned below, upon completion and publication.
- **To commission resources:** The task force commends the website it has developed, which will include a list of recommended resources with annotations. More resources are needed, however. It is the task force’s opinion that those needs exist on multiple levels, and we recommend that the Synod commission or continue this work, which includes:
 - **Practical resources:** In light of the survey data, the task force identified a need for practical resources to support church workers in their vocations. It is recommended that the ONM in collaboration with the Office of Pastoral Education develop published resources and continuing education offerings to aid church workers in responding to individual situations pertaining to sexual orientation and gender identity, especially in pastoral care and student/parent relations. It is also recommended that the ONM in collaboration with the CTCR and LCMS Communications develop a lexicon that provides definitions for

terminology related to sexual orientation and gender identity, along with a guide for the recommended use of such terms in Synod publications.

- **Countercultural resources:** There is a need for culturally relevant literature that addresses these issues in plain language. The task force has begun this work by developing publishable resources that would target the temptations, peer pressure, and media subversiveness associated with homosexuality, gay marriage, transgenderism, pornography, and casual sex.
- **Apologetic resources:** There is a further need for resources that would specifically counter intellectual and theological arguments in support of these sexual errors. The task force has begun working with Dr. Armin Wenz, longtime professor in our German sister church, SELK, to revise his earlier pamphlet exposing the theological errors of homosexuality based upon the New Testament. The task force encourages the completion of this work. It also commends the CTCR's responses to *ReconcilingWorks* (and its document, "Lutheran Introduction to Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression"), an organization that has misrepresented Lutheran theological principles and biblical passages to support homosexuality. These are available at resources.lcms.org/reading-study/ctcr-library-individual-opinions-for-study-and-consideration.
- **Catechetical resources:** Finally, the task force believes there is also a need for persuasive, biblically based literature that might be used in congregational settings to help the Church better understand the theological reasons for the positions the Synod has taken on marriage and sexuality, as well as express pastoral concern for those who may be misled by opinions at odds with Scripture. To that end, the task force recommends that the CTCR, in consultation with the ONM and the seminaries, consider if and how studies might be produced on the family as a unit and the foundation for a healthy society (man and woman, husband and wife, parents and children, procreation and sexual chastity, vocation and the three estates), biblical anthropology, the vocation of singleness, same-sex attraction, and gender dysphoria.

Christopher S. Esget, *Chairman*

R59

Task Force on Electoral Circuit Parameters (2023 Res. 9-06A)

Introduction

2023 Res. 9-06A, "To Appoint Task Force to Evaluate Current Electoral Circuit Parameters," was adopted with the acknowledgment that "due to demographic changes over the past several convention cycles, it has become necessary for more and more visitation circuits either to request an exemption from the President of the Synod or to be combined in order to qualify to meet the parameters for an electoral circuit. The result has been a gradual decrease in the number of electoral circuits within the Synod and the number of delegates attending conventions." The charge to the task force was to "consider the parameters for the electoral circuits which se-

lect delegates to conventions of the Synod to determine if they are adequate as they are or should be changed" and "to clarify some of the ambiguity in the Bylaws regarding multi-congregation parishes which cross district or circuit lines." The task force was to include "the Secretary of [the] Synod, the Commission on Constitutional Matters [CCM], the Commission on Handbook [COH], and three district presidents and three district secretaries (from different districts) chosen by the Council of Presidents." Realizing the difficulty of accommodating so many individuals, the CCM and COH each designated three individuals to serve as their primary representatives to the task force. In preparation for the first meeting, the Secretary of the Synod drafted a white paper with the history of selecting delegates, the trend in delegate numbers to the convention and exceptions requested and granted, and a view toward the shape of the future based upon past and current demographics. The task force met nine times from October 2024 to December 2025 to review the charge by the 2023 Synod convention and to offer a report and to recommend to the Synod changes to the Bylaws to address the concerns raised.

Background

In its founding, the Synod defined its own polity, giving each congregation an equal vote (the equality of congregational votes is known as *Stimmengleichheit*). The office of pastor being a divine institution conferred through the congregation as the possessor of all ecclesiastical authority, the Synod determined to have each congregation receive two votes, one by its pastor and the other by its lay delegate. Before growth necessitated a change and the division into districts had been adopted, the Synod left it to the individual congregations to select a lay delegate to accompany the pastor and the matter was relatively simple. The franchise was given to the congregation, exercised by the pastor and a lay delegate to the Synod convention. The basic principles of this franchise gave congregations or parishes equal representation, no matter what their numerical size, and a "balance of power" was maintained by equal representation of clergy and lay. The Synod is conceived as an aid and, indeed, an extension of such congregations or parishes without any other constituencies or units.

When it was no longer feasible because of size, and after the division of the Synod into districts in 1854, beginning with the 1872 convention, the congregations and parishes of the Synod were represented by a circuit delegation consisting of one pastor and one lay vote at the Synod convention. The Constitution did not change and was applicable to both district and Synod conventions. The practice for conventions of the Synod was that each pair of delegates, one a pastor of a *Pfarrgemeinde* (that is, the collection of congregations regularly served by one pastor: 2019 Res. 9-12, Bylaw 2.5.5) and the other a layman, now came from a group of congregations (circuit). Since the 1969 convention of the Synod (due to 1967 Res. 5-18), electoral circuits have consisted of "either of one or two adjacent visitation circuits, as shall be determined by the district board of directors on the basis of the following requirements: each pair of delegates shall represent from 7 to 20 member congregations, involving an aggregate confirmed membership ranging from 1,500 to 10,000" (Bylaw 3.1.2 [a]). "Exceptions to these requirements may be made only by the President of the Synod upon request of a district board of directors" (Bylaw 3.1.2 [b]).

The visitation circuits themselves are established by districts (that is, by district conventions, unless a district convention has explicitly authorized a district board of directors to carry this out) "according to geographical criteria." There is technically no lower

or upper limit (other than practical ones) on the size of a visitation circuit, other than that one should ordinarily not exceed the upper bound for the related electoral circuit, either in number of confirmed members or of member congregations, and that it should ordinarily take no more than two adjacent visitation circuits to form one electoral circuit. Practical limits, lower and upper, may be inferred from the functions—important in their own right—described in Bylaw chapter 5.

The 1973 report of the Committee on Organization to the convention dealt with questions raised about the voting rights with some consideration given to a more equitable division of delegates among districts, allowing large congregations more than one lay vote, giving a second and third lay vote to the other congregations of a multi-congregation parish, and allowing advisory pastors and campus pastors, too, to vote. The committee rejected all as incompatible with the essential principles of voting rights in the Constitution: that the Synod consists of equal congregations or parishes, no matter the size, that possess the franchise, and that there be a balance of lay and clergy vote (1973 *Workbook*, 208–9).

Another task force had been established by the 1975 Anaheim convention that was to study and propose revisions to the Constitution, Bylaws, and organization of the Synod. Several overtures to change the franchise within the Synod were submitted to the 1977 Synod convention. Two new issues were added to the charge given to the task force formed in 1975: one was to consider the way delegates were elected, and the other was to consider allowing advisory delegates to vote, with a proportional increase in the lay votes (1979 *Workbook*, 59–63). The task force in 1979 proposed significant wording changes to several articles of the Constitution, and in addition proposed changes to the eligibility of the delegates who would cast the two votes of the congregation or parish. One vote was to be cast by a pastor or teacher in full-time office in the congregation, and the other by a duly elected lay delegate of the congregation (1979 *Proceedings*, 111, 137).

At the 1981 convention, the President of the Synod, in his address to the convention, recommended the proposed changes both to allow teachers to vote (*Proceedings*, 64) and Res. 2-14, which proposed that the delegates of an electoral circuit be a pastor and anyone else from a congregation of that circuit. Preferably, it should be a layman, but any teacher or ordained minister who was not the pastor of one of the congregations would also be eligible. After lengthy discussion, this was referred to a committee to be appointed by the President of the Synod for a report to the 1983 Synod convention (1981 *Proceedings*, 141).

In its report to the 1983 convention, the task force formed by the 1981 convention gave a report detailing the length of its research and the various possibilities that have been suggested with the advantages and disadvantages of each. In the end, it concluded that the disadvantages of any of the suggested ways to change the exercise of the franchise in the Synod outweighed what would be gained by such a change. It termed the current exercise of franchise a long-established and well-working procedure (1983 *Workbook*, 213–15). The floor committee's Res. 5-23 resolved that no change be made in the Constitution or Bylaws pertaining to the franchise. However, no action was taken, and it was apparently not brought to the floor of the convention (1983 *Proceedings*, 190). Another overture submitted to the 1995 convention of the Synod was declined by inclusion in "Omnibus B Resolution," declining to act on it and simply referencing the past action of the Synod, specifically that of 1983 (1995 *Proceedings*, 160).

By 1998 the decline in the number of congregations and parishes and the number of communicant members had resulted in an increasing number of exceptions requested of the Synod President. The number of exceptions has ranged from 3 percent and 9 percent, in 1998 and 2001, respectively, to 14 percent in 2004, hovering between 10–12 percent since, apart from a low 7 percent exception ratio in 2016. Absent a bylaw to define on what basis or criteria exceptions may be granted, the decision has been largely subjective and not without its own controversy at times. By the time of the creation of this task force, predictions based on the trends observed in the decline in both congregations and communicants expected larger and larger numbers of requests for exceptions from visitation circuits that did not meet the current bylaw criteria as electoral circuits. Assuming a uniform 8 percent triennial drop in confirmed membership, this would have anticipated that 22 percent of 2023 electoral circuits could require exceptions for the 2026 convention—a number that could approach 30–40 percent in the 2029 and 2032 conventions.

Work of the Task Force

The task force commissioned several surveys to determine the health and viability of the current visitation circuits and the opinions of pastors, circuit visitors, district presidents, and Praesidium on the size and effectiveness of Synod conventions in view of their purpose "to afford an opportunity for worship, nurture, inspiration, fellowship, and the communication of vital information." The general conclusions from these surveys both set the direction for the work of the task force and undergirded the recommendations made in this report.

The surveys revealed a profound desire on the part of all to strengthen visitation circuits and the functioning of winkles (circuit pastors' conferences) and indicated that the optimum number needed was five actively serving pastors with the emeritus pastors who reside in the circuit. When the numbers of active participants dropped below that number, it directly impacted upon the health and effectiveness of the visitation circuit. With respect to the electoral circuits, the surveys needed to be flexible enough to provide adequate and fair representation at the Synod convention and yet maintain a viable connection to the visitation circuit wherever possible. The discussions and proposed changes in the Bylaws recommended by the task force flowed from the concrete data of the white paper, the opinions of 1,682 parish pastors, 772 candidate or emeritus pastors, 393 circuit visitors, and 27 district presidents, and the combined experience of the members of the task force across the regions of the Synod and within the districts and circuits where they reside.

Even early on, the task force felt the urgency of the task and the consequences of making no change to the status quo. Although this is not the recommendation of the task force, the failure to make any changes would create an untenable situation due to the rise in the number of exceptions for electoral circuits from triennium to triennium and the increasing difficulties in forming circuits within the current parameters of the Bylaws. An increasing number of electoral circuits for the 2026 Synod convention and beyond are approaching the minimum numbers of communicant members required to constitute an electoral circuit (1,500) and others are very close to the maximum number of congregations allowed (20). Details of these trends are outlined in the white paper along with projections for the situation three to six years beyond the 2026 Synod convention.

Already the districts have realized and begun to address the situation by realigning circuits at their 2025 conventions and by work-

ing to minimize their number of exceptions. With this realignment and the reduction in exceptions requested and because of the work of the Synod President to reduce the number of exceptions granted, only 7 percent of the 2026 Synod convention electoral circuits required and were granted exceptions, instead of the 22 percent expected if the districts had done no realignment. This, combined with a small but significant slowdown from the projected 8–9 percent triennial drop in confirmed membership to closer to 7 percent, has relieved the situation for the moment, but this will not remove the necessity for the Synod to address this at the 2026 convention to prevent even greater challenges down the road. It should be noted here that exceptions are not only for those circuits that fall below the 1,500 communicant minimum but are also granted for those which must exceed the upper limit of 20 congregations in order to reach the 1,500-communicant limit.

The task force gave consideration to a number of options. The first set of those options was to deal with the matter of exceptions. In the past, districts have typically requested exceptions for electoral circuits which fall below the 7 to 20 congregations and 1,500 to 10,000 communicant member parameters of the Bylaws instead of redrawing circuit boundaries so that visitation circuits meet the requirements of the Bylaws to be electoral circuits. As the Synod decreases in both the aggregate communicant membership and the number of congregations due to closure or consolidation, the pressure upon the districts will continue to be felt going forward. Some districts may find it more difficult to eliminate the request for exceptions because of geographical constraints (the “saltwater” and non-geographical districts in particular). Because of this, the task force considered the various reasons for exceptions and a means to allow continued exceptions but under tighter parameters spelled out under bylaw requirements. If no exceptions were permitted, the Synod would then place the full responsibility squarely on district boards of directors to assure compliant-sized electoral circuits.

Second, the task force considered changing the current upper limits for electoral circuits, currently 20 congregations or 10,000 confirmed members. It was noted that the upper limit of confirmed membership number is never reached, but removing the upper limit on numbers of congregations (or parishes, as will be addressed later) could be helpful for some districts in forming electoral circuits. With this, the task force considered another limit placed on the formation of visitation circuits into an electoral circuit. Currently, the bylaw allows for two adjacent visitation circuits to be formed into an electoral circuit; anything else requires the request for an exception. Removing this limit of two visitation circuits would allow more flexibility for districts both to create visitation circuits with ideal sizes for ministry needs while allowing them greater flexibility when they must be combined to form an electoral circuit.

Along with this was the consideration of removing the requirement that visitation circuits combining into an electoral circuit be “adjacent” and allowing non-adjacent visitation circuits to combine into an electoral circuit. The rationale for this was that visitation circuits which could be ideal sizes to combine into an electoral circuit are not always adjacent to each other and that changes in communication technology would facilitate non-adjacent visitation circuits to meet. However, it was determined that such a change would affect only a few districts and circuits and, while helpful, would not contribute greatly to the solution of the problem. Furthermore, it was feared that such non-adjacent permission might create its own problems similar to the gerrymandering seen in the political sphere and that cobbling together a patchwork of visitation circuits

which do not share knowledge of each other and which would need to elect delegates who are unknown to each other would create its own set of problems.

The task force discussed simply changing the composition of circuits from “congregations” to “parishes” and thus acknowledging the growing number of multi-congregation parishes being formed due to declining size and ability to support a full-time pastor. This was also seen as a means to encourage circuits to have a viable number of actively serving pastors to support the health and vitality of those visitation circuits. Without a “critical mass” number of pastors within visitation circuits, the circuit will find it difficult to network together “for [the] mutual care, support, advice, study, ecclesiastical encouragement, service, coordination, resources, and counsel” for the sake of both congregation and Synod. If a circuit is composed of several congregations in dual or tri-parishes, then the functioning of the circuit and the pastoral winkles can be adversely affected. It was noted from the surveys that winkles suffer if fewer than five pastors are present. Having a greater number of pastors is beneficial to the health and vitality of both congregation and clergy. Requiring six parishes in a circuit rather than seven congregations would increase the likelihood of having six or more pastors present at winkles. Obviously, this proposal would have a greater effect on districts with a higher number of multi-congregation parishes; however, a change from seven congregations to six parishes would help both rural and urban circuits ensure adequate visitation needs as well as balanced electoral representation for the Synod convention.

Another option considered by the task force, a so-called “relieved model,” would attempt to provide more flexibility in the size of circuits to allow for circuits with larger congregations in urban and suburban areas (and therefore well above the confirmed member limit) to have fewer congregations, while providing for circuits with many small congregations in sparsely populated regions to qualify with somewhat fewer members, through the use of a mathematical equation. While the current thresholds of congregations and communicant members do not take into account the difference between larger and smaller congregations, this could potentially account for population and geographic differences. Although this could provide some stability from triennium to triennium and might relieve the pressure on districts to realign circuits, the formula is complex and presents its own difficulty to circuits and districts and would require much more explanation and understanding to be useful. For these reasons, the task force decided not to recommend this option at this time.

Finally, the task force considered completely separating visitation from electoral circuits so that the districts were not in any way bound by the boundaries of the visitation circuits in creating electoral circuits which would meet the current criteria. Districts could conceivably draw different maps for each purpose. Visitation circuits would continue to have the purpose of ecclesiastical visitation and pastors’ winkles while electoral circuits could be drawn differently for the limited purposes of election of delegates to the Synod convention. In this way, the Synod could decide to reduce the overall size of the convention both for cost savings and in order to facilitate more deliberation among fewer delegates. The task force considered how it might work to simply apportion the number of delegates to each district based upon a formula of number of congregations and communicant membership and leave it to the districts to draw the electoral map based on those numbers, perhaps even without geographical constraints. The task force believed that such an option represented a fairly radical change both in represen-

tation and structure for the Synod and that such was well beyond the Synod's charge to the task force.

Even a more modest version of this option retaining the necessity for geographic lines in the electoral circuit and expecting circuit forums could still meet in person was not without its own set of problems. On one hand, the electoral circuits could be more easily adjusted to the changing needs or dynamic situations of the Synod while preserving its congregations from disruption in the normal work of the visitation circuit. Though visitation circuits would be formed with the sole focus on visitation and the mission of God without being concerned about meeting specific numerical membership requirements, the separation of the electoral circuit from the visitation circuit was not believed to be helpful overall. The Synod has for the entirety of its existence seen a connection between the two and this might lead to weakened ties between the individual congregations or parishes of the circuit and the overall work in common through the Synod. Because of the confusion this might occasion, the task force did not give more serious consideration to this change.

Recommendations

Having considered all the foregoing, the task force makes the following proposal to the 2026 Synod convention:

1. Change the Bylaw 3.1.2 standard from *congregations* to *parishes*;
2. Remove from the bylaw entirely the possibility of exceptions (except that no district shall be left without any circuit); and
3. Remove from the bylaw the upper limits for the number of congregations, confirmed members, and how many visitation circuits may combine into an electoral circuit.

The task force believes that this realignment would more closely connect the number of delegates to the actual size of the Synod and the number of its parishes. Therefore, the task force recommends the following bylaw changes to the Synod in convention:

Proposed Action

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.1.2 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Voting Delegates

3.1.2 Electoral circuits shall meet as required by the Bylaws of the Synod to elect circuit voting delegates to the Synod's national conventions.

- (a) An electoral circuit shall consist ~~either of one or two of one or more~~ adjacent visitation circuits, as shall be determined by the district board of directors on the basis of the following requirements: each pair of delegates shall represent ~~from 7 to 20 member congregations~~ at least six (6) parishes (as defined in Bylaw 2.5.5; each congregation of a parish divided across circuit lines counts, for this purpose, as an equal fraction of the parish, i.e., 1/2 for each congregation in a parish of two congregations; 1/3 for each in a parish of three; etc.), involving an aggregate confirmed membership ~~ranging from of at least 1,500 to 10,000~~.
- (b) Exceptions to these requirements may be made only by the President of the Synod upon request of a district board of directors. No exceptions shall be granted, except that each

district shall have at least one electoral circuit.

- (c) Voting delegates shall consist of one pastor and one layperson from each electoral circuit. These pastoral and lay delegates and their alternates shall be elected according to the regulations of the Synod (Bylaw 3.1.2.1).
- (d) The lay delegate shall serve throughout the triennium following the convention as an advisory member of the forum or fora of the visitation circuit(s) comprising the electoral circuit forum.

Addendum

While 2023 Res. 9-06A did not assign to the task force the topic of nonvoting advisory delegates, the task force did review the work of the task force to the 2023 convention of the Synod and its work with respect to advisory delegates and giving the voting franchise to advisory delegates. Given the projection of retirements and the increasing numbers of pastors emeriti in particular, the task force did discuss how this would impact the overall potential size of the convention. Given the track record of most districts electing fewer than the current Bylaws allow for advisory commissioned and ordained delegates to the Synod convention, the task force did not believe that this merited an addition to the charge given to the task force by the 2023 convention and decided to leave this topic to another group for study and recommendation, should the convention so choose. The task force does point out the potential, should districts exercise it and advisory members desire, to have the number of advisory delegates increase in proportion to the number of voting delegates.

Larry A. Peters, *Chairman*

1 The heights of solid bars in Figure 1 (excluding the slashed portion at the top, which reflects visitation circuits
2 “combined away” into others to reach electoral circuit requirements) represent the number of electoral
3 circuits formed for each convention, the green (lower) bar, those meeting the requirements and the red,
4 yellow, and orange bars representing exceptions granted by the Office of the President to those that did not.
5 Throughout the period of Figure 1, in comparison to the circumstances of 1969, when the present system was
6 put into use, the Synod has had, on average, fewer and increasingly fewer confirmed members in an
7 “average” electoral circuit than in 1969; it has also had fewer congregations per electoral circuit, although
8 this ratio is increasing. In 1969, there were 11.5 member congregations and 3,928 confirmed members, on
9 average, per electoral circuit; in 1998, there were 10 and 3,247; in 2023, 10.9 and 2,622.⁵
10 Comparing lines to bars in Figure 1, the voting size of the convention⁶ has only recently begun to trend
11 moderately downward in response to slight decline in the number of member congregations (5,775 in 2023
12 vs. 6,033 in 2004) and significant decline in confirmed membership (1.39M in 2023 vs. 1.95M in 1998). There
13 were 532 electoral circuits in 2023 compared to a 2004 high of 628, a decline of 15% in a period that saw a
14 27% decline in confirmed membership and a 5% decline in the number of member congregations.
15 There is a stable, regional non-uniformity. Figure 2 shows, for each region,⁷ in 2010 and 2023, the proportion
16 of confirmed members and congregations, plus the number of exceptions, all of which contribute to the
17 number of electoral circuits, and the number of non-SMP parish pastors.⁸ Exceptions tend to be granted
18 disproportionately in the ESE and WSW regions, as well as, to a lesser extent, the non-geographical districts,
19 offsetting a relatively lower number of confirmed members in those regions and a commensurate challenge
20 forming compliant electoral circuits—a long-term pattern, as the comparative data from 2010 indicate.⁹

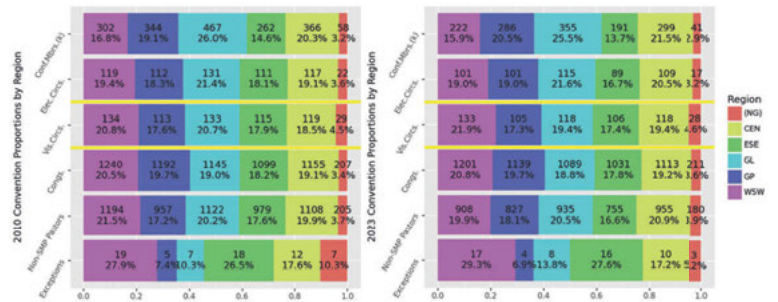


Figure 2: Proportion of Electoral and Visitation Circuits, Congregations, Confirmed Members, Non-SMP Pastors, and Exceptions per Region, 2010 and 2023

⁵ Such averages are useful for general comparison over time of representation rates but obscure wide variance among actual circuits.
⁶ In 2023, the 532 electoral circuits were ultimately represented by 521 pastoral and 502 lay voting delegates plus 453 advisory and other registered attendees, for a total of 1,476, at the lower end of a range that has varied between 1,459 and 1,633 since 1989. In that period, the number of voting delegates (representing circuits) grew gradually from 1,139 in 1989 to 1,241 in 2004 and has declined since, the number of advisory and other registrants increasing significantly from 363 in 1989.
⁷ While the designated regions have no formal connection to circuit alignment or convention representation, they do provide familiar and reasonable “clusters” for analytical purposes. For the purposes of this study, the congregations of nongeographical districts (English and SELC) are removed from their usual regions and treated separately as one non-geographic region (“NG”).
⁸ These are eligible to serve as pastoral delegates to the Synod convention.
⁹ According to Bylaw 3.12.1, regions “shall take into consideration geographical and number of congregations information in the interest of fair representation.” They have, in addition, been formed in an attempt not to exacerbate imbalance of confirmed

2. Characterization of Current Visitation and Electoral Circuits

1 The Office of the President approved 532 electoral circuits for representation at the 2023 convention. Of
2 these, 413 were visitation circuits that satisfied the minimum requirements in their own right, 59 were pairs
3 of adjacent visitation circuits (7 of which had more than 20 congregations), and 3 were *triples* of adjacent
4 visitation circuits (2 of which had more than 20 congregations). 57 (11%) were under requirements and
5 received exceptions: 7, having fewer than 7 congregations; 49, having fewer than 1,500 members (10 of which
6 were pairs of adjacent visitation circuits); and 1, having both fewer than 7 congregations and fewer than
7 1,500 members. Of the 57 “underage” exceptions, as noted above, 17 were granted to geographical districts
8 in the WSW region and 16 in the ESE region.
9

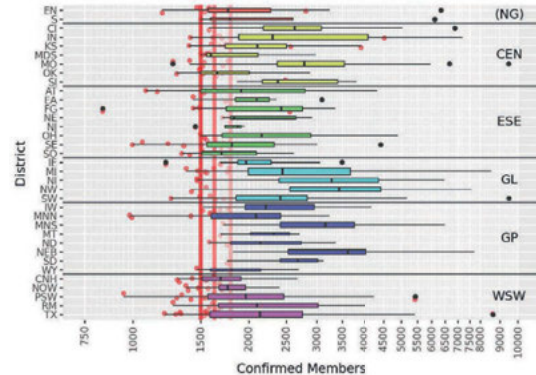


Figure 3: Distribution, Confirmed Membership of 2023 Electoral Circuits (SY2021 data; thresholds at 1,500, 1,630, and 1,792; see text)

10 Figure 3 shows, on a logarithmic axis, boxplot¹⁰ histograms indicating the distribution of the confirmed
11 member sizes of the circuits in each district (the width of each box reflecting the number of circuits in each
12 district). Data are from SY2021, used to apportion circuits for the 2023 convention. The dark red line indicates
13 the lower bound of 1,500 confirmed members; the other two red lines are at 1,630 members and 1,792
14 members, the confirmed member sizes (all other things being equal) a circuit would need to have in 2023 to
15 meet the requirement of 1,500 members, after a typical 8% triennial decline, in 2026 and, after an additional
16 9% triennial decline, in 2029, respectively. The darker red dots represent electoral circuits that received
17 exceptions in 2023; the lighter red dots, those that may require exceptions or *realignment or combination* of
18 adjacent visitation circuits, all other things being equal, for 2026 (52 circuits) and 2029 (49 circuits). With
19 these threshold lines moving well into the “box” of the two center quartiles (and even to or beyond the
20 median for districts like EN, SELC, MDS, OK, NE, SE, SO, WY, CNH and NOW), and with the total number of
21 exceptions required to maintain the present apportionment of circuits nearly doubling and tripling the

membership. It is important to note that electoral circuit metrics explicitly take into account confirmed membership. Higher historical rates of confirmed membership decline in the ESE and WSW regions may have contributed to these regions’ heightened exception rate; geographical challenges and lower concentrations of LCMS presence may also play a role.
¹⁰ A boxplot represents a “distribution curve” (ideally, the familiar “bell curve”) coming up out of the page. The colored box represents the middle quartiles (half the data points) with the divider at the median. The “whiskers” protruding from the box represent the outer quartiles, but to a distance no more than 1.5 times the interquartile distance. Outliers beyond the whiskers are marked as black dots.

number of exceptions that would be required in the next two conventions, it is clear that “doing nothing” is not a realistic option.¹¹

Figure 4 adds another dimension of the 2023 convention circuit apportionment, indicating on the vertical axis the number of congregations involved in each electoral circuit as well as (by the color of the dot) the number of visitation circuits included in each combined electoral circuit. Confirmed member thresholds are indicated as in Figure 3. The figure also distinguishes by color those electoral circuits formed of two or three adjacent visitation circuits. Evident from the figure are the following:

- Exceptions based on confirmed membership are today numerous in the WSW and ESE regions; many electoral circuits in all regions, however, are likely within one or two conventions of falling, all things being equal, below that bar. With the greatest concentration of “optimized” circuits near 1,500 confirmed members and also the greatest historic confirmed member loss rates, the WSW and ESE regions will continue to prove challenging for continuing apportionment of electoral circuits at near-present levels.
- A great number of circuits are also right at the minimum of 7 congregations, across all regions, and are within one closure or merger of falling below that requirement (future closures are *not modeled*).
- There are presently many adjacent visitation circuits combined for purposes of representation in the ESE and WSW regions and nongeographic districts (orange and red dots), but fewer elsewhere.
- In the WSW region, many of these combined circuits nonetheless require, or likely soon will, exceptions for confirmed membership. A number of combined circuits, largely in the WSW, ESE, and GP regions, have more than 20 congregations; as further combinations occur, perhaps to triple-circuit combinations rather than double, this can be expected to increase, perhaps markedly. This may have a negative impact on the many far-flung congregations meeting together to determine their representation or discuss. Electronic meeting is possible but has its own significant challenges.

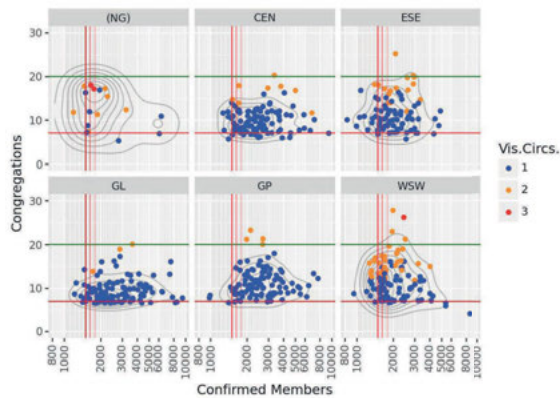


Figure 4: Confirmed Membership and Congregations of 2023 Electoral Circuits by Region (SY2021 data; confirmed membership thresholds at 1,500, 1,630, and 1,792; see explanation of Figure 3 in text), Indicating Combined Circuits

¹¹ Of course, one realistic option for “doing something” may be leaving requirements as they are, requiring districts to realign circuits on the understanding that the Office of the President will likely control the number of exceptions granted to a reasonable and customary level around 10%. It is important to note that any change recommended by the task force would impact, at the earliest, the 2029 convention.

- A number of circuits with very large congregations have been granted exceptions on the number of congregations required, along with some more moderately-sized circuits (these fall below the horizontal red bar).

3. Characterization of Confirmed Membership Change

The rate of confirmed membership change over time is a factor in the “stability” of circuit designations, electoral circuit combinations, and the rate of requests for exceptions. Electoral circuit qualification is based on the statistics gathered in the year prior to the convention (i.e., the 2023 convention relied on SY2021 confirmed membership data as of December 31, 2021, gathered by roughly June 2022; the 2026 convention will rely on SY2024 data). District alignment of visitation regions, usually done at district conventions in the year prior to the Synod convention, generally relies on the previous statistical year (SY), so districts have to predict circuits likely to drop below requirements in the intervening year of data reporting.

Through the period 1994–2022, the confirmed membership of the Synod has been decreasing at an accelerating rate, with some regional variation. Figure 5 shows the *triennial* rate of confirmed membership change throughout the period for each district and region (these data are presented to show the trend using LOESS, or “locally-weighted scatterplot smoothing”). The confirmed membership of the Synod as a whole was experiencing 2% triennial loss in 2003, 4% in 2011, 6% in 2016, and approaching 8% in 2023. In 2022, the WSW Region was experiencing 9.5% triennial loss (with CNH and NOW districts reporting experiencing 12–13% *reported* triennial losses, despite having some of the greatest reporting lags in the Synod, which may mean the actual *reportable* losses at present may be significantly higher). ESE, CEN, and GL regions are near the Synod average, while the GP Region and non-geographic districts are experiencing 5–6% triennial losses. This means an electoral circuit of 1,630 confirmed members at the time of one convention’s electoral circuit qualification will likely have, all other things being equal, 1,500 for the next, and 1,380 for the one thereafter. (In the WSW region, again, all other things being equal, a circuit would need 1,657 members at one convention to have 1,500 for the next; and in the GP Region, 1,590.)

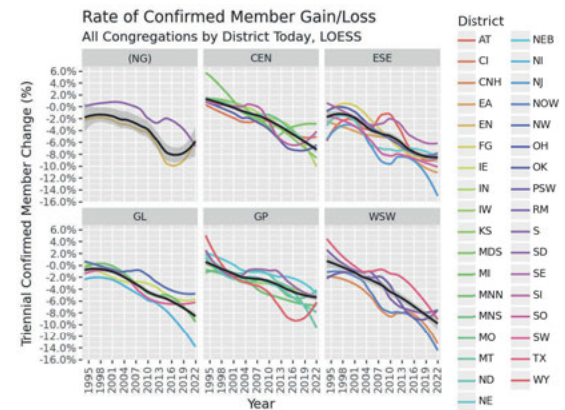


Figure 5: Triennial Rate of Reported Confirmed Member Gain / Loss by District / Region, 1994–2022

Of course, these changes are not uniform within a given district. Figure 6 shows the distribution (in box-plot form, with the colored portion of the box reflecting the two inner quartiles, or half the circuits) of recent rates of confirmed membership change across the districts—a reminder that “all other things” are rarely equal. A considerable number of circuits reported confirmed membership losses, over the past three years, of more

than 10%, with some districts having half or more of their circuits in this range.¹² At the same time, there are districts reporting as many as a quarter of their circuits having net gains in the past three years. In this sense, the vertical lines indicated in Figures 3 and 4 to show threats to circuit stability may here and there—and more frequently in the WSW region—underestimate the challenge at hand, or, in fewer places, overstate it.

Suggested by these data is a fundamental philosophical question for the task force: To what extent should the convention shrink to reflect this decline (see also Figure 1)? On the one hand, a proportional “shrinkage” seems rational; on the other, it would result in “loss of representational resolution” in the areas of the Synod where our congregations and ministerium and visitation are stretched the thinnest, areas in which congregations face unique challenges and areas that may in some ways be the “tip of the spear” for all.

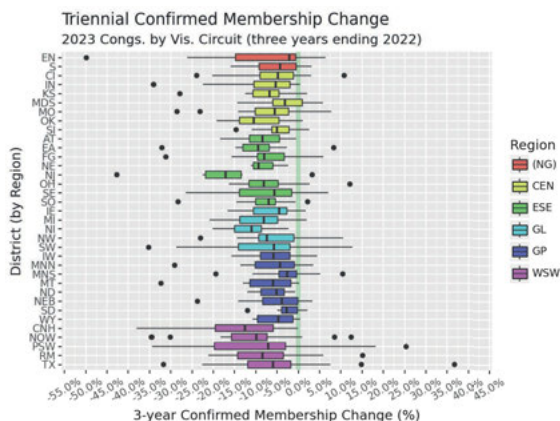


Figure 6: Distribution of Visitation-Circuit-Level Reported Confirmed Membership Change, 2019–22

4. Selected Changes Proposed at the Level of Synod Convention Overtures for the Formation of Circuits, Visitation and Electoral

In addition to the *adopted* changes detailed in the rationale to 2023 Res. 9-06A, there have been over the years any number of overtures and resolutions proposing changes to the requirements and/or process for the formation of visitation and/or electoral circuits. These are briefly summarized as follows, going back only to 2010, the most recent restructuring of the Synod (interestingly, the part of the restructuring that would have changed how Synod convention delegates were elected received another three years of discussion and then was roundly defeated, as 2013 Res. 7-07A, by a vote of 62 in favor and 830 opposed).

More recent proposals have been less (conceptually, if not numerically) radical, suggesting dropping the confirmed membership requirement to 1,250, 1,000, or 750, and/or revising the congregation requirement to 5. Such proposals would render presently exceptional circuits unexceptional and give some degree of buffer of stability into the future. They would, however, if adopted alone, also introduce the possibility of at least some districts “optimizing” circuits for the new limits, trading stability for representational share. To the extent this is done, representational shift will occur and the sought-after stability would not be achieved.

¹² A study on the regional level of circuits segmented by starting confirmed membership “size” indicated no significant correlation between that size and the circuit’s rate of change in the years 2019–22.

Interesting “tweaks” have included allowing a lower congregational bound for circuits with more than 4,000 confirmed members or requiring a certain number of installed pastors. These would tend to balance the possibility of realignment to much smaller circuits with fewer members, either by allowing greater representation for the largest congregations or by limiting the division of new circuits.

Long-term (at least three triennia) stability of representation has been proposed a number of times as a desirable feature (perhaps by allowing automatic exceptions for a certain number of conventions for a once-valid circuit falling below bounds) but never adopted.

Table 1: Overview of Convention Overtures and Resolutions regarding Synod Convention Representation, 2010–23

2023	Ov. 9-01, 13	To appoint task force to study (adopted as 2023 Res. 9-06A)
	Ov. 9-12	To lower confirmed membership requirement proportional to change in membership, in consultation with Council of Presidents
	Ov. 9-14	To lower confirmed membership requirement to 1,250
	Ov. 9-15	To lower congregation requirement to 5 and confirmed membership to 1,000, with the districts setting the circuits at the beginning of a decade and the circuits remaining valid despite changes
	Ov. 9-16	To lower congregation requirement to 5 and confirmed membership requirement to 750
	Ov. 9-17	To eliminate distinction between visitation and electoral circuits and eliminate confirmed membership requirement
2019	Ov. 9-06, 07	To allow district board of directors to shift congregations to meet electoral circuit requirements, but to create no more electoral than visitation circuits
	Ov. 9-08	To allow each district president to grant exception to no more than 20% of his district’s electoral circuits
	Ov. 9-09	To eliminate distinction between visitation and electoral circuits and eliminate confirmed membership requirement, requiring at least 7 pastors (excluding the effect of pastoral vacancies).
	Ov. 9-11	See 2013 Ov. 7-15
2016	Ov. 11-38	To allow district boards of directors to align according to existing criteria but with alignments remaining valid for 9 years.
	Ov. 11-39	To allow district boards of directors establish electoral circuits independent of visitation circuit boundaries, with a minimum of 7 congregations and 1,500 members, except that if 5,000 confirmed members are represented, only 4 congregations are required.
2013	Ov. 7-03	To allow visitation circuits to be distinct from electoral circuits
	Ov. 7-08	To study definition of electoral circuits
	Ov. 7-14, 24 Res. 7-07A (declined)	To elect Synod convention delegates by electoral circuit caucus at district conventions, with a total number of delegates equal to 10% of the number of Synod congregations (this would be c. 580). Ordained/lay delegate pairs would be allotted to districts proportional to the average of their proportions of member congregations and confirmed members. Delegates would need to be present at the district convention; ordained would not be required to be parish pastors. (Ov. 7-24 from COH in response to referral of 2010 Res. 8-05B.)

2010	Ov. 8-28–29, 31–32	To reject Blue Ribbon Task Force on Synod Structure and Governance (BRTFSSG) proposal to elect Synod convention delegates at district conventions
	Ov. 8-43	To return to direct representation of each pastor and congregation at the Synod convention
	Ov. 8-56	To remove distinction of electoral and visitation circuits. Require 10–15 congregations in geographic proximity, of compact shape. Large congregations of over 2,000 baptized members are to be dispersed to the extent possible, starting with metropolitan areas. Allow geographical exceptions for circuits with one-way drive time to a central location of more than three hours.
	BRTFSSG	To fix convention voting delegate count at 650, 325 ordained/commissioned ministers and 325 lay. These would be sent by each district in a number proportional to the average of its proportions of member congregations and confirmed members. Election would be by circuit caucus at the district convention, the electoral circuits being formed early in the convention.
	Ov. 8-44 Res. 8-05B (referred)	This resulted in 2010 Res 8-05B, which was referred to the Commission on Handbook (COH). (Ov. 8-44 was similar but with delegates being pastor/lay.)

While even a resounding rejection of a resolution does not necessarily mean that the delegates shared a common reason for rejecting it, it does seem likely that the resounding defeat of 2013 Res. 7-07A—albeit more than a decade ago—suggests that, despite its challenges, the Synod’s congregations remain quite attached to the present system, in which visitation circuits gather individually or with neighbors to elect directly their member congregations’ pastoral and lay representation at the Synod convention.

While various adjustments of parameters have been proposed, this has been done without a great deal of insight into how these adjustments could not only arrest the decline of but potentially dramatically increase the size of the Synod convention, or have the potential to encourage districts so inclined to sacrifice stability or visitation circuit viability for representational share. This is the topic of this document’s next section.

5. Analysis of Potential Change due to Variation of Electoral Circuit Formation Parameters

What would be the potential impact, in terms of convention size and possible changes to representational balance, of changing the basic minimum parameters for electoral circuit qualification (7 member congregations and 1,500 confirmed members)? The answer to this question is not simply mathematical but also geographical, and the unique features of the districts (principally, distribution of congregation membership count and geographic dispersal of congregations with large membership) make it impossible to adopt a generally useful “rule of thumb.” Recalling Figure 1, the number of congregations in the Synod suggest the possibility of 825 electoral circuits (for the 2023 convention) and the number of confirmed members, 930, but the actual number of electoral circuits, 532, is 64% of the one (districts ranging from 43% to 89%) and 57% of the other (districts ranging from 40% to 100%).

A set of experiments was conducted using a *heuristic* Max-P Regionalization algorithm¹³ adapted to make use of multiple spatially extensive regional attribute thresholds (in this case, principally, number of congregations and collective confirmed membership, but also in some instances the number of *parishes* or non-SMP pastors installed). Max-P attempts to cluster a set of geographic areas into the *maximum number* of “homogeneous” regions such that each cluster satisfies such thresholds. In this instance, the measure of

¹³ <https://pysal.org/spopt/notebooks/maxp.html>. 999 iterations were used, with 10 rounds of simulated annealing on each viable partition. The code was adapted by the author to allow multiple dimensions of spatially extensive thresholds and for generalized threshold functions (i.e., not requiring simply x congregations and y confirmed members but satisfaction of a function of x and y) and corrected to avoid a deadlock condition.

“homogeneity” is strictly geographical; the latitude and longitude were used as the homogeneity variables to keep the circuits formed as geographically compact as possible.

These experiments have important limitations. Being a stochastic, heuristic algorithm, there is no *guarantee* that the algorithm achieves the maximum number of electoral circuits possible. It is theoretically possible that it *understates* to some (likely small) degree the number of electoral circuits possible. It also assumes *no exceptions*, which we know are presently occurring at a rate of about 11%. More importantly, it may ignore important geographical features (i.e., mountain ranges, bodies of water, non-Euclidean travel times) or the many other factors that rightly go into the selection of visitation and electoral circuits. It is likely that, because of all these factors, the algorithm likely *somewhat overstates* the number of reasonably achievable circuits.

Nonetheless, noting that 15% of 2023 circuits are already exceptional relative to SY2022 data,¹⁴ the number of circuits formed by Max-P on SY2022 data for a given district varied from 96% to 139%¹⁵ of those aligned for the 2023 convention, with a median (coincidentally) of 111% (standard deviation 12%). Some districts (e.g., AT, CNH, NJ, OK, PSW, SELC, SE, SW, TX, WY) are very close to “optimally” aligned to maximize representation¹⁶ (Max-P forms 4% fewer to 5% more circuits); others (CI, MNS, MT, ND, NE, NEB, NI, NW, OH, RM, SD, SI) are farther from such (Max-P forms 20–39% more circuits), possibly reflecting other alignment priorities or a desire to keep circuits stable long-term rather than continually realign to maximize representation.

These preliminaries out of the way, we will now evaluate, for a variety of parameter selections, the extent to which a given set of parameters: (1) renders presently or likely-soon-to-be exceptional circuits unexceptional; and (2) would give districts *the option* of optimizing their representation to new, lower standards, increasing their representation share and the size of the total convention delegation. Max-P enables the second measure.

Table 2: Percent of 2023 convention circuits (assuming no realignment or recombination of visitation circuits, and an 8–9% triennial drop in confirmed membership) that would require exceptions for the 2026 (see text), 2029, and 2032 conventions

Congregations	Confirmed Members				Confirmed Members				Confirmed Members			
	800	1000	1200	1500	800	1000	1200	1500	800	1000	1200	1500
4	0%	2%	5%	21%	1%	2%	9%	29%	1%	5%	18%	39%
5	1%	2%	5%	21%	1%	2%	9%	30%	2%	5%	18%	39%
6	1%	2%	5%	21%	1%	2%	9%	30%	2%	5%	19%	40%
7	2%	3%	6%	22%	2%	4%	11%	31% ¹⁷	3%	7%	20%	41%
	SY2024 proj. (2026 convention)				SY2027 proj. (2029 convention)				SY2030 proj. (2032 convention)			

Under the assumption that districts *do not realign or recombine* 2023 circuits, Table 2 shows, for a variety of combinations of circuit formation parameters (minimum congregations and minimum confirmed members) the estimated proportion of 2023 circuits (assuming an 8–9% triennial drop in confirmed membership *and no congregation closures or mergers*) that would require exceptions for the 2026,¹⁸ 2029, and 2032 conventions. As indicated previously, 22% of existing 2023 electoral circuits would require exceptions

¹⁴ 11% were exceptional at the time 2023 convention representation was fixed on the basis of SY2021 data.

¹⁵ If Max-P is taken as an “upper bound” on the number of possible circuits, district “efficiency” at forming “optimal representation” circuits ranges from 72% to 104% (median 90%; value in excess of 100% possible due to exceptions). Max-P, taking into account geographical constraints, presents a tighter upper bound on the number of unexceptional electoral circuits possible to form given a particular set of parameters. It is useful as a *bound* but not likely useful as a *method*, as it takes into account only optimization for maximum representation and that, with an imperfect understanding of real travel times.

¹⁶ This is not the only, and perhaps not the most important factor for “optimization” of visitation and electoral circuits.

¹⁷ These are not evenly distributed: 65% of non-geographical circuits, 45% of those in the WSW region, and 39% of those in the ESE region would likely require exceptions to maintain 2023 circuits in 2029, with 15–30% requiring them in other regions.

¹⁸ Note that any changes to the circuit formation parameters would take effect subsequent to the 2026 convention; hence, the shading of all but the lower-right corner of the 2026 frame.

for 2026, 31% for 2029, and 41% for 2032. If the confirmed member requirement were reduced to 1200, the exception rate could be held to 11% for the 2029 convention (but would likely rise to 20% for 2032). Lowering the confirmed member requirement to 1200 would likely allow 6 additional visitation circuits in 2029 due to splitting of electoral circuits combined for 2023, but these, too, would likely revert by 2032. It should be noted that in the “congregation requirement” dimension, closures, mergers, and charters are *not* modeled.

It must at the same time be asked, however, *if* districts were to take advantage of changed circuit requirements to realign circuits to optimize for representation, how significant the change in proportional representation or in the total convention size would be. A significant increase in convention size might have undesirable budgetary and logistical complications, and a significant potential for districts to increase their proportion of representation, potentially at the cost of visitation or other “working” aspects of current circuits may also raise appropriate concern. The previously described Max-P algorithm was used to “optimally” form electoral circuits under a wide range of parameters, based on SY2022 data. Table 3 shows, for a range of congregation and confirmed membership requirements, the theoretical potential increase in the size of the national convention (left),¹⁹ if all districts redistricted “optimally,” and the percentage of optimally formed circuits that would require exceptions after the elapse of three years (right).

Table 3: Potential for increase in number of electoral circuits relative to an “optimal” baseline and proportion of resulting circuits requiring exceptions after a 3-year interval (present data; no accounting for future change)

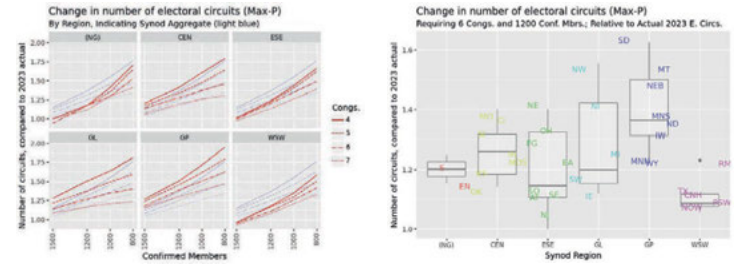
Congregations	Confirmed Members in SY2022 (present)				Confirmed Members in SY2025			
	800	1000	1200	1500	800	1000	1200	1500
4	68% / 91%	50% / 70%	34% / 52%	14% / 29%	28%	34%	42%	47%
5	52% / 73%	39% / 58%	26% / 44%	11% / 26%	22%	30%	36%	44%
6	37% / 55%	28% / 45%	19% / 35%	6% / 20%	14%	26%	33%	39%
7	22% / 38%	16% / 32%	11% / 26%	— / 14%	12%	20%	28%	35%
Potential increase in convention voting delegation given various changes in circuit minimums, relative to optimal (602 circuits) / (ital.) 2023 actual (532 circuits)					Proportion of “optimally formed” circuits likely to require exceptions after 3 years (of 8–9% conf. membership decline)			

Table 3 reflects formation of circuits based on present statistics, a definite upper bound on increases. Given that 2029 is the first convention for which changed requirements would take effect, and given that districts tend to desire some stability in circuit formation, Table 4 shows the change in number of circuits relative to optimal formation at current parameters and relative to 2023 counts, for a variety of parameters, *assuming districts form circuits with the assumption of an 8–9% triennial confirmed membership decline and forming circuits that will likely be valid in 2029*. For more conservative parameter changes (e.g., to 6 congregations and 1,200 members) this likely better estimates the “upper bound” on convention size impact relative to 2023.

Table 4: Potential for increase in number of 2029 electoral circuits (formed on the assumption of an 8–9% triennial membership decline) relative to an “optimal” baseline and proportion of resulting circuits requiring exceptions for the 2032 convention

Congregations	Confirmed Members in SY2027 (2029 Conv.)				Conf. Mbrs. in SY2030 (2032 Conv.)			
	800	1000	1200	1500	800	1000	1200	1500
4	69% / 76%	48% / 55%	31% / 37%	10% / 15%	49%	58%	63%	68%
5	56% / 63%	39% / 46%	26% / 31%	7% / 12%	40%	48%	59%	66%
6	41% / 48%	31% / 36%	19% / 25%	3% / 8%	31%	45%	53%	62%
7	28% / 34%	21% / 26%	12% / 17%	— / 5%	23%	36%	47%	57%
Potential increase in convention 2029 voting delegation given various changes in circuit minimums, relative to optimal (556 circuits) / (ital.) 2023 actual (532 circuits)					Proportion of “optimally formed” circuits likely to require exceptions after another 3 years			

¹⁹ Percentages set in Roman type are relative to *optimally formed circuits*, given current requirements (7 congregations and 1,500 members); on SY2022 data, 602 such circuits are possible, 13% more electoral circuits than are currently formed (15% of which are currently exceptional). Italicized percentages are relative to the actual number of 2023 electoral circuits, of which there are 532.



(a) With a variety of parameters, regionally (b) With 6 congs. and 1200 conf. mbrs., by district
Figure 7: Change in electoral circuits, relative to 2023 actual, using Max-P and forming for 2029 with the assumption of continued 8–9% triennial confirmed membership decline

The interaction of congregation confirmed membership sizes, counts, and geographical factors, and their peculiar combinations in the different districts and regions mean that variation of parameters does not have a uniform effect across the Synod. Figure 7 shows the *potential* for relative increase in the number of electoral circuits as estimated by the Max-P algorithm, configured to form circuits with sufficient excess confirmed members today to survive a continued 8–9% triennial decline until the 2029 convention, for (a) a variety of parameter combinations, by region; and (b) for circuits with a minimum 6 congregations and 1,200 members, by district. In (a), variation in the confirmed membership requirement is along the x-axis; variation in the congregation count requirement is indicated by the different line styles. Variation in the latter requirement has a more pronounced effect in the regions with a greater proportion of relatively larger congregations. ESE and WSW regions struggle to add circuits at a rate similar to other regions (of course, their “baseline” includes a greater proportion of exceptional circuits already, so they have more “negative inertia” to overcome). Perhaps paradoxically, though, lowered requirements would allow other regions (especially in the GP region, but for reasonable parameters also in the GL and CEN regions) to add circuits at a higher rate than these could.

Taking one example of moderate change to parameters in Figure 7(b), with 6 congregations and 1,200 members required, one can see a great variety in the ability of districts to add new circuits, ranging from increases at or below 10% (AT, SO, NJ, SW Districts and all of the WSW Region except for RM District) to over 50% (NEB, NW, SD).²⁰ Such potential swings in representation are neither “right” nor “wrong,” but are significant to note and perhaps of broader variance than might be expected, even in districts that are not among the smallest. Note also that these figures *include no exceptional circuits*, for which some provision (even if limited, either with empirical rationales, hard ratios, or spatial or numerical limits) might presumably continue to be made.

6. Alternate Requirements for Electoral Circuit Formation

Similar circuit formation experiments were performed with alternative requirements for electoral circuit formation, including requiring 4, 5, 6, or 7 *parishes* instead of *congregations*, or requiring 2, 3, or 4 installed pastors in addition to the existing requirements for congregations and confirmed members. The former

²⁰ District-level rates of potential representation change range from 1.11 to 1.75, with a mean of 1.37 and standard deviation of 0.17. Comparing “optimal” circuits of 7 congregations and 1,500 members to those of 6 congregations and 1,200 members (using the “optimal” instead of 2023 actual as baseline), district-level rates of potential representation change range from 1.11 to 1.50, with a mean of 1.21 and standard deviation of 0.075. A significant amount of the potential change and the variability in the potential change is due to pre-existing differences in how “optimally” districts have selected circuits (see all prior caveats on the sense of “optimal”).

would bring circuit formation into line with representation of congregations as *parishes* in circuit forums, district conventions, and the vote for President. The latter would have a similar effect, but also impact circuits that have for other reasons a low ratio of installed pastors to congregations. These results can be detailed for the task force at some point if there is interest.

7. Codependent Bounds for Electoral Circuit Formation (“Relieved Model”)

At least one overture has proposed *codependent* bounds on electoral circuit size, allowing a circuit with a surplus of confirmed members to exist with a deficit of congregations. The inverse, to allow a circuit with a surplus of congregations to exist with a deficit of confirmed members, has more potential to address the bulk of current exceptions. Suppose one such model (of many possible) is defined as follows:

A valid electoral circuit shall consist of no fewer than:

4	congregations	≥ 6000 confirmed		1,500	≤ 7
5	if it has	≥ 4500 members	and	1,450	8
6	≥ 3000			1,400	9
7	congregations	otherwise		1,350	10
				1,300	11
				1,250	12
				1,200	13
				1,150	14
				1,100	15
				1,050	16
				1,000	17
				950	18
				900	19
				850	≥ 20

While far more complicated than the “rectangular” rule we have today, this “relieved rule” has the benefit of allowing regular “relieving” of the membership relieving for circuits well in excess of the number of congregations and, conversely, in the congregation parameter for circuits well in excess of the required number of confirmed members. Figure 8 shows graphically the range of circuits (here, formed using Max-P), targeting 2029 compliance, as described above. This is a mathematically more detailed version of an eminently *reasonable* specification of electoral circuits of ages past, that “Large congregations shall form small circuits, and small congregations shall form large circuits” (1960 Bylaw 1.51), allowing the relatively larger circuits, in terms of either congregations or confirmed members, to be relatively smaller in the other

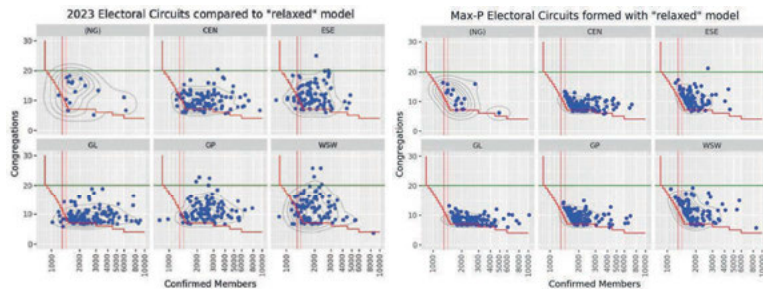


Figure 8: 2023 electoral circuits compared to (left), and Max-P electoral circuits formed using (right), “relieved” model, targeting 2029 compliance, by region.

dimension. Recall Figure 4, which shows how many of the 2023 exceptions (and potential 2026 and 2029 exceptions, if nothing is done) fall within the “relieved wings” opened by the relaxed model. This approach has the benefit of not moving the “lower left” corner of the “acceptable domain” (which remains at 7 congregations and 1,500 confirmed members). Note that different regions use the “space” differently.

Only 78% of 2023 circuits are likely to meet present confirmed membership requirements for the 2026 convention, and 69% for 2029 and 59% for 2032 (see Table 2). Were current requirements to be replaced with the “relieved” model (applying the same model of annual change used in Table 2), 88% of 2023 circuits would meet requirements in 2026,²¹ 80% in 2029 (64% non-geographic, 71% ESE, 74% WSW, 83% CEN and GL, 87% GP), and 71% in 2032 (57% WSW, 64% non-geographic, 64% ESE, 72% CEN, 77% GL, 85% GP). Considering Max-P formed circuits optimized to deliver maximum representation but targeting compliance in 2029 (compare Table 4), the relieved model could be used to form an approximate maximum of 593 electoral circuits, an increase of 7% relative to those formed “ideally” using current metrics and of 11% relative to actual 2023 circuits. Of these circuits, 90% would likely remain compliant for 2032 (78% of non-geographic, 82% ESE, 87% WSW, 88% CEN, 94% GP, 96% GL).

The “relieved” model thus has a lower potential for convention growth than any of the alternative models considered in Table 4 except for the not very useful 6 congregation/1500 confirmed member model and a much more stable “ideal,” with a much greater proportion of circuits remaining compliant for the next convention. By offering to accommodate the (numerically) most “reasonable” of the current exceptions for at least the next few conventions, while avoiding the potential for explosive representation growth, this model—complicated though it may be to explain, relative to what we have today—may show some promise.

A concise statement of the “relieved” rule using a piecewise function would be as follows (*m* being the number of confirmed members and *c* being the number of congregations):

$$c \geq 4 \text{ and } m \geq \begin{cases} 1500 + 1500(7 - c) & \text{if } 4 \leq c < 7 \\ 1500 - 50(c - 7) & \text{if } 7 \leq c \leq 20 \\ 850 & \text{if } c > 20 \end{cases}$$

8. Basic Contextual Data on the Member Congregations and Pastors in the Circuits of the Synod

Geographic factors are significant when considering the reasonability of circuit formation. Figure 9 shows, for 2023 visitation and electoral circuits, the distribution, by district, of electoral circuit radii, expressed in

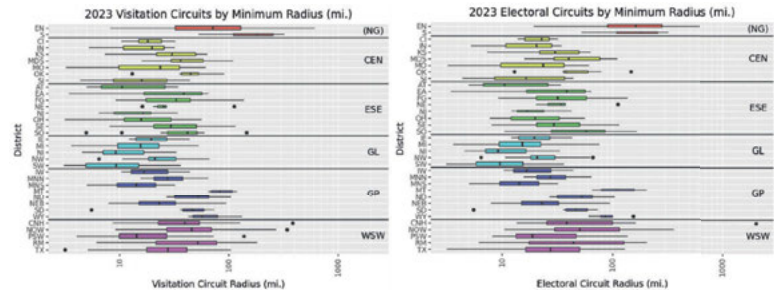


Figure 9: Minimum radius (miles) of 2023 visitation (left) and electoral circuits (right), by district and region.

²¹ It is not possible, of course, to apply the relaxed model rule as early as for the 2026 convention, though it could be used as a guide in judging the “reasonableness” of exceptions in bulk.

miles²² (these are displayed on a logarithmic scale due to the great variation in the geographic size of electoral circuits). Northern Illinois and South Wisconsin (and the Great Lakes Region, in general) have the most compact visitation circuits, with a median radius below 10 miles. Among geographical districts, Montana and Wyoming have the highest median radii at ~80 and ~50 miles, respectively (these increase to ~110 and ~85 miles for electoral circuits, when combination is taken into account); Great Plains and West-Southwest regions are similarly challenged with relatively large visitation circuits that tend to combine into significantly larger electoral circuits (this is, of course, even more the case with the nongeographic districts).

These data highlight, especially in those districts and regions where congregations are more geographically dispersed, the significant difference between visitation circuit expanse (these having *no* minimum parameters except common sense) and electoral circuit expanse, which may render visitation, gathering for regular *Winkels* and circuit forums, convocations, or other functions much more difficult or even impractical. Presently, there is pressure to increase the size of visitation circuits to maximize representation, rather than combining adjacent visitation circuit, generally “inefficiently,” into combined electoral circuits and “losing” representation. However, the value of the visitation circuit *as such* may be greater—if it is working well—than the incremental value of greater Synod convention representation. This may be increasingly true as pressures (vacancy and MDiv “droughts,” cultural, demographic, and economic pressures—as well as potential for new planting and revitalization opportunities) can only increase the need for visitation and for circuits to work meaningfully and regularly together.

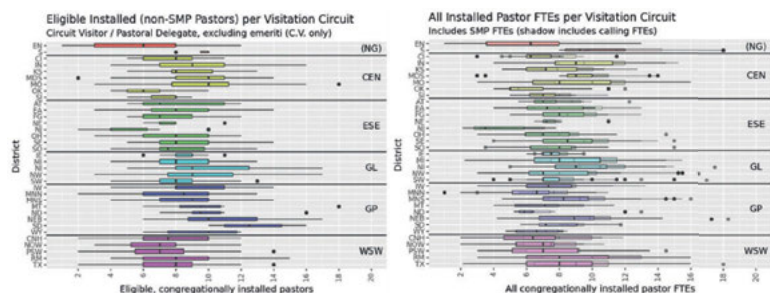


Figure 10: Number of eligible (non-SMP) installed pastors (left) and total installed pastor FTEs (right) per visitation circuit

Another important aspect of *visitation* circuit formation (in addition to *electoral* circuit formation) is the having “critical mass” available to elect a circuit visitor and a pastoral delegate and alternate for the Synod convention. Figure 10 shows the distribution of installed, non-SMP pastors per visitation circuit (left) and the number of installed pastor FTEs per circuit (right), as reported on the Parochial Service Report (the shadow on the right indicates the installed total plus the number of FTEs currently reported as being called). (Note that emeriti pastors are eligible to serve as circuit visitors, but not as delegates/alternates; nonetheless, they are not included in the counts above.) In the West-Southwest Region and in a number of other districts, a quarter or more of *visitation* circuits have six or fewer non-SMP installed pastors and a similar number of total FTEs. A handful of circuits have fewer than four or even two. Such circuits are highly pressured to identify eligible pastors to serve as visitor and delegate, and probably have lack “critical mass” to support *winkels*, forums, and convocations in a fulsome way. (It is possible, at the same time, that extreme geographic isolation, for example, may be a reason the circuits are as they are.) As the task force looks at adjusting electoral and (to some extent) visitation circuit parameters (the latter are not specified numerically

at present) the task force will want to be sure that the non-electoral functions of the circuits are not negatively impacted.

9. Concluding Thoughts

This whitepaper intends to provide useful, baseline background for the task force as it undertakes its work. It is certainly not thought to be exhaustive of the information the task force may want or need to consider. The Office of the Secretary and Department of Rosters, Statistics, and Research Services stands at the ready to provide further analytical and/or survey work needed. This paper has also been shared with the Council of Presidents at its September 2024 meeting, with the request that any input for the task force be shared with the Office of the Secretary for distribution to the task force.

This paper is not intended to and does not identify a particular solution (though it does survey and extend on a variety of proposals previously suggested). Neither does it definitively identify the numerical or philosophical questions that will identify or refine whatever solution (*if any modification is, in fact warranted*) the task force will ultimately recommend. It is hoped that the paper will, however, support the task force in rapidly identifying such questions and the means necessary to work through them to identify a well-reasoned recommendation or recommendations.

²² Due to issues with projection, the radius of circuits involving Hawaii and the Church of All Nations in Hong Kong are inaccurate.

**2023 Res. 9-06A Task Force
To Evaluate Electoral Circuit Parameters**

Whitepaper II

John W. Sias, Secretary
February 13, 2026

This whitepaper provides a supplemental update, subsequent to circuit alignment for the 2026 convention based on Statistical Year (SY) 2024 data, to the statistical and historical data provided in Whitepaper I. Due to significant realignment in a number of districts, projections based on current state have changed somewhat. A preliminary form of the data presented in this paper was available to the task force as it assembled its proposal; it is hoped to be useful for the floor committee and convention as they consider the task force proposal and any alternatives.

1. Electoral and Visitation Circuits Today, Statistically and Historically Considered

Had no circuits been realigned or recombined from their 2023 configurations, 22% of electoral circuits would have required exceptions for the 2026 convention (confirming pre-convention estimates, Whitepaper I, Table 2). Significant realignment, however, by several districts and a disciplined approach, by the Office of the President, to granting exceptions, has resulted in only a 7% exception rate for 2026. This reflects the general impression of the task force that a reduction in convention size is reasonable, and reasonably achievable, within essentially the current framework of requirements.

The 2026 convention will comprise delegates from 497 electoral circuits, 461 meeting the requirements and 34 having “underage” exceptions. These 497 electoral circuits represent 5,672 member congregations and 1,291,318 confirmed members. Figure 1 updates Whitepaper I, Figure 1, to include also the 2026 convention. The line graphs indicate the number of confirmed members in the Synod divided by 1,500 (the lower bound for electoral circuit formation; for comparison, in 1968, this figure would have been 1,252, slightly below 1998’s 1,301) and the number of member congregations divided by 7 (again, the lower bound; for comparison, the 1968 figure was 783).

The heights of solid bars in Figure 1 (excluding the slashed portion at the top, which reflects visitation circuits “combined away” into others to reach electoral circuit requirements—an increasingly prominent category) represent the number of electoral circuits formed for each convention, the green (lower) bar, those meeting

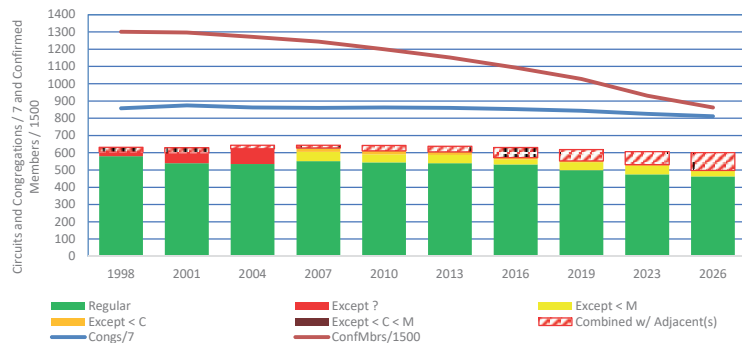


Figure 1: Trends in LCMS Electoral Circuits, 1998–2026 Conventions

the requirements and the red, yellow, and orange bars representing exceptions granted by the Office of the President to those that did not.

Throughout the period of Figure 1, in comparison to the circumstances of 1969, when the present system was put into use, the Synod has had, on average, fewer and increasingly fewer confirmed members in an “average” electoral circuit than in 1969; it has also had fewer congregations per electoral circuit, although this ratio has rebounded, in 2026, to near the 1969 level. In 1969, there were 11.5 member congregations and 3,928 confirmed members, on average, per electoral circuit; in 1998, there were 10 and 3,247; in 2023, 10.9 and 2,622; in 2026, 11.4 and 2,602.¹

Comparing lines to bars in Figure 1, the voting size of the convention² has only recently begun to trend moderately downward in response to slight decline in the number of member congregations (5,672 in 2026 vs. 6,033 in 2004) and significant decline in confirmed membership (1.29M in 2026 vs. 1.95M in 1998). There were 497 electoral circuits in 2026 compared to a 2004 high of 628, a decline of 21% in a period that saw a 32% decline in confirmed membership and a 6% decline in the number of member congregations.

There is a stable, regional non-uniformity. Figure 2 shows, for each region, in 2010 and 2026, the proportion of confirmed members and congregations, plus the number of exceptions, all of which contribute to the number of electoral circuits, and the number of non-SMP parish pastors. Exceptions tend to be granted disproportionately in the ESE and WSW regions, offsetting a relatively lower number of confirmed members in those regions and a commensurate challenge forming compliant electoral circuits—a long-term pattern, as the comparative data from 2010 indicate.³

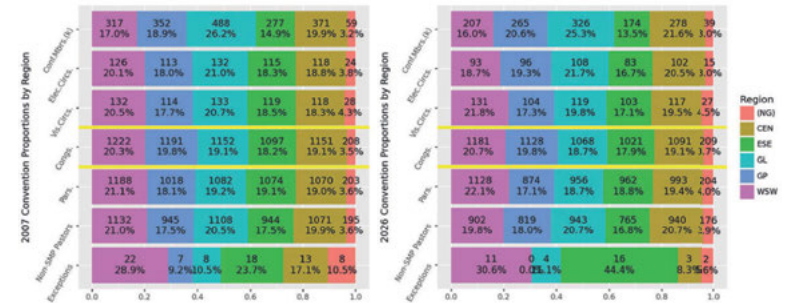


Figure 2: Proportion of Electoral and Visitation Circuits, Congregations, Confirmed Members, Non-SMP Pastors, and Exceptions per Region, 2010 and 2026

2. Characterization of Current Visitation and Electoral Circuits

The Office of the President approved 497 electoral circuits for representation at the 2026 convention. Of these, 375 were visitation circuits that satisfied the minimum requirements in their own right, 76 were pairs of adjacent visitation circuits (11 of which had more than 20 congregations), and 12 were triples of adjacent visitation circuits (8 of which had more than 20 congregations). 34 (7%) were under requirements and received exceptions: 3, having fewer than 7 congregations; 31, having fewer than 1,500 members (4 of which were pairs of adjacent visitation circuits); and none, having both fewer than 7 congregations and fewer than

¹ Such averages are useful for general comparison over time of representation rates but obscure wide variance among actual circuits.
² See details in Whitepaper I, note 2.
³ In 2026, many fewer exceptions were requested and granted in CEN, GL, and GP regions; the 2023 distribution of exceptions granted was very similar to that for 2010.

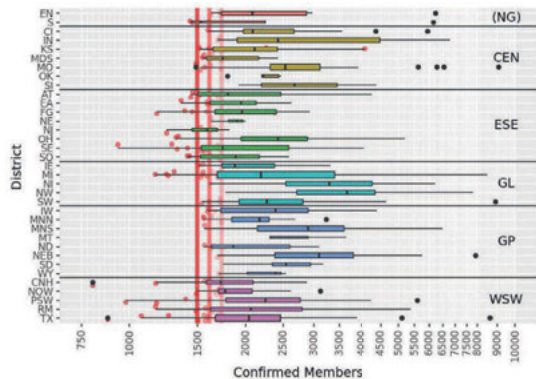


Figure 3: Distribution, Confirmed Membership of 2026 Electoral Circuits (SY2024 data; thresholds at 1,500, 1,613, and 1,734; see text)

1 1,500 members. Of the 34 “underage” exceptions, as noted above, 11 were granted to geographical districts
2 in the WSW region and 16 in the ESE region.

3 Figure 3 shows, on a logarithmic axis, boxplot⁴ histograms indicating the distribution of the confirmed
4 member sizes of the circuits in each district (the width of each box reflecting the number of circuits in each
5 district). The dark vertical line indicates the lower bound of 1,500 confirmed members; the two lighter
6 vertical lines are at 1,613 members and 1,734 members, the confirmed member sizes (all other things being
7 equal) a circuit would need to have in 2029 to meet the requirement of 1,500 members, after a typical 7%
8 triennial decline, and in 2032, respectively. The darker red dots to the left of the vertical lines represent
9 electoral circuits that received exceptions in 2026; the lighter red dots, those that may require exceptions or
10 realignment or combination of adjacent visitation circuits, all other things being equal, for 2029 (77 circuits) and
11 2032 (an additional 45 circuits). The task force, in recommending elimination of exceptions, does so aware
12 that where these threshold lines move well into the “box” of the two center quartiles (and even to or beyond
13 the median for districts like SELC, MDS, AT, NJ, SE, and NOW), realignment of visitation circuits or
14 combination of visitation circuits into increasingly large electoral circuits will be necessary.

15 Figure 4 adds another dimension of the 2026 convention circuit apportionment, indicating on the vertical
16 axis the number of congregations involved in each electoral circuit as well as (by the color of the dot) the
17 number of visitation circuits included in each combined electoral circuit. Confirmed member thresholds
18 are indicated as in Figure 3. The figure also distinguishes by color those electoral circuits formed of two or
19 three adjacent visitation circuits. See Whitepaper I for analysis, which is generally unchanged.

20 Relative to Figure 4 in Whitepaper I, it may be observed that a significant reduction in exceptions was
21 achieved by formation of more circuits with more than 20 congregations each, beyond the upper bound set
22 in existing bylaws. The task force recommends removing these upper bounds (20 congregations and 10,000
23 confirmed members), as smaller congregations will mean the size of circuits will likely continue to increase,
24 particularly within the WSW and ESE regions.

⁴ A boxplot represents a “distribution curve” (ideally, the familiar “bell curve”) coming up out of the page. The colored box represents the middle quartiles (half the data points) with the divider at the median. The “whiskers” protruding from the box represent the outer quartiles, but to a distance no more than 1.5 times the interquartile distance. Outliers beyond the whiskers are marked as black dots.

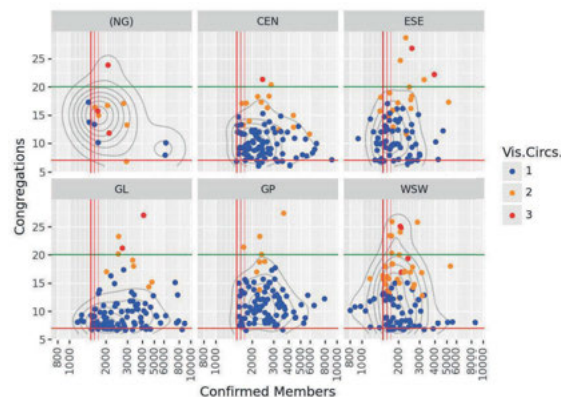


Figure 4: Confirmed Membership and Congregations of 2026 Electoral Circuits by Region (SY2024 data; confirmed membership thresholds at 1,500, 1,613, and 1,734; see explanation of Figure 3 in text), Indicating Combined Circuits

3. Characterization of Confirmed Membership Change

2 The rate of confirmed membership change over time is a factor in the “stability” of circuit designations,
3 electoral circuit combinations, and the rate of requests for exceptions. Electoral circuit qualification is based
4 on the statistics gathered in the year prior to the convention (i.e., the 2026 convention relied on SY2024
5 confirmed membership data as of December 31, 2024, gathered by May 2025; the 2029 convention will rely
6 on SY2027 data). District alignment of visitation regions, usually done at district conventions in the year

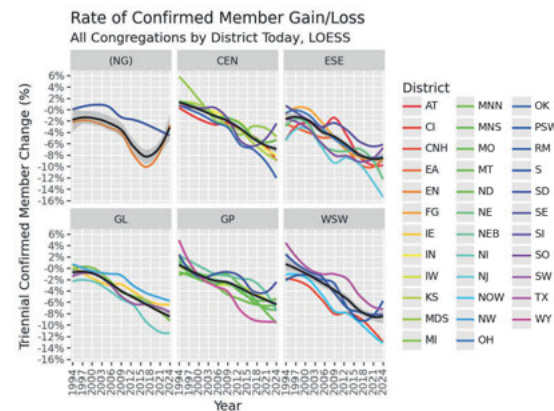


Figure 5: Triennial Rate of Reported Confirmed Member Gain / Loss by District / Region, 1994–2024

prior to the Synod convention, generally relies on the previous statistical year, so districts have to predict circuits likely to drop below requirements in the intervening year of data reporting.

Through the period 1994–2024, the confirmed membership of the Synod has been decreasing at a generally accelerating rate, with some regional variation. Figure 5 shows the *triennial* rate of confirmed membership change throughout the period for each district and region (these data are presented to show the trend using LOESS, or “locally-weighted scatterplot smoothing”). The confirmed membership of the Synod as a whole was experiencing 2% triennial loss in 2003, 4% in 2011, 6% in 2016, 8% in 2020, and 7% in 2024. These rates fluctuate regionally; in 2019 and 2020, the WSW region experienced 11% triennial loss rates; presently it has dropped to 6% (but with increasing lag in reporting, which can render the rate artificially low); at present, all regions have triennial loss rates between 5.5% and 7.6%. At a triennial loss rate of 7%, an electoral circuit of 1,613 confirmed members at the time of one convention’s electoral circuit qualification will likely have, all other things being equal, 1,500 for the next, and 1,395 for the one thereafter. Put another way, a circuit would need 1,613 members today to have 1,500 in three years, and 1,734 today to have 1,500 in six years. (It should be noted that the upturn in the small buckets of districts and the non-geographical category may not be as significant, in fact, as they appear.)

Of course, these changes are not uniform across the districts or within a given district. Figure 6 shows the distribution (in box-plot form, with the colored portion of the box reflecting the two inner quartiles, or half the circuits) of recent rates of confirmed membership change across the districts—a reminder that “all other things” are rarely equal. A considerable number of circuits reported confirmed membership losses, over the past three years, of more than 10%, with some districts having half or more of their circuits in this range. At the same time, there are districts reporting as many as a quarter of their circuits having net gains in the past three years. In this sense, the vertical lines indicated in Figures 3 and 4 to show threats to circuit stability may here and there—and more frequently in the WSW region—underestimate the challenge at hand, or, in fewer places, overstate it. Comparing to the same figure in Whitepaper I, note the change in scale; some of the losses reported in years no longer part of the window were extreme. In a few districts, more circuits are reporting gains; in others, reported losses are more pronounced. Nonetheless, the general analysis holds.

Section 4 of Whitepaper I is historical in nature and requires no update.

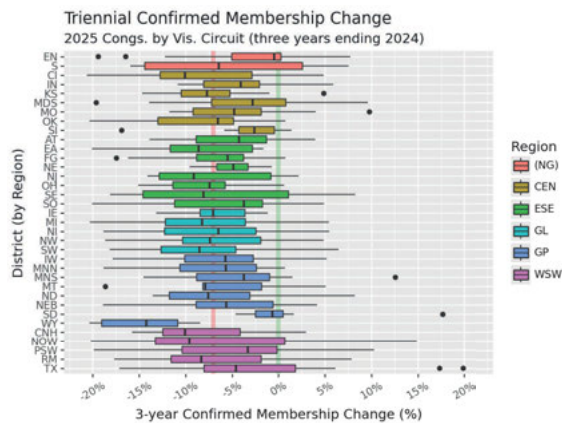


Figure 6: Distribution of Visitation-Circuit-Level Reported Confirmed Membership Change, 2021–24

5. Analysis of Potential Change due to Variation of Electoral Circuit Formation Parameters

Whitepaper I explored the question of the potential impact, in terms of convention size and possible changes to representational balance, of changing the basic minimum parameters for electoral circuit qualification (7 member congregations and 1,500 confirmed members). The set of heuristic Max-P experiments described in Whitepaper I was repeated with SY2024 data and to reflect some of the choices made in the task force’s later work. For details on the Max-P experiments, see Whitepaper I, Section 5.

Noting that 7% of 2026 circuits are exceptional relative to SY2024 data, and that the Max-P model admits of no exceptions, the number of circuits formed by Max-P on SY2024 data for a given district varied from 100% to 167% of those aligned for the 2026 convention, with a median of 121% (standard deviation 16%). Some districts (e.g., CNH, EA, NE, NJ, MDS, MI, SELC, SW, TX) are very close to “optimally” aligned to maximize representation (Max-P forms no more than 10% more circuits); others (CI, EN, IW, MNN, MNS, MT, ND, NEB, NI, NW, OH, OK, SD, SI, WY) are farther from such (Max-P forms 20–67% more circuits), possibly reflecting other alignment priorities or a desire to keep circuits stable long-term rather than continually realign to maximize representation.

These preliminaries out of the way, we will now evaluate, for a variety of parameter selections, the extent to which a given set of parameters: (1) renders presently or likely-soon-to-be exceptional circuits unexceptional; and (2) would give districts the option of optimizing their representation to new, lower standards, increasing their representation share and the size of the total convention delegation. Max-P enables the second measure.

Table 2: Percent (%) of 2026 convention circuits (assuming no realignment or recombination of visitation circuits, and a 7% triennial drop in confirmed membership) that would require exceptions or realignment/combination for 2029–2035 conventions

Congregations	Confirmed Members				Confirmed Members				Confirmed Members			
	800	1000	1200	1500	800	1000	1200	1500	800	1000	1200	1500
4	0.2%	1.0%	3.0%	14.9%	0.4%	1.0%	4.0%	23.9%	0.8%	2.0%	6.6%	32.4%
5	0.2%	1.0%	3.0%	14.9%	0.4%	1.0%	4.0%	23.9%	0.8%	2.0%	6.6%	32.4%
6	0.2%	1.0%	3.0%	14.9%	0.4%	1.0%	4.0%	23.9%	0.8%	2.0%	6.6%	32.4%
7	0.8%	1.6%	3.6%	15.5% ⁵	1.0%	1.6%	4.6%	24.6%	1.4%	2.6%	7.2%	33.0%
SY2027 proj. (2029 convention)					SY2030 proj. (2032 convention)				SY2033 proj. (2035 convention)			

Table 2 shows, for a variety of combinations of circuit formation parameters (minimum congregations and minimum confirmed members) the estimated proportion of 2026 circuits (assuming a 7% triennial drop in confirmed membership and no congregation closures or mergers) that would likely have fallen below the indicated minimum congregation and confirmed membership requirements by the time to align for the 2029, 2032, and 2035 conventions. As indicated previously, 15.5% of existing 2026 electoral circuits would require exceptions (if allowed; otherwise, adjustment or combination) for 2029, 24.6% for 2032, and 33.0% for 2035. If the confirmed member requirement were reduced to 1200, the exception rate could be held to 3.6% for the 2029 convention (but would likely rise to 4.6% and 7.2%, respectively, for 2032 and 2035).⁶ Of course, it is not realistic to expect that with the bar lowered that at least some districts would not restructure to increase representation, potentially increasing the size of the convention, possibly dramatically. It should be noted that in the “congregation requirement” dimension, closures, mergers, and charters are *not* modeled.

⁵ These are not evenly distributed: 20.0% of non-geographical circuits, 20.4% of those in the WSW region, and 30.1% of those in the ESE region would likely require exceptions to maintain 2026 circuits in 2029, with 6.2–11.1% requiring them in other regions. If the 7/1500 requirement is held, in three triennial time, 33.0% of circuits would have to be revised, as indicated: 46.7% of non-geographical circuits, 50.6% of those in ESE, 46.2% of those in WSW, and 19.3–27.5% of those in the other regions.

⁶ These projected exception rates are *much lower* than those in the first paper, partially because realignment for the 2026 convention—primarily at district initiative and partially because of a reduced number of exceptions granted—significantly reduced the number of circuits within a few triennial drops of (or already below) the confirmed membership line. They are also reduced by the adjustment of projected 8–9% triennial drops to 7% due to incorporation of 2023–24 reporting. A reduction to 1,200 members helps only so much; 13.3% of non-geographical, 19.3% of those in ESE, and 11.8% of those in WSW would be exceptional in three triennial.

It must at the same time be asked, however, if districts were to take advantage of changed circuit requirements to realign circuits to optimize for representation, how significant the change in proportional representation or in the total convention size would be. A significant increase in convention size might have undesirable budgetary and logistical complications, and a significant potential for districts to increase their proportion of representation, potentially at the cost of visitation or other “working” aspects of current circuits may also raise appropriate concern. The previously described Max-P algorithm was used to “optimally” form electoral circuits under a wide range of parameters, based on SY2024 data. Table 3 shows, for a range of congregation and confirmed membership requirements, the theoretical potential increase in the size of the national convention (left table),⁷ if all districts redistricted “optimally,” and the percentage of optimally formed circuits that would require exceptions after the elapse of three years (right table).

Table 3: Potential for increase in number of electoral circuits relative to an “optimal” baseline and proportion of resulting circuits requiring exceptions after a 3-year interval (present data; no accounting for future change)

Congregations	Confirmed Members in SY2024 (present)				Confirmed Members in SY2027			
	800	1000	1200	1500	800	1000	1200	1500
4	66% / 97%	47% / 74%	32% / 56%	14% / 35%	26%	32%	35%	46%
5	52% / 80%	38% / 63%	26% / 49%	9% / 29%	19%	25%	36%	42%
6	37% / 62%	27% / 50%	18% / 40%	4% / 24%	17%	23%	30%	39%
7	23% / 48%	17% / 38%	10% / 33%	– / 18%	12%	19%	24%	35%
Potential increase in convention voting delegation given various changes in circuit minimums, relative to optimal (588 circ.) / (ital.) 2026 actual (497 circ.)					Proportion of “optimally formed” circuits likely to fall below minimums after 3 years (7% conf. membership decline)			

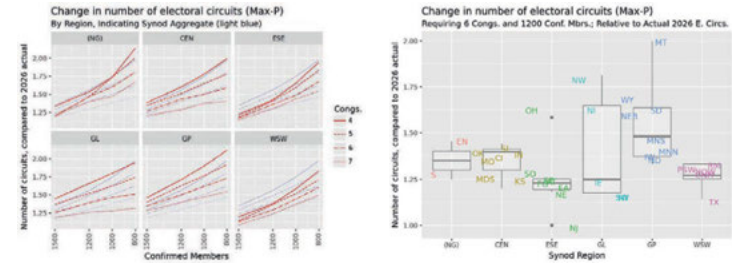
For example, if the bylaw bounds were to be adjusted to require 1200 confirmed members and five congregations instead of 1500 and 7, the number of delegates could be increased by as much as 49% relative to current alignment (or by 26%, if we imagine a theoretical maximum number of delegates at present). 36% of the circuits formed, however, at that “optimal alignment” would likely fall below the new bar within one triennium. To reduce to five congregations and 800 members could result in a voting delegation 80% larger.

Table 3 reflects formation of circuits based on present statistics, a definite upper bound on increases. Given that 2029 is the first convention for which changed requirements would take effect, and given that districts tend to desire some stability in circuit formation, Table 4 shows the change in number of circuits relative to optimal formation at current parameters and relative to 2026 counts, for a variety of parameters, assuming districts figure on a 7% triennial confirmed membership decline to form circuits that will likely be valid in 2032. For more conservative parameter changes (e.g., to 6 congregations and 1,200 members) this likely better estimates the “upper bound” on convention size impact relative to 2026.

Table 4: Potential for increase in number of 2029 electoral circuits (formed on the assumption of a 7% triennial membership decline) relative to an “optimal” baseline and proportion of resulting circuits requiring exceptions for the 2032 convention

Congregations	Confirmed Members in SY2027 (2029 Conv.)				Conf. Mbrs. in SY2030 (2032 Conv.)			
	800	1000	1200	1500	800	1000	1200	1500
4	68% / 88%	48% / 47%	31% / 47%	12% / 25%	23%	28%	36%	41%
5	55% / 74%	39% / 41%	26% / 41%	8% / 22%	20%	25%	33%	42%
6	41% / 58%	30% / 34%	20% / 34%	5% / 18%	14%	22%	30%	34%
7	28% / 43%	19% / 25%	11% / 25%	– / 12%	12%	18%	24%	33%
Potential increase in convention 2029 voting delegation given various changes in circuit minimums, relative to optimal (557 circuits) / (ital.) 2026 actual (497 circuits)					Proportion of “optimally formed” circuits likely to fall below minimums after another 3 years			

⁷ Percentages set in Roman type are relative to optimally formed circuits, given current requirements (7 congregations and 1,500 members); on SY2022 data, 602 such circuits are possible, 13% more electoral circuits than are currently formed (15% of which are currently exceptional). Italicized percentages are relative to the actual number of 2023 electoral circuits, of which there are 532.



(a) With a variety of parameters, regionally (b) With 6 congs. and 1200 conf. mbrs., by district
Figure 7: Change in electoral circuits, relative to 2026 actual, using Max-P and forming for 2029 with the assumption of continued 7% triennial confirmed membership decline

The interaction of congregation confirmed membership sizes, counts, and geographical factors, and their peculiar combinations in the different districts and regions mean that variation of parameters does not have a uniform effect across the Synod. Figure 7 shows the potential for relative increase in the number of electoral circuits as estimated by the Max-P algorithm, configured to form circuits with sufficient excess confirmed members today to survive a continued 7% triennial decline until the 2029 convention, for (a) a variety of parameter combinations, by region; and (b) for circuits with a minimum 6 congregations and 1,200 members, by district. In (a), variation in the confirmed membership requirement is along the x-axis; variation in the congregation count requirement is indicated by the different line styles. Variation in the latter requirement has a more pronounced effect in the regions with a greater proportion of relatively larger congregations. ESE and WSW regions struggle to add circuits at a rate similar to other regions (of course, their “baseline” includes a greater proportion of exceptional circuits already, so they have more “negative inertia” to overcome). Perhaps paradoxically, though, lowered requirements would allow other regions (especially in the GP region, but for reasonable parameters also in the GL and CEN regions) to add circuits at a higher rate than these could.

Taking one example of moderate change to parameters in Figure 7(b), with 6 congregations and 1,200 members required, one can see a great variety in the ability of districts to add new circuits, ranging from increases at or below 25% (SELC, MDS, KS, IE, SW, MI, TX, and most of the ESE region) to over 60% (MT, NW, WY, SD, NI).⁸ Such potential swings in representation are neither “right” nor “wrong,” but are significant to note and perhaps of broader variance than might be expected, even in districts that are not among the smallest. Note also that these figures include no exceptional circuits (the task force is proposing eliminating them).

6. Alternate Requirements for Electoral Circuit Formation

Similar circuit formation experiments were performed with alternative requirements for electoral circuit formation, including requiring 4, 5, 6, or 7 parishes instead of congregations, or requiring 2, 3, or 4 installed pastors in addition to the existing requirements for congregations and confirmed members. The former would bring circuit formation into line with representation of congregations as parishes in circuit forums, district conventions, and the vote for President. The latter would have a similar effect, but also impact

⁸ District-level rates of potential representation change range from 1.00 to 2.00, with a mean of 1.36 and standard deviation of 0.20. Comparing “optimal” circuits of 7 congregations and 1,500 members to those of 6 congregations and 1,200 members (using the “optimal” instead of 2026 actual as baseline), district-level rates of potential representation change range from 1.14 to 1.50, with a mean of 1.21 and standard deviation of 0.066. A significant amount of the potential change and the variability in the potential change is due to pre-existing differences in how “optimally” districts have selected circuits (see all prior caveats on the sense of “optimal”).

circuits that have for other reasons a low ratio of installed pastors to congregations. These results were not presented in Whitepaper I but became relevant later in the task force's work. This update will present data on parish-based formation, which is an idea the task force is recommending as bringing circuit formation into line with other *Pfarrgemeinde*-based processes (see 2023 Res. 9-12 regarding this concept), in which, from the very early days of the Synod, the sum of congregations served by one pastor received, together, one pastor and one lay vote (see also Bylaw 2.5.5).

Considering electoral circuits formed for the 2026 convention, if seven *parishes* were to be required, rather than seven *congregations*, an additional 6.5% of present circuits would be rendered exceptional (as elsewhere, these are not evenly distributed, striking districts making more use of multi-congregation parishes and having fewer very small congregations: 1.1% additional in WSW, 8.3% in GP, 3.0% in CEN, 17.6% in GL, and 1.2% in ESE Regions). Reducing the requirement to six *parishes* from seven *congregations* renders 1% or fewer more circuits exceptional at present and in the next three triennial projections. This is the recommendation of the task force.

Table 5: Percent of 2026 convention circuits (assuming no realignment or recombination of visitation circuits, and a 7% triennial drop in confirmed membership) that would require exceptions or realignment/combination for the 2029–2035 conventions

Parishes	Confirmed Members				Confirmed Members				Confirmed Members			
	800	1000	1200	1500	800	1000	1200	1500	800	1000	1200	1500
4	0.2%	1.0%	3.0%	14.9%	0.4%	1.0%	4.0%	23.9%	0.8%	2.0%	6.6%	32.4%
5	0.2%	1.0%	3.0%	14.9%	0.4%	1.0%	4.0%	23.9%	0.8%	2.0%	6.6%	32.4%
6	1.2%	2.0%	4.0%	15.7%	1.4%	2.0%	5.0%	24.5%	1.8%	3.0%	7.6%	32.8%
7	7.4%	8.2%	10.3%	21.1% ⁹	7.6%	8.2%	11.1%	29.2%	8.0%	9.3%	13.7%	37.0%
	SY2027 proj. (2029 convention)				SY2030 proj. (2032 convention)				SY2033 proj. (2035 convention)			

Table 5 shows the percent of 2026 convention electoral circuits requiring realignment or recombination for a variety of parish-based requirement models over the next three conventions. As indicated in the leftmost sub-table, if the bylaw is amended to require at least six parishes in an electoral circuit and the current 1,500 confirmed members, 15.7% of current circuits are estimated to require adjustment before 2029, with an additional 8.8% requiring attention by 2030 and 8.3% by 2033.

Table 6: Potential for increase in number of 2029 electoral circuits (formed on the assumption of a 7% triennial membership decline) relative to 2026 actual and proportion of resulting circuits requiring exceptions for the 2032 convention

Parishes	Confirmed Members in SY2027 (2029 Conv.)				Conf. Mbrs. in SY2030 (2032 Conv.)			
	800	1000	1200	1500	800	1000	1200	1500
4	81%	62%	46%	24%	23%	25%	35%	41%
5	62%	49%	38%	19%	16%	21%	30%	35%
6	46%	36%	28%	13%	14%	16%	24%	34%
7	30%	24%	18%	7%	9%	13%	20%	28%
	Potential increase in convention 2029 voting delegation given various changes in circuit minimums, relative to 2026 actual (497 circuits)				Proportion of “optimally formed” circuits likely to fall below minimums after another 3 years			

Table 6 shows, similar to Table 4 as based on congregation counts, the potential increase in voting delegation size if a variety of *parish*-based metrics were to be adopted and if districts were to form optimal circuits based on SY2027 projections for the 2029 convention (a realignment far more extensive than dealing with fraction of circuits that would have become exceptional by that time, left sub-table of Table 5 above). Adopting a standard of 6 parishes and 1,500 members would allow a *theoretical maximum* increase in the 2029 voting convention delegation, relative to 2026, of 13% (17–18% in CEN, GL, and GP regions and 4–6% in WSW and

⁹ These are not evenly distributed: 20.0% of non-geographical circuits, 20.4% of those in the WSW region, and 30.1% of those in the ESE region would likely require exceptions to maintain 2026 circuits in 2029, with 6.2–11.1% requiring them in other regions. If the 7/1500 requirement is held, in three triennia's time, 33.0% of circuits would have to be revised, as indicated: 46.7% of non-geographical circuits, 50.6% of those in ESE, 46.2% of those in WSW, and 19.3–27.5% of those in the other regions.

ESE regions due to relatively fewer circuits with large parishes and relatively less importance at present of the multi-congregation parish model; it must be remembered, of course, that the WSW and ESE regions also are starting off with a “baseline” exception rate much higher than the other regions. With exceptions forbidden the model, they are “playing catchup” with regions that have already adjusted to larger circuits made up of smaller congregations).

7. Codependent Bounds for Electoral Circuit Formation (“Relieved Model”)

The task force determined not to pursue this model further, so updated data is not presented here.

8. Basic Contextual Data on the Member Congregations and Pastors in the Circuits of the Synod

Geographic factors are significant when considering the reasonability of circuit formation. Figure 9 shows, for 2026 visitation and electoral circuits, the distribution, by district, of electoral circuit radii, expressed in

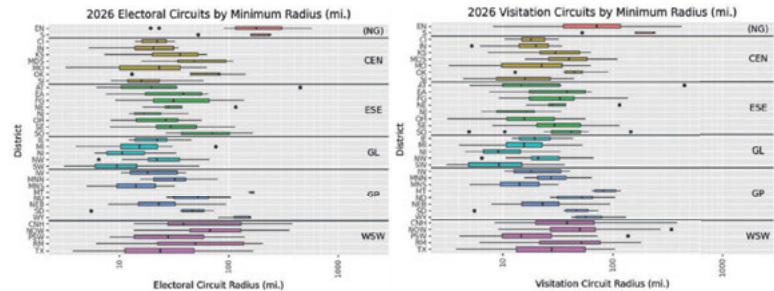


Figure 9: Minimum radius (miles) of 2023 visitation (left) and electoral circuits (right), by district and region.

miles¹⁰ (these are displayed on a logarithmic scale due to the great variation in the geographic size of electoral circuits). South Wisconsin and Northern Illinois (and the Great Lakes Region, in general) have the most compact visitation circuits, with a median radius below 12 miles (mi.). Among geographical districts, Wyoming and Montana have the highest median radii at 70 and 88 mi., respectively (these increase to 132 and 163 mi. for electoral circuits, when combination is taken into account); Great Plains and West-Southwest regions are similarly challenged with relatively large visitation circuits that tend to combine into significantly larger electoral circuits (WSW has a mean radius of 46 mi. for visitation and 61 mi. for electoral; ESE, 37/45 mi.; GP 34/36 mi.; CEN 27/31 mi.; GL 17/18 mi.; this is, of course, even more the case with the nongeographic districts, at 111/222 mi.).

See general comments and data (changed but not dramatically since the first presentation) and commentary on eligible installed pastors and pastoral full-time equivalents in Whitepaper I, Section 8.

9. Concluding Thoughts

This whitepaper updates selected portions of the data presented to the task force in support of its work, focusing especially on changes due to 2025–26 circuit realignments and adding data on parish-based circuit requirements. The changes proposed by the task force will provide, for most circuits, a stable transition between 2026 and 2029 conventions. This document attempts to provide a rough numerical framework for evaluating the task force's conservative change—which will over time reduce the size of the convention by keeping representational proportions consistent with the post-1969 historical norm—in the context of many

¹⁰ Due to issues with projection, the radius of circuits involving Hawaii and the Church of All Nations in Hong Kong are inaccurate.

1 other possibilities, such as reducing the number of confirmed members or congregations (parishes) required
 2 to form an electoral circuit in order to preserve the same geographical units of representation with which we
 3 are familiar, but at a much higher proportional representation. Such an approach would come with a
 4 significant risk of engendering widespread recirculating. Setting the limits low enough to avoid all exceptions
 5 for current circuits for multiple triennia could dramatically increase the size of the convention and create
 6 circuits that ultimately are lacking in strength for other purposes (selection of a visitor, strength of
 7 ministerium, etc.) This updated whitepaper and its still-useful forebear are hoped to be helpful to the floor
 8 committee and convention in considering not only the floor committee's proposal but also various
 9 alternatives.

R60

Report on Efforts to Address Mental Health and Mental Illness (2023 Res. 3-03A)

As directed by the 2023 convention, LCMS Health Ministry, under the Office of National Mission (ONM), provided leadership and coordination to address a broad spectrum of issues related to mental health, suicide prevention, mental illness and disorders. There was ongoing collaboration among ONM ministries, particularly Life Ministry, Youth Ministry, Disaster Response and Training, Specialized Spiritual Care Ministry, and Worker Wellness. Synod entities, agencies, auxiliaries and recognized service organizations collaborated on these important topics throughout the triennium as well.

LCMS Health Ministry's focus was to promote a Christ-centered approach to mental health by equipping church workers, individuals, congregations, and schools with tools and support that aid in wellness of body and soul, mind and spirit.

Resources and Programs, Easily Accessed and Widely Available

Two community-oriented secular programs were identified to be helpful to Lutherans because of their nature of being easily accessed and widely available. The United States National 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is freely available via phone, text and internet. This helpline provides immediate access to experts and emergency support during a mental health crisis.

Also identified was the training program Mental Health First Aid. This secular program is customizable to add Lutheran theology when taught by LCMS instructors. There are LCMS supplementary videos and resources available, including an online video course hosted on *LCMSlearning.org*.

Newly Developed Resources and Programs for Spiritual Care

Lutheran care for souls troubled by mental health challenges is focused on providing ongoing spiritual care through the Church. Christ-centered compassion and ministerial supportive care is provided to those in need through prayer, private Confession and Absolution, and the Means of Grace (God's Word and Sacraments).

ONM resources for mental health and illness can be found on the Synod webpage: *lcms.org/social-issues/mental-health*.

Two distinctly Lutheran online video-based courses were created with oversight provided by LCMS psychologists. The courses were made freely available on *LCMSlearning.org* with financial support provided by the LWML. One course is specifically focused on care provided to children and youth. The other is a program that provides Lutheran theological content for secular training programs such as Mental Health First Aid, QPR, and LivingWorks.

A resource set, "Restoring Hope: Care for Mental Health," was created directly by LCMS Health Ministry, with funding provided by the LWML. The resources offer guidance on providing spiritual support to individuals, caregivers, and others who are navigating various mental health challenges. Published in English and Spanish, the resources provide pertinent Scripture passages, hymns, theological reflection and prayers for common mental health issues, as well as other valuable resources and information. Thousands of copies of the print forms have been distributed to date.

LCMS Health Ministry collaborated with LCMS Specialized Spiritual Care Ministry to provide resources and training through the new Lutheran Visitation Education program for chaplaincy roles and parish church workers, along with the ongoing continuing education for specialized spiritual care workers.

Promotion of Mental Health

Bible studies, resources, and campaigns were developed to care for people within and outside the Church and to reduce stigma around mental illness and bias against persons suffering from mental illness or seeking help.

Digital Media

- Created an ongoing social media awareness campaign with regular posting on Facebook and Instagram.
- Published podcast series and episodes on ONM podcasts God's Mission Here, Friends for Life, and End Goals.

Educational Events

Live presentations were provided to congregations, church workers, parish nurses, district webinars, national conferences, and participants at the LCMS Youth Gathering.

Mental Health Collaboration with Agencies, Auxiliaries, and RSOs

LCMS Health Ministry has coordinated and collaborated with numerous Synod entities, agencies, and recognized service organizations (RSOs), including Concordia University System, Concordia Publishing House, Concordia Plan Services, KFUO Radio, and the LWML.

Grants were provided to RSOs and congregations for mental health programs:

- Concordia Counseling
- DOXOLOGY
- GracePoint Institute for Relational Health
- Lutheran Family Service, Iowa
- Lutherans For Life
- Lutheran Counseling and Family Services of Wisconsin
- Night of Hope
- Shepherd's Canyon Retreat

ONM will continue to equip, resource, collaborate, and coordinate the ongoing efforts to address mental health and mental illness issues remaining focused on Jesus Christ, who invites us to cast our burdens on Him because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7).

Daniel M. Galchutt, *ONM Executive Director*

R61

Opinions of the Commission on Constitutional Matters

The following opinions of the Commission on Constitutional Matters were issued since the report to the 2023 convention and were selected by the commission's chairman as being of general interest to the Synod (for example, reviews of agency bylaws and policy manuals are not included unless of specific interest). Full commission minutes are reported at *lcms.org/ccm*.

Scope of Board of Directors Authority to Approve Usage of Lutheran Church Extension Fund Assets under Bylaw 3.6.4.4.1 (23-3003)

Minutes of March 30, 2023

By an email of January 30, 2023, the president and chief executive officer of the Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod (LCEF) requested, on behalf of the LCEF Board of Directors, an opinion on the following question:

Background: Over the past year, LCEF has engaged in conversation with another confessional Lutheran church body (not in altar and pulpit fellowship with the Synod) regarding the ability of LCEF to provide loans to its congregations, schools, and affiliated ministries (organizations akin to the recognized service organizations of the Synod).

Bylaw 3.6.4.4.1, addressing the use of LCEF assets, reads, “The assets of the Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod shall be used exclusively to provide financing and services for the acquisition of sites, for the construction of facilities, for the purchase of buildings and equipment, for operating expenses, for professional church worker education, for the residential housing needs of professional church workers, for promoting strategic ministry planning and assisting in capital campaigns; *and for other purposes approved by its governing board consistent with the ministry and mission of the Synod under policies approved by the Board of Directors of the Synod.*” [emphasis added]

Because lending to ministries of the other church body would require the use of LCEF assets beyond the LCMS, clarity on the intended scope of Bylaw 3.6.4.4.1 and the authority of the Synod Board of Directors in that regard is being requested.

Question: May the Synod Board of Directors, in exercising its authority under Bylaw 3.6.4.4.1, determine that a certain use of assets by LCEF is consistent with the ministry and mission of the Synod? (The instant “certain use” refers to the lending of LCEF assets “beyond the LCMS,” within another confessional Lutheran church body that is not in altar and pulpit fellowship with the Synod.)

Opinion: The commission finds that the question, although apparently simple in form, requires a three-part analysis.

The first question that must be answered is, Who interprets the Constitution and Bylaws of Synod? The answer is simple and found at Bylaw 3.9.2: “The Commission on Constitutional Matters exists to interpret the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod. ...”

The second question is, What is “the ministry and mission of the Synod” as it relates to the scope of “other activities” to which assets of LCEF may permissibly be applied (Bylaw 3.6.4.4.1)? Most broadly speaking, this is asking, What is the purpose of the Synod? The purpose of Synod is found in the first Bylaw, under section 1.1, “Purpose of the Synod.” Bylaw 1.1.1: “Committed to a common confession and mission, congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod join with one another in the Synod to support one another and to work together carrying out their commonly adopted objectives. The Synod is organized to work in support of and on behalf of [such] congregations to assist them in carrying out their ministries. ...” Bylaw 1.1.1 (a): “The Synod functions in support of its member congregations. ...” Bylaw 1.1.1 (b): “The Synod on behalf of its member congregations administers those ministries

that can be accomplished more effectively in association with other member congregations through the Synod. In this way member congregations utilize the Synod to assist them in carrying out their functions of worship, witness, teaching and nurture, service, and support.” Bylaw 1.1.1 makes clear that Synod exists for and on behalf of *member congregations*.

That concept is naturally and properly reiterated in Bylaw 3.6.4: “The Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod ... [was established] to further the objectives and duties of the church extension fund *within the Synod*. It is formed to provide financial resources and related services for ministry, witness, and outreach *of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*” (emphasis added). It is *within that framework* (i.e., church extension *within the Synod*, providing financial and related services for ministry, witness, and outreach *of the Synod*) that the LCEF assets, as stated in Bylaw 3.6.4.4.1, “shall be used exclusively to provide financing and services for the acquisition of sites, for the construction of facilities, for the purchase of buildings and equipment, for operating expenses, for professional church worker education, for the residential housing needs of professional church workers, for promoting strategic ministry planning and assisting in capital campaigns; and for other purposes approved by its governing board consistent with the ministry and mission of the Synod under policies approved by the Board of Directors of the Synod.” Finally, Bylaw 3.6.4.4.2 makes clear that the assets of LCEF (as to distribution of operating results) are for the exclusive use of LCMS “member districts, congregations, and corporate Synod, as determined by its governing board.” Thus, the third necessary part of this analysis—the relation, under the Bylaws, between the mission and ministry of the Synod and the scope of possible legitimately authorized operations of LCEF, especially as it regards the instant question—is concluded.

Because the church body in question is not “*within the Synod*” (Bylaw 3.6.4; CCM Op. 00-2189) or serving the “ministry, witness, and outreach *of [the Synod]*” (Bylaw 3.6.4.4.2; CCM Op. 13-2696; emphasis added), the commission, consistent with the cited opinions, finds that Synod’s Bylaws prohibit LCEF funds being loaned to the church body or its congregations or other ministries. Only within said bounds, namely, *within the Synod* and serving the ministry, witness, and outreach *of the Synod*, is the Board of Directors able by policy to permit the “other purposes” of LCEF assets described in Bylaw 3.6.4.4.1.

Lutheran Church Extension Fund Canada Corporation (23-3005)

Minutes of March 30, 2023

This opinion is potentially relevant to discussions of corporate form requirements. However, due to its length and nature as a line-by-line review, it is not incorporated here. See minutes.

University Board of Regents Unilateral Separation (23-3006)

Minutes of March 30, 2023

The Board of Directors of the Synod has submitted a series of 10 questions related to actions taken November 8, 2022, by the Board of Regents of Concordia University Texas (CTX), requesting an opinion from the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM). In conjunction with Bylaw 3.9.2.2 (b) the commission invited input from the President of the Synod, the Synod Board of Directors, the Concordia University System (CUS) Board of Directors, the

Boards of Regents of all CUS Universities, Dr. Dean Wenthe, president of CUS, and Mr. Matthew Buesching (LCMS Counsel).

Before specifically addressing the questions submitted, the commission deems it necessary to provide as background a summary overview of the pertinent sections of the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod pertaining to the Synod Board of Directors, agencies of the Synod, and universities of the Synod, which apply to the questions submitted.

Summary Overview of Pertinent Sections of the Constitution and Bylaws Regarding the Synod Board of Directors, Agencies of the Synod, and Universities

Synod Board of Directors

Constitution Article XI E 2 identifies the Synod Board of Directors as “the legal representative and custodian of all the property of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, directly or by its delegation of such authority to an agency of the Synod.” The Synod Board of Directors exercises “supervision over all property and business affairs” of the Synod “except in those areas where it has delegated such authority to an agency of the Synod or where the voting members of the Synod through the adoption of bylaws or by other convention action have assigned specific areas of responsibility to separate corporate or trust entities,” and regarding these the Synod Board of Directors has “general oversight responsibility as set forth in the Bylaws.”

Bylaw 1.2.1 (r) in relevant part defines the property of the Synod as “all assets, real or personal, tangible or intangible, whether situated in the United States or elsewhere, titled or held in the name of corporate Synod, its nominee, or an agency of the Synod.”

The Synod Board of Directors is the “legal representative” of the Synod and the “custodian of all property of the Synod.” It is responsible for “the general management and supervision of the business affairs of the Synod, except to the extent that management authority and duties have been delegated” to, here, an agency “by the Articles of Incorporation, Constitution, Bylaws or resolutions of a convention of the Synod” (Bylaw 1.4.4). When authorized by the Bylaws, an agency, to which this authority was delegated by this provision, is entrusted with the management and business affairs of the Synod “to the extent of its jurisdiction.”

Bylaw 3.3.4.3 assigns to the Synod Board of Directors the responsibility to provide for “review and coordination of the policies and directives of the Synod authorized by the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod, evaluating plans and policies and communicating to the appropriate boards and commissions suggestions for improvement. ...”

Bylaw 3.3.4.4 gives the Synod Board of Directors responsibility for the “general management of the business and legal affairs of the Synod.” It is “authorized to take on behalf of the Synod any action related to such business and legal affairs which has not been expressly delegated by the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod to other officers or agencies of the Synod,” and to those it has “general oversight.” Bylaw 3.3.4.7 designates the Synod Board of Directors as the custodian of all property of the Synod as defined in Bylaw 1.2.1 (r). However, it may delegate these powers to any agency of the Synod that has direct supervisory responsibility of that property.

Bylaw 3.3.4.10 authorizes the Synod Board of Directors to obtain from any agency of the Synod all records and other information

relative to the property of the Synod and to matters over which the Board of Directors has general oversight.

Agencies

In the structure of the Synod an agency is defined in Bylaw 1.2.1 (a), which defines an agency as “an instrumentality other than a congregation or corporate Synod ... caused or authorized to be formed” by the Synod in convention or by the Synod Board of Directors. A listing of agencies then follows, specifically including every board and university of the Synod.

Bylaw 1.4.1 states that Synod’s delegate convention is “the legislative assembly” of the Synod, which alone “ultimately legislates policy, program, and financial direction” for the work of the Synod. It “reserves to itself the right to give direction to all officers and agencies of the Synod.” Unless explicitly indicated in the Bylaws, all officers and agencies are “accountable to the Synod for all their actions.” Bylaw 1.4.3 states that “Officers of the Synod and its agencies serve in accordance with duties assigned to them or otherwise authorized by the Constitution and appropriate bylaws.”

Because agencies were caused or authorized by the Synod, are given direction by the Synod via its Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions, and are accountable to the Synod, every agency is bound by the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod (Bylaw 1.4.5). An agency does not have authority to amend or alter the Bylaws of the Synod or the applicability of the requirements of the same to itself. Only a delegate convention of the Synod has authority to amend the Bylaws (Const. Art. XIV). Therefore, any action taken by an agency which contradicts the Constitution, Bylaws, or resolutions of the Synod is null and void, as is specifically stated in CCM Op. 05-2439 (from Question 2): “any action or resolution by any officer, board, commission, district, or other agency of the Synod that is in violation of the Synod’s Constitution and Bylaws is null and void.”

Bylaw 1.5.2 requires all members of boards or commissions of every agency to avoid conflicts of interest as described in the bylaw. Bylaw 1.5.2 (b) states that all board members of an agency must carry out their responsibilities “in a manner reflecting the highest degree of integrity and honesty consistent with the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod. ...” Board members of an agency shall not enter into activities that “may be detrimental to the interests of the Synod.” Inappropriate activity, if it does not cease, is a cause for removal. Bylaw 1.5.2 (c) requires that prior to accepting a position, all elected and appointed board members of an agency must sign a statement that they have received, understand, and agree to abide by this provision. Bylaw 1.5.7 describes the causes of and process for removal from membership on a board or commission, with a breach of fiduciary duty regarding responsibilities to the Synod or agency included among the causes for removal.

Universities as Agencies of the Synod

The Constitution, Bylaws and resolutions of the Synod are directly applicable and binding on all universities of the Synod, as agencies of the Synod (Bylaw 1.2.1 [a]), and to the boards of regents governing them. The confessional position of the Synod as stated in Const. Art. II, namely and without reservation, the Scriptures as the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition thereof, is applicable and binding on the entire Synod, which includes all its agencies, as well as the individual and congregational members of the Synod. Const. Art. III lists among objectives of the Synod the training of professional church

workers (Const. Art. III 3) and the support of *synodical* colleges and universities (Const. Art. III 5) *subject to the Scripture and Lutheran Confessions*. The Synod's universities have been formed and incorporated into the Synod to serve these fundamental ecclesial purposes. (The formation of what would become Concordia University Texas was directed by resolution of the Synod convention in 1923 [*Proceedings*, p. 30].) Constitutional and Bylaw provisions dealing with governance of the institutions—including the assignment of ecclesiastical supervision and oversight to responsible officers and the entrusting of institutional governance to the regents, jointly and severally, acting as fiduciaries of the Synod—are intended to preserve for the ministry and mission of the Synod the institutions that the member congregations, acting through the Synod, have created, sustained, and relied on (Bylaw 1.1.1 [b]).

A university which wishes to change its articles of incorporation (by amendment or restatement) or its bylaws is required to receive advance approval from the CCM of the Synod (Bylaw 3.9.2.2.3 [a]). Failure to do so makes such a change null and void—as it has been adopted contrary to the Bylaws of the Synod, to which every agency is bound—and unable to be put into practice.

The Bylaws of the Synod prescribe membership of the board of regents, how members are elected or appointed, their term of office, and maximum number of consecutive terms an individual may serve (Bylaw 3.10.6.2). The only way by which any of these requirements prescribed in the Bylaws can be changed is by action of a delegate convention of the Synod amending the Bylaws of the Synod, since a delegate convention of the Synod is the sole legislative body of the Synod, and it alone has authority to change the Bylaws (Const. Art. XIV). Should an agency make any changes to its Bylaws that violate the Bylaws of the Synod, such changes are null and void, as the Bylaws of the Synod control and supersede (Bylaws 1.4.3, 1.4.5, 1.5.2 [b], 1.5.3.6, etc.). Such a change could only be enacted if a future delegate convention of the Synod amended the Synod's Bylaws.

The members of the board of regents of a Synod university, who have signed a statement prior to taking office affirming they have received, understand, and agree to abide by the conflict of interest provisions of Bylaw 1.5.2, are required to operate the institution “as an agent of the Synod, in which ownership is primarily vested and which exercises its ownership through the Board of Directors as custodian the Synod's property” and then through “the Board of Directors of Concordia University System” and, finally, through “the respective board of regents.” In operating the institution, the university board of regents is to “carefully exercise its fiduciary duty to the Synod” (Bylaws 3.10.6.4 [i] and 3.10.6.4 [i][1]). While the university board of regents does have ultimate responsibility and independence in operating the institution, it always remains subject to the pre-established Bylaws of the Synod (Bylaw 3.10.6.5).

The Bylaws of the Synod provide a specific procedure for the consolidation, relocation, separation, or divestment of a university (Bylaw 3.6.6.4 [i]), which does not allow a university to unilaterally separate itself from the Synod, or declare itself to be independent of the Synod. According to this prescribed procedure for a university to be divested it requires a two-thirds vote of approval by the Synod Board of Directors, along with the approval by two-thirds vote of one of the following three: the Council of Presidents, the board of regents of that university, or the Concordia University System Board of Directors.

Should such an action (separation or divestiture) be taken as prescribed in Bylaw 3.6.6.4 (i), the result would be that the university

now separated or divested would no longer be an agency of the Synod, which in turn would have several repercussions. Some of these would include the loss of functions exclusively reserved to “colleges and universities of the Synod,” under its forms of ecclesiastical governance and ecclesiastical supervision:

- Graduates from the university or those satisfactorily completing an approved program would no longer be eligible to receive a call or be eligible for individual membership in the Synod as commissioned ministers (Bylaws 2.7.1–3; 2.8; 2.9).
- Those individual members of the Synod (commissioned or ordained) currently serving the university would no longer be eligible to be classified as active members of the Synod (Bylaw 2.11.1). If such individuals wished to continue as individual members of the Synod, they would need to apply for candidate status or if qualified for emeritus status (Bylaws 2.11.2; 2.11.2.1; 2.11.2.2).
- The university would no longer be eligible for advisory representation at conventions of the Synod under Bylaw 3.1.4.2 (a).
- Finally, the university would no longer be entitled to participate in those services offered by the synodwide corporate entities, which are reserved to agencies of the Synod.

Questions Submitted

Question 1: Does a board of regents of a university of the Synod have authority to unilaterally change its governance model from that described in Synod Bylaw 3.10.6 (modifying the means of appointment of its board of regents, for example)?

Opinion: No. It is only a delegate convention of the Synod that, as the legislative body of the Synod, has authority to amend the Bylaws of the Synod (Const. Art. XIV) or the Constitution of the Synod (Const. Art. XV). Until such an action by a delegate convention of the Synod takes place, the members of a university board of regents have no authority or ability to change the governance model of Bylaw 3.10.6—which, as noted above, exists in the ultimate interest of furthering the Synod's ecclesial purposes and remains binding on any university of the Synod. Unless a university were to be separated or divested by the Synod under Bylaw 3.6.6.4 (i), any such changes by a board of regents to the governance model described in Bylaw 3.10.6 would be null and void, and the Synod would continue to operate according to the Bylaws as adopted by the convention and published in the *Handbook* in all areas including elections and membership on the board of regents. Individual regents act outside their authority and contrary to their individual fiduciary duties to the Synod when they affirm such an action (Bylaws 1.5.2 [b] and [b][1]; 3.10.6.4 [i] and [i][1–2]).

Question 2: Does a board of regents of a university of the Synod have authority to amend its articles or bylaws without the prior approval described in Synod Bylaw 3.9.2.2.3 (a)?

Opinion: No. As an agency of the Synod, the board of regents of a university of the Synod may only amend its bylaws or articles of incorporation with prior approval of the CCM of the Synod. Any such change made without that approval would be null and void (Bylaw 3.9.2.2.3 [a]). If such a proposed change to the articles or bylaws of the university were contrary to the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod as then current, the commission would be required to reject such change. Outside the convention itself, the commission has the

sole authority to interpret the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod and has no authority to alter or waive their requirements (Bylaw 3.9.2).

Question 3: Does a board of regents of a university of the Synod have an obligation to comply with the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod, including without limitation Article II and Article III of the Constitution, when operating and managing and taking action on behalf of the university, including an action purporting to separate the university from the Synod?

Opinion: Yes. The Constitution in all its articles, the Bylaws, and the resolutions of the Synod are binding on all agencies of the Synod, which includes every university. A board of regents of a university of the Synod operates the university as a fiduciary and an agent of the Synod, which includes being faithful to the confessional position (Const. Art. II) and the Objectives of the Synod (Const. Art. III) and faithfully maintaining and adhering to the model of governance set forth by the Synod (Bylaw 3.10.6.4 [i][1–2]). Ownership of the university remains primarily invested in the Synod, and is exercised first through the Synod’s Board of Directors, which is the custodian of all property of the Synod, then through the CUS Board, and finally through the board of regents, operating with the authority set forth for it in the Bylaws of the Synod. In operating the institution as an agent of the Synod, a board of regents of a university and its members are bound to carefully exercise its fiduciary duty to the Synod (Bylaws 3.10.6.4 [i] and 3.10.6.4 [i][1]). If a university board of regents were convinced that it was in the best interest of both the Synod and that institution for the institution to be divested or separated from the Synod, then it would be obligated to follow the process detailed in Bylaw 3.6.6.4 (i) and to submit to its conclusion.

Question 4: Do individual members of a Synod university board of regents have a duty to comply with the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod, including without limitation Article II and Article III of the Constitution, when operating and managing and taking action on behalf of the university, including an action purporting to separate the university from the Synod?

Opinion: Yes. Constitutional and Bylaw provisions dealing with governance of the institutions—including the assignment of ecclesiastical supervision and oversight to responsible officers and the entrusting of institutional governance to the regents, jointly and severally, acting as fiduciaries of the Synod—are intended to preserve for the ministry and mission of the Synod the institutions that the member congregations, acting through the Synod, have created, sustained, and relied on (Bylaw 1.1.1 [b]). Any noncompliance with these provisions on the part of a board of regents or individual regent is therefore *not in the interest of the Synod*. Bylaw 1.5.2 (b) and (b)(1) require that every board member of every agency of the Synod shall, when operating and managing and taking action on behalf of such agency (in this case, the university), carry out responsibilities in a manner “reflecting the highest degree of integrity and honesty consistent with the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod,” and shall act consistently *in the interest of the Synod*. “Any inappropriate activity shall cease or the position will be vacated” (Bylaw 1.5.2 [b] [1]). As a board of the Synod (Bylaw 3.2.2 [6]), a board of regents, which has been given authority to manage the university on behalf of the Synod, has a direct, “fiduciary” responsibility *to the Synod*,

which is to be exercised carefully (Bylaw 3.10.6.4 [i][1]). Bylaw 1.5.1.3 requires each member of a board be sensitive in all activities to avoid “taking or giving offense, giving the appearance of impropriety, causing confusion in the Synod, or creating potential liability.” Regarding separating or divesting the university from the Synod, see the answer above.

Question 5: Is a university of the Synod and its board of regents an eligible party subject to the dispute resolution process set forth in Synod Bylaw section 1.10?

Opinion: Yes. Agencies of the Synod are included in those to whom the dispute resolution process applies (Bylaw 1.10.3).

Question 6: Assuming a university of the Synod and its board of regents are eligible parties to the dispute resolution process set forth in Synod Bylaw section 1.10, does the dispute resolution process apply to a dispute between the Synod (or its President or Board of Directors) and a board of regents regarding that board of regents unilaterally amending or modifying its governance documents, and regarding whether the action of the board of regents is within the authority granted to it under the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod?

Opinion: Essentially, no. The fundamental material question of whether a Synod university has the authority to unilaterally change its governance from that prescribed in the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod, since such a question pertains fundamentally not to the presenting fact situation but to the interpretation and meaning of the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod, is outside of the authority of the dispute resolution process to arbitrate or adjudicate, as stated in the Bylaws. Authority to interpret the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod is specifically given by the Bylaws only to the Synod’s CCM (Bylaw 3.9.2.2). Any dispute resolution process is subject in all its aspects to “Holy Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod” (Bylaw 1.10.18). As to the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod, opinions of this commission are finally dispositive of any questions as to their interpretation that arise during a dispute resolution process (Bylaw 1.10.18.1 [h], [h][1]). While the question of whether a board of regents has the authority described is thus finally resolved by this commission’s interpretation of the Constitution and Bylaws in the negative, this is not to foreclose the applicability of the dispute resolution process to disagreements or disputes, related to or arising out of this action, as may apply to the board of regents as a whole or to individual regents as “members of congregations of the Synod elected or appointed to positions with . . . an agency of the Synod” (Bylaw 1.10.2 [5]).

Question 7: Assuming that the noted parties and issue would be subject to the dispute resolution process, would the outcome of the process, presuming that it is consistent with the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod, be binding on the parties involved?

Opinion: The Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod are of themselves generally, and as to the central material question noted above in particular, already binding on both the parties and on the outcome of any dispute resolution process, as explained above. As to other aspects of related disagreements or disputes, the outcome of any dispute resolution process, provided it is consistent with “Holy Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and the Constitution and By-

laws of the Synod” (Bylaw 1.10.18), would be binding on the parties.

Question 8: Can a university of the Synod and its Board of Regents avoid the dispute resolution process set forth in Synod Bylaw 1.10 by taking unilateral action purporting to separate the university from the Synod (cf. Synod Bylaw 1.10.2)?

Opinion: No. “No person, congregation, *or agency* [emphasis added] to whom or to which the provisions of this dispute resolution process are applicable because of their membership in the Synod may render this procedure inapplicable by terminating that membership during the course of the dispute resolution process” (Bylaw 1.10.2).

Question 9: What is the nature and scope of a board of regents’ *fiduciary* duties to the Synod as stated in Synod Bylaw 3.10.6.4 (i)(1)? Are these fiduciary duties solely secular duties or do these fiduciary duties also encompass operating and managing the institution as a fiduciary and an agent of the Synod in a manner consistent with Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod, including without limitation Article II and Article III of the Constitution?

Opinion: The term *fiduciary* is a commonly used legal term of art. *Black’s Law Dictionary* (11th Ed.) offers two definitions, both of which inform the use of the term to describe the duties regents owe to the ecclesial Synod. A *fiduciary* is: “1. Someone who is required to act for the benefit of another person on all matters within the scope of their relationship; one who owes to another the duties of good faith, loyalty, due care, and disclosure. 2. Someone who must exercise a high standard of care in managing another’s money or property.” The commission finds that these common definitions are included within but may not exhaust the sense of “fiduciary duty” that may be inferred from the immediate context of Bylaw 3.10.6.4 (i)(1). More specifically, the context in Bylaws 3.10.6, 3.10.6.1, and 3.10.6.4 provides, without exhausting the full scope of said “fiduciary duties to the Synod,” some particular aspects of the responsibilities regents owe the Synod in governing the respective institution in a manner that is faithful to the confession of the Synod (Const. Art. II) and fulfills its objectives (Const. Art. III; Bylaw 3.10.6.1). The fiduciary duties expected of regents are thus not purely secular but involve the comprehensive stewardship of the institution in the ecclesial interest of the Synod, which has put them in place to govern. Governing the institution as a “fiduciary” or “agent of the [ecclesiastical] Synod, in which ownership is primarily vested” (Bylaw 3.10.6.4 [i][1]) and, indeed, as a “governing board[] of the Synod” (Bylaw 3.2.2), they owe duties of “good faith, loyalty, due care, and disclosure” and a “high standard of care” to maintain the institution in faithfulness to the Synod’s confession (Const. Art. II); in fruitfulness with regard to the accomplishment of the Synod’s objectives (Const. Art. III and relevant bylaws, resolutions, and policies, as such pertain to the operation of a Synod university); and consistent in every respect with the governance model the Synod has set forth to assure the institution operates in its ecclesial interests (see above, “Universities as Agencies of the Synod” and Opinion to Question 4).

Question 10: If a board of regents of a university of the Synod fails to carry out or breaches its fiduciary duties to the Synod as required in Synod Bylaw 3.10.6.4 (i) (1), who or what body, within the Synod, has the authority and responsibility to take action to address and correct the breach of fiduciary duty, including

proceeding under the dispute resolution process or, if appropriate, taking action in secular court?

Opinion: Bylaw 3.3.1.1.1 assigns ecclesiastical supervision of all officers of the Synod and its agencies to the President of the Synod. Bylaw 3.3.1.1.1 (c) gives the President the responsibility and authority to exercise ecclesiastical supervision over the doctrine taught and practiced at the universities of the Synod.

Bylaw 3.3.1.2 assigns to the President of the Synod oversight of all the agencies of the Synod to ensure that these agencies are acting in accordance with the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod. Specifically in regard to the educational institutions of the Synod, the President is charged to officially visit or cause to be visited all these institutions to exercise oversight over their administration relative to adhering to the Constitution, Bylaws, and Resolutions of the Synod (Bylaw 3.3.1.2 [a]).

If the President of the Synod determines there is a violation of the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod, he may call up for review any such action and request that this action be altered or reversed. If the matter is not resolved, the President of the Synod shall refer the matter, as he deems appropriate to the issues and party/parties to the matter involved, to the Synod Board of Directors, the Commission on Constitutional Matters, or to a convention of the Synod. He is also required to report to the Synod those who are not acting in accordance with the Constitution, Bylaws, and Resolutions of the Synod (Bylaw 3.3.1.2 [c]).

The unauthorized separation of a university of the Synod (which is included in property of the Synod) from the Synod inherently involves a legal and property matter properly to be referred by the President (Bylaw 3.3.1.2 [c][2]) to the Board of Directors as the legal representative and custodian of the property of the Synod (Const. Art. XI E 2), which then carries out its constitutional authority in the interest of the Synod. Any conflict or uncertainty in determining the authorities of the officers and agencies of the Synod in this respect is to be resolved as set forth in Articles of Incorporation, Article V. Referral by the President of the legal and property matters involved to the Board of Directors does not exclude the President’s authority otherwise to exercise, or see to the exercise of, ecclesiastical supervision (Bylaw 1.2.1 [j]) or detract from “the President’s constitutional duty to report to the Synod those who do not act in accordance with the Constitution and do not heed his admonition, as prescribed in Const. Art. XI B 2” (Bylaw 3.3.1.2 [c][3]).

The commission has treated the approach that most naturally, in its opinion, followed from the question, but notes that its answer is not to exclude other processes possible under the Bylaws, including the process under Bylaw 1.5.7.1 or other dispute resolution processes (Bylaw section 1.10) among eligible parties involved in the matter.

Questions regarding Concordia Publishing House Bylaws (23-3004)

Minutes of April 28–29, 2023

A member of the Synod has submitted a request for an opinion regarding Bylaws 3.6.3, 1.2.1 (a), and 1.9 consisting of a series of six questions with many subpoints listed for each question. To address these subpoints would require the commission to make broad, theoretical determinations in hypothetical matters, some of which are not clearly or specifically addressed by the Bylaws. The commission, therefore, will limit its answers to the six primary questions asked.

Question 1: What is the scope of “publishing and distribution services” to be provided by Concordia Publishing House (CPH), “for the agencies of Synod,” in Bylaw 3.6.3 (a)?

Opinion: Bylaw 3.6.3 states the purpose of CPH and reads: “The purpose of Concordia Publishing House is to proclaim the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It shall serve the Synod and its agencies by developing, producing, marketing, and distributing products for use by members of the Synod, other Christians, and the public in general.” The terms “developing, producing, marketing, and distributing” products are intended to cover the full range of the steps in having a product prepared for use by the Church. In the case of any given product, the role of CPH might include all aspects or only one or two.

Bylaw 3.6.3 (a) reads, “It shall supply publishing and distribution services for the agencies of the Synod as required, unless this is deemed detrimental to the agency involved.” Agencies of the Synod are defined in Bylaw 1.2.1 (a), which defines an agency as: “An instrumentality other than a congregation or corporate Synod, whether or not separately incorporated, which the Synod in convention or its Board of Directors has caused or authorized to be formed to further the Synod’s Objectives (Constitution Art. III).”

Bylaw 3.6.3 does not describe CPH as the source for the publishing of all material by the Synod, but rather it serves the Synod as required. What is required and offered by CPH will vary depending on the specifics of any given project of an agency.

Question 2: What is meant by the phrase “published by the corporation” in Bylaw 3.6.3 (c)?

Opinion: Bylaw 3.6.3 (c) reads, “Unless otherwise instructed by the Synod, the Board of Directors of Concordia Publishing House shall determine what is to be published by the corporation.” “Published by” has its ordinary meaning; the term “corporation” in this bylaw refers to CPH as a synodwide corporate entity (Bylaw 3.6.1).

Question 3: What is necessary to trigger the exception to the CPH board of directors’ exclusive discretion in the determination of what is to be published by the corporation stipulated in 3.6.3 (c) by the words “Unless otherwise instructed by the Synod”?

Opinion: Bylaw 3.6.3 (c) reads, “Unless otherwise instructed by the Synod, the Board of Directors of Concordia Publishing House shall determine what is to be published by the corporation.” The phrase “instructed by the Synod” refers to a specific convention action, by which the convention may act directly (instructing a certain item to be published) or indirectly (directing the production of a work or a category of work under specified authority, to be published upon completion) or to a requirement that the Synod has adopted and placed in the Bylaws. For example, Bylaw 3.1.10.1 requires CPH to send the official *Convention Proceedings* to every congregation of the Synod and to all delegates, voting and advisory. Similarly, Bylaw 3.6.3 (a) requires CPH to “supply publishing and distribution services for the agencies of the Synod as required, unless this is deemed detrimental to the agency involved.”

Question 4: What is the scope of the approval required by the words “shall be approved through the Synod’s prescribed procedure for doctrinal review” in Bylaw 3.6.3 (d)?

Opinion: The purpose of doctrinal review is described in Bylaw 1.9.1: “Doctrinal review is the exercise of the Synod’s responsi-

bility to determine that every doctrinal statement made in its or any of its agencies’ or auxiliaries’ materials is in accord with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.” Bylaw 3.6.3 (d) reads, “All materials of a religious or theological nature shall be approved through the Synod’s prescribed procedure for doctrinal review before publication,” which specifically states that everything published by CPH that is of a religious or theological nature is subject to doctrinal review as described in Bylaw section 1.9. However, the bylaws provide three exceptions to the requirement of doctrinal review: The first is “study documents and exploratory material ... published by boards, commissions, or other subordinate groups of the Synod,” so long as these are clearly marked as “being released for study and discussion purposes, etc.” (Bylaw 1.9.1.1 [b]); the commission intends to treat the scope of materials included in this exception in Op. 23-3010 and does not do so here). The second is “broadcasts over the Synod’s radio station by other than staff members” (Bylaw 1.9.1.1 [f]). The third is “official reports of the boards, commissions, task forces, and committees of the Synod prepared in response to directives of the Synod” (Bylaw 1.9.1.1 [g]).

Unless the material that is of a religious or theological nature falls under one of the three categories referenced above, it is subject to the process of doctrinal review as described in the Bylaws.

Question 5: What differentiates an “official report” under Bylaw 1.9.1.1 (g) from a study document or exploratory material or other work of general work of authorship?

Opinion: See answer to Question 4. Bylaw 1.9.1.1 speaks for itself as to the distinguishing features of the various categories described.

Question 6: What qualifies as a “response to directives from the Synod” under Bylaw 1.9.1.1 (g)?

Opinion: See answers to Question 4 and Question 3, where “instructed by the Synod” is a comparable phrase.

Service of a Synod Congregation (23-3009)

Minutes of April 28–29, 2023

By an email of April 4, a district president requested an opinion on the following two questions:

Question 1: Is a congregation in violation of Constitution Article VI 3 and Bylaw 2.5.2 if it has as its worship leader a pastor, not called by the congregation, who is Lutheran and has promised to teach completely in line with Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) teaching but is on neither the roster of the Synod nor that of a church body in altar and pulpit fellowship with the Synod?

Question 2: Does a district president have the authority to authorize a pastor who is a member of a church body with which the LCMS is not in altar and pulpit fellowship to proclaim the Word and administer the Sacraments on a regular basis to a congregation of the Synod?

Background: Const. Art. VI lists the conditions of membership in the Synod. The first three of these conditions are pertinent to the questions raised, and read:

1. Acceptance of the confessional basis of Const. Art. II.
2. Renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description, such as:

- a. Serving congregations of mixed confession, as such, by ministers of the church;
 - b. Taking part in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations or of congregations of mixed confession;
 - c. Participating in heterodox tract and missionary activities.
3. Regular call of pastors and any commissioned ministers and regular election of lay delegates by the congregations, as also the blamelessness of the life of such.

In the original 1847 constitution, current Const. Art. VI 3 (in the 1847 arrangement, as Const. Art. II 5) reads, “Proper [*ordentlicher*] (not temporary [*nicht zeitweiliger*]) calling of the pastors and orderly [*ordentliche*] election of congregational delegates by the congregation. The life of both minister and delegate must be beyond reproof” (*Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, April 1943, p. 3) This wording of today’s Const. Art. VI 3 was intended to reject two common trends then occurring in the Lutheran churches in the United States: The one was a mentality of “we hired the pastor and pay him, so we can tell him what to do and fire him at will.” The other was the practice of licensing candidates for the ministry for a set period of time as a trial period. The wording rejects these based on the nature of a call as a divine call, directed by God; as such, it should not have any preset time limitation.

More recently, the Synod’s current understanding of the phrase “regular call of pastors” is described in 1969 Res. 5-23. The resolution states: “The term *regular call* as used in our Synod has always meant a call extended in conformity with the procedures adopted by the Synod as set forth in the *Handbook*” (p. 120).

Const. Art. VI 1 and 2 would also apply to the questions as asked. Const. Art. VI 1 refers back to the confessional statement of the Constitution and requires acceptance of that statement as a condition of membership. Const. Art. VI 2 requires congregations and individual members to reject all mixing of doctrine and practice with those who teach differently. There is to be doctrinal agreement between the congregation and the pastor serving it. This precludes an individual who is a member of a church body not in altar and pulpit fellowship with the LCMS from being called or serving a member congregation.

Regarding Bylaw 2.5.2: Bylaw 2.5.2 currently reads:

Congregations that are members of the Synod, as well as association schools, agencies, auxiliaries, and recognized service organizations shall call and be served only by (1) ordained ministers who have been admitted to their respective ministries in accordance with the rules and regulations set forth in these Bylaws and have thereby become members of the Synod; (2) candidates for the pastoral ministry who have satisfied the qualifications and requirements for assignment of first calls by the Council of Presidents acting as the Board of Assignments; or (3) ordained ministers who are members in good standing of church bodies that have been formally recognized to be in altar and pulpit fellowship with the Synod when agreements for such calls are in place.

A bylaw requiring congregations to call and be served only by ordained members and teachers who are on the roster of the Synod was first adopted by the 1969 convention partially in response to 1969 Ov. 5-05, which referenced pastors who had resigned from the Synod but still wished to continue to serve the congregation which had called them (*Workbook*, p. 229).

In part, the preamble to the resolution, 1969 Res. 5-23, “To Reiterate in Bylaws that Member Congregations Must Be Served by Members of the Synod,” states (*Proceedings*, pp. 119–20):

One of the very purposes of synodical fellowship is to provide guidance and help in the exercise of congregation’s right to call a pastor, and one of the very reasons why a synod exists is to set standards for the parish pastorate so that the individual congregation may be assured that the man whom it calls is qualified to serve as its parish pastor (Charter, Art. II b; Const., Art. III 3).

To this end The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod establishes procedures for determining whether men meet the standards. One of the advantages which a congregation receives when it joins the Synod is the protection against pastors who do not meet such standards.

...

In order that there may be no misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the condition that the membership of congregations in the Synod requires of a congregation that all pastors, as also all teachers, who are called to and who serve the congregations of the Synod must have been admitted to the ministry of the Synod in accordance with the procedures provided by the Synod for certification, recommendation, ordination, or commissioning of such pastors or called teachers, this committee deems it advisable to reiterate the basic constitutional requirements in clear and unmistakable words also in the Bylaws:

The convention adopted Bylaw 4.02, below (printed in the 1969 *Handbook* as 4.01; *Proceedings*, pp. 119–20):

4.02 Eligible Pastors and Teachers

- a. Congregations which are members of the Synod, in conformity with Article III, 3 of the Constitution of the Synod, shall call and be served only by pastors and called teachers who have been admitted to these respective ministries in accordance with the rules and regulations set forth in the synodical *Handbook* and have thereby become members of the Synod.
- b. Congregations which violate this requirement and persist in such violation shall after due admonition forfeit their membership in the Synod.

While the Bylaws were renumbered in the following year, and the term *teachers* was eventually changed to *commissioned ministers*, this bylaw remained essentially unchanged until the 2001 convention of the Synod. During this intervening period, the status of women who were graduates of colleges of the Synod and were teaching in the schools of the congregations of the Synod changed, so that they were allowed to become members of the Synod and be placed on the roster of the Synod. In addition, the use of teachers who were not trained in the institutions of the Synod and therefore not eligible for membership in the Synod greatly increased in the day schools of the congregations of the Synod, which placed them in violation of this bylaw. The result was that 2001 Res. 7-12, “To Separate Calling and Service of Clergy from Other Church Workers” (*Proceedings*, p. 168), changed the bylaw to read:

2.45 Calling Ministers of Religion

- a. Congregations shall seek the advice of the respective District President when calling ordained or commissioned ministers.

- b. Congregations that are members of the Synod shall call and be served only by ordained ministers who have been admitted to their ministries in accordance with the rules and regulations set forth in these Bylaws and have thereby become members of the Synod.
- c. Congregations that are members of the Synod shall call only commissioned ministers who have been admitted to their ministries in accordance with the rules and regulations set forth in these Bylaws and have thereby become members of the Synod.
- d. Congregations that violate these requirements and persist in such violation shall, after due admonition, forfeit their membership in the Synod.

This change demonstrates that the terms *call* and *be served by* are not to be regarded as synonyms. In today's practice many others are serving congregations by leading worship without a call. Emeritus pastors regularly serve as vacancy pastors, at times for congregations not in the process of calling, or regularly simply serve in vacant congregations every Sunday, often for periods of a year or more, which might include offering the Sacraments and conducting weddings and funerals. Ordained ministers on candidate status also are eligible to serve in the same way. Students from the seminaries of the Synod lead worship in congregations that have no pastor. Vicars on occasion are the only one serving congregations with their supervising pastor called by and serving a neighboring congregation. While these other instances of serving reflect a wide variety, what is consistent is that those serving are either ordained members of the Synod, or students authorized by a seminary of the Synod and under the supervision of an ordained member of the Synod.

Question 1: Is a congregation in violation of Const. Art. VI 3 and Bylaw 2.5.2 if it has as its worship leader a pastor, not called by the congregation, who is Lutheran and has promised to teach completely in line with LCMS teaching but is on neither the roster of the Synod nor that of a church body in altar and pulpit fellowship with the Synod?

Opinion: In its response, the commission understands the term *worship leader* as used in this question to mean the individual performing the role of the pastor in the public worship of the congregation, proclaiming the Word and/or administering the Sacraments.

A pastor who is not a member of the Synod or of a church body with which the Synod is in altar and pulpit fellowship is ineligible either to be called by a congregation or to serve a congregation by leading worship. For a congregation to so call or be served would be a violation of the conditions of membership under Const. Art. VI 3. Bylaw 2.5.2 requires congregations to "call and be served only by" individuals listed in the three following categories (i.e., ordained ministers on the roster of the Synod; candidates certified for initial placement, for example, by successful completion of colloquy; and ordained ministers in good standing on the roster of church bodies in altar and pulpit fellowship with the Synod), the word "only" highlighting the exclusive nature of this requirement. A congregation may not *call* an excluded individual. The words "and be served by" indicate that a congregation also may not be *served by* an excluded individual in a pastoral capacity (such as by his leading worship), *even if it does not call him* (cf. Op. 20-2957). By calling or being served by an excluded individual, the congrega-

tion puts its membership in the Synod in jeopardy (Bylaw 2.5.4; Const. Art. VI 3; XIII 1).

Question 2: Does a district president have the authority to authorize a pastor who is a member of a church body with which the LCMS is not in altar and pulpit fellowship to proclaim the Word and administer the Sacraments on a regular basis to a congregation of the Synod?

Opinion: No. A district president does not have the authority to ignore the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod but rather needs to admonish a congregation that insists on calling or being served by a pastor who is a member of a church body not in pulpit and altar fellowship with the Synod that by doing so the congregation puts its membership in the Synod in jeopardy (Bylaw 2.5.4; Const. Art. VI 3; XIII 1).

Advisors in Restriction, Removal from Office, Etc. (23-3011)

Minutes of June 8–11, 2023

By an email of June 6, a member of the Synod, an ordained minister, requested opinions on the following questions, which he prefaced with the following statement:

CCM Opinion 12-2660 states the following: "An overarching principle in the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod, as well as in the [*Standard Operating Procedure Manuals (SOPM)*] for both the dispute resolution process and the process of expulsion from membership in the Synod, is one of due process, fairness, and impartiality. Thus, all hearings and all investigations must be conducted in a fair and equitable manner."

The following questions pertain to the "due process, fairness, and impartiality" of the LCMS Bylaws and other official documents when addressing the issue of obtaining and providing advice and counsel in the adjudication process when an individual member of Synod faces potential removal from office or is placed on restricted or suspended status by a district president.

In its reply, the commission notes the following context, which is necessary to understanding the opinions that follow:

The commission, as interpreter of the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod, can only interpret the term *advisor* with regard to such advisors as are identified explicitly in the Bylaws, for example in Bylaws 2.14.7.8 (h), 1.10.7.4 (a), etc. It does not in the following responses deal with other individuals from whom parties may informally seek advice, except in response to Questions 6 and 8, in which the "advisors" in question are not those described in the Bylaws.

With regard to questions of "due process, fairness, and impartiality," raised at several points below, the commission responds that the Constitution of the Synod and procedures set forth in the Bylaws (and attendant *Standard Operating Procedures Manuals*) establish the parameters for "due process, fairness and impartiality." The conduct of an ecclesiastical supervisor within such processes and generally, as he carries out his duties under Constitution Article XII 7–8, is expected to be consistent with the constitutional purposes of his office, namely as described in Const. Art. III 8–9. His conduct is subject to review by mechanisms included in these processes and by the President of the Synod.

Question 1: Bylaw 2.14.7.8 (h) indicates that the accused is permitted to make use of an advisor in the adjudication

process for expulsion from membership in the Synod. Bylaw 1.10.7.4 (a) and Bylaw 1.10.18.1 (e) also permit an advisor in dispute resolution cases. Is the use of an advisor also permitted under Bylaw 2.13.2 when an individual member of Synod is placed on restricted status? If it is prohibited, how do the bylaws ensure due process, fairness, and impartiality?

Opinion: There is a significant difference in the purpose of Bylaw sections 2.14, 2.17, and 1.10. Bylaw section 1.10 is for resolving disputes among members of the Synod. It may lead to the formation of a formal panel, which will hear the case and render a binding decision. Both parties in the dispute, if they so choose, are allowed to select an advisor of their choice, who will assist in the formal proceedings subject to the applicable bylaws. Bylaw sections 2.14 and 2.17 deal with the process for removal of a member of the Synod from membership in the Synod. These sections conclude with formal proceedings, as the result of which a hearing panel will render a binding decision. Both parties in the process, if they so choose, are allowed to select an advisor of their choice, who will assist in the preparation for the formal hearing and at the formal hearing operate subject to the applicable bylaws.

The purpose of Bylaw 2.13.2 is to facilitate the ability of a district president to exercise proper ecclesiastical supervision by conducting an investigation when he becomes aware of substantive information that could lead to the expulsion of a member from the Synod under Article XIII or the removal of a member of the Synod from a called position by a congregation. An individual on restricted status is eligible to continue in his current call and any other position currently held in the Synod at the time he was placed on restricted status. He may not accept a call to any other position of service in the Synod. While in certain cases restricted status can be extended, restricted status is intended to last for no more than one year with either the situation being resolved and restricted status removed, or the member suspended which leads to an expulsion process described in Bylaw section 2.14 or 2.17.

An individual on restricted status may petition the Council of Presidents for removal of restricted status as described in Bylaws 2.13.3–2.13.3.2. In the event that the petition to remove restricted status fails, the member simply continues on restricted status and the investigation by the district president continues.

Bylaws 2.13.3–2.13.3.2 make no provision for an advisor in the process, since in essence the question is whether or not the district president should proceed in determining the facts of the case in order to enable him to conclude the process either with a lifting of the restricted status or suspension of the member. The role of the advisor comes at the time the formal proceedings begin under Bylaw section 2.14 or 2.17. At this point an advisor is available to each party, intended to assist both parties in the presenting of their cases before the hearing panel.

The only formal proceeding involved in Bylaws 2.13.2–2.13.3.2, dealing with restricted status, is the hearing of a petition for removal of such status (Bylaw 2.13.3.2). The attendance at that hearing is fixed by Bylaw 2.13.3.2 (e) and, in notable contrast to procedures under Bylaw sections 1.10, 2.14, and 2.17, does not allow for attendance of an advisor to *either* party.

Question 2: If the answer to Question 1 is “yes,” in what way(s) is this advisor different from the spiritual care that is mandated in Bylaw 2.13.2.4 and Bylaw 2.13.4.3 (b)?

Opinion: Bylaws 2.13.2.4 and 2.13.4.3 (b) require the district president to “minister to [a restricted or suspended] member either directly or through others, concern himself with the spiritual well-being of [the] member, and continue efforts to resolve those matters which led to the imposition of [restricted or suspended] status.” This activity is the responsibility of the district president and originates from his office. The advisors provided for in the procedures of Bylaw sections 1.10, 2.14, and 2.17 are selected by the respective parties, subject to those Bylaws and *Standard Operating Procedures Manuals*. There is no formal advisor provided in the 2.13.2 or 2.13.3 process. This does not preclude the restricted or suspended member from seeking advice from other sources of his or her own choosing.

Question 3: Is the individual member of Synod who is placed on restricted status free to choose her or his advisor in the same manner that is permitted under Bylaw 1.10.7.4 (a), Bylaw 1.10.18.1 (e), and Bylaw 2.14.7.8 (h)? If not, how do the bylaws ensure due process, fairness, and impartiality?

Opinion: There is no advisor provided in the 2.13.2 or 2.13.3 process.

Question 4: Must any advisor to an individual member of the Synod who is on restricted status be appointed by the applicable district president or approved by the district president? If “yes,” how does this ensure due process, fairness, and impartiality?

Opinion: There is no advisor provided in the 2.13.2 or 2.13.3 process.

Question 5: May a district president prevent an individual member of Synod from serving as an advisor to another individual member of Synod by exercising ecclesiastical discipline against her or him? If “yes,” how does this ensure due process, fairness, and impartiality?

Opinion: There is no advisor provided in the 2.13.2 or 2.13.3 process. Should the case of an individual who had been placed on restricted status proceed to a Bylaw section 2.14 or 2.17 process, the member, who is now on suspended status, may choose anyone as an advisor in accordance with the Bylaws and the controlling *Standard Operating Procedures Manual*.

Any such advisor, if a member of the Synod, remains even in his or her conduct as an advisor under the ecclesiastical supervision of his or her district president. It is conceivable that a member of the Synod in serving as an advisor could act in such a way that he or she would put his or her own membership in the Synod in jeopardy.

It was unclear to the commission if this question is also intended to be in relation to the advisor referenced in the following question. If so, see the response to Question 6.

Question 6: The February 2020 edition of the *Circuit Visitors' Manual* states the following concerning the choice for an advisor when a pastor might be facing possible removal from office by a congregation's voters assembly: “The district president is encouraged to appoint a pastoral adviser [sic] for the pastor to assist him in examining the charges and preparing biblical responses to charges” (5 a, p. 275). “The pastor is encouraged to have an advisor with him during this meeting to assist him in preparing his biblical

responses to charges. This advisor is to be appointed by the district president” (7 g, p. 275). Assuming that the CCM reviews and approves this manual, how does this procedure constitute due process, fairness, and impartiality (especially if the district president himself has placed the individual member of Synod on restrictive status or suspended status)?

Opinion: The section of the *Circuit Visitors' Manual* quoted in the question is a portion of a larger section of that same manual that addresses the role of the district president when there is a conflict between a congregation and its pastor that has degenerated to the point where the congregation is considering terminating the pastor's divine call. As described in Art. III 9 of the LCMS Constitution, the district president is responsible for the well-being both of the congregation and the pastor and to help both through these difficult times.

In carrying out this responsibility for both, the document included in the *Circuit Visitors' Manual* encourages the district president to appoint a pastoral advisor for the pastor as well as to consider appointing an advisor for the congregation. The appointment of an advisor in these instances is not addressed in the Bylaws.

The Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod do not require the pastor or congregation to accept the advisor appointed by the district or prohibit their seeking advice from other sources. It is nonetheless conceivable and consistent with a district president's office that he might *advise* against having a certain individual serve as an advisor out of concern that it would not prove helpful in resolving the matter at hand.

Question 7: In the LCMS adjudication process, do the same rights and privileges afforded to ordained ministers of religion in the LCMS Bylaws, *SOPM*, and other documents apply also to commissioned ministers of religion? If *not*, how does this ensure due process, fairness, and impartiality?

Opinion: The processes described in the Bylaws and *Standard Operating Procedures Manuals* apply to all members of the Synod.

Question 8: May a district president prevent an individual member of Synod from serving as an advisor to another individual member of Synod in the procedures of a congregation when potential removal of the called worker from office is at stake? If *yes*, how does this ensure due process, fairness, and impartiality?

Opinion: See answer to Question 6.

Scope of Bylaw 1.9.1.1 (b) concerning Concordia Publishing House (23-3010)

Minutes of June 8–11, 2023

At the request of the Board of Directors of Concordia Publishing House (CPH), clarification was sought on the relationship between Bylaw 1.9.1.1 (b) and Bylaw 3.6.3 (d).

Question 1: Is CPH considered a “board[], commission[], or other subordinate group[] of the Synod” pursuant to Bylaw 1.9.1.1 (b) which may produce study documents and exploratory material, which if properly marked, may be published without first being submitted to the doctrinal review process?

Opinion: Bylaw 1.9.1.1 (b) provides an exception to the normal doctrinal review process for “study documents and exploratory

material” produced by “boards, commissions, or other subordinate groups of the Synod.” The commission understands this question to be a question of the scope of this bylaw generally, and also specifically to CPH. In order to answer this question, there are two items which need to be addressed. First, whether CPH is a “board[], commission[], or other subordinate group[] of the Synod,” and, second, what is the scope of “study documents and exploratory material.”

With respect to the first inquiry, CPH is included within the definition of an “agency” and specifically within that of a “synodwide corporate entity” under Bylaws 1.2.1 (a) and (w), either of which would fall under the definition of a “subordinate group” of the Synod. The board of directors of CPH is, moreover, also a board of the Synod (Bylaw 3.2.2), and the board determines, “unless otherwise instructed by the Synod,” “what is to be published by the corporation” (Bylaw 3.6.3 [c]). CPH does, therefore, fall within this broad category, most naturally by its board being one “of the Synod.”

With respect to the second inquiry, the category of “study documents and exploratory material” (Bylaw 1.9.1.1 [b]) is not without limitation. Since this term is not defined within the Bylaws, we must look to the natural meaning of the term and the context in which it is used. The most natural import of this term is that it is intended for a limited purpose. Indeed, the notice that is required under Bylaw 1.9.1.1 (b) for such materials includes that the material “is being released for study and discussion purposes.”

Could any board, commission, or other subordinate group produce material for study on any topic? Could, for instance, the Commission on Constitutional Matters produce study materials on exegetical or doctrinal topics? By no means. There must be a nexus between the Synod's charge of the board, commission, or other subordinate group and the study materials it is producing. In the previous example, the Commission on Constitutional Matters is not charged under the Constitution and Bylaws with matters of exegesis or doctrine; therefore, it would not be appropriate for the commission to be producing such study materials outside of its purview. Any such materials would not aid the commission in the carrying out of its duties; instead, the production and publication of such would be more of a usurpation of responsibilities assigned to others under the Constitution and Bylaws. The commission finds that the scope of “study documents and exploratory material” conceived of as being produced, possibly without doctrinal review, by a given “board[], commission[], or other subordinate group[] of the Synod,” is limited by the specific charge given to the particular entity in the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod. Materials that would not be in keeping with the charge of a particular “board[], commission[], or other subordinate group[] of the Synod” are not hereby authorized to be produced and published by that group. (Of course, where CPH is not itself generating a work but “supply[ing] publishing and distribution services for the agencies of the Synod as required,” Bylaw 3.6.3 [a], the applicable limitation on the scope of “study documents and explanatory material” is determined by the charge of the entity generating the document. The generating entity also bears the burden of satisfying the applicable requirements of doctrinal review.)

This understanding of Bylaw 1.9.1.1 (b) comports with the history of that bylaw and historical practice. As originally enacted in 1971, the provision that has become Bylaw 1.9.1.1 (b) read:

“The right to produce study documents and exploratory material plainly designated as such and published by boards, commissions, or other subordinate groups of the Synod is

recognized. When such material is to be issued publicly, it shall be subject to doctrinal review.”

It is clear from this language that study materials were meant to be used by a particular board, commission, or other subordinate group (which use could include dissemination to a sphere of competent discussion partners in a study process of limited scope); not publicly. And if such materials were to be used by a particular board, commission, or other subordinate group, it naturally follows that such materials would be related to the charge of that board, commission, or other subordinate group. A key aspect of this system is discernment. A particular board, commission, or other subordinate group and its “sphere” as described above is competent to review and evaluate critically those items which fall within its purview. This discernment is also a key aspect of the related concept of dissenting from doctrinal positions of the Synod, wherein objections are first raised “within the fellowship of peers (that is, with those who are competent to evaluate the issue critically)” (Bylaw 1.8.2) and then to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations. It would be nonsensical for a group to produce study material unrelated to its charge but to be used only by that group. Instead, these materials serve essentially as “penultimate” documents intended to result in a clearer or more correct *public* presentation of doctrine or practice in subsequent documents or efforts. Given this context, it is not surprising that the bulk of the study documents historically have originated with the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (Bylaw 3.9.5), which has explicit charges in this regard (Bylaws 1.6.2 [b][1–2], 1.8.2, 3.9.5, and 3.9.5.2–3.9.5.2.1).

In 2007, the language of Bylaw 1.9.1.1 (b) was changed by deleting the final sentence of the original language (as included above) and inserting the provisions related to the required notice that exists in the current version of the Bylaw. The commission finds that the 2007 change did not fundamentally change the scope or purpose of “study documents and explanatory materials.” It changed the potential scope of *distribution* of such materials by removing the restriction on *public issue* of such items prior to doctrinal review. It did so while continuing to satisfy the concern that such documents be shared with discernment and not be understood as reliably teaching the doctrine of the Synod by requiring them to feature prominently the noted caution (Bylaw 1.9.1.1 [b]).

Since CPH’s edition of Albrecht Peters’ *Commentary on Luther’s Small Catechism* (2009–13; hereafter, *Commentary*) was cited as an example in the materials provided to the commission related to this question, the commission finds it necessary to briefly discuss historical materials with doctrinal content (that is, falling under Bylaw 1.9.1.1 [a]; cf. Bylaw 3.6.3 [d]). Unlike materials that have not been published yet or materials of which the author is still living and able to make changes, these historical materials are not malleable. Yet, these texts may contain positions on doctrine that are not in alignment with Synod’s positions. The Bylaws do not provide an exception to doctrinal review for these materials, unless their distribution is contemplated strictly within the parameters of “study documents or exploratory materials” described above; their “historical” nature does not of itself render them such.

The commission notes that the doctrinal review of these “historical materials” may require a more nuanced approach by the Commission on Doctrinal Review. One possibility for approval of such documents that are, on a whole, profitable for use, with discernment, in the Synod would be for the originating body to identify and include clearly in prefatory or other accompanying published material, to the satisfaction of the Commission on Doctrinal Review, statements

identifying doctrinal errors or statements that are “inadequate, misleading, ambiguous, or lacking in doctrinal clarity” (Bylaw 1.9.2 [f]) in the historical texts. “Positions deviating from the doctrinal resolutions of the Synod” shall be “clearly identified as such” (Bylaw 1.9.2 [g]). It may be a more difficult path to follow, but the path cannot be avoided as the Bylaws require such review. While the *Commentary* preface included the statement that the content had not been doctrinally reviewed, its being a study document, it *also* included such statements, which may—given the apparent intended audience of the work—satisfy any concerns about doctrinal statements included in the historical text itself (which obviously cannot simply be adjusted away).

With respect to CPH specifically, it is a “board[], commission[], or other subordinate group[]” under Bylaw 1.9.1.1 (b) and is therefore able to produce study materials. But as with any other board, commission or subordinate group, the study materials it can produce are those that relate to matters that fall within its purview. CPH’s purpose is “to proclaim the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Bylaw 3.6.3). It does this “*by developing, producing, marketing, and distributing*” certain materials (*ibid.*, emphasis added). Study materials produced by CPH, with no other originating board, commission, or other subordinate group, would be limited to study and exploration of development, production, marketing, and distribution. This sphere of responsibility would be very unlikely to generate a study document in the sense contemplated here. Bylaw 3.6.3 (d) requires that any of those materials CPH publishes that are of a religious or theological nature must be “approved through the Synod’s prescribed procedure for doctrinal review before publication.” (The interplay of Bylaws 3.6.3 [d] and 1.9.1.1 [b] will be discussed in the below opinion.) This restriction makes sense in that if CPH were to publish materials that were not doctrinally sound, it would undermine its purpose of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Question 2: Assuming that CPH is such a subordinate group of the Synod, does Bylaw 3.6.3 (d) which states “All materials of a religious or theological nature shall be approved through the Synod’s prescribed procedure for doctrinal review before publication” prevent CPH from publishing material pursuant to Bylaw 1.9.1.1 (b)?

Opinion: The commission understands this to be a question of the interplay of Bylaw 3.6.3 (d) (which requires doctrinal review before CPH can publish) and Bylaw 1.9.1.1 (b) (which, as discussed above, allows for publishing in certain situations without going through doctrinal review). The commission finds that Bylaw 3.6.3 (d) requires CPH to comply with the doctrinal review requirements of Bylaw section 1.9 with respect to “all materials of a religious or theological nature.” Where CPH, within the “nexus” described in Question 1, satisfies the requirement of doctrinal review by way of the mechanism described in Bylaw 1.9.1.1 (b), it has thereby satisfied the requirement of Bylaw 3.6.3 (d).

The commission notes, in closing, that bylaws dealing with doctrinal review and dissent, given changes in the structure of the Synod and in the free exchange of information, may be due for comprehensive review and revision.

Doctrinal Review Challenge of Exempted Items (23-3014)

Minutes of July 27–August 3, 2023

On July 28, 2023, the Secretary of the Synod asked the commission for an opinion on the following question, which the commission ad-

dressed while the Secretary was attending to convention business:

Question: Noting Op. 17-2869, does Bylaw 1.9.1 (and Bylaw 3.9.3) permit material exempted from original doctrinal review under Bylaw 1.9.1.1 (g) or (b) to have its doctrinal review certification appealed, following publication, under the procedure of Bylaw 3.9.3.2.2?

Opinion: Op. 17-2869 does not have as its subject matter the exceptions noted in Bylaw 1.9.1.1 (b) or (g), but does put forth the general position that all matters can have their doctrinal statements reviewed: “The primary responsibility for doctrinal supervision and review lies with the President of the Synod” (1.9.2 [a]) and he exercises this responsibility for doctrinal review of all materials and publications of Synod and its agencies or auxiliaries either through those reviewers appointed under Bylaw 1.9.2 (a) or through those stipulated separately in 1.9.1.1 (c–f).

The exceptions noted in Bylaw 1.9.1.1 (b) or (g) are not subject to doctrinal review and are therefore not doctrinally certified. The first requirement of Bylaw 3.9.3.2.2 is that the publication challenged be doctrinally certified. Without the publication being first doctrinally certified, the challenge procedure outlined in Bylaw 3.9.3.2.2 is not available.

Therefore, any questions concerning the doctrinal content of those matters under Bylaw 1.9.1.1 (b) and (g) would normally be referred to the President of the Synod.

Proposed Amendments to Convention Resolutions (23-3012, cont.)

Minutes of July 27–August 3, 2023

The commission reviewed several proposed amendments to resolutions published in the First Edition of *Today's Business*, upon request either of their submitters or of floor committees to which they had been recommended.

(H) Proposed Substitute for Res. 7-03, “To Work Toward Resolution with Concordia University Texas”

In its review of Substitute Resolution 7-03 (2023 *Today's Business*, 3:395) the Commission on Constitutional Matters notes that while agencies and corporate Synod are eligible for the dispute resolution process, such a dispute cannot involve the interpretation and of the Constitution and Bylaws, since the Synod in convention has assigned this responsibility to the Commission on Constitutional Matters. As stated in Op. 23-3006:

Question 6: Assuming a university of the Synod and its board of regents are eligible parties to the dispute resolution process set forth in Synod Bylaw section 1.10, does the dispute resolution process apply to a dispute between the Synod (or its President or Board of Directors) and a board of regents regarding that board of regents unilaterally amending or modifying its governance documents, and regarding whether the action of the board of regents is within the authority granted to it under the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod?

Opinion: Essentially, no. The fundamental material question of whether a Synod university has the authority to unilaterally change its governance from that prescribed

in the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod, since such a question pertains fundamentally not to the presenting fact situation but to the interpretation and meaning of the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod, is outside of the authority of the dispute resolution process to arbitrate or adjudicate, as stated in the Bylaws. Authority to interpret the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod is specifically given by the Bylaws only to the Synod's Commission on Constitutional Matters (Bylaw 3.9.2.2). Any dispute resolution process is subject in all its aspects to “Holy Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod” (Bylaw 1.10.18). As to the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod, opinions of this commission are finally dispositive of any questions as to their interpretation that arise during a dispute resolution process (Bylaw 1.10.18 [h], [h][1]). While the question of whether a board of regents has the authority described is thus finally resolved by this commission's interpretation of the Constitution and Bylaws in the negative, this is not to foreclose the applicability of the dispute resolution process to disagreements or disputes, related to or arising out of this action, as may apply to the board of regents as a whole or to individual regents as “members of congregations of the Synod elected or appointed to positions with ... an agency of the Synod” (Bylaw 1.10.2 [5]).

Any proposal to submit a dispute regarding matters of governance either to the Synod's dispute resolution process or an external mediator is out of order.

The commission notes, as it did in Op. 23-3006, that the Synod's dispute resolution process could be available to the various individuals involved in the dispute should they desire to seek personal reconciliation, and is the exclusive remedy (Bylaw 1.10.1.1):

1.10.1.1 The Holy Scriptures (1 Cor. 6:1–7) urge Christians to settle their differences by laying them before the “members of the brotherhood.” Therefore, the Synod in the spirit of 1 Corinthians 6 calls upon all parties to a disagreement, accusation, controversy, or disciplinary action to rely exclusively and fully on the Synod's system of reconciliation and conflict resolution. The use of the Synod's conflict resolution procedures shall be the exclusive and final remedy for those who are in dispute. Fitness for ministry and other theological matters must be determined within the church. Parties to disputes are urged, in matters of a doctrinal nature, to follow the procedures as outlined in Bylaw section 1.8.

The parties here would be required to use the 1.10 dispute resolution process, which includes both the formal component and the informal component. If the parties desire to use a mediator in that informal process, they would be required to use a Synod reconciler (Bylaw 1.10.5) rather than an external mediator. Any use of an external process or mediator is precluded by Bylaw section 1.10.

Specific Ministry Pastor Supervision of Commissioned Ministers (23-3017)

Minutes of March 15–16, 2024

By an email of September 27, a district president requested an opinion on the following questions regarding the permissibility of supervision of commissioned ministers by a specific ministry pastor (SMP). Consonant with Bylaw 3.9.2.2 (b), the commission requested, received, and reviewed input from the Council of Presidents and members of the Pastoral Formation Committee. Having concluded

the extensive discussion begun in its December meeting, the commission offers the following background and responds to the series of questions as follows:

Background: Interpretation of Bylaw 2.13.1 (a)

The questions asked arise out of Council of Presidents Policy Manual 14.2.3's assertion (dated April 2018) that the "supervision of commissioned ministers, other rostered workers, a school, etc." by an SMP is precluded by Bylaw 2.13.1 (a)'s prohibition of the SMP "[being] placed or called into ecclesiastical roles that exercise pastoral oversight outside the context of his call." The commission must first address the meaning of Bylaw 2.13.1 (a), namely, to determine if the language "outside the context of his call" necessarily prohibits the specification of an SMP's call as involving supervision of some other called worker, such as a commissioned minister.

The "Background" for 2007 Resolution 5-01B slightly elucidates "outside the location of his call," the original language of the noted bylaw, adding (*Proceedings*, 135) the clarifying language "i.e., in the church-at-large," along with the four subordinate examples that came to be included as the prohibitions of Bylaw 2.13.1 (b)(1–4). It further speaks of the SMP's "jurisdictional" limitations being on the basis of "theological education [] formed within the context of [an SMP's] specific ministry and [that] does not represent the breadth and depth of theology and ecclesiology that forms a basis for pastoral oversight *beyond the local level*." (In the related bylaw language, 2010 Res. 7-05 replaced *location* with *context*, with the sole stated purpose of preventing the misinterpretation of Bylaw 2.13.1 [a] to mean that an SMP cannot receive a call to a new position of service, even though he has been trained for such and certified for such as determined by his district president.) The prohibition of Bylaw 2.13.1 (a) does not, therefore, address the SMP's exercise of pastoral oversight *within his parish*, as may be assigned to him in the role described in his call documents (e.g., sole pastor, staff pastor). Rather, it addresses and prohibits his undertaking *ecclesiastical roles exercising pastoral oversight in the church-at-large*, such as (but not limited to) those listed in Bylaw 2.13.1 (b)(1–4).

Granting that this is far from the only consideration in whether an SMP may properly be placed into such a role (see further below), Bylaw 2.13.1 (a) does not itself, therefore, prohibit an SMP's specific context and call from being defined to include supervision of another called worker of the same parish, such as a commissioned minister. This understanding of Bylaw 2.13.1 (a) is consistent with the Synod's designation of the SMP *as pastor* and even in some circumstances *as sole pastor* of his parish. The bylaw limits the SMP's jurisdiction to the scope defined by his present call (see 2007 Res. 5-01B, "Background," *Proceedings*, 133–34) but does not make him less a pastor within the scope of that call. (This is not, however, to deny that his service as pastor remains, throughout his service as an SMP, subject to the additional supervision of a general ministry pastor.)

Considering specifically a sole-pastor SMP, while such SMP remains under the supervision of another ordained minister (not SMP) who serves outside his parish, such SMP *and not that supervisor* (whose call is elsewhere) *is the pastor* of his parish. The sole-pastor SMP (as opposed to being one in a staff-pastor position) exercises the fullness of the pastoral office in that congregation (including preaching the Gospel, administering the Sacraments and the authority of spiritual judgment, Walther's Ministry Thesis V). Any auxiliary offices in the parish necessarily serve under his pastoral oversight, as from his office *as the pastor of the congregation* all others originate as helpers to it (Walther's Ministry Thesis VIII).

He serves, in turn, under the ecclesiastical supervision of his district president (as does any pastor who is a member of the Synod), as well as under the additional supervision¹ of a non-SMP pastor. The authority, however, of his office *as pastor loci* is not diminished by Bylaw 2.13.1 (a); diminished only is his *jurisdiction* outside the scope defined by his call (in this case, outside his parish).

Background: SMP Formation, Specific Ministry Context, and the Role of District Presidents

At the same time, the theological education of an SMP is formed *for a specific ministry context*: "[The SMP] is eligible to serve only in that specific ministry context for which he has been trained and may not be offered or accept a call for ministry for which he has not been certified as determined by his district president" (Bylaw 2.13.1). The SMP program consists—by design, as an exceptional route—of training and formation that lacks the depth and breadth of preparation afforded by the M.Div. track: "Emerging needs and economic pressures often make it impossible to call a pastor who has received a broad and thorough theological education to every congregation or mission station where, nevertheless, people need to hear the Gospel" (2007 Res. 5-01B, "Background," *Proceedings*, 133). The SMP curriculum focuses on "basic competencies" for Word and Sacrament ministry, with seminars and local mentorship touching on aspects of the particular context (perhaps including "basic mission planter training, edge gathering, and advanced mission planter training") (id., 134). Upon certification, call, and ordination, "the student is placed on the pastoral roster of the Synod as a 'specific ministry pastor.' He now may preach and administer the Sacraments under supervision in a specific locality." He subsequently must complete the educational program to "continue development of the foundational competencies necessary for serving as a specific ministry pastor" (id., 135).

Specific ministry pastors are "pastors certified for calls into *specific ministry contexts*, who serve under the supervision not only of the district president but also of a designated general ministry pastor. As such, they are eligible for calls *into a similar specific ministry context*, where they continue under the supervision of a general ministry pastor" (id., 135).

While the specific kind of ministry or context may vary in some duties and responsibilities from situation to situation, what does not change is that the SMP remains under the supervision of a pastor who is not SMP. This supervision is essential to the ongoing service of SMPs in whatever context and continues as long as the SMP is in service or rostered, unless he continues his education and reaches "a level appropriate to general ministry pastor" and, as a result of an examination, has his status changed (*ibid.*). In view of the fact that "an SMP pastor has been certified and ordained to serve in a *specific kind of ministry*" (emphasis added), the implementing resolution looked for "opportunity" for such a pastor "*subsequently* to be prepared to serve the church more broadly," noting that this further necessary preparation would require "a combination of further academic preparation, accumulated pastoral experience, and examination (id., 134)."

In view of the limited training and formation of SMPs, 2013 Res. 5-04B resolved "that district presidents not approve specific ministry sites which could reasonably be expected to support a general pastor or sites where a minister of religion—commissioned could fulfill the duties" (*Proceedings*, 140). This restriction, still in effect, underscores and circumscribes the authority and responsibility of district presidents to limit the calling or service of SMPs to ministry contexts for which their training adequately prepares them and for

which there is no option of a more fully trained minister. The convention adopted this resolution citing the prior report of the SMP task force, as follows: “Special circumstances (e.g., small parishes which cannot afford a pastor) exist. Flexibility is vital as the church fulfills her vocational calling to preach the Gospel to everyone everywhere. While the church cannot maintain her theological integrity, fidelity, and courage in these bewitching times unless she has an overall well-trained and doctrinally steeped ministerium, special circumstances warrant less-trained pastors so the means of grace can be delivered by a called and ordained pastor. Therefore the task force recommends the retention of the SMP program for special circumstances” (id., 139–40).

The SMP program remains an exceptional path to the exercise of the pastoral office and not the ordinary one. To ignore this distinction is to violate the very provisions by which the SMP program was conceived and for which it was established. Clearly, the training ordinarily provided for an SMP *does not prepare him adequately for every type of parish call, even for every one that exercises pastoral oversight only within the parish context*. As Bylaw 2.13.1 and the fifth *resolved* of 2013 Res. 5-04B make clear, “the respective district president remains responsible for determining the appropriateness of the specific ministry” (id., 139), a responsibility that must be undertaken with deliberate care and wise judgment about the content and adequacy of SMP training for the responsibility and authority to be exercised within a particular call to a particular parish. (The Council of Presidents as such [or as the Board of Assignments, Bylaw 3.10.1.3] may also have a role with respect to the definition of such contexts, at least initially, as these men are “placed by the Council of Presidents into a specific Word and Sacrament ministry context” [Bylaw 2.13.1].)

Finally, while the question fundamentally turns on the interpretation of Bylaw 2.13.1, the SMP program is set forth by 2007 Res. 5-01B, and it is also incumbent on the commission to weigh the significance of this resolution (and others) relative to the question at hand. To the commission, the training of an SMP as described in the enabling and subsequent resolutions and in the *SMP Policy Manual* (2021) of Concordia Seminary, which the commission examined, does not appear to contemplate service at the head of a parish staff including a school or professional church worker auxiliary offices (commissioned ministers). That the preparation of a typical SMP² is *less* in some respects than that of a commissioned minister is reflected by the prohibition of 2013 Res. 5-04B. A careful judgment is required of the district president *as to a particular ministry context (call, parish) and to some extent to a particular man*, whether the service of an SMP in a given capacity is appropriate. This judgment is unique to every case, and is not the purview of the commission, but of the district president.

The commission offers that the SMP program has been addressed in some fashion by each convention since its adoption in 2007 and that, as it continues to account for an increasing proportion of ordained ministers in the Synod—which, in local areas, has become significant—elements of its implementation continue to present challenging unclarity and require district presidents to exercise significant judgment with little clear and concrete guidance. Such is the genesis of these questions and of this opinion, which had to be rendered on some very fine historical distinctions of few bylaw words. This is perhaps itself a call for the convention to assess and clarify yet again.

Question 1: Is there any circumstance under Bylaw 2.13.1 in which an SMP might have supervisory authority over a commissioned worker?

Opinion: Yes, in limited circumstances.

The commission must first clarify the sense of “supervisory authority” in the question. Whether an SMP can exercise “employment” supervision, generally, over others employed by his parish is a matter of the congregation’s self-governance (Constitution Article VII), into which the commission does not intrude. The commission specifically addresses *pastoral oversight*,³ that being the sense in which the holder (sole or senior pastor of the congregation) of the Office of the Holy Ministry in that place oversees the doctrine, practice, and life of those occupying any auxiliary offices in the congregation, a consequence of their offices assisting and being responsible to the Office of the Holy Ministry he bears (cf. Walther’s Ministry Thesis VIII).

As explained above, Bylaw 2.13.1’s main paragraph limits the development of an SMP to a “specific Word and Sacrament ministry context” for which the training, which lacks necessarily the breadth and depth of general pastoral formation, in the judgment of the district president, can be expected adequately to prepare him. His subsequent calls are limited to ones for which the district president can certify his limited training as preparing him.

Bylaw 2.13.1 (a), as explained above, does not address the pastoral authority of an SMP *within his context (call, parish)* and therefore does not itself preclude his role being defined to include supervision of, for example, a commissioned minister within his parish. This does not diminish the responsibility of the district president to approve the training and calling of SMPs to only those specific ministry contexts for which the training is adequate and for which more fully prepared options are not available (2013 Res. 5-04B). While the commission cannot foreclose the possibility (e.g., with regard to an SMP who also served capably as a commissioned teacher/principal) that a particular SMP *could* be equipped to exercise pastoral oversight, within his parish, over a commissioned auxiliary minister, it does not find this ordinarily to be the case—a position supported by, for example, 2013 Res. 5-04B’s assertion that SMPs not be used where a commissioned minister could fulfill the duties. Ultimately, however, this lies within the determination by the district president that the specific ministry context (call, parish), involving as it does whatever supervisory capacities with regard to auxiliary offices present in the context, is one for which the necessarily limited training of an SMP adequately prepares him.

Question 2: For example, if a large congregation with a staff of senior pastor, SMP, a director of Christian education, a full day school staff, and a director of parish music experiences a vacancy in the senior pastor position, what would be the appropriate relationship between the SMP and the commissioned workers?

Question 3: If the answers to the above questions indicate that there is never a circumstance that an SMP might have supervisory authority over a commissioned worker, would that obligate congregations in the scenario envisioned above to engage a vacancy pastor in order to maintain proper supervisory authority over not only the SMP, but also all commissioned workers involved?

Opinion (regarding Questions 2 and 3): Relationships inherent to the SMP’s current call would be unchanged. As to relationships

requiring adjustment due to the senior pastor vacancy, it is the parish's determination—with the benefit of the advice, counsel, and ecclesiastical supervision of the respective district president and within the commitments it has made as a member of the Synod—how pastoral oversight will be provided for in the vacancy. (It should be noted that an assistant or associate pastor remaining in the parish does not always serve as the senior during a vacancy, even where he is a general pastor.) If the district president cannot certify that the SMP is adequately trained to take on oversight of the congregation's auxiliary offices (or otherwise, to carry out the role of the senior pastor), the congregation will need to obtain the service of a different vacancy pastor who is so equipped. The SMP “is eligible to serve only in that specific ministry context for which he is trained” and may not serve outside that context (call, parish) without the certification of his district president (Bylaw 2.13.1).

Endnotes

1. 2007 Res. 5-01B and the bylaws it introduced appear to have used the terms supervision and oversight without reference to the definitions of Bylaw 1.2.1. Supervision here does not appear to be either “to have authority over, to direct actions, to control activities” (the definition of supervision, Bylaw 1.2.1 [u])—because the SMP and neither the supervising general pastor nor the district president is pastor within the scope of the SMP's call—or, in the case of the supervision general pastor, the fullness of the ecclesiastical supervision assigned to the district president (Bylaw 1.2.1 [i]). The Council of Presidents continues to define, in practical terms, the sense of the general pastor's supervisory work. This terminology is referred to the Commission on Handbook for potential clarification.

2. Some particular SMPs, of course, already possess certification as a commissioned minister. While the particular SMP may thereby have the training expected of a commissioned minister and ought not by virtue of additional SMP training be excluded from commissioned ministry roles, it should not be presumed that this combination constitutes adequate preparation for pastoral supervision of commissioned ministry in a congregation.

3. See note 1 above regarding the use of oversight in a sense likely far more general than that of Bylaw 1.2.1 (p).

Lutheran Church Extension Fund Articles of Incorporation and Bylaw Review (23-3024)

Minutes of March 15–16, 2024

In its review of a proposed amendment to the Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) Articles of Incorporation (Op. 23-3015, minutes of September 6, 2023), the commission had noted a number of additional items potentially requiring attention and indicated that it would undertake a full review of the LCEF bylaws and consult with LCEF regarding some of them, in particular, the requirement of Synod Bylaw 3.6.1.3 (a) that “a minimum of one-third of the voting members of every governing board [of a synodwide corporate entity] shall be elected by the Synod in convention.”

The commission now undertakes that review. In addition to the bylaw items identified in the commission's previous review (Op. 23-3015, September 6, 2023, these reproduced here for convenience), the commission notes the following, marked as “(new)”:

Articles of Incorporation (new)

ARTICLE SEVENTH: “subject to the Constitution and Bylaws” should read “subject to the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions.” (Bylaw 3.6.1.8 [b])

ARTICLE EIGHTH: members-at-large are limited to three successive terms, while in the corresponding bylaw (Article I, Section 1 [c]), there is no qualification on the limit of three terms. This is inconsistent. Presumably, the bylaws should

be brought into line with the articles (see below).

ARTICLE EIGHTH: the commission notes that the “rounding down” of the number of additional members appointed by the Synod Board of Directors is not inherent in controlling Synod Bylaw 3.6.4.2.1; however, the commission notes this aspect of the LCEF articles as “semi-original” (dating to the implementation of the 1979 structure in 1981 LCEF articles) and does not find it, therefore, to require modification.

Bylaws

Article I, Section 1 (c): see above under ARTICLE EIGHTH: “three terms” should read “three successive terms” (new).

Article I, Section 2: while not inconsistent with the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod, a reference to “written or telegraph notice” of a special meeting may be worthy of update.

Article II, Section 1: Synod Bylaw 3.6.1.3 (a) provides that a minimum of one-third of the voting members of the governing board of a synodwide corporate entity shall be elected by the Synod in convention. Thus, with three voting members elected by the convention, LCEF's board may contain no more than six appointed voting members; it presently has eight. Bylaw 3.6.1.3 (a) was (as Bylaw 3.192, reading “A minimum of approximately one-third” until 2004) introduced by 1998 Res. 8-02B, for “implementation following the 2001 convention” (*Proceedings*, 166).

A review of LCEF Bylaws in the commission's files noted a modification by the LCEF membership in November of 1999, containing provisions adopting the present makeup of the LCEF board “beginning with the installation of officers elected at the convention of the [Synod] occurring in the year 2001.” The language adopted by LCEF designated three members to be elected by the Synod in convention, as newly required by 1998 Bylaw 3.490, but did not reduce the total size of the board to bring the ratio into alignment with Bylaw 3.192 (present-day Bylaw 3.6.1.3 [a]) or with the comment under which the 1998 change to Bylaw 3.490 was adopted, which indicated that the change was to “establish[] that a minimum of approximately [n.b., the Bylaw no longer allows approximation] one-third of the voting board members are elected by the Synod in convention” (1998 Res. 8-03B, *Proceedings*, 167). (Perhaps the ratio of 3/11 was felt to be “approximately” 1/3 at the time, although documentation of this conclusion has not been identified.) Nonetheless, this reflects the identification of a long-standing but apparent conflict between the Bylaws of the Synod and those of LCEF, which needs to be corrected.

Article II, Section 3: Here it is provided that no director may be re-elected after serving four consecutive terms; Synod Bylaw 3.6.4.3, however, does not read “consecutive” or “successive,” but limits directors of LCEF to four terms total.

Article II, Section 4: It would be appropriate to include the requirement of Synod Bylaw 1.5.3, that the board of directors meet at least quarterly (new).

Article II, Section 6 (f): perhaps “including the District Vice-Presidents” is intended here?

Article VI, final sentence: “to ascertain that” should read (cf. Bylaw 3.6.1.7 [a]) “for it to review and approve that.”

Synod Bylaw 1.5.2 requires implementation of the Synod's conflict of interest policy. While explicit mention in these gov-

erning documents is not required, the commission wishes to ensure this is implemented (new).

The commission thanks LCEF for submitting its articles and bylaws for review and looks forward to reviewing a draft of changes developed pursuant to this review. Foremost among issues identified is the requirement of Synod Bylaw 3.6.1.3 (a), that a minimum of one-third of the voting members of the governing board of LCEF be elected by the Synod in convention. The commission understands consultation to be underway between LCEF and the Secretary as to how LCEF's governing documents and organization can be brought into compliance with this requirement.

District Convention Advisory Delegate Poll and 2023 Res. 9-08A (24-3025)

Minutes of March 15–16, 2024

By an email of February 13, an ordained minister serving a district of the Synod requested an opinion on the following matter (as it was revised and extended by the Secretary for clarity). Consonant with Bylaw 3.9.2.2 (b), the commission requested input from district presidents, district boards of directors, and the Praesidium of the Synod.

Background: A district of the Synod in 2022 adopted a resolution directing the district to provide for a non-binding advisory vote of nonvoting advisory delegates prior to votes taken at 2025 and subsequent district conventions. (This has been, in one form or another, a practice of long or short standing in a number of districts.)

The 2023 Synod convention, meanwhile, adopted Res. 9-08A, “To Strengthen Nonvoting Advisory Delegate Participation at Conventions,” which reads in relevant part: “Recent efforts have included polling advisory delegates prior to delegate voting, but *in addition to violating the established rules of order (Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised [12th ed.] 45:72), such polling reduces the advice and counsel given to a single word—either ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’ The counsel these advisors can bring is much more nuanced and valuable than merely a single word*” (emphasis added).

Question: Taking into consideration 2023 Res. 9-08A and Bylaw 4.2.1 (f), “The president of the district shall conduct the sessions according to accepted parliamentary rules [...],” is it consistent with the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod for a district convention to conduct a non-binding advisory vote of nonvoting advisory delegates prior to votes of voting delegates?

Opinion: 2023 Res. 9-08A has, in response to a number of overtures suggesting broader use of the non-binding advisory vote (Ov. 9-20–25), considered the question of strengthening nonvoting advisory delegate participation at conventions and recommended other means instead, raising concerns regarding rules of order and that advisory delegates’ advice not be reduced to a simple *yes* or *no*. The resolution did not, however, prohibit the practice.

Furthermore, the commission observes that Bylaws 3.1.9 (i)(3) and 4.2.1 (f) do not prescribe *Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised (RONR)* or any other parliamentary manual in such a way as to prevent the alteration of its rules by a Synod or district convention adopting special (or “standing,” *RONR* 2:24, 59:27–37) rules (id., 2:16n5, 2:22). Both Synod and district conventions thus frequently alter the basic provisions of Robert’s (or whatever other parliamentary manual might be used), in a manner fully in accord with “accepted parliamentary rules” (id., 2:14–24).

Therefore, while the Synod in convention has recommended otherwise—and these recommendations should be taken under serious advisement by districts in ordering their conventions—it is not prohibited by the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod for a district to conduct the contemplated non-binding advisory vote, provided its convention has adopted a special rule providing for such.

Lutheran Church Extension Fund Canada Corporation (23-3005A)

Minutes of August 9–10, 2024

This opinion is potentially relevant to discussions of corporate form requirements. However, due to its length and nature as a line-by-line review, it is not incorporated here except for the following. See minutes.

Broader observations and recommendation: 1981 Res. 5-07 was proposed by the Board of Directors in response to a commission opinion (Ag. 1433, minutes of July 25–26, 1980; see also minutes of October 24–25, 1980; January 30–31, 1980; February 19, 1981; and April 24–25, 1981) regarding separate incorporation of a district church extension fund, the essence of which was that absent a bylaw or resolution prohibition of districts separately incorporating their church extension operations—notwithstanding a Board for Church Extension policy to the contrary—districts could incorporate their church extension funds “for the same reason for which at least in part the Synod [had], namely, to protect the assets of the fund.” 1981 Res. 5-07 was adopted to address the concern that the approach of this opinion (Ag. 1433) would result in unregulated incorporation of subagencies by agencies of the Synod in general. It seems that—adoption of the resolution and two subsequent (2004 Res. 4-11 and 2016 Res. 9-02A), partial revisions notwithstanding—a state of “uncertainty, possibly contradictions, conflicts, complexities, and definite lack of clarity” (1981 Res. 5-07, first *whereas*) remains regarding the requirements for subsidiary corporations.

The commission respectfully suggests that the Board of Directors undertake again, as in 1981, to clarify the requirements necessary to protect the Synod’s interests at the incorporation or revision of corporate documents of Synod’s agencies and subagencies, taking into account not only the remaining-in-force aspects of 1981 Res. 5-07 and 2016 Res. 9-02A, but also, generally, the requirements of Bylaw section 1.5, many of which have proven problematic for specific types of corporate instruments (for example, foreign mission corporations) in ways that are both difficult to adjust and outside the very narrow ability of the board to grant exceptions (see Bylaw 1.5.3.6). Such a project could take into account legal opinions as to the effectiveness or sufficiency of controls in place and, where conditions do not permit the obvious mechanism to be implemented as required, provide a framework within which the board could grant studied exceptions to individual corporations or classes of corporations, providing the Synod with effectively the same necessary assurances by different means.

This would be a worthy project if for no other reason than that the last, partial attempt to address these issues will be a decade old by 2026 and that it leaves us to rely in part on a standard that will be 45 years old, which itself is not documented in the Bylaws. The proliferation of subagencies and their worldwide projection, as well as decades of change in corporate law provide further urgent motivation. The commission also found, in researching the history of corporate formation among Synod subagencies since 1981 for

its opinion in the instant matter, many other weighty reasons for this undertaking.

Were the fruit of such an effort to be adopted by the 2026 or some future convention, a review and revision of governing documents under clear standards and with rational and justifiable exceptions could then—finally—be undertaken, and a clear and useful standard could be established for decades to come. This would be helpful to the Synod and her agencies, and their continued, well-governed service for and on behalf of their member congregations.

The commission requests that the Secretary highlight this matter for the attention of the Synod's Board of Directors.

Lutheran Church Extension Fund Canada Corporation (23-3005B)

Minutes of September 23, 2024

This opinion is potentially relevant to discussions of corporate form requirements. However, due to its length and nature as a line-by-line review, it is not incorporated here. See minutes.

Concordia Plan Services Property Casualty Insurance Program (24-3043)

Minutes of February 3, 2025

By an email of December 3, the president and CEO of Concordia Plan Services (CPS) forwarded a request for opinion on a proposal, shared with the Board of Directors in November, to develop an alternative risk management solution, involving creation of a single-parent captive¹ insurance company to serve Synod agencies (CPS has administered the insurance program for such for some years, but without a captive) and, for the first time, member congregations and schools. The captive could offer property, liability, automobile, and worker's compensation coverages; other coverages would be offered through a fully-insured carrier. CPS would enter into arrangements for program administration, a fronting carrier, reinsurance, etc. The proposal is in response to urgent needs of congregations and schools facing dramatically increasing premiums or even serious problems with placement of insurance (impacting also the work of the Lutheran Church Extension Fund); it is projected to offer lower, or at least stabilized, premiums and more accessible placement not only for these but also for participating Synod agencies.

CPS requested an appearance before the commission to answer any questions and to provide further explanation. This was deferred until the commission could review the material and ultimately determined not to be necessary.

The commission has distilled two essential questions out of the memorandum provided by CPS as follows:

Question 1: Is provision of property casualty coverage, as described, within the constitutional purposes of the Synod and, therefore, an activity for which an agency (Bylaw 1.2.1 [a]) may be formed in a manner consistent with the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod? (It is understood that formation of such an incorporated agency requires, at least under BOD Policy 6.12 and underlying resolutions, the approval of the Synod Board of Directors.)

Opinion: Provision of (or facilitation of the placement of) property casualty insurance for member congregations, schools, and perhaps recognized service organizations through a captive would

be a new activity for the Synod, although convention material² and board minutes³ show that this is not the Synod's first look at assisting congregations with their property casualty insurance needs. Nonetheless, its constitutionality must be assessed. Simply put, in the absence of a specific convention directive (Bylaws 1.3.3; 1.4.1, 1.4.5), have the congregations asked the Synod to support them in this fashion, for the conduct of their ministries (Bylaw 1.1.1)?

A. Necessity of Constitutional Review

In order for the contemplated activity to be constitutional, it must flow from the objectives of the Synod stated in Constitution Article III. A surface reading of this article in isolation reveals no obvious reference to provision of property casualty insurance to member congregations or other related organizations, or even to a related class of services.⁴

The Synod's constitutional framework authorizes officers "[to] assume only such rights as have been expressly conferred upon them by the Synod" (Constitution Article XI A 1). With regard to this limited grant, the Synod "at all times has the right to call its officers to account" (Const. Art. XI A 2). The right to pursue activities beyond the Synod's stated objectives is, obviously, not expressly conferred. The Synod has accepted, as will be seen, that there is a limited category of activities not *explicitly* present among but *constructively* identified as within the Synod's explicitly stated objectives. The expansion of work into such areas is, however, fraught with constitutional peril for the officers and agencies undertaking it (not to mention the risk of investment of a presumably significant portion of necessarily limited resources in an activity a convention could later summarily determine not to be within its charge to the Synod and its agencies). If undertaken, expansion of such work must be undertaken with due care.

B. Contextual and Historical Understanding of Const. Art. III in General

Under the broad reasons of the Preamble (one of which is "our Lord's will that the diversities of gifts should be for the common profit," 1 Cor. 12:4–31) and the confession of Art. II, Const. Art. III states the objects of the Synod (or Synodical Union). These are augmented or made more concrete (as touching on material, financial, and civil aspects) by the explanatory language of Bylaw 1.1.1, which summarizes the Synod's purpose as being "organized to work in support of and on behalf of congregations to assist them in carrying out their ministries. ..." Article II of Synod's Articles of Incorporation (AOI) reinforces the view that the Synod (or its authorized agencies) may provide some business and property services not explicit in Const. Art. III. Objectives included there are "(b) To assist in the establishment of Evangelical Lutheran congregations and preaching stations"; "(c) To assist, advise, and protect member congregations ..."; "(f) To provide assistance and resources to the congregations [and] schools ... for the dissemination of the Christian Gospel"; and "(g) To establish and conduct all such enterprises and endeavors and to exercise such further power as may be necessary or expedient to carry out the objectives stated in the Constitution." The Synod has incorporated not only to provide aid and counsel narrowly focused along the particular, ecclesial lines described in Const. Art. III but, in part, to assist its member congregations in the areas of business and property, so as to support generally their practical existence and work.

While Const. Art. III is certainly central to the fundamental definition of Synod's purposes, a completely rigid, isolated, surface reading of the article is thus not contextually tenable.

Neither is such a reading historically tenable. It may be observed that the Art. III objectives (other than the 10th) are more ecclesial in emphasis; they lack obvious reference to the accustomed, concrete efforts of the Synod to assist congregations and other entities with financial or other services. This is most notable and relevant, as congregational property matters are involved here, with regard to the work of church extension—an activity in which the Synod has been formally, substantially, and nationally involved since 1902,⁵ even well before the modern statement of the Constitution in German and then in English (1917–20). The work of church extension must be constructively identified within Article III, as will shortly be demonstrated, with relevance to the presently contemplated activity.

C. The “Constructive” Constitutionality of Church Extension Work

Prior to the 1979 revision, the Synod’s second constitutional objective was “The joint extension of the Kingdom of God,” “joint” being added in 1924. This, compared with the post-1979 text, provided more explicitly fertile constitutional ground for the work of church extension. 1979 Res. 2-03, which amended the objective, however, lists as rationale that “the objectives ... should reflect the mission of congregations organized to strengthen one another for service”; “should affirm the Synod’s role as an organization designed to serve congregations as God uses them to extend His kingdom”; “should include the Synod’s program of social ministry and its program of care for its full-time workers”⁶; and “should be stated in terms of action that reflect the urgency of the call to be in mission.”

The 1979 change in language in the second objective must be understood in light of the stated rationale, resulting in an ultimate meaning closer to the broader, pre-1979 language than would first appear. (That is, a completely rigid, isolated, surface reading of Art. III is not historically tenable.) The language appears to be intended to be a more detailed, rather than narrower, statement of the same idea, emphasizing with precision the efficient means (bold witness) that brings about the “joint extension of the kingdom of God.” “Strengthen[ing] congregations” in this may involve support distantly ancillary to the central activity of “*bold witness by word and deed*,” extending—at least in the case of church extension work—to materially aiding the congregation’s (or school’s) possession, retention, and actual use of a building in which regularly to carry this out.⁷

The financial and administrative work of church extension (i.e., principally, building and maintaining properties for member congregations, schools, and recognized service organizations), as performed by the Lutheran Church Extension Fund and a few remaining district funds, is thus comprehended, albeit not obviously or explicitly, in the Synod’s second constitutional objective, along with the rest of a limited class of generally “strengthening” activities contemplated in Art. of Inc. II, as noted above, but not explicitly enumerated in Const. Art. III. The Synod is to “strengthen congregations ... in giving bold witness by word and deed” (Const. Art. III 2) by serving “as an organization designed to serve congregations as God uses them to extend His kingdom” and as a vehicle of “congregations organized to strengthen one another for service” (1979 Res. 2-03) and thus to support *materially* as well as *spiritually* “the joint extension of the Kingdom of God” (pre-1979 Const. Art. III 2).

The “constructive” constitutionality of church extension work by a Synod agency, as thus understood, is supported by a long history of acceptance and the convention’s repeated confirmation of this

impression by adoption of bylaws explicitly delimiting the scope of work of the relevant entity, principally Bylaws 3.6.4–3.6.4.4.2 and 3.6.1–9.

D. Application to the Provision of Property Casualty Insurance to Synod Congregations and Schools

The commission has identified that the “strengthening congregations ... in giving bold witness” language of Const. Art. III 2 is historically and contextually open to the possibility of including implicit, constructively constitutional activities. (The commission considered and discarded many other theories of constitutionality related to the presently contemplated activity, some of which were suggested by the petitioner, involving objectives 4, 5, 6, 9,⁸ and 10.⁹)

The contemplated activity is considered with respect to this class of “generally ‘strengthening’ activities” within which the work of church extension falls. Like church extension, this activity could “strengthen congregations” in their central activity of “bold witness by word and deed” by materially aiding the congregation’s (or school’s) possession, retention, and actual use of a building in which regularly to carry this out. The commission thus finds that the proposed activity falls within this same permitted domain, though it lacks church extension’s historical track record of acceptance by the convention and relevant adopted bylaws.

E. Responsibility for Regulating and Assigning Activities Not Explicitly Assigned by Bylaw or Resolution

The fact that an activity—even one explicitly or constructively called for by the Synod’s objectives—is perceived by someone to be helpful to congregations is not license for any agency to engage in it unilaterally. “All agencies that serve the Synod at the national or district level in a specific area of ministry shall administer their assigned areas of responsibility as provided or authorized by the Constitution and applicable bylaws or as assigned by the respective convention” (Bylaw 1.4.5).

While business affairs explicitly delegated by adoption of bylaws or other convention action to specific agencies are merely overseen by the Synod Board of Directors, areas not so delegated remain within the native authority of said board as “the legal representative and custodian of all the property of [the Synod],” exercising “supervision over all property and business affairs” (Const. Art. XI E 2). “[The board] shall be authorized to take on behalf of the Synod any action related to such business and legal affairs which has not been expressly delegated by the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod to other officers or agencies of the Synod” (Bylaw 3.3.4.4). With regard to activities for which the convention has not assigned the responsibility, it thus falls to the Board of Directors to regulate, between conventions, what new activities may be entered into and—should it so authorize—to whom this new activity should be assigned.

The board’s authority to enter into or to authorize entry into a new area of business is not arbitrary, but relies on a finding that the activity is within the constitutional objectives of the Synod and that such entry or authorization is consistent with the board’s fiduciary duty not only to corporate Synod but, more importantly, to the members of the Synod. It needs to do so cognizant, as noted in (A) above, that it is getting itself and potentially another agency or agencies “out ahead of the convention,” an act that necessarily involves evaluation of a complex business case (perhaps as evidenced by the long history, documented in the first three footnotes above, of similar attempts not having been realized or having endured) and

requires exercise of great care. Synod in convention, should it find a decision unwise, could later reverse it, possibly at great expense. It is nonetheless a possibility—within the domain of constitutional activities—with which the Board of Directors has been entrusted.

Question 2: Is provision of property casualty coverage as described an activity within the Bylaw charge of CPS, or can it be assigned to CPS by the Synod Board of Directors in a manner consistent with the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod?

Opinion: Bylaws 3.7.1.1–2 describe the Bylaw charge of CPS in two parts. Under the first, it is assigned to be trust manager for the trusts of the Concordia Plans. Under the second, it is assigned responsibility for “managing other ancillary programs, including various supplemental insurance and administration services programs and the Support Program.” CPS has suggested that the proposed service (and associated subagency) would fall under this “ancillary program” provision. The commission notes that this pursuit, however, is not ancillary to *worker benefits*, which is the natural domain (Bylaw 3.7.1.1) of CPS, to which such program would naturally be expected to be “ancillary” (“providing necessary support to the primary activities or operation of an organization, institution, industry, or system,” *Oxford Languages*; “aiding; auxiliary; attendant upon; subordinate; a proceeding attendant upon or which aids another proceeding considered as principal,” *Black’s Law Dictionary*). A Medicare supplement program, for example, might be understood naturally to fall within the scope of such ancillary services for an organization primarily charged with worker benefits; a property casualty insurance program—dealing with property rather than with workers—less naturally so.

The commission finds the proposed activity—while within the scope of “constructively constitutional” activities possible for Synod to engage in—not to be within the predefined, Bylaw scope of any existing agency or entity. In considering whether or how this activity might be assigned to CPS or an agency thereof, the commission first addresses a series of general possibilities for how such an activity could come to be undertaken (while neither expressing any judgment about the practicality or advisability of any given approach, nor claiming this list to be exhaustive):

The Synod in convention, as “the legislative assembly that ultimately legislates policy, program, and financial direction to carry on the Synod’s work on behalf of and in support of the member congregations” (Bylaw 1.4.1) could:

- amend bylaws to assign the activity to an existing or new (Bylaw 3.6.1.1) synodwide corporate entity; or
- direct or request the initiation of, or formation of an agency for, this activity by corporate Synod.

The Synod Board of Directors, which possesses the authority to enter into and to delegate to an agency of Synod constitutionally permissible business, property, and legal endeavors not delegated by the Constitution and Bylaws to others (Const. Art. XI E 2; Bylaws 1.4.4, 3.3.4.4; AOI II [g] and V), could:

- within the auspices of corporate Synod, initiate the activity; or
- follow the process described in Bylaw 3.6.1.1 (and requirements of Bylaws 3.6.1–3.6.1.9) for formation of a synodwide corporate entity for this purpose, concurrently developing and proposing to the subsequent convention appropriate bylaws for its governance; or

- cause or authorize to be formed a new agency that is not a synodwide corporate entity (Bylaw 1.2.1 [a], subject to the elements of 1981 Res. 5-09 withstanding 2016 Res. 9-02A) to further this objective. This agency could be under the auspices of corporate Synod or of a parent agency whose bylaw purpose is sufficiently broad to accept it.

Specifically, can the Synod Board of Directors authorize CPS to establish a subagency to undertake this activity? As noted prior, this activity is not *natively* within the charge of CPS, which relates to worker benefit plans. However, neither is the activity assigned to any other agency of Synod. It remains to the Board of Directors—should it find, in its general management of the business and legal affairs of the Synod, that this activity would be appropriate for the Synod to undertake—either to carry it out, or to delegate it to a suitable existing or new agency.

Bylaws constrain the operating domain of synodwide corporate entities more closely than they do those of other agencies. Bylaw 3.6.1 provides that synodwide corporate entities have “purpose, function, and assigned areas of responsibility . . . set forth in [the Synod] Bylaws” (emphasis added). CPS, importantly, is not a synodwide corporate entity but the manager of the synodwide *trust* entities known as the Concordia Plans. It relies on Bylaw 3.6.1.5 for appointment of its chief executive but not otherwise on Bylaw 3.6.1, treating of synodwide corporate entities. It thus falls under the bylaw treating of assignment of responsibility to agencies in general, Bylaw 1.4.5, which reads, “All agencies that serve the Synod at the national or district level in a specific area of ministry shall administer their *assigned* area of responsibility as provided *or authorized* by the Constitution and applicable bylaws or as assigned by the respective convention.” CPS’s area of native responsibility is assigned by Bylaws 3.7.1.1–2, the latter indicating an openness to certain “other ancillary programs, including various supplemental insurance and administration services programs.” As the commission noted earlier, it does not understand this activity to fall under that provision. However, as an agency (and not a synodwide corporate entity), CPS may receive areas of work not only as *provided* in the Constitution and Bylaws but also as *authorized* by these documents (Bylaw 1.4.5).

As noted earlier, the commission understands the proposed activity to be within the scope of activities possible for Synod to engage in, but not to be within the predefined, Bylaw scope of any existing agency or entity. The Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod (Const. Art. XI E 2; Bylaws 1.4.4, 3.3.4.4) *authorize* the Board of Directors of the Synod to delegate this work to an agency. The commission finds no reason to conclude that the Board of Directors would not be able to delegate it, rather than to an agency of corporate Synod, to an agency of CPS.¹⁰

Should this route be pursued, the commission requests for its prior review and approval, under Bylaw 3.9.2.2.3, the new or amended governing documents of any agency undertaking the contemplated activity so that it can concretely carry out its responsibility to review such for consistency with the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod. As explained above, these documents would need to be accompanied by the resolution of the Synod Board of Directors determining that this activity is to be entered into on behalf of the Synod and assigning it to the given (proposed) agency (subagency). Apart from clarifying direction of the convention itself, which is itself subject to constitutional limits, only with this authorization by the Synod Board of Directors can the commission

finally approve initiation of this activity and creation of any related corporate form as constitutionally permissible.

Concluding remarks and recommendations: Concordia Plan Services' Articles of Incorporation list as the "principal purpose and function the administration of the pension, retirement, health, and other employee benefit plans (hereinafter, the 'Plans') established by the Synod in accordance with the terms of such Plans." The control by CPS of an activity outside this principal purpose and function will presumably necessitate changes to these governing documents, as well. (Compare Articles of Incorporation of the CPS Ancillary Program Agency, as reviewed in Op. 15-2773.)

The commission suggests, asking that this opinion be shared with the Board of Directors, that if the board determines to undertake this activity and to assign it to CPS or a subagency thereof, it would be best for the Synod Bylaw description of the work of CPS to be amended by the next convention to include this new activity, even if already entered into. Review of proposed bylaws would be welcomed concomitant with that of the other documents governing the activity and potential subagency.

Endnotes

1. *The idea of a captive (whether itself a single-parent agency of the Synod or participation in a group) serving Synod and certain of its agencies was explored 2006–8 by the Board of Directors (Minutes, Aug. 25–26 and Nov. 16–17, 2006 [see docket of latter, exhibit IC-11]; May 16–18, 2007; Feb. 14–16, Nov. 20–21, 2008). In the last of these, the Treasurer noted that a risk-sharing concept would be pursued as an alternative.*

2. 1959 Res. 16-11 declined an overture suggesting mutual property insurance covering "churches, schools, parsonages, etc.," possibly in connection with "an existing organization, such as the A.A.L.," such arrangements having "been found impracticable in past experience and been judged unwise by competent men in the insurance field." 1971 Res. 4-11, "To Decline Study of Fire and Casualty Insurance Program," dismissed the proposal of Ov. 4-85 to study developing a "synodwide" fire and casualty insurance program, serving "all congregational, college, district, and synodical buildings," on the grounds that this was "impractical for administrative and financial reasons." Both declinations are based on contemporary business evaluations and not on constitutional grounds.

3. Aug. 29–30, 1980, BOD minutes (#308) evidence a suggestion by the Executive Planning Group to "establish a property insurance company to provide fire and casualty insurance to congregations at reduced rates" in the decade of the 1980s. This was suggested under the Synod's "servant relationship to the congregations of the Synod," in which it could, at least in the area of "Program Administration, Finance, and Support Services," "offer additional support services, including the centralization of certain services, without centralizing any ecclesiastical powers."

May 25–27, 1983, BOD minutes (#616) show adoption of a resolution (exhibit H-9), coordinated with an amendment to policy treating the Synodical Insurance Program:

WHEREAS, For many years the Synod has utilized its purchasing power to provide blanket insurance coverages for all institutional properties at a great savings; and

Whereas, It is evident from numerous inquiries that the servant role of the Synod should be utilized to assist congregations in need of protection to secure it at the lowest possible dollar cost; and

Whereas, The potential of expanding such programs to include congregations has been under study for several years; and

Whereas, The Board of Directors empowered the Synod's Treasurer to work toward offering congregations a program of insurance coverages to protect property and human resources, utilizing the mass purchasing power of the Synod while at the same time preserving the decision-making authority of each entity and relating the costs to the specific risks involved; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Board of Directors adopt the Concordia Risk Pooling Fund Agreement, as an amplification of its Policy Statement on Synodical Insurance; and be it further

Resolved, That publicity regarding this new opportunity be shared with all congregations of the Synod for their information and decision (see attachment).

Exhibit H-9 indicates that, so far as the program's coverage of congregations is concerned, the Synod would be responsible "to monitor the program, to be sure that it runs as well as is intended, and to make and renew relationships periodically with the commercial insurance companies based upon performance and cost factors. In addition, experience credits or other payments which reflect a decrease in the cost of insurance because of the mass purchasing and the risk pooling, including through the substantial deductible which is inherent in the program, will be utilized through the Synod, as authorized in the agreement among the congregations." The Synod consulted with Nordstrom Risk Management (Los Angeles, Calif.) and agreed with the Great American Insurance Company (Cincinnati, Ohio) and later Preferred Risk (Des Moines, Iowa, later known as GuideOne) to offer the insurance. The form of congregational agreement is included in the docket.

The Treasurer reported at the BOD meeting of Feb. 22–24, 1984 (#149), "Approximately 350 congregations are covered in the Concordia Risk Pooling Fund, which is being revamped and for which a new carrier will be engaged as of April 1. Because of certain weaknesses in marketing, the program has met the objective of obtaining lower insurance cost for congregations but has not met the objective of having congregations in a plan which will benefit the church at large. Districts are participating well in the directors and officers liability insurance program which has been provided. Certain resolutions of the Board of Directors, as well as other entities involved, will be needed in order to clearly state the particulars regarding the coverage provided." Minutes of May 23–25, 1984 (#222), indicate that "A number of Districts have joined the Synod in its insurance program and more will be doing so as their policies expire. The program has been redirected to provide better marketing and involvement of local agents, and will hopefully result in greater penetration and service throughout the Districts. Presently, nearly 400 congregations have participated in the former program. Some difficulties with regard to the directors and officers liability risk insurance are being resolved. Only one entity is not now sharing in the cost of providing this coverage." Minutes of Aug. 22–24, 1984, note (#294), "In the area of insurance matters, it was noted that a mailing is planned to all congregations, identifying the new congregational insurance program through Preferred Risk [became GuideOne in 1999] of Des Moines. The new program does not allow as much flexibility in setting premiums as was possible under the old plan of pooling a \$100,000 deductible against which first dollar losses, subject to a cap, were paid. Nevertheless, it should attract more congregations since there will be more personal contact by agents in the field."

Minutes of Dec. 4–6, 1985, indicate the program as still active (#682). In 2003, LCMS ended its remaining relationship with Lutheran Trust (a.k.a. Church Asset Management), the St. Charles, Mo., broker that had ultimately facilitated the program.

4. With respect to the property and operations of Synod agencies, administration of the Synod's "insurance plan" for Synod agencies may be understood to lodge under Articles of Incorporation II g, whereby corporate Synod is authorized "to establish and conduct all such enterprises and endeavors and to exercise such further power as may be necessary or expedient to carry out the objectives stated in the Constitution" and the Board of Directors' authority and responsibility as "custodian of all the property of the [Synod]" (Const. Art. XI E 2).

5. Suelflow, "Church Extension Commission," in Survey Commission Report on District—Synod Relations, 1962.

6. The 4th and 10th objectives were added at this time.

7. With regard to church extension work, at the time of adoption of the "modern" Article III in 1979, the Lutheran Church Extension Fund had just been incorporated in 1978. The convention presumably did not intend to

adopt changes to invalidate constitutionally this long-standing and recently-incorporated activity.

8. *Present objectives 2 and 9 appear to root in a common, very general objective of the pre-1917, German constitution (Chapter IV 3: “Common protection and extension of the church”). The latter objective 9 has been understood most often to relate to duties and rights of pastors and congregations vis-à-vis one another and the Synod (1975 Res. 9-07; 1977 Res. 5-01; 2001 Res. 2-03A; 2010 Res. 5-01A; “Opinion on Dissenting Groups and Activities,” CCM Minutes, Oct. 30–31, 1969 [ref. Op. 03-2328, Minutes, Apr. 29, 2003; Op. 05-2443, Oct. 16–18, 2005; Op. 11-2589, Sept. 3–4, 2011]; CCM Ag. 1879; Minutes, Dec. 14, 1989; Ag. 1901, Aug. 30, 1990; Ag. 2115 [with regard to RSOs], Aug. 24, 1998; Op. 02-2280, Oct. 2, 2022; Op. 02-2309, Jan. 20–21, 2003; Op. 03-2338 [incl. A and C], Dec. 13, 2003; Op. 09-2570, Jan. 23–24, 2010; Op. 10-2581, Sept. 7, 2010; Op. 13-2669, May 16–17, 2013; Op. 22-2980, May 2, 2022; Standard Operating Procedures Manuals for dispute resolution and expulsion), once with reference to procedural rights within the Synod under worker benefit plans (1967 Res. 4-46). It presumably also extends but does not seem explicitly to have been applied in interpretation to the Synod’s efforts (e.g., Bylaw 1.2.1 [f][2] to “retain” on behalf of itself and its membership “all authority and autonomy allowed a church under the laws and Constitution of the United States and the State of Missouri.” Whether and to what extent the protection and rights describe have to do with congregational property or its enjoyment, other than in a free exercise sense, the commission does not here opine.*

9. *Although this activity is proposed by Concordia Plan Services, the constitutional basis for its core work of administering the Concordia Plans is clear (Const. Art. III 10) but, just as clearly, inapplicable to the instant question. The commission notes that work related to worker benefit plans was carried out before the 1979 addition of the relevant (10th) objective.*

10. *While Bylaws 3.7.1.1–2 do not provide for this function, neither do they exclude delegation of new functions to CPS or its subordinate agency by the Synod Board of Directors. Further, there is some analogy to the assignment of this function, even if not exact, in the “administration services” conceived under Bylaw 3.7.1.2 and the Board of Directors’ general authority to establish limits for CPS’ administration of plans on behalf of the Synod (Bylaw 3.7.1.4).*

Member of the Synod as “Journalist” (24-3040)

Minutes of March 21–22, 2025

A district president of the Synod, by an email of Nov. 18, requested an opinion on the following:

Question: Does a rostered minister of the Synod who regards him/herself a journalist relinquish the responsibilities outlined in the Bylaws and Constitution relative to Matthew 18?

Opinion: That the “rostered minister” (individual member of the Synod) “regards him/herself as a journalist” has no bearing on the member’s responsibilities under the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod.

The Bylaws of the Synod mention duties of members relative to Matthew 18 in Bylaws 1.10.1–1.10.1.6, in other passages dealing with disputes among Synod members and entities, and in Bylaw sections 2.14–17, dealing with suspension and expulsion from the Synod. Certain of the provisions apply to those who have entered (perhaps under obligation) into specific processes (cf. Op. 04-2401). Clearly, a member invoking, for example, Bylaw section 2.14 to seek suspension and expulsion of another member must follow the procedures there identified, including those involving Matthew 18, regardless of external factors such as one’s journalistic pursuits.

The general preface to Bylaw section 1.10, comprising Bylaws 1.10.1–1.10.1.6, describes the expectations the congregations have adopted for the Synod’s members “when[ever] disputes, disagree-

ments, or offenses arise among members of the body of Christ” (Bylaw 1.10.1), which reach members who have not intentionally entered into a Bylaw section 1.10 process. It is the commission’s presumption that it is primarily with regard to these generally applicable provisions that the question is put, as no specific process is mentioned as underway or incipient. Members of the Synod are expected to seek reconciliation of the erring: “The words of Jesus in Matthew 18:15–20 provide the basis for church discipline for the local congregation. The same passage also grants Christ’s guidance to all Christians in seeking to settle other disputes, many of which fall outside the purview of church discipline involving the congregation. In either case, the steps of Matthew 18 should be applied lovingly in both formal and informal settings. ... Conflict resolution in the church is to lead to reconciliation, restoring the erring member in a spirit of gentleness (Gal. 6:1). Its aim is to avoid the adversarial system practiced in society” (Bylaw 1.10.1.2). The Synod’s expectation is that its members will seek to *restore the erring*, but do so gently and within the offices and procedures the Synod has set forth for this purpose and following the scriptural admonition it has noted in its bylaws. This expectation, too, applies to members, regardless of external factors such as one’s journalistic pursuits.

The responsibilities outlined in the Bylaws and Constitution relative to Matthew 18 apply to members of the Synod, regardless of one’s vocation. In Op. 04-2401, the commission has noted that “there is no constitutional provision that allows any person, group, board, commission or other entity to assume the responsibility of ecclesiastical supervision in the Synod that has been given to the President of the Synod under Article XI B or the District President under article XII 7. This includes the formal or official constitutional responsibility to admonish or reprove members of the Synod. No one is to interfere in the work of another.”

The commission has further noted, in the same opinion, that “if and when a pastor or any individual or group does not assume the constitutional responsibility for ecclesiastical supervision in the Synod,” there is nothing to “prohibit any Christian from rebuking a Christian brother so long as biblical” (Matthew 18) “and confessional” (Large Catechism, Eighth Commandment) “principles are followed.”

Elsewhere, in Op. 05-2422, the commission has said that “members of the Synod walk together according to the covenants that they have mutually agreed upon by such membership, as delineated in the Synod’s Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions. One of those covenants is provided in Bylaw 2.14.3 (c), which details how members of the Synod have agreed to respond, ‘even if the alleged violation of Article XIII of the Constitution is considered to be “public.”’ In such case Matthew 18:15 is still followed.”

Also in Op. 05-2422, the commission reasoned that “if a false doctrine or practice is public, a pastor is not prevented (while observing principles of Christian love) from informing his own congregation(s) regarding true doctrine or practice when there is danger that the flock will be harmed by the falsehood.” “However, he may not assume this responsibility for other congregations that are not under his care or for the general public.”

While the “responsibilities outlined in the Bylaws and Constitution relative to Matthew 18” apply to Synod members, no matter their other vocations or avocations, *how* those responsibilities apply to particular communications or situations depends on the particulars of the given case.

The commission thanks the district president for the question, and if further insight is sought, would encourage him to consult the Commission on Theology and Church Relations document “Public Rebuke of Public Sin: Considerations in Light of the Large Catechism Explanation of the Eighth Commandment” (May 2006).

Pastoral Formation Committee and Existing Routes (24-3039)

Minutes of March 21–22, 2025

A congregation of the Synod, by an email of Nov. 11, requested an opinion on the following questions. Consistent with Bylaw 3.9.2.2 (b), written input was solicited from the boards of regents of seminaries and universities of the Synod, as well as from the members of the Pastoral Formation Committee.

Background: The Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) was created by 2016 Resolution 6-01 to foster collaboration between the seminaries, following the report of the 2013 Res. 5-14A Task Force, which “recognized ‘the need to provide for greater coordination and collaboration between our two seminaries’” and “recommended ‘that there be an entity ensuring that the seminaries do coordinate and collaborate with respect to these various programs’” (2016 R64, *Workbook*, p. 279).

The *Handbook* provisions governing the PFC appear in Bylaws 3.10.4–3.10.4.7. In addition to fostering collaboration, the PFC is assigned one specific power: it “shall” recommend any new routes leading to ordination for approval by resolution of the Synod (Bylaw 3.10.4.1).

The PFC also is directed to “review, assess, coordinate, support and make suggestions for improvement of all existing noncolloquy routes leading to ordination in the Synod, including seminary and pre-seminary education programs” (Bylaw 3.10.4.3). Other PFC responsibilities are outlined in Bylaws 3.10.4 and 3.10.4.4–5.

The 2023 Synod convention resolved “That the seminaries, in consultation with the Pastoral Formation Committee, retain responsibility for the academic, admissions, and financial parameters for each approved non-residential route to ordination in the Synod” (2023 Resolution 6-03A).

The Bylaws governing the seminary board of regents are found at 3.10.5–3.10.5.5. Particularly relevant to this opinion is Bylaw 3.10.5: “Each seminary of the Synod, with its president and faculty, shall be governed by a board of regents, subject to general policies set by the Synod.”

Question 1: If a seminary board of regents wishes to modify the academic, admissions, or financial parameters, or the means or place of instruction, for any existing approved non-residential, noncolloquy route to ordination in the Synod of such seminary, and such action would otherwise comply with any applicable Synod Bylaw, Constitution, or resolution requirements or restrictions on the authority of such board (e.g., the third *resolved* in 2023 Res. 6-03A), do the provisions of Bylaws 3.10.4–3.10.4.7 require such board to obtain the authorization or consent of the PFC before the board takes such action?

Opinion: As further background specific to this question, the Bylaws concerning the PFC need to be read in conjunction with the Bylaws governing seminaries as “general policies set by the Synod” (Bylaw 3.10.5). As such, a seminary board of regents must

comply with obligations imposed on the seminaries by applicable PFC bylaws.

Bylaws 3.10.4.1–2 are limited to “new routes to ordination.” As the question does not involve “new routes to ordination,” Bylaws 3.10.4.1–2 are not applicable. (Nonetheless, the commission notes that the PFC could raise an objection to a modification of an existing route so extensive that it could be construed as effectively “new,” in which case these provisions might be found to be applicable.) This leads to Bylaw 3.10.4.3 to determine if said bylaw applies.

Bylaw 3.10.4.3 states: “The committee shall review, assess, coordinate, support and make suggestions for improvement of all existing noncolloquy routes leading to ordination in the Synod, including seminary and pre-seminary education programs.” Because the question refers to “seminary” and “existing noncolloquy routes leading to ordination,” Bylaw 3.10.4.3 is applicable; the question remains to what degree Bylaw 3.10.4.3 is applicable to the question at hand.

The question before us refers to consent and authorization. For consent and authorization to be a duty and responsibility of the PFC and a requirement to be satisfied by a seminary board of regents such a requirement would need to be laid out either explicitly or implicitly as a prerequisite to fulfilling or complying with either the Synod’s Constitution or Bylaws. Nothing in Bylaw 3.10.4.3 rises to that standard.

Having answered that, as to the question asked, the seminary would not need to receive consent and authorization from the PFC, it should be noted that the change or changes referred to do need to be submitted to the PFC in order for the PFC to perform its duty to “review, assess, coordinate, support and make suggestions for improvement to” the seminary’s proposed plan.

Question 2: If a Concordia University System institution board of regents wishes to modify the academic, admissions, or financial parameters, or the means or place of instruction, for any existing pre-seminary education program of such institution, and such action would otherwise comply with any applicable Synod Bylaw, Constitution, or resolution requirements or restrictions on the authority of such board (e.g., Bylaw 3.6.6.1), do the provisions of Bylaws 3.10.4–3.10.4.7 require such board to obtain the authorization or consent of the PFC before the board takes such action?

Opinion: Bylaw 3.10.4.3 renders pre-seminary education programs within the scope of the PFC’s review, assessment, coordination, support, and suggestion of improvements. This work of the PFC is to be accommodated by Synod universities offering pre-seminary programs, which, like the seminaries, are not required to obtain PFC consent or authorization for such modifications.

Lutheran Church Extension Fund Real Estate Solutions (24-3042)

Minutes of April 7, 2025

By an email of Dec. 2, the President and CEO of the Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) forwarded a request for opinion on a series of questions:

Background: LCEF is considering being involved in some level of real estate development work in concert with property owned by one or more LCMS-related entities that would qualify as

eligible borrowers of LCEF under LCMS bylaws and related resolutions. Such development work, as it relates to this question, would include third-party investors and developers that may be for-profit entities. Per LCEF, LCEF would not be making significant capital contributions to the project. The LCMS-related entity would retain some yet-to-be-determined ownership or control over some of the property for ministry purposes post-development. Other portions of the property could be used for other purposes, including housing or commercial use.

Question 1: Is such LCEF development work consistent with Synod Bylaws 3.6.4 and 3.6.4.4.1?

Opinion: The question here boils down to whether development activity that includes some ministry-specific purposes and other, non-ministry purposes falls within LCEF's charge under Bylaw 3.6.4, which provides that LCEF "is operated ... to further the objectives and duties of the church extension fund by providing financial resources and related services for ministry, witness, and outreach" within the Synod and in limited circumstances beyond the Synod. The answer to this question will depend on the specific development project being presented; a blanket answer that all are permitted or all are not permitted is not possible. The answer for a specific project involves looking at two factors—the *who* and the *what*.

As to the *who*, LCEF is permitted to provide financial resources and related services within the Synod, to and within partner churches that are in altar and pulpit fellowship with the Synod and, upon the recommendation of the President, to certain Lutheran entities formed and operating outside of the United States (which are not understood to be at issue here). If the recipient of the financial resources is a professional church worker, a congregation in the Synod, or an agency of Synod, then the resources would be "within the Synod" and this factor would be satisfied (as it would be if the entity is, or is within, a partner church with which the Synod is in altar and pulpit fellowship, subject to Board of Directors approval). However, if, as the background from LCEF suggests, the recipient of the financial resources is, directly or indirectly, a subsidiary of, or a joint venture with, persons and/or entities that are not professional church workers, congregations in the Synod, or agencies of the Synod, then the recipient would not be "within" the Synod (similarly, with a partner church). In such cases, providing financial resources would be beyond LCEF's authority.

As to the *what*, the development would need to "further the objectives and duties of the church extension fund" (Bylaw 3.6.4). The "purpose, function, and assigned areas of responsibility" of a synodwide corporate entity are "set forth in [the Synod] Bylaws" (Bylaw 3.6.1, see opinion to Question 2, Op. 24-3043, minutes of Feb. 3, 2025), and the entity operates within such limitations (Bylaw 3.6.1.6). With regard to LCEF, the bylaws specify that it provides "financial resources and related services for ministry, witness, and outreach" (Bylaw 3.6.4). It does so by providing "financing and services for the acquisition of sites, for the construction of facilities, for the purchase of buildings and equipment, for operating expenses, for professional church worker education, for the residential housing needs of professional church workers, for promoting strategic ministry planning and assisting in capital campaigns; and for other purposes approved by its governing board and the Synod Board of Directors, which purposes shall be consistent with the ministry and mission of the Synod" (Bylaw 3.6.4.4.1). The commission understands that the specifically enumerated activities and any "other purposes approved by its governing board and the Synod Board of

Directors"—as these relate to property development—must be to develop facilities *for* "ministry, witness, and outreach," consistent with the general statement of purpose in Bylaw 3.6.4 (see also Op. 24-3043, Background, Part C, "The 'Constructive' Constitutionality of Church Extension Work"). Admitting that ministry property may have *incidental* commercial use (for example, a parking lot rented to a neighboring office building during the week, or retired school facilities leased to Head Start), the commission finds such a situation to be clearly distinguishable from investment or activity *for the purpose of* significant commercial development, even if it in some sense is intended to support or facilitate space for ministry.

In such development, where the commercial aspect is not merely incidental to ministry but substantial and significant, the benefit to "ministry, witness, and outreach" of LCEF assets or activity in support of this aspect would be derivative, not direct. As such, this is not development contemplated in the bylaw-assigned work of church extension.

Question 2: In connection therewith, various special purpose entities ("SPEs") may be created or utilized to accommodate the various ownership and management interests of LCEF, the LCMS-related entity, and third-party investors and property developers. If LCEF is the sole or partial member of an SPE that functions in an ownership or investment role as opposed to a development role, does that SPE need to meet all the requirements of an "agency" under LCMS bylaws, resolutions and CCM opinions?

Question 3: If LCEF either directly or through an SPE of which it is a member has a partial membership interest (more likely a minority interest) in an SPE that has the primary development role of a project (a "Development SPE"), does that Development SPE need to meet all the requirements of an "agency" under LCMS bylaws, resolutions and CCM opinions considering that other third-party stakeholders will also have an interest in that Development SPE?

Opinion: For purposes of answering these questions, we assume that the hypothetical development project is one that satisfies the requirements set forth in our opinion on Question 1 above.

Regardless of what the ownership structure ultimately looks like, as set forth in our Op. 23-3005A (see minutes of August 9–10, 2024, item 44), the new entity here would be, as an agency of LCEF and/or the LCMS-related entity, an agency of the Synod. This is true regardless of how many levels there are between LCEF and/or the LCMS-related entity and the ultimate property-owning entity. Starting with the entity that LCEF and/or the LCMS-related entity are directly members of, that entity would be an agency of an agency, which makes it an agency of the Synod as well. Were that entity a member of another entity, then that entity would likewise be an agency of the Synod. This would continue down throughout the ownership chain until it terminated with the property-owning entity, which would also be an agency of the Synod. Since all the entities would be agencies of the Synod, the requirements related to agencies generally would apply to all of the entities in such a development.

While not directly asked, it is important to note that one of the requirements of an agency that is created by another agency is that the creating agency must be the sole member of the new agency (see 1981 Res. 5-07). All of the background provided by LCEF

and even the questions asked all assume that there would be structures that involve ownership by LCEF and/or the LCMS-related entity, on the one hand, and third parties (whether developers or investors), on the other hand. Regardless of the level of the various ownership interests, or the rights associated with the interests, the fact of having an entity that is not wholly owned by an agency of the Synod would not be permissible.

2023 Res. 7-04B Review of Higher Education Governance Documents (23-3023)

Minutes of September 12–13, 2025

The commission received an assignment in 2023 Res. 7-04B, “To Revise Bylaws to Revisit and Renew Relationship of Colleges and Universities with the Synod,” part C, “To Clarify Relationship of the Synod’s Board of Directors to the Concordia University Boards of Regents,” to provide input to the Board of Directors of the Synod on “the governing documents and governance practices of all higher education institutions of the Synod,” with “all boards of regents and boards of associated foundations [being] directed to correct any identified noncompliance with the Synod Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions.” The commission requested documents in a memorandum of December 8, 2023, making some follow-up requests. It commenced its review of the documents at its March 2024 meeting with the first documents received, determining to hold all the reviews for collective release. It concluded its review of the last institution’s documents at this meeting and now releases its reviews for all the universities and seminaries of the Synod.

In its reviews it has noted areas where institution governing documents are not in harmony with the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod, in some places, due to the changes effected in the Synod Bylaws by 2023 Res. 7-04B, but in many places, with regard also to prior Synod Bylaws. It is important to note that the commission is charged to identify such disharmonies, not to improve generally upon the governing documents of the institutions (although it sometimes offers what are intended to be helpful suggestions). In this work, the commission must often consider where an omission from agency articles or bylaws of a detail that is not explicitly required to be included in such documents (by, for example, Bylaw 1.5.3.6) constitutes such a disharmony. To give one specific instance, the commission has found, and indicates in these reviews, that agency articles and bylaws, where they state or assume from corporation law generally an ability of the board to amend the articles or bylaws, need to include explicitly the requirement that such amendments be reviewed and approved in advance by this commission, as required by Synod Bylaw 3.9.2.2.3 (a). As the Board of Directors considers changes to Bylaw section 1.5, containing requirements for governing documents and practices of Synod agencies, the explicit requirement of inclusion of this explicit provision in agency governing documents may warrant inclusion.

Generally, the commission has noted certain provisions included in agency documents that, apart from inclusion of material from the Synod Bylaws, could prove misleading in isolation. It has not, however, generally scrutinized the governing documents for places where contradictory default inferences from laws of relevant jurisdictions or arguments from silence made otherwise might cloud a Synod procedure for, for example, removal of directors (Bylaw 1.5.7) or limitations on real property or borrowing authority, etc. The commission has likewise not fully attended to the implications of board policy for the agencies, which is generally beyond its scope of work. The commission considers the determination of

what language needs to be included in the documents to grant the Synod necessary comfort as to the binding nature of particular aspects of Synod governance on the institutions to be a matter for consideration by the Board of Directors more than by this body.

The commission, because the nature of its work is to detect disharmony, tends to produce *negative* documents indicating facets that require correction. Staff of the Office of the Secretary is preparing an accompanying document with the intention of providing *positive* guidance, more useful for a university or seminary considering development of new provisions or policies and seeking suggestions as to what *should be* included. Once the review of this document by the Office of the Secretary and this commission is complete, the Office of the Secretary intends to release it as an item complementary to the following opinions.

The opinions that follow are named after the respective institutions but receive the agenda item number assigned to the general review project, Ag. 23-3023.

The commission notes to the Board of Directors all the following reviews and will provide to the Board of Directors not only its opinions but all documents reviewed.

In the following, the commission notes also that it has not attempted to correct all instances of references to Synod Bylaws rendered incorrect simply due to renumbering as a result of 2023 Res. 7-04B or other changes.

For reports on individual institutions’ governing documents, relevant to Report R5, see noted minutes.

Director of Family Life Ministry Authorization (25-3072)

Minutes of December 2, 2025

By an email of September 21, augmented by submission of further documents on September 22, the chairman of the Concordia University System (CUS) Board of Directors (BOD) requested an opinion of the commission on the following question, related to the CUS BOD’s motion, taken September 19, to wit:

[Resolved,] To approve the minor curricular changes to the Director of Family Life Ministry (DFLM) Program and authorize it to be offered at the Master’s level at Concordia Nebraska and Concordia Wisconsin under Bylaw 3.6.6.1 (b), contingent upon review by the Commission for Constitutional Matters.

The commission was also provided with a document entitled, “White paper in support of changes to colloquy requirements for commissioned status of Commissioned Family Life Ministers in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,” as was provided to the CUS BOD, and a number of other backup documents. At the suggestion of the Secretary, the question was worded thus:

Question: Does the CUS BOD possess the authority under Bylaw 3.6.6.1 (b) (as opposed to the authority reserved to the convention under Bylaw 3.6.6.1 [g]) to authorize implementation of a commissioned minister preparation program previously offered at the bachelor’s level at one Concordia campus in the form of a master’s level program including substantially equivalent subject matter at the same or a different Concordia university?

Opinion: On the recommendation of the Board for Higher Education (BHE)/CUS, 2004 Res. 5-04A authorized the Director of

Family Life Ministry (DFLM) as a type of commissioned minister and authorized BHE/CUS, presumably under 2004 Bylaw 3.8.3.4 (c), to “review and approve new programs” in this area under its broad assignment to “have overall responsibility to provide for the education of commissioned ministers” (2004 Bylaw 3.8.3.1). The resolution described the program thus:

The family life program is multi-disciplinary, emphasizing theology, sociology, law, economics, and scripturally sound psychology. The family life graduate will possess the theological, academic, and practical training needed for providing specialized services to families in a variety of situations and settings. Students preparing for the position of Director of Family Life Ministry will participate in a program of study that conforms to the requirements established by the Concordia University System for admitting, monitoring, and placing church-vocations students. The requirements for the study of theology are the same as for Lutheran teacher and director of Christian education students. Family life ministry programs on Concordia University System campuses will maintain required academic standards so that graduates will also be eligible for professional licensure.

Today, CUS is charged:

- on the one hand, to “review and approve new implementations of and discontinuance, whether actual or constructive, of programs of study leading to professional church work in the interest of the institution(s) and the Synod” (Bylaw 3.6.6.1 [b]), to maintain standards for such programs (Bylaw 3.6.6.4 and its subparagraph [c]), and to conduct visitation and possible disaffirmation of such programs (Bylaw 3.6.6.4.1 and its subparagraph [d]), and
- on the other, to “receive, revise, and recommend to conventions of the Synod for approval any proposals for creating, essentially revising, or renaming programs of study and certification for commissioned ministry” (Bylaw 3.6.6.1 [g]).

The question before the commission is whether the authorization of DFLM programs as indicated falls under the former provision, thus requiring only CUS approval, or the latter, instead requiring approval of the convention.

The CUS resolution does not create or rename a program of study and certification for commissioned ministry, so as to create or rename a new category of commissioned ministry, to be added to the list presented today in Bylaw 2.6.1.1. Such would clearly require action of the convention, pursuant to a recommendation from CUS as described in Bylaw 3.6.6.1 (g).

This leaves the question of whether the resolution amounts to “new implementation[s]” (Bylaw 3.6.6.1 [b], delegated to CUS) or an *essential revision* (Bylaw 3.6.6.1 [g], requiring convention action) of an *existing* program of study and certification for commissioned ministry/leading to professional church work (namely the DFLM program). The former, within the realm of CUS BOD to approve, would be an implementation by a new Concordia university or in an incidentally different outward form of the essence of an existing program among those listed in Bylaw 2.6.1.1. The latter, requiring convention approval, would be a revision of the “intrinsic, fundamental nature” or of “an indispensable element” (*Collins Dictionary*) of an existing church work program to have a fundamentally different requirement with regard to some presently indispensable element. In the former case, a graduate’s formation by a “new implementation” would be readily recognized as “equivalent” in

terms of subject matter expertise and ministerial formation to that of a graduate of one of the other implementations; in the latter, the formation of a graduate of an “essentially revised” program might not be.

While the relative evaluation of curricula belongs to CUS and not to this commission, the commission observes that the language of “minor curricular changes” and “including substantially equivalent subject matter” seems consistent with the sort of “new implementation” of an existing program described in Bylaw 3.6.6.1 (b) and, therefore, within the authority of CUS BOD to authorize.

The commission notes, however, that the provided white paper indicates “all rostered, commissioned workers in the LCMS take core theology classes that include the study of Old Testament, New Testament, doctrine and confessions of the LCMS, methods in religious education, and the role of the church professional. A DFLM takes these classes as well.” However, as might be expected, the master’s level program descriptions provided do not include this coursework. The commission thus understands the master’s program to be incomplete, as to certification, in itself, requiring the “core theology class” requirements to be satisfied through a prior undergraduate church work program or some other means. It has been clarified for the commission that, while the master’s degree is not inclusive of the theology requirements, a track for completion of said requirements would be provided and required *for those seeking certification*, either via classes at the respective Concordia or through CUEnet (whether by certification or colloquy). This was likened to the “modularity” of the education major and Lutheran Teacher Diploma pathway at a number of Concordia universities. Considered within this context, this nuance does not alter the commission’s conclusion, stated above.

Presidential Appointment following Invalid Circuit Election (26-3074)

Minutes of February 6–7, 2026

The Secretary of the Synod posed a question as follows:

Question:

A circuit conducted timely elections for pastoral and lay delegate and alternates to the Synod convention, correct in all respects except that the alternate lay delegate was elected from the same congregation as, and subsequent to, the alternate pastoral delegate. The alternate lay delegate was, therefore, not certified by the district secretary. After the bylaw certification deadline, the lay delegate was rendered unable to attend the convention. Does the defective election of an alternate lay delegate preserve the ability of the district president to appoint a replacement lay delegate for the circuit under Bylaw 3.1.2.1 (m)?

Background:

Op. 10-2580, 13-2675, and 19-2906 do not definitively answer this question. Op. 10-2580 notes that “Bylaw 3.1.2.1 (j) allows appointment by a district president in some instances of defective elections. However, in each of those prior instances considered by the CCM where that right was recognized, an election was held in a timely manner, but was defective in some other respect.” Op. 10-2580 seems to refer to Ag. 1851 (Dec. 3, 1998), in which the commission commended appointment of replacements by the district president in a situation where delegates and alternates had been elected “timely” but outside the forum and by a procedure other than that specified in the bylaws. At the same time, Op. 19-2906 speaks of “due election” and Op. 13-2675 states

that “Where no proper election has occurred, no vacancy exists [to be filled by presidential appointment].”

Opinion: The commission finds that Bylaw 3.1.2.1 (m), which authorizes presidential appointment, presumes the prerequisites of both a delegate and an alternate election. Subparagraph (l), adopted in 2023 Res. 9-05A, emphasizes that a circuit can, before the deadline, remedy an earlier failure to elect a delegate or alternate. A circuit that has not elected both a delegate and alternate by the bylaw deadline does not, in accord with Op. 13-2675 and longstanding practice, have recourse to presidential appointment.

The commission finds that an election invalid at the time of election and not certified by the district secretary does not constitute an election of a delegate or alternate. The remedy for a failure to elect is to complete the failed election in another forum prior to the deadline (Bylaw 3.1.2.1 [l]). If the circuit has not before the deadline validly elected both a delegate and alternate in the category (pastoral/lay) where the vacancy occurs, recourse to presidential appointment is not available.

LCEF Board of Directors, District Membership Limitation (26-3076)

Minutes of February 6–7, 2026

The Secretary of the Synod posed the following question on February 5:

Background: The Board of Directors of The Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod (LCEF) is a governing board of the Synod (Bylaw 3.2.2), the membership of which is stated in Bylaw 3.6.4.3, which reads as follows, the number of directors being left to specification in the bylaws of LCEF:

- 3.6.4.3 The board of directors for the Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod shall consist of such number of directors as are specified in the bylaws of The Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod. All voting members of the board of directors of the Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod shall serve a maximum of four three-year terms.
1. Three directors shall be elected by the Synod in convention and shall include one ordained or commissioned minister and two laypersons.
 2. The remaining voting directors shall be chosen by the members.
 3. The representative designated by the Board of Directors of the Synod shall also be a nonvoting member of the board.

LCEF Bylaw II 1 provides: “No more than two elected Directors can be from the same district of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.” Presently, the board has midterm incumbents from seven districts. Three seats (and possibly four, if Bylaw 3.6.4.3 [1] is amended to admit *four* convention-elected directors as approved in Op. 24-3050A) are up for election by the 2026 convention. Two of those seats are held by lay incumbents having districts in common with two of the seven midterm incumbents, meaning that, under the LCEF bylaw, no further members can be admitted from those two districts (presuming the incumbents are reelected). There is the potential that electing another member from one of those two districts in the ordained/commissioned seat (which is elected prior) could either preclude the reelection of an incumbent in one of the lay seats or produce a situation where the LCEF bylaw stricture is violated.

The commission has dealt prior with agency bylaws placing additional geographical limitations on the membership of a partially elected, partially appointed board, in Op. 16-2800A finding:

The requirement that the two laypersons elected by the Synod be resident freeholders of (i.e., with residence in and having freehold title to property within) Seward County, Nebraska, cannot be imposed on the Synod convention by the university’s bylaws and, as stated, are invalid. The requirement of the former CUNE bylaws was simply that two of the laypersons (including those elected by Synod and district and appointed by the board) be resident freeholders of Seward County. The Synod’s choice of its two elected laypersons cannot be so restricted. Should, following a Synod convention, the board be in a position of lacking two resident freeholders of Seward County, Nebraska—if this is, in fact, a legal requirement that must be retained—it is the board’s responsibility to meet this requirement, not the Synod’s, and the board may satisfy this requirement by its ability to appoint members.

This opinion, narrowly construed, was later codified in Bylaw 3.10.6.2 [2]:

- 3.10.6.2 The board of regents of each college and university shall consist of no more than 18 members, all voting.

...

2. One ordained minister, one commissioned minister, and two laypersons shall be elected by the geographical district in which the institution is located. If any board is required by its governing documents to include one or more persons holding residence or church membership in a specific locality, the institution is responsible for ensuring (including by appointment, if necessary) that individual(s) meeting such requirements are included among those persons serving on such board, and no such geographic restriction shall apply to Synod-elected regents.

...

Question 1: Is the requirement of LCEF Bylaw II 1 binding on the convention as it elects members of the LCEF Board of Directors, precluding election of members such that their election would result in more than the maximum number allowed under the bylaw to be from a given district, or is the requirement not binding on the convention and required to be dealt with by the LCEF membership?

Opinion 1: Were the limitation to be stated in Synod Bylaws as well as in those of LCEF, there would be no question as to the applicability of the limitation to the directors to be elected by the convention. The requirement, however, is stated only in the LCEF Bylaws.

The situation is distinguishable in two important regards from the case dealt with in Op. 16-2800A and in Bylaw 3.10.6.2 [2]: First, the LCEF requirement is one not required by local statute and not purely geographical, but one dealing with district representational balance. It thus may serve not some local jurisdictional requirement but the Synod’s own interests (although not codified in its own Bylaws). Second, the LCEF bylaws, as bylaws of a synodwide corporate entity, are subject to the unique process of Bylaw 3.6.1.7 (while the provision in question was adopted, to be clear, prior to the adoption of Bylaw 3.6.1.7).

Nonetheless, Synod Bylaws regarding synodwide corporate entities (first adopted in 1998 Res. 8-03B, then newly requiring all the en-

tities to have board members elected by the Synod in convention) provide as follows (emphases added):

3.6.1.3 Each synodwide corporate entity shall have a governing board.

- (a) A minimum of one-third of the voting members of every governing board shall be elected by the Synod in convention *as described in these Bylaws*.
- (b) The names of the individual members of each of these governing boards shall be reported annually in an official periodical of the Synod.

Further, Synod's bylaw regarding LCEF's board of directors (adjusted, along with those of other entities, in 1998 to include the convention-elected directors) states:

3.6.4.3 The board of directors for the Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod shall consist of such *number* of directors as are specified in the bylaws of The Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod. All voting members of the board of directors of the Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod shall serve a maximum of four three-year terms.

- 1. Three directors shall be elected by the Synod in convention and shall include one ordained or commissioned minister and two laypersons.
- 2. The remaining voting directors shall be chosen by the members.
- 3. The representative designated by the Board of Directors of the Synod shall also be a nonvoting member of the board.

The commission finds that Bylaw 3.6.1.3 (a)—which states that election is “as described in *these Bylaws*”—requires that all limiting factors regarding the election of members to a synodwide corporate entity governing board by the Synod convention must be stated in the Bylaws of the Synod. Bylaw 3.6.4.3 makes reference to the bylaws of LCEF only with regard to the *total number* of directors on the board and not to any further requirements placed on the election of directors by the convention.

The commission therefore finds, consistent with the general line of reasoning of Op. 16-2800A (quoted above), that for the requirement (namely, that no more than two directors be elected from any one district) to be binding on the Synod in convention, it must be recorded in the Bylaws of the Synod—which it is not. If the convention's choices are to be limited, it must have adopted that limitation.

The convention can be asked to add the language to the Synod Bylaws, perhaps to Bylaw 3.6.4.3, and if it does so, the provision would be operative from the time of adoption.

Question 2: If the requirement is not binding on the Synod convention and the convention elects directors such that more than the allowed number, in total, are from a given district, what is to become of any appointed (that is, elected by the LCEF membership, not by the Synod convention) member(s) from such a district?

Opinion 2: The commission finds that LCEF Bylaw II 1, that “no more than two elected Directors can be from the same district of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,” is—to the extent that it limits the choice of the Synod in convention as to directors it elects—in conflict with Synod Bylaw 3.6.1.3 and therefore inoper-

ative for those directors *only*; the constitution and bylaws provide no basis to render it inoperative for the appointed directors. This determination controls and supersedes.

The commission observes that corporate law will have to be consulted regarding the impact of this effective change in the bylaws of LCEF on the service of midterm directors whose district membership and that of those elected by the Synod in convention might conflict with the rule.

The commission further observes that a slight change in the wording of LCEF's bylaw—if the desire is to accommodate the convention's current freedom while preventing conflict with current terms of existing directors—might be helpful: “No directors can be elected by the membership from any district already providing at least two elected directors.”

Completeness of Record in Bylaw 2.14.4.2 (a) Concurrence (25-3070)

Minutes of February 6–7, 2026

A pastor of the Synod requested the commission's opinion on the following three questions, occasioned by the determination of a district president not to suspend on the basis of a formal written accusation, filed under Bylaw section 2.14, in a matter of doctrine and practice. The President of the Synod had concurred in the determination of the district president not to suspend, as provided for in Bylaw 2.14.4.2 (a).

In accordance with Bylaw 3.9.2.2 (b), input was requested from the President of the Synod and the district presidents of the accuser and the accused. In accordance with the principles of the *Standard Operating Procedures Manual (SOPM)* for said bylaw section, and out of an abundance of caution for the possibility of resuming formal process, background material provided was restated for the commission in a case-nonspecific manner.

Question 1: Does the concurrence of the President of the Synod under Bylaw 2.14.4.2 (a) eliminate the accuser's right to appeal for action if the President did not receive or did not review the full written charges and the record of the district president's investigation, as required by Bylaw 2.14.4.2?

Opinion: Bylaw 2.14.4.2 sets forth a procedure by which a district president can, in a matter of doctrine and practice and where there is a formal written accusation, obtain the advance concurrence of the President of the Synod in his decision not to suspend an accused member, so as to preclude a subsequent appeal (to the President of the Synod) for action by the accuser (Bylaws 2.14.4.2 [a], 2.14.5 [a]). Where the responsible district president has determined not to suspend, the district president has determined *either* that cause does not exist *or* that admonition *has proven not futile*, rendering suspension inappropriate (Constitution Article XIII 1). The mechanism of Bylaw 2.14.4.2 allows him—when he has reached such a preliminary determination—to request the President's concurrence, potentially rendering it final and not subject to appeal as to the present allegations and facts and finally concluding the process initiated by the submission of the formal written accusation. The mechanism was developed “to help district and Synod presidents to speak ‘with one voice’ in potentially contested declinations to suspend” (April 7, 2017, Memorandum of the Secretary to the Board of Directors, describing bylaw changes presented for approval as a result of the 2016 Res. 12-14 Council of Presidents consultation process).

The constitutional right and duty to “promote and maintain unity of doctrine and practice in all the districts of the Synod” upon which the appeal for action is founded is *the President’s* (Const. Art. XI B 3; Op. 16-2791; 2016 Res. 12-14) and *not the accuser’s*. Where the President has concurred in a district president’s decision not to suspend, he has finally exercised, with regard to the matter at hand, his right and duty to intervene in the matter to “promote and maintain unity of doctrine and practice in all the districts of the Synod.” The concurrence mechanism of Bylaw 2.14.4.2 does not in essence *prevent* a matter from coming before the President of the Synod for review; it simply *advances* the President’s review of, and potential concurrence in dismissal of, a matter that might otherwise subsequently come before him as an appeal for action.

Prerequisite to obtaining such concurrence, the district president is to “convey [] to [the President of the Synod] the accuser’s formal written accusation, the record of [the district president’s] investigation, and [the district president’s] preliminary determination” (Bylaw 2.14.4.2). It is the clear expectation of the bylaw that these items be conveyed fully, and to this the district president is duty bound (see also clear standards for what is to be included in the “record of the investigation,” *SOPM* for Bylaw section 2.14, December 2023, Flow Chart Detail, Step 2.3, pp. 31–32). It must be said, at least in passing, that a district president’s withholding of required information from the President to obtain a concurrence and frustrate a potentially valid appeal for action would be a “violat[ion] ... of the requirements or procedures” as described in Bylaw 2.14.10.2, with potential for the consequences there also described.

It must also be said that the President must be aware he is granting a concurrence for him to have been said to have done so. Bylaw 2.14.4.2 requires certain materials to be presented to the President within the framework of a formal request for concurrence in a matter involving doctrine and practice and a formal, written accusation. Clearly, if the President is not aware he is granting such concurrence (for example, if a district president in a conversation describes a situation without providing a formal, written accusation, and the President casually indicates approval of the district president’s approach or conclusions), no such concurrence is granted. As the question is presented, however, there is no question of whether the President understood that he would be granting, and did grant, a concurrence upon materials presented to him that at least facially met the requirements of Bylaw 2.14.4.2.

We now turn to the question at hand, which is of what options an accuser has if, after a concurrence has been delivered, he believes the “accuser’s formal, written accusation, the record of [the district president’s] investigation, and[or] [the district president’s] determination” were not fully delivered to the President, or fully reviewed by him.

We deal with the latter part first. The question in its second aspect asks whether a failure of the President to *review* the record in full invalidates the concurrence. This, the dignity of the President’s office presumes (see “Third” below) but the bylaws do not clearly require, or present a definite standard for review of such, or provide a finder of fact to reach such a determination. This being the case, the commission has no authority to set a standard or provide a finder of fact regarding this aspect, and it will therefore not be further considered in this opinion.

Now to the first part, as to the full conveyance of the required material to the President. The President’s concurrence is a finally dispositive act as regards the facts presented in the formal, written accusation. Of it there is no means of review provided, and from

it there is no further appeal. It has the full effect of a presidential determination not to initiate formal proceedings upon an appeal for action, just delivered earlier in the process.

Specifically, the Bylaws provide for no latter-day review of the adequacy of the material presented to the President that could void his concurrence and restore his ability to receive an appeal for action in the matter at hand. Bylaw section 2.14 in other places provides explicit opportunities for review of procedural adherence, as well as specific remedies. For processes that reach a panel (constituted only when a member has been suspended), the panel is empowered to consider compliance with the bylaw provisions; indeed, one of the sub-issues each panel decides is: “Was proper procedure followed by the ecclesiastical supervisor in suspending the member of the Synod (Const. Art. XIII 2; Bylaws 2.14.3–2.14.10.3)?” (id., Decision, p. 57). There is a procedure for objections to alleged non-compliance—when a matter is before a panel—that can result in corrective action and even a new panel (id., General Regulation V, p. 18). But the Bylaws of the Synod provide no authority—*prior* to an empanelment—to review the actions of ecclesiastical supervisors (other than that they so empower the President, Const. Art. XI B 1–2; Bylaw 3.3.1.1.1 [b, d]; 3.3.1.2 [b–c]) and grant no authority—not even to the President—to compel performance or to correct, outside established bylaw procedures and timelines, prior actions or failures to act. Here, the appeal for action and its attendant prior concurrence are *themselves* instances of established bylaw procedures allowing the President to intervene upon the performance of duties by the initial ecclesiastical supervisor; bylaws provide no further authority to—or means whereby any might—intervene upon the intervention, especially after the fact.

When the President’s concurrence is officially requested under the provision in question, the President must determine, therefore, before he concurs, whether he is entirely satisfied with the adequacy of the record before him to allow his determination that there is no cause that the worker should be suspended, or further admonished under possibility of suspension, on the basis of the facts presented in the formal, written accusation. In case of any doubt in the President’s mind as to the completeness of the record before him that cannot be resolved by conference with the district president, he has the options either to not concur, which may prompt the district president to revise his determination or initiate further investigation, for which more time can be allotted, or to take no action, allowing the district president to proceed with his own determination (id., Step 2.5, p. 32). These options both preserve the potential for appeal for action to the President and for his subsequent independent investigation of the charges and his admonition and/or suspension of the accused (id., Step 2.6, p. 33).

In summary, the commission finds:

First: That a presidential concurrence once clearly given in response to a clear request under Bylaw 2.14.4.2 cannot be voided, so as to restore the possibility of appeal for action. The Bylaws provide no specific mechanism for an appeal for action to be revived following a presidential concurrence under Bylaw 2.14.4.2. “Expulsion shall be executed only after following such procedure as shall be set forth in the Bylaws of the Synod” (Const. Art. XIII 2). Where the bylaws and attendant *SOPM* do not themselves provide means of procedural correction, the ability to correct procedural errors is severely curtailed. Where a concurrence is requested, the onus is on the Synod President to ensure that any doubt about sufficiency of the material before him is resolved before he grants any such concurrence. Once he has concurred, a subsequent discovery of the

incompleteness of the prerequisite material does not give him the right to withdraw or void his concurrence and proceed to take up the now-precluded appeal for action.

Second: That, the concurrence feature of Bylaw 2.14.4.2 having been added as “a mechanism to help district and Synod presidents to speak ‘with one voice’ in potentially contested declinations to suspend” (Secretary Memo), its purpose would be frustrated if such concurrence, once granted, did not terminate the matter at hand. The concurrence mechanism brings a matter, so far as it extends, before the ultimate sitting authority responsible for the doctrinal and practical unity of the Synod, namely the President, and gives him a stated window in which to act (or not) upon such facts as are presented to him. This preserves the right of the accused to timely process, while allowing the President either to “speak with one voice” together with a district president in dismissing a matter or—should he have any doubts about concurring—the right at the time to preserve the ability of an accuser to appeal for action.

Third: That the onus of “the supervision regarding the doctrine and the administration” and the responsibilities to “conscientiously use all the means at [the President’s] command to promote and maintain unity of doctrine and practice in all the districts of the Synod” (Const. Art. XI B 1–3) rests here, as elsewhere, on the President. These are duties he is expected to perform in good faith, upon which good faith the Synod ultimately relies. His concurrence concludes with finality the process initiated by the formal written accusation presented to him. The President is the ultimate determiner of whether the requirements of Bylaw 2.14.4.2, upon which his concurrence is contingent, have been carried out, and the time for him to make that determination—as regards the process for potential expulsion of the accused—is before he would grant concurrence in the disposition of that process. There is no mechanism provided in the Bylaws for independent or latter-day review of the sufficiency of materials provided to the President under Bylaw 2.14.4.2, much less, of the extent or quality of his review of those materials. The district president and President must be accountable for the conduct of their offices, but that is a matter outside the particular Bylaw section 2.14 process and with no impact on it.

Question 2: Does the complainant have the right to request and receive confirmation or evidence that the President of the Synod received and reviewed the full written charges and the record of the district president’s investigation, as required by Bylaw 2.14.4.2, prior to concurring under Bylaw 2.14.4.2 (a)?

Opinion: See above as to “and reviewed.” There is no standard or finder of fact for latter-day review of this aspect. As to “received,” neither the Bylaws of the Synod nor the relevant *SOPM* establish such a right. The concurrence of the President of the Synod under Bylaw 2.14.4.2 necessarily includes the implicit certification that, in the determination of the Synod’s ultimate ecclesiastical supervisory officer, the procedure stated has been followed in good faith, including the provision of all required materials. The President could explore doubts in this regard as part of his ecclesiastical supervision of the district presidents, but the complainant has no such independent right.

The Bylaws do not preclude an accuser from inquiring of the accused’s district president whether the entire formal written statement of the matter was conveyed to the President, or of the President, whether such was received or how it was reviewed. At the same time, the Bylaws do not establish a right to a response.

Question 3: If the required procedure of Bylaw 2.14.4.2 was not properly followed, does that procedural failure invalidate the President’s concurrence under Bylaw 2.14.4.2 (a), thus restoring the complainant’s right of appeal for action?

Opinion: With regard to the completeness of the record presented to the President or the adequacy of his review, the situation here presented, the question has been answered above. The President’s concurrence, once given in response to a clear request, is finally dispositive of the matter as presented in the formal, written accusation.

Reconsideration of Op. 24-3031, Adjunct Seminary Faculty (24-3031A)

Minutes of February 6–7, 2026

By an email and memorandum of May 6, 2025, the presidents of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, requested that the commission reconsider its Opinion 24-3031, Adjunct Seminary Faculty, which can be found in the minutes of March 21–22, 2025. The commission accepted the request and solicited input, under Bylaw 3.9.2.2 (b), from the boards of regents and presidents of the seminaries and universities of the Synod, as well as from Concordia University System and the President of the Synod, some of which (and some members of which) responded with written materials.

Two concerns are expressed in the request to reconsider Op. 24-3031:

1. That Bylaw 3.10.5.5 (g) should be considered as applicable to full-time faculty only, not, as the opinion states, to all faculty (part-time and/or temporary included).
2. That the term “staff” used in Bylaw section 3.11 should not be considered, as the opinion states, as applicable to “faculty” (including part-time or temporary).

Opinion: As to the first concern, the request for reconsideration cites several bylaws in which the unqualified word *faculty* must be meant to refer only to *full-time faculty*, in some cases because only the full-time faculty vote and some action of the faculty is being referred to. The fact that they do not vote (or do not tend to receive sabbaticals), however, does not place the part-time faculty outside the *faculty*, as Bylaw 3.10.5.7 makes clear. In fact, Bylaw 3.10.5.7 must limit which faculty can vote precisely *because* the part-time and temporary faculty *are faculty*. The commission finds no reason in the bylaws cited to conclude that Bylaw 3.10.5.5 (g)’s use of the term *faculty* can, on the basis of the bylaw language, be determined to refer only to full-time faculty.

While the commission recognizes that understanding the reference to “the appointment of faculty members” in Bylaw 3.10.5.5 (g) to apply beyond the full-time faculty runs counter to now-common practice, the commission stands by its interpretation of the bylaw as stated in the original opinion. The commission further restates that because the primary purpose of each seminary is to teach and train those going into the ministry, the involvement of the boards of regents in the appointment of all those carrying out that education would seem to be their “fulfilling of the mission of the seminary” (Bylaw 3.10.5.1).

As to the second concern, the commission finds that the term “staff” is used in a wider sense in Bylaw section 3.11, as opposed to the narrower sense used in contradistinction to faculty in, for example,

Bylaw 1.5.1.1. In that bylaw, when *staff* is defined as excluding faculty, it is under the proviso that the distinction is “for the purposes of this bylaw only.” As used in Bylaw 3.11.1, the term encompasses employees of any and all Synod entities, including both faculty and staff of the Synod’s seminaries and universities.

In the input received regarding the reconsideration, concern was expressed that the opinion could curtail the seminaries’ flexibility and agility to address emergent needs. Additionally, historical context was provided to support the current practice of appointing part-time and/or temporary faculty without Board of Regents approval specific to particular appointments. The commission, however, notes that the Bylaws still provide flexibility with regard to the appointment of part-time faculty—as noted in the original opinion’s interpretation of Bylaw 3.10.5.5 (g) (emphasis added):

The lack of a Bylaw-specified procedure for this type of faculty [appointment] does not abrogate the board’s involvement. Bylaw 3.10.5.7.2 requires that for all types of appointments, including those treated under subparagraph (g), the seminary is to have “established policies and procedures, these to be put in place by the board of regents (Bylaw 3.10.5.5 [a]). *With regard especially to these “other types of faculty appointments,” the board’s level of involvement in such procedures is left to the board to determine, so long as they ultimately approve of such appointments (Bylaw 3.10.5.5 [g]). The board could choose to undertake such appointments directly, or it could choose to permit the president to undertake such appointments subject to ultimate approval or ratification by the board. The board could also choose to delegate this task to a committee in accordance with Bylaw 1.5.3.3. These examples are not intended to exhaust all legitimate possibilities; so long as the choices of the board do not conflict with another express provision of the bylaws, it is free to accomplish its task of “approving” as it sees fit.*

Having not received input that leads the commission to a different conclusion about the meaning of relevant bylaws, after reconsideration, the commission finds no basis for revision of Op. 24-3031. All are thanked for submitting input.

Commission on Constitutional Matters

Theological Documents

Commission on Theology and Church Relations

Reports

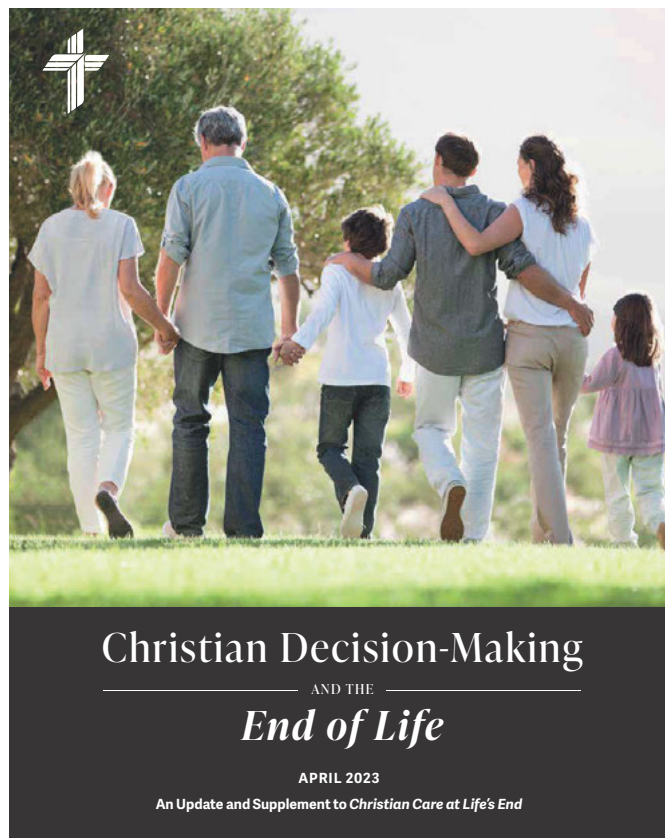
R62.1	<i>Christian Decision-Making and the End of Life: An Update and Supplement to 1993's Christian Care at Life's End</i> (2023)	194
R62.2	Response to Wyoming District Request regarding Immortality of the Soul (2024)	209
R62.3	<i>Mission and Ministry Principles and Practical Observations and Suggestions</i> (2024)	210
R62.4	Response to the 2021 Final Report of the Theological Conversations between the ILC and the Roman Catholic Church (2024)	212
R62.5	Response to the Lutheran Church of Australia's "Way Forward" Proposal (2024)	215
R62.6	<i>Online Technology in the Church: Study Materials</i> (2024)	232
R62.7	<i>A Theology and Philosophy of Lutheran Education</i> (2025)	235
R62.8	<i>Unity in Doctrine, Uniformity and Variety in Practice: A Study Document</i> (2025)	241
R62.9	<i>Proper Administration of the Lord's Supper: Applying Scripture and the Confessions to Contemporary Issues</i> (2025)	250
R62.10	<i>Deacons, Evangelists and the Office of the Holy Ministry in the New Testament</i> (2025)	263

Opinions and Other Documents

R62.11	President of Synod Request for Opinion on Lay Reading of Sermons and Conduct of Worship in the Absence of a Pastor (2023)	269
R62.12	President of Synod Request for Opinion on Lawsuits between Christians or Members and Institutions of Synod (2025)	271
R62.13	Joint Seminary Boards of Regents Request for an Opinion on Admission to Seminary for Divorced Men (2025)	273

Joel D. Lehenbauer, *Executive Director*

R62.1



Christian Decision-Making

— AND THE —

End of Life

An Update and Supplement to *Christian Care at Life's End*

COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY AND CHURCH RELATIONS

Contents

I. Introduction	1
A. Death, the Existential Reality	2
B. A Culture on the Move in Attitude and Legal Permissions	4
C. Dying in America	5
II. Theological Foundations	6
A. Christian Basis for Human Dignity and the Sanctity of Life	6
B. Death with Dignity?	10
C. The Quest for Absolute Autonomy	12
D. The Question of Euthanasia and What It Really Means	13
III. Medical-Ethical Considerations	15
A. Ventilators and Medical Prolongation of Life and Dying	15
B. Who Decides?	17
C. Advance Directives	17
D. The Question of When Enough Is "Enough"	22
E. Refusing or Withdrawing Treatment	23
F. Financial Matters	24
G. Necessary Distinctions and Helpful Terminology	26
1. Burdens of Treatment vs. Burdens of Life	26
2. Caring, But Only Caring	26
3. Irretrievably Dying vs. Terminally Ill	27
4. Intention or Aim of an Action vs. Result of an Action	27
5. Palliative Care vs. Palliative Sedation	27
6. Treatments Which May Be Refused vs. Care Which Should Never Be Denied	28
7. "Vegetable" vs. "Persistent Vegetative State"	29
8. What Do/Did They Want? vs. What Is Best for Them?	29
H. Hospice Care	29
IV. Pastoral and Spiritual Dimensions	32
A. Dealing with Our Uncertainty and Sinfulness	32
B. The Reality of Death and Our Struggle with Helplessness	33
1. Fear of Helplessness and Lack of Control	34
2. Facing Helplessness Due to Suffering	35
3. Facing Helplessness as a School for Learning to Trust God	35
C. Christ's Comfort for the Dying	36
D. Christ's Comfort for the Grieving	37
V. Concluding Remarks	40
Appendix	41

© 2023 The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod 1333 S. Kirkwood Road St. Louis, MO 63122 888-THE LCMs • lcms.org

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cover Image: Lightstock



INTRODUCTION

I. Introduction

In 1993, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) published *Christian Care at Life's End*. The report was an update of the CTCR's earlier (1979) *Report on Euthanasia with Guiding Principles*.¹ This report is, in turn, a further update on the CTCR's past work. In its introduction, the 1979 report said, "Our culture lives in the stormcenter of a biomedical revolution whose consequences defy description."² The 1993 report repeated that assessment, and it is still true. Thirty years later, the biomedical storm has not abated. As was true in 1979, those who promote euthanasia or assisted suicide continue "to justify the taking of human life on moral grounds by describing it as a truly compassionate act aimed at the relief of human suffering."³ The LCMS continues to reject such false compassion. Instead, we affirm that at the end of life the Christian's responsibility toward those who are suffering is, in the words of the Ramsey Colloquium, "always to care, never to kill."⁴

This does not mean, however, that Christians themselves are not faced with difficult end-of-life decisions occasioned by the use of modern technology and medical advances to prolong life beyond previously known limits. As Helmut Thielicke observed already in the 1970s, "Medicine has made such tremendous advances in the modern period that there seems to be almost no limit to what it can do."⁵ The "biomedical revolution" has touched the lives of us all, and as the end of our life or that of a loved one approaches, more of us will be called upon to apply the principles of God's Word in this difficult time.

The CTCR fully affirms its 1993 and 1979 reports. *Christian Care at Life's End* (1993) together with the principles of the 1979 report, which formed the basis of *Christian Care at Life's End*, remain valuable in addressing the sensitive questions about care for those at the end of life in a way that is robustly biblical, theologically sound and pastorally sensitive. This report therefore is not a substitute or revision of that previous work. Rather, it is intended as a supplement and informational resource to help concerned Christians better understand various new challenges that complicate an already delicate, difficult topic. We note especially that since *Christian Care at Life's End* was published, the legal environment has continued to move in the direction of greater personal autonomy and statutory permission to allow physicians to participate in assisted suicide. Together with these legal changes, the United States population has become increasingly supportive of physician-assisted suicide.

¹ Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Christian Care at Life's End* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1993). The 1993 report includes as a supplement (pages 33–44) the CTCR's *Report on Euthanasia with Guiding Principles* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1979). The genesis of the 1993 update was the 1992 LCMS Convention Resolution 3-11A, "To Reaffirm Synod's Position on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide." See *1992 Proceedings*, 116–117.

² CTCR, *Report on Euthanasia*, 33.

³ CTCR, *Report on Euthanasia*, 33.

⁴ "The Ramsey Colloquium of the Institute on Religion and Public Life, 'Always to Care, Never to Kill: A Declaration on Euthanasia,' *First Things* (February 1992): 43–47.

⁵ Helmut Thielicke, *The Doctor as Judge of Who Shall Live and Who Shall Die* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1976), 1.

1

INTRODUCTION

discomfort viewed with alarm, we tend to default to our old Adamic nature in preferring our own "works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly."¹¹ The way of Christ is the way of the cross. Indeed, "God can be found only in suffering and the cross."¹² This view of suffering, however, is neither fatalistic nor masochistic. The Christian recognizes both a responsibility to care for those who suffer and a recognition that God is at work even while His children suffer.

Christians serve in myriad vocations where we are called to "fear, love, and trust" God and to love our neighbor. Loving our neighbor will often involve standing in solidarity with the neighbor and bearing his suffering as well. But Christian vocation never calls for a false "compassion" that would conclude that we may kill our neighbor, even in the name of mercy. The Christian is "always to care, never to kill."

In our increasingly secularized world, spiritual counsel in the face of death is given little attention. A growing number of our fellow citizens are availing themselves of a more direct course of action in order to deal with their most pressing existential reality: impending death. Aided by changing laws permitting their physician to prescribe medications to hasten death, they are resorting to assisted suicide.¹³

The firsthand account by physician Timothy Quill, originally published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 1991, famously articulated the rationale for physician-assisted suicide with respect to his patient Diane, who had been diagnosed with acute myelomonocyte leukemia.¹⁴ "Knowing of her desire for independence and her decision to stay in control, I thought this request made perfect sense."¹⁵ His case study has been much discussed as a model.¹⁶ In a manner now common for arguments in favor of physician assistance in the death of patients, Dr. Quill lays out his steps: (1) assuring that the suicide would be effective and that a slow, lingering death would not occur; (2) avoiding a violent death of the patient; (3) providing the patient with the requisite information about organizations that might assist in the effort; (4) prescribing the dosages of the medications that would permit death to come as quickly and painlessly as possible; and (5) providing comfort to the family of the patient.¹⁷ The actions by Quill eventually became the subject of landmark court rulings.¹⁸

Such hastening of death, as Quill advocates, is one problem. Another is desperately seeking to prolong life when a person is irretrievably dying. Gifford A. Grobstein recently posed a pair of questions facing us as we navigate the waters of the brave new world of medical possibility and legal permission: "In considering caring for our mortal life, especially as it approaches its end, a couple questions may help us to sharpen our thinking: has our desire to delay or even eliminate death clouded or undermined faith in resurrection to immortal life after death? Does delaying death suggest a false hope for a 'quality' of life in advanced age that is not biologically feasible?" Grobstein concludes, "The single greatest challenge in bioethics is living the natural life God has given us, with faith, thanksgiving, and love, while also recognizing the limits of this life when they come and hoping for the life of the world to come."¹⁹

¹¹ LW 31:53.

¹² LW 31:53.

¹³ Assisted suicide of one form or another is also known as Physician-Assisted Suicide, Physician-Assisted Dying, Physician-Assisted Death, Physician Aid in Dying, Medically Assisted Dying (MAD), Medical Aid in Dying (MAID) or Patient-Administered Hastened Death.

¹⁴ Timothy Quill, "Death and Dignity: A Case of Individualized Decision Making," *New England Journal of Medicine* 324, no. 10 (1991): 691–694.

¹⁵ Quill, 693.

¹⁶ Cf. Timothy E. Quill, "Death and Dignity," in Michael M. Uhlmann, *Last Rights: Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia Debated* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 319–42; Andrew J. Dyck, *Life's Worth: The Case Against Assisted Suicide* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 12–28.

¹⁷ See the summary of Quill's rationale in Dyck, 13.

¹⁸ See the thorough discussion of the Quill arguments as they wound their way up through the courts, eventually resulting in a landmark 1997 ruling in Neil M. Gorsuch's *The Future of Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). Quill contended that laws prohibiting physician-assisted suicide violate provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment.

¹⁹ Gifford A. Grobstein, "The Future of Bioethics," *For the Life of the World* 25, no. 3 (Fall 2021), 6.

3

INTRODUCTION

The framework of the report consists of four parts: Part I — a historical and contextual section, Part II — a theological section, Part III — a medical and ethical section, and Part IV — a pastoral and spiritual section. Individual parts may be of greater or lesser interest to different readers with different questions.⁶

A. Death, the Existential Reality

A rabbinic adage claims that it is impossible to look long into the sun or into death.⁷ Since the rebellion of our first parents in the Garden, death has been the inescapable reality of human existence. People often approach the end of their earthly pilgrimage with a variety of regrets, expressed and unexpressed. A hospice social worker chronicled some of the most common:

1. They wish they had been more loving to the people who matter the most.
2. They wish they had been a better spouse, parent or child.
3. They wish they had not spent so much time working.
4. They wish they had taken more risks.
5. They wish they had been happier and enjoyed life more.
6. They wish they had lived their dream.
7. They wish they had taken better care of themselves.
8. They wish they had done more for others.
9. They wish they had chosen more meaningful work.⁸

Martin Luther dealt with death as a daily reality, not as a theoretical one. Living in times of high infant mortality, untreatable diseases, a lack of effective surgical interventions and recurrent outbreaks of plagues, he understood the existential threat death posed. Indeed, while others fled the most recent scourge of plague in Wittenberg in 1527, Martin and his pregnant wife, Katie, remained behind, opening their home to care for the dying. Some speculate that the death of his infant daughter Elizabeth a few months before her first birthday in 1528 was partly due to their ministrations to the dying the previous year. Another one of his children, his beloved daughter Magdalene, died in his arms in 1542. In 1524, Luther based his hymn "In the Very Midst of Life" on a Latin antiphon. Part of it reads: "In the very midst of life Snares of death surround us; Who shall help us in the strife? Lest the life be confound us? ... In the midst of death's dark vale Pow'rs of hell o'er take us. Who will help when they assail, Who secure will make us?"⁹

Christian theology does not support cultural notions of death as "natural," part of the "circle of life" or the way for a loved one to become an angel. Christian thinking about death is nuanced. Death, with sin and Satan, has been vanquished by the risen Lord, but the unholy triad continue to wield dangerous power while we still await the final advent of Christ.

Biblical theology has a similarly subtle understanding of suffering. Suffering marks a fallen world, but it cannot simply be equated with evil. In Luther's 1518 *Heidelberg Disputation*, he articulated a "theology of the cross." "A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is." Furthermore: "This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering."¹⁰ But in our culture where ease is valued and any

⁶ The Commission has also developed a supplementary resource with definitions, timelines and other information, see appendix.

⁷ Paul D. Steinke, "Comfort in the Face of Death," *The Lutheran Witness* (May 1998).

⁸ Grace Buerckle, "The 9 Most Common Regrets People Have at the End of Life," *MindfulJen* (Feb. 24, 2020), mindfuljengreen.com/9-most-common-regrets-people-have-at-the-end-of-life.html.

⁹ "In the Very Midst of Life," *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 755.

¹⁰ LW 31:53. Quotations marked LW are from Luther's Works, American Edition, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut T. Lehmann and Christopher Boyd Brown, 73 vols. (Philadelphia and St. Louis: Augsburg and Concordia Publishing House, 1955–).

2

INTRODUCTION

Put simply, we are addressing this question: How should faithful Christians respond to the advance of medical possibilities and legal permissions, particularly in dealing with terminal illness? **The goal of this report is to provide theologically sound practical and pastoral guidance for Christian care at life's end. Since our goal is practical and pastoral, the discussions of medical terms and legal documents in this report related to end-of-life matters are for information only and should not be considered legal advice. We encourage all who need or desire legal counsel for a particular situation to consult an attorney familiar with the laws in their jurisdiction.**

All of our efforts in this arena, however, must be prefaced with a frank admission of humility in the face of the daunting challenges of understanding the array of specialized knowledge possessed by physicians, scientific researchers, attorneys, philosophers and theologians. Thielicke captured the challenge when he reminded us that "no one who is committed to the gospel—the message of the incarnation of the eternal Word—can claim to have some kind of supratemporal knowledge (a *philosophia perennis*). He knows that he is simply one of the many who have not yet arrived but are still on the way (*theologia viatorum*)."²⁰

B. A Culture on the Move in Attitude and Legal Permissions

The relentless march toward "physician-assisted dying" has made major inroads into law and public acceptance in a growing number of places within the United States. Despite sometimes vigorous opposition by groups opposing physicians enabling the deaths of patients, the trend has been for jurisdictions to liberalize laws governing physician assistance with the death of terminally ill patients. One may reasonably assume that this trend will continue in the coming years in our increasingly secularized culture as "death with dignity" forces continue to mount sustained campaigns to change laws and litigate the matter in the courts.

For decades, polling in the United States has surveyed both the general public and the medical community on the topic of physician involvement in providing lethal medications to terminal patients. For instance, a 2020 Medscape Oncology Ethics Report found that when asked "Should physician assisted dying be made legal for terminally ill patients?" 55% of the more than 5,000 oncologists surveyed nationwide agreed, "compared with 49% in 2018." Of the doctors surveyed, 34% said "no," and 12% indicated that "it depends."²¹ The report concluded: "Acceptance of this concept has grown over the decade. More specialists (57%) than primary care physicians (51%) are in favor of physician-assisted dying being legal."²²

A May 2020 Gallup survey found that nearly 3 out of 4 Americans (74%) answered "Yes" to the question: "When a person has a disease that cannot be cured, do you think doctors should be allowed by law to end the patient's life by some painless means if the patient and his or her family request it?"²³ The majority support for physician-assisted dying included every demographic group surveyed. This was true among males (75%), females (73%), white people (77%), people of color (65%), college graduates (79%), high school graduates or less education (71%), Republicans (69%), Independents (72%), Democrats (85%), conservatives (57%), moderates (80%) and liberals (87%).²⁴

¹¹ Thielicke, *The Doctor as Judge*, 2. Thielicke writes eloquently about the "ambiguity" created by living with the unintended, but predictable, consequences of so-called medical "advances." Each instance of progress carries with it a "price to be paid"; 8.

¹² See Shelby Reese, "Medscape Oncology Ethics Report 2020," *Medscape* (Jan. 29, 2021), medscape.com/dlatheshw/2020-ethics-epi-ontology-6013582.

¹³ Leslie Kane, "Life, Death, and Painful Dilemmas: Ethics 2020," *Medscape* (Nov. 13, 2020), medscape.com/dlatheshw/2020-ethics-report-life-death-601331142.

¹⁴ Published as "Gallup Poll Social Survey 2020" and cited by a prominent medical aid in dying group, "Polling on Medical Aid in Dying," *Compassion & Choices*, <https://compassionandchoices.org/resources/polling-medical-aid-dying>.

¹⁵ "Polling on Medical Aid in Dying," *Compassion & Choices*, <https://compassionandchoices.org/resources/polling-medical-aid-dying>.

4

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, LifeWay Research conducted a major study of American attitudes.²⁵ Their 1,000-person survey sample stratification mirrored the most recent U.S. Census data for gender, age, race/ethnicity, region, metro/non-metro, education and income. The following are among the most relevant findings: 67% agree that it is morally acceptable for a person to ask for a physician's aid in taking his or her own life, and 69% affirm permitting physicians to assist terminally ill patients in ending their life. Significantly, nonreligious persons are more likely to agree (84%) than Christians (59%) and other religions (70%). Those defined as having "evangelical beliefs" were less likely to agree than those without evangelical beliefs (38% vs. 73%).²⁶

C. Dying in America

Death for most Americans will not take place in a hospital. A 2018 Harvard report stated that "although more than 700,000 people die in hospitals each year in the US, the trend is toward fewer in-hospital deaths" even during a time of increasing hospital admissions. In fact, between 2000 and 2015, a sharp turnaround occurred in the places where people died. In comparison with a 2000 survey, those who died in 2015 were more likely to die at home or in a community-based setting (31% vs. 40%) and less likely to die in an acute care hospital (20% vs. 33%).²⁷ Linda D. Bartlett and Karen Rehder claim that death for most Americans is "peaceful, painless, and with family."²⁸ They note that "most Americans spend their last days in their own homes with family and friends; most are alert and in control of their bodily functions; one-third die at home while one-half transfer to a hospital shortly before death; most maintain active interest in the world; most are not depressed; and many report a feeling of hope, believing they have something to live for."²⁹ M. Powell Lawton of the Philadelphia Geriatric Center reported that, "On the day of death 51 percent had no difficulty with orientation or recognition of family; 61 percent had no pain; and 52 percent could breathe freely."³⁰

Nevertheless, despite the reality for the aggregate of persons, significant numbers of individuals do die in hospitals amid various technological interventions. The resulting emotional strains and financial costs of hospital care for dying patients are significant burdens. As a result, such factors continue to drive changes to law and custom that permit physicians to intervene in ways that ostensibly "relieve misery," but do so by hastening or even causing death.

Recent years have witnessed an explosion of debates in the literature on end-of-life issues. A wide variety of voices are heard: medical researchers and physicians, philosophers and ethicists, theologians, attorneys, journalists, disability activist groups, and even presidential commissions.

²⁵ "American Views on Assisted Suicide — Lifeway Research," *LifeWay Research*, <http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Sept-2016-American-Views-Assisted-Suicide.pdf>.
²⁶ Those with "evangelical beliefs" strongly agree" with these statements: The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe; it is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior; Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin; and only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation. These doctrinal matters are shared by faithful members of the LCHS. Polling organizations frequently identify the LCHS as "evangelical" because of such shared beliefs.
²⁷ Robert H. Shmerling, "Where People Die," *Harvard Health* (Oct. 31, 2018), health.harvard.edu/blog/where-people-die-2018103115278.
²⁸ Linda D. Bartlett and Karen Rehder, "Ventilators, Feeding Tubes, and Other End-of-Life Questions," *Lutherans for Life* (Feb. 28, 2020), lutheransforlife.org/articles/ventilators-feeding-tubes-and-other-end-of-life-questions/. The study surveyed 4,000 people age 65 and older.
²⁹ Bartlett and Rehder, "Ventilators, Feeding Tubes, and Other End-of-Life Questions," 7.
³⁰ Quoted by Bartlett and Rehder, "Ventilators, Feeding Tubes, and Other End-of-Life Questions," 7.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Yet our history from the time of the Garden of Eden until the present has been marked by our rejection of God's rightful place as Creator and ourselves as His creation. As early as 1517, Luther declared: "Man is by nature unable to want God to be God. Indeed, he himself wants to be God, and does not want God to be God."³¹ In the New Testament, Paul concludes his discussion in Romans 1:19–25 with the divine consequence of ignoring that created order: "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen."

Finally, the truth of Scripture affirms more than this. Unlike a sculptor who would have an instrumental relationship between himself and what he fashioned or a painter who would leave something of his genius in the paintings he produced, God is related to His creation as "Absolute Giver to absolute receiver."³² Put another way, God gives life; we receive life. We are stewards, not owners, of the lives God entrusts to us. If our lives are given from God, we certainly have no authority over the lives and deaths of others. Since God is the absolute Giver and our nature hardwires us to be receivers, "the most uncreatively thing that a person could do is to refuse God's gift of life."³³ Oswald Bayer helpfully explains that human dignity lies in the "indissoluble intertwining of element and instituting word" by the One who has "bestowed, given on loan—by the One who promises and gives himself unconditionally to humankind: namely, God."³⁴ Because my human dignity does not develop out of my own works or merit, neither can any other human being rip it from me. It belongs neither to me nor to those in power in society. Rather, it remains that which is on loan from God. The relationship of Creator to creature as "Absolute Giver to absolute receiver," is developed biblically by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6 where he teaches that "you are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1cor. 6:19–20).

Since we are both dependent and finite, necessarily creature rather than Creator, any effort to arrogate to ourselves rights that properly belong only to God (e.g., giving or taking life) can only be counted as foolish in the extreme or, more properly, an act of cosmic treason. Continuing Sayer's analogy of God's creation to human artistry, we have no reason to believe that our efforts to seize power from the Artist would be any more successful than if a painting refused to be painted. In Psalm 139, verses 7–12 reflect upon the impossibility of evading the searching presence of the Creator, regardless of the strategies or designs followed by the creature. David then explains:

¹³ For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.
¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.

³¹ LW 31:10.
³² Arand, "Personal Autonomy versus Creatively Contingency," 380. See also Oswald Bayer, "Self-Creation? On the Dignity of Human Beings," *Modern Theology* 20, no. 2 (April 2004), 275–290. Bayer opens with the provocative sentence: "The absurd desire of humans to become self-creators — be it in an individual or a collective way — is as old as humanity itself!" 275.
³³ Arand, "Personal Autonomy versus Creatively Contingency," 392.
³⁴ Bayer, "Self-Creation?" 279. Bayer calls this an unconditional "categorical guaranty."

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

II. Theological Foundations

A. Christian Basis for Human Dignity and the Sanctity of Life

Christian discussions of end-of-life issues must begin with the doctrine of creation.³¹ Created by God, accountable to God, we live as perpetual recipients in relation to His perpetual giving. Secondly, Luther reminds us that the commandment against taking life also obligates us to be protectors and sustainers of life, for ourselves and for others. Lutheran theologians call this a theology of "receptivity and vocation."³² All end-of-life conclusions are predicated on the premise of God's superior claim to us and are bounded by the limits of creation as He designed them. As Luther put it, "The First Article is given for the purpose that we should know and learn where we come from, what we are, and to whom we belong."³³ Indeed, Luther's comments on the First Article of the Apostles' Creed use a form of "all" nine times to emphasize God's role.

What does this mean? I believe that God has made me and ALL creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and ALL my members, my reason and ALL my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and ALL I have. He richly and daily provides me with ALL that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against ALL danger and guards and protects me from ALL evil. ALL this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For ALL this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.³⁴

The doctrine of creation, specifically the teaching of creation out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), confesses that everything in the cosmos owes its existence to the divine will. This sets orthodox Christianity apart from pantheism, panentheism and open them.³⁵ It also establishes the qualitative distinction between Creator and creature.

This idea of the primary differentiation between the Creator and the creature does not exist merely in the realm of dogma. It is central to the Genesis narrative, the Old Testament teachings about idolatry, and Paul's theology and soteriology. The language of Genesis reinforces the consistent teaching of radical differentiation. The verb "create" (*bara* — בָּרָא) in the Hebrew Scriptures has God alone as its subject—only God creates.³⁶

³¹ While Christian discussions of this topic begin with a doctrine of creation, this is not to say that one can only mount a defense against suicide and euthanasia on Christian grounds. Arthur J. Dyck of the Harvard School of Public Health put forth a case based on "logic and facts" to demonstrate that one might argue for a natural and inalienable right to life, a natural love for life, and as a belief in life's sacredness or "incalculable worth" without committing oneself to the Christian faith tradition on the basis of "the moral structure of life's worth and protection." In his *Life's Worth: The Case against Assisted Suicide* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), before showing the importance of the "incalculable worth" of life in Christianity, he argues that such views are compatible with, but not dependent on, one's adherence to the Christian tradition or its doctrine, 73.
³² Charles Arand, "Personal Autonomy versus Creatively Contingency: The First Article and the Right to Die," *Concordia Journal* (October 1994), 388.
³³ Cited by Arand, "Personal Autonomy versus Creatively Contingency," 388.
³⁴ *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 16, emphasis added.
³⁵ Simply defined: Pantheism identifies God with the universe; panentheism holds that God and the universe are distinguished, but the universe influences and changes God, open them distinguishes God and the universe, but because of human freedom God's knowledge of the future is limited and His current governance is limited by human cooperation with Him.
³⁶ Thomas I. McCloskey, "279 279," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr. and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 127.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Thinking of ourselves as radically dependent on a Creator for our lives and identity bears critical implications for our understanding of the topic of human dignity, so much discussed by the advocates of "death with dignity." Charles Arand couples the First Article of the Creed with the assertion of *ex nihilo* creation as the radical counter-cultural confession of second-century orthodoxy. It confuted the idea that the material was intrinsically tainted with evil and notions of an imposed chaotic order of creation popular in such Greek philosophies as Stoicism, Epicureanism and Platonism.³⁷ Arand proffers this truth as a potent affirmation of our belief in the worth of human life. Created by God, we do not have life on our own nor are we free to dispose of it as we will.

Carl Trueman echoes these concerns in his discussion of dignity in *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*.³⁸ The argument that we are created by God and radically dependent on Him has been eroded by the rise of what has been dubbed "expressive individualism." Philosophical trends from Rousseau through the Romantics, to Freud, and then to the New Left have altered the popular understanding of the relationship between Creator and creation. As the self-emerged triumphant, notions of volitional choice in countless arenas of life became the means for individuals to define themselves, thinking that their identity is the sum total of their choices. Even being a Christian is viewed as a personal choice, together with whatever "flavor" of Christian we elect to become. So also, morality is merely another choice. As Christians (and as confessional Lutherans), we are not exempt from this lamentable psychologizing of identity and dignity. As Trueman noted, "The general culture of expressive individualism and of choice of identity is ours too."³⁹

We are not suggesting that the shift from rigidly hierarchical notions to the current emphasis on individual dignity was entirely wrong. The democratizing of government and society has certainly been beneficial in many ways. But such benefits are most firmly grounded in the fact that God has created and provided redemption for every person rather than in tenuous claims of human dignity. While human dignity is frequently ill-defined, it is certain that any authentic claim of human dignity must be centered in the worth and identity God gives by His creating, redeeming and sanctifying work. "The problem with expressive individualism is not its emphasis on the dignity or the individual value of every human being. That is what undergirded the fight against slavery in the nineteenth century and the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Rather, it is the fact that expressive individualism has detached these concepts of individual dignity and value from any kind of grounding in a sacred order."⁴⁰ In place of dignity based on a universal human nature bestowed by God, today's psychologized expressive individualism grounds dignity in the sovereign right of every individual to determine his or her own identity and to act in ways that demand not mere tolerance but recognition by the society at large.

Lutherans do not stop with locating the nature of human dignity in the Creator-creature relationship. As Christ-centered and cross-focused disciples of Christ, we cannot fail to describe our human dignity in terms of redemption as well as creation. As such, dignity is a gift conferred by the Creator who is also the Redeemer. Luther's explanation of the First Article of the Creed in his Small Catechism defines human beings in terms of their original creation, but with a view to justification when he writes: "God protects me against all danger and shields and preserves me from all evil. And all this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all!"⁴¹ Our lives

³⁷ Arand, "Personal Autonomy versus Creatively Contingency," 393.
³⁸ Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020).
³⁹ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 386. Trueman cites numerous authors, such as Michael Horton, Christian Smith and David Wells, who have demonstrated some of the ways expressive individualism and the choice of identity have had pernicious effects on the Christian church of our day. The descriptor "therapeutic" in the term made famous by Smith, "Therapeutic Moralistic Dilemma," describes this emphasis upon the shift from helping persons adjust to the demands of their duties toward God or their accountability to a larger society to an agenda that makes the self-determining individual primary.
⁴⁰ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 387.
⁴¹ Martin Luther, "Small Catechism," in *The Book of Concord*, Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 354–355.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

are never valued on the basis of our merits or even for our functional capabilities, but always an existence that is “merely owed.”⁴⁶ Bayer puts it so well:

This means that humankind — any human without exception — is, without any merit or any worth that he could grant himself or expect from other humans as recognition, unconditionally and absolutely recognized and valued by his creator, redeemer and perfecter. This means that he has an inviolable and indestructible dignity. Since this dignity is not conferred on him by any human person, no human being can deny it to him.⁴⁷

This does not imply that a right view of human dignity flows only from a theology of creation. Lutherans, following Luther, base their view of the dignity of man in a theology centered in the cross and in a theology of justification. While it is “broadly anthropological” and equally applicable to all, we cannot escape the fact that it must also be seen through the lens of salvation and concerned with matters of eternity.⁴⁸

We are and ever shall be creatures, made by our Creator. However, the basis for our dignity rests on an interconnect- edness of what Bayer calls “three irreducible respects.” In addition to being made by God, we are those who have become corrupted and lost our dignity (ROM 3:23) and yet persons who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ and set free from the systemic corruption of our original creation. Viewed from the perspective of the cross, one might say that what makes us human is a universal need to be justified by faith.⁴⁹

Rather than basing human dignity on something intrinsic to us, as if we owned it and were owed deferential treatment because of it, our dignity must always be viewed as a bestowed endowment. And because of the irrevocable and uncon- ditional grant of dignity by the Triune God, it will always be extrinsic to our abilities, functional capacities and merits. This last point bridges the gap between creation and redemption. Lutheran theology views both creation in Eden and consummation in eternity through the lens of justification and the cross of Christ. Justification addresses the loss of our original dignity and secures it for all humankind, as those for whom Christ died, regardless of one’s faith or lack thereof. In short, “According to Luther, human dignity ... is warranted only by the triune God: the creator, redeemer and perfecter of humans and the world around them.”⁵⁰

But if we are radically and irrevocably dependent on God as our “creator, redeemer, and perfecter,” then dependence on others cannot be seen as a necessary loss of dignity. Creatively dependence marks and circumscribes the very meaning of our identity. To be creatively is to know our true dignity as those created in the image of God. An embodied existence as creatures involves a dependence in faith upon the One who is Lord of life. It also means that we are placed in community where we willingly give aid to others and receive it from them. “When we act for the benefit of another, we do not simply act heroically or philanthropically. We are doing what we have been given to do. As co-workers with God in the ongoing work of creation, we are given the task of supporting and securing the life of others.”⁵¹

Unlike arguments based on the instrumental value of a person (how much they can do, earn, contribute, their level of cognitive capacity or physical ability, and the like), Christians base their understanding of life’s preciousness on the

⁴⁶ Donald Bayer, “Martin Luther’s Conception of Human Dignity,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Marcus Düwell, Jens Braarvig, Roger Brownsword and Dietmar Mieth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 103.

⁴⁷ Bayer, “Martin Luther’s Conception of Human Dignity” 102. Bayer cites Luther’s three seminal works on this topic of human dignity as *The Disputation Concerning Man* (1536), *On the Freedom of the Christian* (1520), and his dispute with Erasmus, *On the Bondage of the Will* (1525). See also Andrew Rommervik, “Lutheran Conceptions of Human Dignity in a Global Context: A Conversation with Indian Dalits and European Americans,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 59, no. 4 (December 2020): 325–353.

⁴⁸ Rommervik, “Lutheran Conceptions of Human Dignity in a Global Context,” 326.

⁴⁹ Bayer, “Martin Luther’s Conception of Human Dignity” 102–103, referencing Luther’s central thesis 32 of the *Disputation Concerning Man*.

⁵⁰ Bayer, “Martin Luther’s Conception of Human Dignity” 106.

⁵¹ Arand, “Personal Autonomy versus Creatively Contingency,” 397.

9

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

is pointless. It’s as simple as that.”⁵⁹

Public arguments for euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide almost always conjoin these two factors: an absolutist approach to human autonomy and self-determination together with an emotional desire to limit or relieve suffering. We often hear pleas for allowing people who are suffering greatly to request assistance in “ending it all.”⁶⁰ One may wonder how often this is “a purely strategic maneuver aimed at keeping the argument for the time being a relatively narrow one. Whatever our judgment of motives, however, the fact is that, simply as a matter of logic, the two prongs of the argument will gradually become independent of each other.”⁶¹

Once we grant the overarching significance of self-determination, why does it matter whether one is suffering “greatly” or not? How does one’s degree of suffering enter in as a factor in the moral equation? If self-determination is but one aspect to be considered and if it must be evaluated along with “great suffering,” what kind of suffering is reason enough for ending one’s life? Would a young athlete who sustained a career-ending injury have the right to claim that the loss of fame and financial security was sufficient justification for assisted suicide?

The other prong of the argument proves problematic as well. If the great suffering of a person makes such powerful moral claims on us that we should kill to end his agony, why would we insist that the person be self-determining or com- petent to request it? We readily ask veterinarians to intervene to “put down” our pets whose bodies are consumed with cancers and painful maladies. We consider it merciful to do so.

The conventional defense of a “right to die” advances by promoting two ideas, both of which can easily expand the class of candidates for such merciful ministrations. “Those who suffer greatly but cannot request relief and those who request help even though their physical pain is not great will begin to seem more suitable candidates.”⁶²

Evangelical writer Joni Eareckson Tada has lived for 55 years since suffering a fracture between the fourth and fifth cervical vertebrae at age 17 and becoming a quadriplegic, paralyzed from the shoulders down. Her years of living with the limitations of her condition have afforded her ample time to reflect on the questions of the quality-of-life ethic and end-of-life decisions. She wisely observes: “When we clamor about the sanctity of our individual rights, we may be reinforcing an all-too-human failing, and that is the tendency to place ourselves at the center of our moral universe. We label our desires ‘rights’ as if to give those willful determinations a showy kind of dignity.”⁶³

The doctrine of creation establishes the principle of partnering with God as co-regents created to exercise dominion over His creation. But this takes place in the context of our creaturely receptivity and response to God who is the Creator. In this context, the idea of self-determination can never be the defining value by which human lives are lived. Our dignity does not lie in our autonomy, but in our dependence.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Arand, “Personal Autonomy versus Creatively Contingency,” 387.

⁶⁰ Many arguments for PAS appear shaped more by the life experience of the writer rather than upon enduring principles. Famed Roman Catholic theologian Hans Küng, for instance, readily admits his argument in favor of PAS has been formed in the context of watching his brother die a very painful death from a brain tumor. Hans Küng, “A Dignified Dying,” Section 145 in *Theresa M. Longtough, On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives in Medical Ethics*, 9th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

⁶¹ Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, 73.

⁶² Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, 76.

⁶³ Joni Eareckson Tada, *When Is It Right to Die?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 73.

11

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

bestowed value of persons as created in the image of God and those for whom Christ died. As Bartlett and Rehder put it:

Christians do well to build our responses on the Truth of God’s Word, which says that:

- (1) human life is sacred regardless of condition or health,
- (2) God is Lord over all matters of life and death and we can trust Him to do what is right according to His will,
- (3) God has demonstrated His goodness and love for us in the cross of Jesus and nothing can separate us from His love,
- (4) God has a purpose for every life.⁶²

B. Death with Dignity?

Driving the engine of the “death with dignity” crusade have been two central ideas: (1) an absolutist approach to human autonomy and its corollary of self-determination, and (2) an emotion-laden desire to limit or relieve suffering.⁶³ Advocates of euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide believe that ‘dignity’ demands the freedom to call our own shots — when we can end our lives before we become ‘helpless’ and dependent on others to care for us.”⁶⁴ Indeed, much of the literature in favor of physician assistance in the dying of patients takes for granted that patient “wishes” bear the weight of moral obligation.⁶⁵

This emotional tilt toward autonomy does not always come packaged with coherent rational explanations. The same physician who would defend abortion on the grounds of the woman’s right to determine what should happen to her body might ignore a suicide note pinned to the shirt of an ER admission with slashed wrists and proceed to attempt to save the person’s life despite the patient’s expressed intents.⁶⁶ Beyond that, one might legitimately question whether “doing what the patient wants” can truly escape the physician imposing his or her values on the patient at the end of life’s journey.⁶⁷

Behind the central arguments, however, stand a couple of additional factors. First, the 1960s and 1970s were an era of rebellion against authority that affected medical care. Physicians were no longer automatically trusted to act in a patient’s best interests, almost as a parent. Their judgments were questioned, second opinions were sought, and patients became more consumerist in their desire to make their own choices and decisions for modalities of care. Second, despite the pub- licity attendant to laws respecting advance directives, patient wishes continued to be set aside for various reasons.⁶⁸ Some of the reasons for the success of efforts to legalize physician-assisted suicide, then, originate in a reaction to how patients have been treated in hospitals and by physicians. Pathologist turned physician-assisted-suicide crusader Jack Kevorkian summed it up on his way to jail: “If I have lost my freedom, I have lost something more valuable than life. Therefore, continuing life

⁶² Bartlett and Rehder, “Ventilators, Feeding Tubes, and Other End-of-Life Questions,” 1.

⁶³ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, especially 64–70, discusses the implications of “psychological man and expressive individualism” shaping the societal idea of what it means to be a “self” in the contemporary world. The absolutist approach to human autonomy accompanies the sociological and philosophical shifts championed by Philip Rieff and Charles Taylor that Trueman explains. Indeed, without these changes, a slogan such as “death with dignity” would be difficult to understand. A valuable analysis of the autonomy-based and utilitarian arguments for assisted suicide can be found in Neil M. Gorsuch’s *The Future of Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). The Supreme Court associate justice concludes: “After considering arguments from history, fairness, autonomy doctrine and theory, and utilitarianism, I suggested that courts and legislators may wish to consider a less frequently voiced per- spective on the assisted suicide and euthanasia question, one grounded in the recognition of human life as a fundamental good. Under this view, private intentional acts of homicide are always wrong” (217–218).

⁶⁴ Bartlett and Rehder, “Ventilators, Feeding Tubes, and Other End-of-Life Questions,” 1.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Tom Beauchamp and James F. Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, 8th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁶⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence: Theological Reflections on Medicine, the Mentally Handicapped, and the Church* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1986), develops this exact scenar- io in his discussion of suicide and the ethics of autonomy, 100–101.

⁶⁷ Dr. Patricia Welton, a psychiatrist, observes (in Dyck, *Life’s Worth*, 15): “It is frighteningly naive to assume that when our guide to medical practice is ‘doing what the patient wants,’ we will escape the imposition of the physician’s values on the clinical encounter. Personal values can be sequestered in the question not asked, or the gentle challenge not posed, or both that should have been.”

⁶⁸ Sometimes hospitals do not have a copy of the patient’s advance directive on hand. Clinical circumstances may have changed to render obsolete the original intention of the author. There may be disagreements with a family about treatment decisions.

10

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

C. The Quest for Absolute Autonomy⁶⁴

As Arand has observed, exalted notions of autonomy elevate isolation and separation, ultimately excluding relevant others from moral conversation and decisions; relationships become merely voluntary associations based on my absolute de- cision-making authority. Callahan shows that this leads to an atrophy of our sense of obligation toward others and their obligations to us.⁶⁵ Older cultures either grounded their claim to moral authority on myths (e.g., the oracle of Delphi demands it) or on a transcendent appeal to faith rather than fate (e.g., Christianity).⁶⁶ In both cases, they operated with a clear sense of the transcendent and the authority such an attitude toward a “higher power” had on the moral commands of the culture. In stark contrast with such approaches, our society increasingly exists without rooting its moral imperatives in anything sacred. That does not relieve us of the necessity to justify our norms, “but they cannot do so on the basis of something sacred or transcendent. Instead, they have to do so on the basis of themselves. Ethics, shorn of its reference to the transcendent, becomes little more than a statement of personal preferences and, increasingly in our therapeutic culture, of ‘feeling.’”⁶⁷ The inherent moral instability and volatility of this approach should be obvious.⁶⁸

Against this, biblical doctrine teaches us that our autonomy is circumscribed and bounded by our creaturely nature as those born into community, not into isolation. It holds that relationships are the currency of our creaturely existence, and that we are called to render and receive assistance to our fellow human beings. Where in this do we have an autonomous right to refuse life or refuse to help our sisters and brothers in their need?

First, Christians affirm the qualitative distinction between Creator and creation. As Creator, God does not cede His rights to the creation, but retains them. This is the thrust of St. Paul’s affirmation in 1 Corinthians 6 when he declares: “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 COR. 6:19–20). Christian doctrine insists that all other ideologies fail to grasp this central truth of existence that there is an infinite qualitative distinction between the Creator and the creation.

Second, the reality of our creatureliness includes an inescapably communal element. Meilaender recounts the lesson he learned from one of his students when discussing suicide. She “described her cousin’s suicide and its continuing effects on his family by saying: ‘He didn’t just take his own life; he took part of theirs too.’”⁶⁹ We are never able to escape the import of the existential question: “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

Third, Scripture repeatedly affirms that not only does God retain the rights to our life, but He determines the number of our days. “Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them” (PSALM 139:16). Not only is God infinitely higher than we are, and not only are we thrown into community with all of its joys and messy obligations, even the length of our sojourn on this planet remains properly with the One who is not only our Creator but also our Sustainer.

⁶⁴ In 1985, bioethicists Tom L. Beauchamp and James F. Childress produced their influential *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), now in its eighth edition. They put forth a four-principle approach to common medical morality: respect for autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice. They address the issue of autonomy by speaking of auto- nomy as creating both “negative” and “positive” duties. Negatively, “autonomous actions should not be subject to controlling constraints by others,” while positively, autonomy requires “respectful treatment in disclosing information” so people can make their own decisions. The idea is that the decision-maker should be as free as possible under the constraints of the existing circumstances. In developing their other three points, they speak of the duty of non-maleficence: “first do no harm” (“avoiding anything which is unnecessarily or unjustifiably harmful”), beneficence: “do as much good as you can,” and justice: distribute health resources fairly. As they apply the principles, “physician assistance in hastening death is best viewed as part of a continuum of medical care.” They find no significant moral difference between “comfort-only care that hastens death and PAS and euthanasia.” Dyck, 45.

⁶⁵ Arand, “Personal Autonomy versus Creatively Contingency,” 399.

⁶⁶ Trueman helpfully demonstrates the relevance of Rieff to this topic, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 74–82.

⁶⁷ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 79.

⁶⁸ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 76. Rieff refers to this by the neomarcusian “third world,” roughly equivalent to what Charles Taylor means by the “immanent frame.” It denotes a culture where transcendence has collapsed into immanence and partakes of the kind of ethics Alasdair MacIntyre dubs emotivism.

⁶⁹ Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, 74.

12

D. The Question of Euthanasia and What It Really Means

Lutheran catechesis reinforces the truth that the Fifth Commandment calls upon us to “fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need.”⁷⁰ The Ramsey Colloquium’s directive “always to care, never to kill”⁷¹ echoes this tradition. “For Christians, each person’s life is a divine gift and trust, taken up into God’s own eternal life in Jesus, to be guarded and respected in others and in oneself.”⁷²

Physician-assisted suicide may escape the technical meaning of euthanasia since it “only” involves the physician in prescribing the drugs that will end life when taken by the patient. Such specious logic cannot evade the fact that purposefully enabling an act is to participate in it. There is a difference, however, between enabling death and accepting its inevitability. “Deeply embedded in our moral and medical traditions is the distinction between *allowing to die*, on the one hand, and *killing on the other*.”⁷³

Christian ethicists have made a strong case for the right to refuse or withhold medical treatments if they are either “useless or excessively burdensome.”⁷⁴ But, even here, to reject a treatment must never devolve into rejecting a life. It engages others in a conspiracy to abandon, to kill another human being. Only flights of sophistry can disguise the fact that despite all the language regarding choice and self-determination, euthanasia represents a license to kill.

The experience of the Netherlands may prove instructive. Euthanasia has been known to be regularly practiced in the Netherlands since 1973, even prior to the current more permissive law.⁷⁵ Indeed, one might argue that the 2001 law sought to make legal what had been practiced behind closed doors in the previous decades.⁷⁶ The official guidelines now require that the patient’s decision is “voluntary, well considered and persistent, in the presence of unbearable pain without hope of improvement.”⁷⁷ They mandate the consultation with more than one doctor and concurrence between the physician and the patient that euthanasia is the only reasonable option. Despite claims that the Dutch experience has been “virtually abuse-free,” studies have consistently shown that cases of voluntary euthanasia have been underreported by less than half of the actual cases for a variety of reasons (e.g., fear of being challenged for how strictly one followed the guidelines in the law).⁷⁸ Since 2002, euthanasia is regulated by the Termination of Life on Request and Assisted Suicide (Review Procedures) Act. Rates for officially reported euthanasia have risen steadily in the Netherlands, from under 2% of all deaths in 2002 to more than 4% in 2019.⁷⁹ But major skepticism exists as to how accurate the official numbers are, given the incentive to avoid scrutiny, additional paperwork and the refusal by some physicians to report their euthanasia cases.

⁷⁰ *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, 14.

⁷¹ “The Ramsey Colloquium, ‘Always to Care, Never to Kill,’” 45.

⁷² Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, 76–77.

⁷³ “The Ramsey Colloquium, ‘Always to Care, Never to Kill,’” 45.

⁷⁴ “This distinction occurs repeatedly in the literature and is enshrined in Meilaender’s influential work.

⁷⁵ Brian Pollard, “Current Euthanasia Law in the Netherlands,” *Catholic Education Resource Center* (2003), catholiceducation.org/en/controversy/euthanasia-and-assisted-suicide/current-euthanasia-law-in-the-netherlands.html. Gorsuch recounts the much-celebrated 1984 assisted suicide that resulted in the Dutch Supreme Court siding with the physician on the grounds of “conflicting duties.” Despite the nominally illegal nature of physician-assisted suicide in the Netherlands, the court found that the killing was justified by the doctor’s professional judgment about the quality of his patient’s life. Neil M. Gorsuch, *The Future of Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 104–105. This legal protection expanded considerably in 1994 when “the Dutch Supreme Court held that, for a request for assisted suicide or euthanasia to be justified on ‘sincerely’ grounds, the patient’s suffering need not be physical, the patient need not be terminally ill, and purely psychological suffering can qualify a patient for an act of euthanasia,” 105.

⁷⁶ “On this, see Ian Dowbiggin, *A Merciful End: The Euthanasia Movement in Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 169.

⁷⁷ Gorsuch summarizes the law as permitting assisted suicide and euthanasia when the physician: “1. holds the conviction that the request by the patient was voluntary and well-considered, 2. holds the conviction that the patient’s suffering was lasting and unbearable, 3. has informed the patient about the situation he was in and about his prospects, 4. and the patient [held] the conviction that there was no other reasonable solution for the situation he was in, 5. has consulted at least one other, independent physician who has seen the patient and has given his written opinion on the requirements of due care, referred to in parts 1–4, and, 6. has terminated a life or assisted in a suicide with due care,” *The Future of Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia*, 106.

⁷⁸ Gorsuch devotes a major portion of Chapter 7 (103–116) to a thorough discussion of the Dutch experience with assisted suicide and euthanasia, including a critical review of major studies. He observes that “the surveys have consistently found that a significant proportion of assisted suicides and acts of euthanasia go unreported, even though Dutch professional and legal guidelines allow the practices and expressly require them to be reported to public authorities,” *The Future of Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia*, 113.

⁷⁹ See “A Critical Look at the Rising Euthanasia Rates in the Netherlands,” as reported by [healthcare-in-europe.com](https://healthcare-in-europe.com/en/news/a-critical-look-at-the-rising-euthanasia-rates-in-the-netherlands.html) (Jan. 15, 2021), <https://healthcare-in-europe.com/en/news/a-critical-look-at-the-rising-euthanasia-rates-in-the-netherlands.html>.

III. Medical-Ethical Considerations

The Commission recognizes that a host of medical and ethical matters come to bear as we face the end of earthly life for ourselves or our loved ones. Many of the issues have to do with making decisions about treatment — what sort, how long, how do we decide and so forth. The following are some of the matters that must often be considered. What about matters such as the use of devices to help with breathing or procedures that provide hydration and nutrition? Is there sometimes an appropriate time to stop the use of such artificial means for prolonging a physical life? And who should make such decisions — patients, their family, doctors? Are advance directives advisable? Are they absolute?

There are many such questions. The items below seek to address some of them, in no particular order of priority or logical progression.

A. Ventilators and Medical Prolongation of Life and Dying

Elizabeth R. Skoglund observes, “If a respirator or ventilator can be a bridge back to life, then we have the obligation to try it. If, on the other hand, the respirator is used when death is inevitable, simply to slow the dying process, then it is wrong—fully keeping us from being released to be with God.”⁸⁰

Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) orders often involve the issue of ventilators. A DNR designation refers to a medical order making clear an individual’s request that no measures be taken to resuscitate him if his heart or breathing stops. The order is made while the individual is mentally capable and conscious, or by his health care proxy if he is not. DNR covers a wide range of specific instructions to health care providers. Some patients may choose to have “full code” with intubation and to be placed on a ventilator (short or long term). Another patient may decide not to be on a ventilator with a “DNR Select” code status, where the heart would be shocked if it stops but intubation/ventilation is not performed. Some in this category choose to permit use of a BIPAP (similar to a CPAP for sleep apnea) to assist with breathing. A third option involves a patient that chooses to have a status of Do Not Resuscitate (DNR). Various treatments (e.g., antibiotics, tube feeding) and other care preferences can be specified on some DNR forms in some jurisdictions to guide health team members.

As for medically assisted nutrition and hydration, Luther’s words are on point when he reminds us in the Small Catechism that “we should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need.”⁸¹ He expands on this in the Large Catechism by explaining “this commandment is violated not only when we do evil, but also when we have the opportunity to do good to our neighbors and to prevent, protect, and save them from suffering bodily harm or injury but fail to do so. . . . If you see anyone who is suffering from hunger and do not feed her, you have let her starve.”⁸² Even in a state of coma, patients are often aware of their surround-

⁸⁰ Bartlett and Rehder, “Ventilators, Feeding Tubes, and Other End-of-Life Questions,” 2.

⁸¹ *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, 14.

⁸² Klaus I. Sjoberg, “The Large Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther,” in *Word and Faith*, ed. Hans J. Hillenbrand, Klaus I. Sjoberg and Timothy J. Wengert, vol. 2, *The Annotated Luther* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 329.

The experience of the Netherlands with its permission to euthanize provides us with a warning about the trajectory of a society that surrenders the sanctity-of-life ethic and the protection of the weak and vulnerable. One suspects that in a world of limited resources, the permission to die will soon morph into a duty to die. Heads of nursing homes, eldercare attorneys and others in the senior living sector have reported dealing with greedy relatives trying to find a way to limit the expense of care for a frail relative.⁸³ Imagine if the person lived in a jurisdiction where the law permitted physician-assisted suicide. Would terminally ill seniors be pressured to become “compassionate heroes” for their families to preserve more of the inheritance? Common sense tells us that they would. The conjoining of legal permission with social acceptance would result not in more freedom, but in less.⁸⁴

Unfortunately, the logic of providing euthanasia leaves us with a major dilemma exposed by the Netherlands experience. Typically, euthanasia policies say that we should offer it as a right both because of our claims to self-determination and in order to relieve suffering for the terminally ill. However, we have noted earlier (see “The Quest for Absolute Autonomy”) that oftentimes these two criteria are separated in practice.

Meilaender has provided a strong defense of the rejection of euthanasia and affirmation of “double-effect” reasoning.⁸⁵ With respect to euthanasia, he offers four simple observations. First, physicians are obliged to do what they can to relieve the suffering of their patients. Here the “can” must be limited to “morally can.” A physician would be prohibited from doing something that would relieve suffering but violate a moral code. Second, refusing to approve actions that are intended to kill the patient does not imply that we must do everything possible to keep the person alive (e.g., it is sound medicine and morally appropriate to refuse treatments that are useless or excessively burdensome). Third, the freedom to order one’s own life is not absolute. We may not marry our sister, sell one of our kidneys to the highest bidder or take certain drugs. Fourth, genuine compassion must respect the boundaries established by the Creator-creature divide. Hence, “we cannot give ultimate authority over our life to another human being, nor are we authorized to exercise such authority over another.”⁸⁶

⁸³ Medicare in the United States, for instance, does not provide for “custodial care” in nursing homes and senior living communities. Some family members have objected to depleting their loved one’s financial resources on “useless” care. In order to qualify for the government aid that may be available, some families enter into convoluted legal mechanisms for shielding assets. An entire specialty of law focuses on means to transfer assets into legal instruments that make a frail senior appear to be penniless and in need of government-provided nursing home care.

⁸⁴ Consider the arguments Meilaender makes regarding this in *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, 75–80.

⁸⁵ Gilbert Meilaender, *Bioethics and the Character of Human Life: Essays and Reflections* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2020), 121–132.

⁸⁶ Meilaender, *Bioethics and the Character of Human Life*, 123. It is important to note that Meilaender refers to “ultimate authority” and is not speaking against something such as a health POA.

ings and of conversations that take place. “Patients are not blind. They see the offering or non-offering of appropriate food and fluids as an expression of love and concern or lack of love and concern.”⁸⁷ Tube feeding should never be deemed useless or futile if it sustains life and prevents death by starvation or dehydration.⁸⁸ Since a patient’s life is God-given, we will not deem a treatment futile that sustains the life, “even though we might all agree this is not the life anyone would choose for himself.”⁸⁹

The concern that oral tube feeding runs the risk of infection or that it may even lead to incidental aspiration that may result in pneumonia hardly stands up to scrutiny. If one method of delivering nutrition and hydration proves problematic, there are other means to do it. The so-called “G-tube,” for instance, provides a long-term alternative to the short-term nasogastric delivery of nutrition and hydration following a minor surgical procedure. Placement of a G-tube can be performed in three ways: surgically through making small incisions guided by a laparoscope, surgically by means of an open incision to the abdomen, or endoscopically employing a scope into the stomach to create the stoma from the inside.

One might reasonably ask if ever removing artificial nutrition and hydration represents a permissible act. Here the question revolves around whether one is “allowing a person to die” or is intending to cause death. This paper affirms the principle that withholding or withdrawing treatments may be done when it becomes useless or excessively burdensome. In many end-of-life situations, the continued administration of hydration and nutrition may create rather than ameliorate problems.⁹⁰ For instance, if the kidneys no longer process fluids for elimination, adding fluids artificially may result in painful edema (swelling). Yet, we are reminded that the burdensomeness is that of the treatment, not of life itself. We are called to care for other persons and do all that we can reasonably do to assist in sustaining their lives. Certainly, fulfilling the commandment not to kill, but to “fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need” ordinarily includes supplying food and water.⁹¹

Another question involves comatose patients. Are we morally obligated to sustain their lives by means of artificial nutrition and hydration when the very fact of being in a persistent vegetative state makes any return to normal life highly unlikely? But, even here, the annals of medical science are replete with examples of remarkable, even miraculous, recoveries from an unconscious or persistent vegetative state. For instance, Munira Abdulla (born 1959), an Emirati woman, lapsed into a coma following a car accident and regained consciousness after 27 years.⁹² While for a conscious patient, the use of tube feeding may prove terrifying and lead to a state of extreme agitation, an unconscious person would (obviously) not experience treatment as excessively burdensome. This illustrates the distinction between a treatment imposing an excessive burden and family members wishing to be relieved of the burden of sustaining a person’s life. Meilaender correctly notes that such care cannot be described as “useless, since it preserves the life of the embodied human being (who is not a dying patient).”⁹³ To withdraw or withhold nutrition and hydration from a person means certain death. Regardless of our professed motives, we would be aiming at the death of the person. For this reason, sensitive ethicists such as Meilaender conclude: “For the permanently unconscious person, feeding is neither useless nor excessively burdensome. It is ordinary

⁸⁷ Bartlett and Rehder, “Ventilators, Feeding Tubes, and Other End-of-Life Questions,” 3.

⁸⁸ Bartlett and Rehder, “Ventilators, Feeding Tubes, and Other End-of-Life Questions,” 3.

⁸⁹ Richard Eyer, *Holy People, Holy Lives* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014), Kindle Edition, locations 1202–1203.

⁹⁰ For a thorough discussion of the morality of withholding food and water, cf. Joanne Lynn and James F. Childress, “Must Patients Always Be Given Food and Water?” in *By No Extraordinary Means*, ed. Joanne Lynn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 47–60. “The question is whether the obligation to act in the patient’s best interests was discharged by withholding or withdrawing particular medical treatments. All we have claimed is that nutrition and hydration by medical means need not always be provided.” 59. In the same book, Daniel Callahan frets that mounting social and economic pressures will precipitate “prematurely terminating nutrition” rather than providing it for too long after it becomes burdensome. Callahan, “Public Policy and the Creation of Nutrition,” 65. Callahan follows Callahan’s chapter and cautions against self-deception. He argues that we should make these decisions with *clear-eyed awareness*, accepting moral responsibility for the lines we draw and limits we set. Callahan, “What Is Morally Justifiable to Discontinue Medical Nutrition and Hydration?” 47–48.

⁹¹ See CTRC, *Christian Care at Life’s End*, for further discussion of these kinds of difficult and challenging decisions.

⁹² “UAE Woman Munira Abdulla Wakes Up After 27 Years in a Coma,” *BBC News Service*, April 23, 2019, [bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-48020481](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-48020481).

⁹³ Gilbert Meilaender, “On Removing Food and Water: Against the Stream,” *The Hastings Center Report* 14, no. 6 (December 1984), 13.

MEDICAL-ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

human care and is not given as treatment for any life-threatening disease. Since this is true, a decision not to offer such care can enact only one intention: to take the life of the unconscious person."⁹⁴

We do not know what spiritual communion God may or may not have with a person in a persistent vegetative state. That some have recovered and resumed relatively normal lives makes it dangerous to presume that we are merely sustaining a biological shell rather than keeping a person alive.⁹⁵ However, whether we are physicians or nurses attending to a patient, family members called to bear the infirmity of their loved one, or even the patient himself or herself in a persistent vegetative state, we are all still God's creatures, "the instruments by which he provides and preserves life."⁹⁶

B. Who Decides?

The annals of medical ethics are full of accounts of debates over who should be the decider. The popularity of living wills, a topic we will consider in the next section, is in large part a reaction to the fear of physicians imposing their own values and ideas upon the end-of-life decisions. Some doctors will err on the side of determining that the patient is a "lost cause" and act accordingly. Others will opt for every treatment conceivable, whether it is prudent or not. Complicating this scene, we have questions regarding whether physicians may ethically object to performing particular procedures, even against their consciences and religious beliefs. An influential article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* argued that physicians freely chose to enter the field of medicine and that "conscience clauses" should not be permitted.⁹⁷

Most people probably agree that patients are not obliged to submit themselves to every recommendation by a physician, even their own. Nor are doctors required to follow bad medicine or unethical practice no matter how strongly their patients plead for it. We would want patients and their physicians to discuss and deliberate on how to proceed with a course of treatment. This should include a candid disclosure of the potential risks and the rewards attendant to it. But what if the patient cannot participate in such a conversation due to the temporary effects of a traumatic injury or a chronic case of dementia? Case law has tried to answer that hypothetical case with advance directives and "substituted judgment" criteria. What would the patient have wanted us to do if she were of sound mind and capable of making her wishes known? But does this approach resolve the dilemma of decision-making?

C. Advance Directives

Much of contemporary thinking about end-of-life decision-making has accepted a rather simplistic resolution to a difficult problem. The solution is that the patient alone decides on the care to be received. Given this assumption, a further question is how a patient is to be treated if he is no longer capable of decision-making. The answer proposed is that individuals should write down their wishes regarding medical treatment in advance of the time treatment is needed — an "advance directive." The most commonly known form of advance directive is the so-called "living will." In a living will, a hypothetical patient — let's say, Mary — expresses the kind of care that she would want as she contemplates life's end. But this ignores the fact that patients eventually face an all-too-real end of life that is not hypothetical at all. Indeed, there is a real question

⁹⁴ Meilaender, "On Removing Food and Water," 13.

⁹⁵ Elsewhere in this document, we argue that one may refuse or withhold treatment from someone in certain circumstances. Sustaining the life of one who is not actively dying is not the same as removing nutrition and hydration for someone who is in end-stage renal failure and for whom the very continuation of hydration will increase the person's discomfort and distress.

⁹⁶ Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 55. Kolb reminds us that "both human creatures and nonhuman creatures function as stewards of God's Father and the Latin term *steward* [sic], behind which he remains the creative agent of life."

⁹⁷ Roni Y. Stahl and Ezekiel J. Emanuel, "Physicians, Not Conscience — Conscientious Objection in Health Care," *New England Journal of Medicine* 376 (2017): 1380–1385. Against this line of thinking, that when you enter a profession you voluntarily surrender your rights to certain kinds of decisions based on ethical values, Leon Kass makes a strong case for understanding the role of the physician as a professional one bound by the rule: Doctors must not kill. He mounts a strong case against physician-assisted suicide. He concludes that what dying people most need as the "treatment of choice is company and care," "I Will Give No Deadly Drug," *Why Doctors Must Not Kill*, in *The Case against Assisted Suicide: For the Right to End-of-Life Care*, ed. Kathleen Foley and Herbert Hendin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 38.

MEDICAL-ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

While many are persuaded by such arguments for living wills, particularly when taken cumulatively, there are also sound reasons, both practical and theological, to question the use of living wills.⁹⁸

1. A minority of people actually utilize living wills. In 1976, California was the first state to legally sanction them, yet almost 45 years later, a 2020 survey by the Gallup organization revealed that only 45% of Americans have a living will (and only 46% have a will for their assets).
2. People who do complete living wills typically do so prior to when the living will would take effect. As noted earlier, what someone may or may not want can change significantly when the time of actual need arises. People are often confused when asked to sign a living will concerning what their actual end-of-life wishes might be. One study pointed to a third of preferences for life-sustaining treatment changing over periods as short as two years.⁹⁹
3. Living wills are often unclear or even contradictory in the preferences they identify.
4. Living wills are frequently lost, misplaced or not transmitted to those making medical decisions. Despite efforts by physicians to get patient wishes into their electronic records, medical charts often do not contain the intentions of the patient, let alone the actual document.¹⁰⁰
5. Living wills, even when transmitted, often do not correlate with the care decisions made by surrogates at the bedside of the dying person. While family members generally predict patient preferences more accurately than physicians, "these studies call into question whether living wills are likely to have a significant impact on the medical care received by an incompetent patient, at least in cases where surrogate decisions are made either by relatives of the patient or by physicians who know the patient."¹⁰¹

Another concern is vital for Christian consideration of living wills. We have warned that the biblical foundation for human dignity is not personal autonomy, but the reality that God has created each person, that He bestows human value and worth (or dignity), and that He determines the course of human life from conception to death. For these reasons, we cannot ignore the danger that some may seek to utilize a living will or another advance directive to project their autonomy into the territory of an unknown and uncertain future. Of course, there are other reasons why living wills may be appealing. They may serve simply to communicate an individual's thoughts and desires about medical care and death without any rejection of God's sovereignty over life or the gracious character of His wise decisions concerning our lives.

In addition, some who utilize living wills see them as a means for them to express loving concern for their family. They assume that a living will would minimize the pain and conflict their loved ones might face in trying to address difficult end-of-life decisions. Such a motivation, commendable as it is, requires further consideration. In contrast with those who wish to avoid burdening their family members, Gilbert Meilaender bluntly says, "I want to burden my loved ones."¹⁰² By this, he addresses the desire to spare family members at the time of death.

Meilaender summarizes the comments he has heard frequently in seminars: "I'm afraid that if my children have to make decisions about my care, they won't be able to handle the pressure. They'll just argue with each other, and they'll

⁹⁸ *Taking Care*, 71–79. Laws governing the wording and execution of a General Durable Powers of Attorney, an Advance Medical Directive and other similar documents vary from state to state. It is beyond the purpose of this report to survey the various state laws; rather, readers are encouraged to seek competent legal advice from an attorney familiar with the laws in their state.

⁹⁹ *Taking Care*, 74.

¹⁰⁰ When the Presidential Council on Bioethics report was written in 2005, they reported that only 16% of patient charts contained the actual form. *Taking Care*, 75–76.

¹⁰¹ *Taking Care*, 78.

¹⁰² Gilbert Meilaender, "I Want to Burden My Loved Ones," *Things That Count* (Wilmington, DE: Interlegiate Institute, Inc., 1999). The essay is reproduced in *First Things* (March 2010), [firstthings.com/article/2010/03/i-want-to-burden-my-loved-ones](https://www.firstthings.com/article/2010/03/i-want-to-burden-my-loved-ones).

MEDICAL-ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

whether the Mary who articulated her preferences two decades ago in a living will would agree with them today in her particular situation and circumstances.¹⁰³

In order to address the deficiencies of substituted judgment and living wills, many ethicists opt for the designation of a legal proxy to act in the best interests of the person. Activated in various forms, the Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare (under a variety of names) empowers a proxy named by the patient to act in the best interests of the patient.

The living will was first proposed by attorney Luis Kutner and defended in the *Indiana Law Journal* in 1969.¹⁰⁴ Since then, much ink has been spilled over the wisdom of such an advance directive. It must be stated at the outset that there is no perfect and simple answer to the question of whether living wills are beneficial.¹⁰⁵ Thoughtful people will continue to disagree over the wisdom of using them.

The commonly identified arguments for drafting a living will may be summarized as follows:¹⁰⁶

1. Living wills preserve self-determination. Given that the patient will be the one either to benefit or be burdened by future treatments, it stands to reason that he should offer informed consent before being subjected to medical interventions.
2. Living wills afford an opportunity for a person to declare his or her own wishes for the circumstances of death. The patient may not want to be kept alive by a machine.
3. Living wills offer some measure of protection against the twin dangers of over-treatment and under-treatment. Just as some people are adamant that they want to be resuscitated in the event of a cardiac event, others insist that they should have a DNR order attached to their files.¹⁰⁷
4. Living wills can serve to relieve anxiety and to facilitate the process of avoiding procrastinated decision-making in this critical area of life.
5. Living wills help families by not burdening them with difficult decisions at times of emotional duress. Even if a family is exemplary in its functioning, watching a parent die is an overwhelming emotional burden, one that does not lend itself to calm and wise choice-making when the decision may need to be made almost instantly.
6. Living wills can safeguard family finances. The financial consequences of end-of-life care may be significant, squandering a family's resources on interventions that may have little benefit.
7. Living wills can reduce litigation risk. Physicians tend to prefer a legal safety net against torts brought by family members unhappy with the clinical outcome or experiencing guilt and second thoughts about the wisdom of a course of treatment.

¹⁰³ The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod website offers two brief but helpful discussions of advance directives. See Christian Life Resources, "Living Wills vs. Medical Directive Statements: There is a Difference," <https://christianliferesources.com/2012/09/09/living-wills-vs-medical-directive-statements-there-is-a-difference/> and Christian Life Resources, "A Basic Understanding of Medical Directives," <https://christianliferesources.com/2018/05/15/a-basic-understanding-of-medical-directives/>.

¹⁰⁴ Luis Kutner, "Due Process of Euthanasia: The Living Will, A Proposal," *Indiana Law Journal* 44, no. 4, Article 2 (1969), repository.law.indiana.edu/vol44/iss2.

¹⁰⁵ The terms "living will" and "advance directives" are used interchangeably herein.

¹⁰⁶ *Taking Care: Ethical Confronting in Our Aging Society*. The President's Council on Bioethics, September 2005, 67–70.

¹⁰⁷ It might be noted that the survival to discharge after in-hospital CPR was 18.7% for patients between 70 and 79 years old, 15.4% for patients between 80 and 89 years old, and 11.6% for patients of 90 years and older according to a study reported in *Age and Aging*. Mike S. Gijb, et al., "Chance of Survival and the Functional Outcome after in-Hospital Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation in Older People: A Systematic Review," *ICUP Academic*, Oxford University Press, April 22, 2014, <https://academic.oup.com/aging/article/43/4/436/282127>.

MEDICAL-ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

feel guilty, wondering whether they're really doing what I would want. I don't want to be a burden to them, and I will do whatever I can in advance to see that I'm not."¹⁰⁸

Those who have served in pastoral ministries or in institutions caring for the elderly will recognize the sentiment Meilaender repeats. Not all families are intact, or cooperative, or even particularly stable. Dying seniors may have one or more estranged children with whom they have not spoken in years or even decades. Sometimes the relationships between the children become the crux of the dissension. The end-of-life crisis facing an aging mother or father will only exacerbate existing sibling issues that have never been resolved satisfactorily. At times, a child may question or mistrust a parent's decision-making on behalf of another parent. Would it not be better to prevent such conflict and relieve the burden of decision-making by simply drafting a living will that states what a patient's wishes for end-of-life care should be?

Meilaender rejects the underlying assumption that a family should be spared such burdens. To be a family is to bear one another's burdens. "Is this not in large measure what it means to belong to a family: to burden each other — and to find, almost miraculously, that others are willing, even happy, to carry such burdens? Families would not have the significance they do for us if they did not, in fact, give us a claim upon each other."¹⁰⁹

The logic of living wills elevates personal autonomy and self-determination above any other ethical values. But if dying people nearing the end of life demonstrate anything, it is that they are neither autonomous nor self-determining. Whether attended to by physicians, nurses or willing family caregivers, the wishes and the needs of a person at the threshold of death may be quite different from those that were anticipated perhaps decades earlier while one was still a vigorous person. As death draws near, such a document is of far less importance than prayerful conversation between family members, medical caregivers and one's pastor.

Meilaender reminds us that living wills may cut short such conversations that should rightly occur about a loved one's care. He notes that the severely demented or unconscious loved one becomes a stranger of a sort. His very condition evokes enormously deep and painful emotions. We may experience guilt over things we should or should not have said, memories of acts we wish we could take back, and fear (even terror) that we might find ourselves in the same situation someday. Defaulting to the legal language of a living will permits us to turn away from these concerns and shield ourselves behind the excuse of "just doing what Mom wanted." More ominously, moved by our discomfort and personal fears for our own futures, we may be tempted to do less than we should to sustain the life of our loved one.¹¹⁰ Against this, some object that this burdens the loved ones, exactly what the living will attempts to avoid. But if the language of countless sentimental greeting cards means anything, love is the kind of burden we freely accept. "For to burden one another is, in large measure, what it means to belong to a family — and to the new family into which we are brought in baptism."¹¹¹

The living will, therefore, may be questioned from the standpoint of Christian theology and common sense for two reasons. First, the wish to specify all of the conditions of care at life's end from the perspective of an earlier time may represent an effort to assert an illegitimate "right" to autonomy and self-determination. As already noted, the Christian doctrine of creation prizes creaturely dependence and receptivity over an individualized quest for autonomy and self-assertion of rights.

Second, living wills are based on the false assumption that we can predict and fully understand future events. Because these assumptions are false, living wills have proven remarkably ineffective in accomplishing their intended purposes, as

¹⁰⁸ Meilaender, "I Want to Burden My Loved Ones."

¹⁰⁹ Meilaender, "I Want to Burden My Loved Ones."

¹¹⁰ Meilaender, "I Want to Burden My Loved Ones."

¹¹¹ Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, 103.

MEDICAL-ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

we noted earlier.¹¹² For these reasons, we suggest that living wills do not represent the best means for loved ones to exercise their God-given responsibilities to provide compassionate care for their loved ones. "In the end, no legal instrument can substitute for wise and loving choices, made on the spot, when the precise treatment dilemma is clear and care decisions are needed."¹¹³

Rather than endorsing living wills, many sensitive ethicists, both Christian and non-Christian, have instead defended the use of proxy directives such as a durable power of attorney (POA) for health care. A POA for health care avoids the impossible task of guessing what a legally incompetent person might want given the particular clinical circumstances near the end of life. Instead, it rightfully burdens those who loved her with asking a far more relevant question: "What is best for her now?"¹¹⁴

Some might argue that durable POA documents share with living wills a desire to reach into a future beyond the scope of time when we are fully competent to direct our own care. But unlike the living will, which extends its reach by means of legal specifications to guarantee the patient's own wishes and autonomy, the proxy affirms the individual's creaturely dependence and his need to rely upon others.

A health care POA designates that an individual, as the principal, appoints another person to be his agent to make health care decisions if he is unable or unwilling to make them.¹¹⁵ A POA for health care should not be confused with a POA for property or business transactions, which appoints a person to make business- or property-related decisions. Even though the health care POA may not necessarily be making decisions, the agent most often has access to applicable medical records. Many jurisdictions provide for the health care POA to be durable, which means the agency designation remains in place even though the principal no longer retains ability to make decisions for himself or herself.

The selection of a health care agent is a critical decision as the agent will have ultimate authority for decision-making even after the individual is no longer able to express their own wishes. The individual chosen to be the health care agent should be someone with the capability to make decisions even if other family members are not in agreement.

It is normally prudent to choose a single health care agent. Commonly, one or two successors can be named in a health care POA, but only in an order of priority. Naming two individuals as health care co-agents only provides an opportunity for conflicts and stalemates and, therefore, the possibility that no decision is made.

Many times in a health care POA, an individual expresses certain wishes for how they want end-of-life decisions to be made. It is important the health care agent chosen be an individual well-grounded in the principal's spiritual foundation as well as their personal wishes. This helps to ensure that the health care agent is well equipped to assimilate the medical and health care facts that are unfolding and make appropriate, timely decisions.

Rather than a living will, the health care POA offers a better option for directing end-of-life care. As Meilaender concludes, it makes a simple statement to health care providers: "Here is a person upon whom I have often been dependent

¹¹² See pages 41–42. The 2005 report *Taking Care* devotes an entire chapter, pages 55–59, to "The Limited Wisdom of Advance Directives." This report of the President's Commission on Bioethics articulates multiple reasons for rejecting the living will in favor of power of attorney process and legal surrogate instruments.

¹¹³ *Taking Care*, 56.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Taking Care*, 55–59, where the legal rulings in landmark 20th-century cases are discussed in terms of various permutations of subjective and objective standards, including "substituted judgment" and "best interests" standards.

¹¹⁵ Power of Attorney documents vary widely; yet many jurisdictions have their statutory Health Care POA formats available online through their health departments or they may be accessed through a party's legal counsel or health care provider. It is important to ensure that current documents reflecting a person's end-of-life wishes are readily available and locatable when they may be needed.

MEDICAL-ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Unallowable indications where it is unethical to employ ANH include administering it against the patient's or surrogate's express wishes, compelling medical professionals to participate in ANH insertion in violation of their conscience, or utilizing ANH when the patient is declared brain dead.¹¹⁸

E. Refusing or Withdrawing Treatment

In discussing the ethics of refusing treatment, several authors cite a helpful metaphor, known as "the good host," first prof-fered by the Anglican David H. Smith.

A couple invite friends to dinner. Food and drink are pleasant; the conversation bubbles. The good host is hos-pitable and courteous to his guest, no matter what his shifts in mood. But there comes a time when the party "winds down" — a time to acknowledge that the evening is over. At that point, not easily determined by clock, conversation or basal metabolism, the good host does not press his guest to stay but lets him go. Indeed he may have to signal that it is acceptable to leave. A good host will never be sure of his timing and will never kick out his guest. His jurisdiction over the guest is limited to taking care and permitting departure.¹¹⁹

The illustration compares end-of-life decisions to the hospitality offered by a good host. The good host neither pushes his guests out the door too early nor does he inveigh upon them to remain after the end of the party.¹²⁰ While a growing number of jurisdictions may permit physician assistance in facilitating the deaths of their patients (e.g., by prescribing the lethal medication for the terminal patient to take), Christian ethics does not choose death or aim at it. Here it must be stated that neither do we make a false idol out of biological life as if it were the only or highest good.¹²¹

Unlike those availing themselves of the permission in those states with physician assistance in suicide laws, we are not called to choose death or aim at it. However, refusing treatments, even life-saving ones, may be a correct Christian choice. At 86 years of age, Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna, was taken to the arena. The proconsul attempted to persuade him to curse Christ and he would be free to go. But Polycarp refused, saying: "For eighty-six years I have served him, and he has done me no evil. How can I curse my king, who saved me?"¹²² While Polycarp freely answered the proconsul's questions, expecting that it would result in his death, he did not do so intending or aiming at death.¹²³ The same moral reasoning applied to the soldier who sacrifices his life willingly for the well-being of others. While one might reasonably know or suspect that making a charge against overwhelming odds will result in one's death, this is not an act of suicide. Dying may be the most likely outcome, but it is not part of the soldier's plan of action.

Many end-of-life treatments to reduce pain will carry negative, even possibly lethal, side effects. The narcotic morphine, for example, has become a commonly prescribed end-of-life medication to relieve severe pain that does not respond to other analgesics. As the patient's pain increases, caregivers typically administer larger doses of the

¹¹⁸ "Position Statements," Christian Medical & Dental Associations' (CMDA), March 23, 2022, <https://cmda.org/policy-issues/home/position-statements/>.

¹¹⁹ David H. Smith, *Health and Medicine in the Anglican Tradition* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 52.

¹²⁰ Haerwus cites Daniel Callahan's recuperating of the meaning of "natural death" with some qualified approval since the phrase itself may be too misleading to be of much help. Haerwus instead opts for the description of a "good death." Haerwus, *Suffering Presence*, 98. Callahan defines "natural death" as one when (1) one's life work has been accomplished; (2) one's moral obligations have been discharged; (3) one's death will not seem an offense to sense or sensibility; and (4) one's process of dying does not involve "unbearable and degrading pain." 97. Haerwus quotes Eberhard Jungel as teaching that the Christian proclamation of Jesus Christ freeing us from the curse of death implies that "human life has a natural end which comes when the time allotted to life has expired. Man has a right to die this death and no other." Haerwus, *Suffering Presence*, 97. Haerwus concludes that we ought not allow the "symbol of brain death to transmute us by requiring that we delay death so long that we can no longer die a good death . . . it should not be used as a substitute for the responsibility each of us has to die our own death." Haerwus, *Suffering Presence*, 98.

¹²¹ Haerwus asserts that "we should die in such a manner that others see that they are sustaining us and that correlatively due credit is given to God as the ultimate giver of life." Haerwus, *Suffering Presence*, 96.

¹²² Jatto L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, Vol. 1. (Pahoby, Mass: Prince Press, 1984), 43–45.

¹²³ This differentiation between intention and result plays a large role in Roman Catholic moral philosophy and has been credited to Thomas Aquinas. The so-called doctrine of "double effect" also comes into discussions of sedation, which may ease pain but may also hasten death. Note that while this notion becomes quite important in Roman Catholic medical ethics, there are some who dispute the appropriateness of it. David VanDrunen, for instance, refuses to employ the category as such because he deems the criteria not "always helpful" and argues that the use of it proves unhelpful as a rule to "determine the application of the principle on every occasion." Cf. VanDrunen, *Bioethics and the Christian Life*, 213–226.

MEDICAL-ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

for love and care in the past. Now, when I can no longer participate in decisions about my medical care, I am content to continue to be dependent upon his love and care. Talk with him about what is best for me."¹¹⁶

D. The Question of When Enough Is "Enough"

When is a treatment useless? When is a treatment excessively burdensome? A commitment to the sanctity of life and a refusal to accept physician-assisted suicide does not involve an idealistic effort to sustain biological life at all costs. When all indications point to God calling the soul from the body, "there is no point in merely blowing wind through the empty tent with ventilators and machines."¹¹⁷ When death appears imminent, the decision to withhold or withdraw food and hydration is not deciding to kill. Rather, it represents an important aspect of caring for the dying person. We do not wish to add burdens to the patient at such a time, but to relieve him of additional burdens.

While it may be appropriate to withdraw or withhold nutrition and hydration for someone who is imminently dying, that does not mean that we may act in this way because a patient is not dying fast enough. As fallible men and women with deceitful hearts (*Jer. 17:9*), it is easy to deceive ourselves with faulty reasons for why we should hasten death. Hospital and skilled nursing facility nurses have all heard families use a patient's poor "quality of life" as a reason to suspend treat-ments. Others speak of the psychological toll that a prolonged dying process may have on a physically frail or emotionally unstable spouse or other family members to rationalize a speedier death. An adult child may protest that this "useless care" is sapping the limited savings that the surviving parent will need to "get by." No doubt selfishness motivates some heirs who would rather a patient die quickly so their inheritance will not be used for patient care.

Despite such specious reasoning, we acknowledge that there are times when it is inappropriate to provide nutrition and hydration artificially. Depending on the specific condition, when major organs begin to fail, nutrition and hydration may actually increase the discomfort the body experiences after it no longer accepts or processes such sustenance effec-tively. In the active stages of dying, deterioration of the digestive tract can lead to discomfort and bloating. Similarly, as the heart becomes weaker and less efficient in pumping blood, fluid overload creates several negative conditions including fluid backup in the lungs, respiratory distress and excessive swelling of the tissues.

The Christian Medical and Dental Associations promotes a four-option approach to dealing with the ethical issues presented by artificial nutrition and hydration (ANH):

- Strong indications for use of ANH include patients with an inability to take oral fluids and nutrition with a high probability of reversing it; a patient in a stable condition but who is unable to swallow; a patient with a newly diagnosed but not imminently fatal severe brain impairment; gastrointestinal tract failure or need for bowel rest; or a fully informed patient wishing to survive until an important life event.
- Allowable indications for use of ANH speak to a morally neutral situation where a patient or surrogate should make the best decision after consulting with appropriate medical personnel. Examples would include a patient wishing to prolong life despite a severe and progressive neurologic impairment (e.g., end-stage amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also called Lou Gehrig's disease or ALS) and situations in which there is uncertainty whether the anticipated benefits versus burdens justify the intervention.
- Not recommended but allowable indications for ANH include when a patient or surrogate asks to overrule the patient's advance directive due to a specific or changing clinical context.

¹¹⁶ Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, 104.

¹¹⁷ Bartlett and Rehder, "Ventilators, Feeding Tubes, and Other End-of-Life Questions," 8.

MEDICAL-ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

drug.¹²⁴ Morphine not only deadens pain; it also suppresses respiration. The aim of the treatment, however, intends to mitigate pain and not to cause the death of the patient. If a caregiver deliberately overdoses the patient in order to eu-thanize him, we would say that he killed him since death was the physician's aim. If, however, a carefully adjusted dose of morphine to relieve pain suppressed respiration and the patient died, we would not reach the same determination since death was not the intent. This has led to the following guidelines for the moral answer to questions of refusing or withdrawing treatment.¹²⁵

First, a treatment may be refused if it is useless for the person relative to his condition. Since there is no moral obliga-tion to undergo treatments that hold little prospect of curing or even ameliorating the symptoms of a disease, refusing to accept a particular treatment does not equal the rejection of the gift of life.

In some cases, the refusal of treatment is more than "allowing to die"; it is done in order that the individual will die. A parent who will not allow a baby with Down syndrome to receive a necessary surgery might be said to refuse the surgery so that the child will die. This kind of verbal trickery has become more popular in our era when we tend to think of per-sonhood in terms of skill sets and cognitive abilities. For example, the evangelist and motivational speaker Nick Vujicic was born with tetra-amelia syndrome, leaving him without arms or legs. Had he also suffered from a blockage in his digestive system requiring surgery, one might easily have imagined his parents asking if he might be a candidate for euthanasia in a nation such as the Netherlands.

Second, treatments that are useful and perhaps even lifesaving may sometimes be excessively burdensome. In such cases, because life is not our god, we are not called upon to bear all burdens in order to stay alive. A variety of medical procedures, treatments and even medications may prolong life, but at an unwarranted burden. The patient chooses life, not death, simply not the life promised by the particular medical treatment. Elderly cancer patients, for instance, may choose not to accept the recommended chemotherapy because of the burden of the side effects.

As in the first guideline, this one may be abused quite readily. If we confuse the burdens of treatment with the burden of life, we move into an ethical danger zone. During the last several decades, for instance, the news has brought stories of Karen Quinlan and Terri Schiavo to our attention. None of us would wish for an unconscious existence in a persistent veg-etative state, sustained by artificial nutrition and hydration. But, as Meilaender has wisely said, "if we act on such a thought and withdraw the feeding tube, the burden at which we are taking aim is not treatment but life itself."¹²⁶ Christian wisdom says that if the treatment will benefit the life the patient has (whether we would choose such a life for ourselves or not), we are called to choose life.

F. Financial Matters

Since insurance policies, government provisions for coverage and state-specific legislation vary greatly and change rapidly, it would not be possible to address all of the practical matters related to how finances intersect with the convictions of a faithful Christian end-of-life ethic. Nevertheless, a few observations must be made.

Given the growing acceptance of assisted suicide, it is almost certain that withholding medical care for the terminally ill and for those with cognitive and other functional deficits will increase, and that some of that increase will be for finan-cial reasons. Rising medical costs for lifesaving or life-prolonging treatments come into sharp conflict with the strictures of

¹²⁴ Not only medical caregivers, but also family members may sometimes be authorized to administer morphine. It would be vital in such cases that there be instruction in the proper way to do so, as well as counsel concerning the distinction between caring and killing.

¹²⁵ The following points are so common to end-of-life books and articles that they hardly require detailed documentation, and are commonly identified by Roman Catholic, Reformed (e.g., Van-Drunen) and Lutheran ethicists. Lutheran ethicist Meilaender, for instance, often lists these as helpful principles. The reader may be directed to Meilaender's *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, 84–87, for a summary in his section "Guidelines."

¹²⁶ Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, 87–88.

MEDICAL-ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

budgets and bottom-line considerations by insurance companies. This becomes particularly true in an era when a Christian value on life seems less “cost effective” to those who think only of human life in pragmatic and non-theistic terms. As long ago as 1984, Colorado Governor Richard D. Lamm argued that there simply would not be enough money to fund all of the possible technological interventions that medical science presents. Lamm, a former certified public accountant, earned the moniker “Governor Gloom” for suggesting that the elderly have “a duty to die and get out of the way with all of our machines and artificial hearts and everything else like that and let the other society, our kids, build a reasonable life.”¹¹⁷ John Kilner makes several solid criticisms of age-based rationing of life-sustaining medical care. After considering a variety of utilitarian considerations, he concludes, “Our elderly and aged deserve our respect and our protection. Rationing their health care because of their age is to treat them with disdain rather than with dignity.”¹¹⁸ As a variety of ethicists have observed, the unintended consequences of loosening the restrictions on physician-assisted dying and euthanasia may result in a rapid closing of the distance between personal preference and the morally obligatory. What may begin as a possible course of action based on the wishes of the terminally ill person may soon become a “duty to die and get out of the way.” Such opinions seem even more persuasive when medical resources are scarce, and beds, medications, oxygen and other means of care are rationed and perhaps unavailable to those with a better chance of survival.

The selection of physician, hospital and hospice program directly impacts the approach to end-of-life treatments. Patients and their health care surrogates need to ask whatever questions are required in order to discover the approach their health care provider will take when faced with terminal conditions, incapacity and possibly prolonged custodial care. It would be better to change physicians than to have one who was reluctant to cooperate with the wishes of the patient or POA when determining next steps for the hospital or hospice. Remember also that hospice aims to support the family in offering palliative medication and emotional support, not provide restorative therapies. Doing one’s due diligence in researching and contracting with the hospice organization that will fit your needs is paramount. Similarly, while dedicated hospice in-patient facilities offer much greater care, they also have their own policies and procedures that may not align with the convictions and concerns of the family for caring for their loved one. Inquiries with hospice programs and in-patient programs can determine what one may expect prior to signing up with the hospice.

The choice of the agent granted durable power of attorney for health care should similarly be considered seriously. Family dynamics may present the POA with decision-making in an unenviable environment. One child may feel guilty about how she treated mom and wants to do everything medically possible to prolong life, while another one may be struggling with financial reverses and secretly hopes that enough money will be available in the estate to rescue him from fiscal ruin. Those chosen to carry the responsibility of POA should be able to resist the temptations of competing voices and to decide based on what is best for the loved one.

One potential cause of conflict over patient care can occur when different individuals are given responsibility for the medical POA and the financial POA. For example, a parent may designate one child to handle the POA for finance and another to assume the POA for health care. This may seem advisable if one child has a health care background and another has a demonstrated skill in handling money. But the arrangement can also lead to unhappy consequences. The person responsible for managing the financial affairs could conceivably refuse to allow payment for a high “out of pocket” course of treatment endorsed by the child with the medical POA.

¹¹⁷ “Gov. Lamm Asserts Elderly, If Very Ill, Have ‘Duty to Die,’” *New York Times*, March 29, 1984. Lamm’s view was endorsed by some ethicists, for example John Harbring in “Is There a Duty to Die?” *The Hastings Center Report* 27, no. 2 (1997), 34–42.

¹¹⁸ John F. Kilner, “Age-Based Rationing of Life-Sustaining Health Care” Section 74 in Therese M. Lysaught, *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives in Medical Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

25

MEDICAL-ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

3. Irretrievably Dying vs. Terminally Ill

One may suffer from a condition the physician labels “terminal” without facing imminent death. Some prostate cancers may grow so slowly that eventually a different malady actually causes death. Doctors may then elect to treat such a cancer with benign neglect, since the consequences of the cures may be worse than the reasonable expectation of death in the near term. The fact remains that such a person has a “terminal disease” or a “terminal condition.” However, that in and of itself does not fix an expiration date on the person’s life.

Other people are irretrievably dying, and their body has begun to shut down.¹¹² Family members may be advised that a vital organ has begun to malfunction in a life-threatening way. Often efforts to shore up the function of one organ (e.g., the heart) will create additional problems for another one (e.g., kidneys). Some forms of advanced disease may be so progressed that only hours or days remain. Someone who is irretrievably dying may find few treatments that can be called “useful.” Here the Christian duty of maximizing care comes into play.

4. Intention or Aim of an Action vs. Result of an Action

Elsewhere in this report, we cite the distinction between a “suicide mission” and an “act of suicide.” The first does not aim at death; it is merely doing one’s duty as a soldier. The second intends for the act to produce death. This can be true even when another agent may be involved. The so-called “death by cop” scenario describes a situation where a person uses a gun to provoke the police to respond with deadly force. Here, we say that the person was committing suicide by another’s hand. Polycarp submitted to the death of a martyr; he did not aim to die. Sometimes legitimate medical treatments will result in death notwithstanding the care with which they are employed. A lifesaving but delicate surgery may lead to an unhappy outcome contrary to the wishes of the patient, family and surgeon. More commonly, the use of pain medication may have undesired side effects that are well known to the administering physician. We earlier noted that morphine effectively dulls unrelenting pain so that some call it a “godsend” to sufferers. Unfortunately, it also suppresses respiration and may result in death. However, pain relief and not death was the intention. Ethicists call this the “double effect” doctrine.¹¹³

Wesley Smith’s *Culture of Death* deals with the operational reality of “double effect” as it applies to the care for the suffering. He cites attorney and ethicist Rita Marker’s four guidelines:¹¹⁴

1. The action taken (in this case, treating pain and relieving suffering) is “good” or morally neutral.
2. The bad effect (in this case, the possibility of death) must not be intended, but only permitted.
3. The good effect cannot be brought about by means of the bad effect.
4. There is a proportionately grave reason to perform the act (in this case, the alleviation of severe pain) and thereby risk the bad effect.

5. Palliative Care vs. Palliative Sedation¹¹⁵

Palliative care describes the treatment of the discomfort, symptoms and stress of serious illness. Whether offered in a hospital or clinic, in hospice, or at home, the goal aims at relief from problematic symptoms such as pain, shortness of breath, fatigue, constipation, nausea, loss of appetite and sleep difficulties, among others. Some palliative care seeks to mitigate the side effects of medical treatments (e.g., chemotherapy). It holds forth the hope of improving the quality of life

¹¹² Meilaender makes this distinction: “Irretrievably dying is not the same as to be terminally ill. One can be terminally ill but still expected to live for months or even years. For the patient who is irretrievably dying, few if any treatments can really be useful.” Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, 85.

¹¹³ Widely credited to Aquinas, the doctrine of “double effect” has been much used in Roman Catholic moral literature. Protestants have sometimes employed the same idea by differentiating intention from result.

¹¹⁴ Wesley Smith, *Culture of Death: The Assault on Medical Ethics in America* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000), 106–107.

¹¹⁵ Perhaps the most useful and succinct summary of the ethical issues related to palliative sedation can be found in Meilaender, *Bioethics and the Character of Human Life*, Chapter 11, “Comforting When We Cannot Heal,” 121–132. This section relies heavily upon his points in that chapter.

27

MEDICAL-ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As in most areas of life, advance planning can be extremely helpful. It is generally advisable for those who qualify and can afford it to carry long-term care insurance. However, with annual costs that can be significant, that option will not be practical for persons of lower income and/or savings. Additionally, many applicants for long-term care insurance will be rejected due to pre-existing conditions (including, among others, inability to pass a cognitive test, obesity and certain chronic conditions).

G. Necessary Distinctions and Helpful Terminology**1. Burdens of Treatment vs. Burdens of Life**

Earlier we introduced the matter of medically useless or excessively burdensome treatments. Along with most Christian ethicists, we affirm that no one should be subjected to a treatment that would be useless. But beyond this, no one need agree to every treatment proposed by physicians, regardless of how lifesaving it may be, if the treatment is excessively burdensome. Many cancer chemotherapy regimens, for instance, may produce extremely difficult side effects, particularly for a very aged individual. Some patients may elect to spend time with family or friends rather than accepting a grueling course of chemotherapy with little possibility of extending life.

Refusing a particular course of medical treatment because it proves too burdensome on the patient is radically different from considering the very life of the dying person to be a burden. A person may suffer from the burden of frailty due to age, accident or chronic illness. In some cases, such conditions may cause us to pray for God’s deliverance from them. They are nonetheless common to our human condition and not a ground for suicide or euthanasia. “We may reject a treatment; we must never reject a life.”¹¹⁹

2. Caring, But Only Caring

The Ramsey Colloquium’s declaration “always to care, never to kill” summarizes the Judeo-Christian tradition with respect to our obligations to our fellow creatures.¹²⁰ It also echoes the moral consensus of the Law of God written on every human heart (ROM. 2:15). The classic form of the Hippocratic Oath stated the duties of a physician clearly on this point: “I will give no deadly medicine to any one if asked, nor suggest any such counsel; and in like manner I will not give to a woman a pessary to produce abortion.”¹²¹ But the moral obligation to care for our fellow sisters and brothers so that we “do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need” does not require us to employ treatments that are useless or cause needless suffering.

The commitment “always to care, never to kill” does not mean that we should eliminate all those who suffer or that we gladly ignore their suffering. Instead, it requires that we find efficacious ways to mitigate suffering. Christian ethicists summarize the principle governing Christian compassion in realistic, not idealistic, ways. In the name of Christ, we show compassion most when we maximize care, not when we merely minimize suffering. Indeed, if compassion is the elimination of all suffering, we might achieve it by ridding the world of sufferers. This does not mean, however, that we support needless suffering. While we will continue to cite the sufferings of our Lord and their benefits, that does not require us to refuse remedies and analgesics that can make the suffering we are called upon to bear more bearable. Just as Scripture speaks of endurance in the midst of tribulation, not apart from it, so it also teaches love that remains steadfast through suffering.

¹¹⁹ John T. Pless, *Mercy at Life’s End: A Guide for Lovers and Their Partners* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2013), 13.

¹²⁰ The Ramsey Colloquium, “Always to Care, Never to Kill,” 45–47.

¹²¹ “Hippocratic Oath,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., britannica.com/Elthecode/206652/Hippocratic-oath.

26

MEDICAL-ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

for the patient and reducing the distress of family members. Since unwelcome symptoms exist on a spectrum from easily remedied to the most unmanageable, “palliative sedation” (PS), as defined here, denotes the intentional lowering of awareness toward pain, perhaps including unconsciousness, for patients with severe and unmanageable symptoms. Although being conscious and present to interact with family and friends remains a value that most people seek to retain as they near the end of life, for some the relief of symptoms may outweigh the desire to be conscious.

In some circles, this has been quite controversial. Imagine two scenarios. First, a dying patient suffers extreme pain for which there is no easy solution. The physician gradually increases the dosage of morphine until the person can tolerate the pain, even though it might also reduce the patient’s level of consciousness. Double-effect reasoning would support this as a moral decision and good medical practice. But consider a twist to this scenario. What if the physician administers a barbiturate drip intended to leave the patient unconscious? Here the goal is not to mitigate the suffering but to eliminate the conscious experience in which the suffering is perceived. Does this constitute a treatment protocol that fails the moral test because it intends an arguably evil effect (that is, permanent unconsciousness)? We might argue that surgeons render patients unconscious routinely during surgical procedures. We call it anesthesia. But this argument proves too much. The medication producing unconsciousness during surgery is both limited in duration and intended to allow repairs that will restore the patient to health and return to somewhat normal function. The medication given to create a permanent state of unconsciousness aims at an evil effect (if you consider consciousness an important value). Meilaender demurs on the grounds that consciousness is not always a value that must or ought to be counted as supremely important. While we might say that it would not be morally correct to put a healthy young person into a state of permanent unconsciousness, the same might not be the case for a 95-year-old with hours left to live. Imagine that this elderly saint has prayed with her pastor and bid each member of her family and family circle good-bye. Faced with difficult-to-manage pain, we might agree with those who say, “Consciousness seems to me, if I may put it a little too brashly, not quite that big a deal.”¹¹⁶

6. Treatments Which May Be Refused vs. Care Which Should Never Be Denied

Elsewhere in this document the point has been made that one may reasonably and responsibly refuse treatment when it is medically useless or excessively burdensome. The 1993 CTCR report proposed four factors to be considered as relevant for withholding or withdrawing treatment:

- (a) When irreversibility is established by more than one physician;
- (b) When a moment in the process of dying has been reached where nothing remains for medical science to do except to offer palliative care;
- (c) When possible treatment involves grave burdens to oneself and to others; and
- (d) When there are no means left to relieve pain and no hope of recovery remains.¹¹⁷

While treatments may be refused, care must never be denied. Pless cites Wesley Smith’s observation that “Futile Care Theory” has corrupted medical ethics such that some hospital protocols actually require that feeding tubes be withdrawn from patients in a persistent vegetative state, even over the objections of family decision-makers and in spite of explicit patient desires expressed in advance directives.¹¹⁸ Pless concludes that “a treatment may be refused or discontinued if it is deemed futile, but care is never futile and is not to cease until natural death.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Meilaender, *Bioethics and the Character of Human Life: Essays and Reflections* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2020), 127. Meilaender allows that some cases may be more problematic. For instance, he balks at a blanket permission for palliative sedation where the patient’s suffering is not a result of an underlying physical pathology causing extreme and unendurable pain but a result of feelings of loneliness, depression or disgust with the dependence occasioned by old age.

¹¹⁷ CTCR, *Christian Care at Life’s End*, 37.

¹¹⁸ Pless, *Mercy at Life’s End*, 12.

¹¹⁹ Pless, *Mercy at Life’s End*, 13.

28

7. “Vegetable” vs. “Persistent Vegetative State”

Lay use of the term “vegetable” for a person in a coma or a vegetative state represents a horrible misinterpretation of the meaning of the medical term “persistent vegetative state” (PVS). While the word may be acceptable within the scope of its clinical use, the casual use of it may mislead people greatly. The term “coma” refers to the lack of both awareness and wakefulness, whether in an open-eyed or closed-eyed coma state. Patients in a vegetative state may have regained consciousness from a coma, but still have not regained awareness. PVS represents a disorder of consciousness in which patients with severe brain damage are in a state of partial arousal rather than true awareness. Typically the classification of “vegetative state” (VS) gets applied to such persons in the first weeks with the classification “persistent vegetative state” coming after four weeks. While some commonly describe those in a persistent vegetative state as brain dead, that misunderstands the injury. Patients with PVS have a healthy and functioning lower brain stem.

Although very rare, PVS patients may sometimes regain full consciousness. One man, Conley Holbrook, was classified as “comatose” for eight years. On Feb. 25, 1991, he awakened. According to Bartlett and Rehder, 26-year-old Holbrook was not only able to call each of his relatives by name, but he was even able to identify the small children who had been born while he was unconscious.¹⁴⁰ Another person, Patti White Bull, emerged from her unconscious state on Christmas Eve in 1999 after 16 years.¹⁴¹

8. What Do/Did They Want? vs. What Is Best for Them?

As Christians, the question “What did he/she want?” should not be primary in our thinking. A better question for Christian surrogates at the bedside of a dying loved one should be, “What is best for this person?”¹⁴²

H. Hospice Care

Hospice care, in-patient or at home, can become a valuable partner to both the family and the dying person. Unlike health restorative therapies and procedures common in hospitals, hospice aims at palliative relief of pain and symptoms of a terminally ill patient.¹⁴³ Hospice programs also incorporate attending to the emotional and spiritual needs of the patient. Note that the spiritual support provided by a secular organization that conceives of the idea of “spiritual” in the most generic and ecumenical way will be something quite different from pastoral care offered by a Lutheran clergyman.¹⁴⁴ Lutheran pastors will want to provide Word and Sacrament ministry to a terminally ill person on a regular basis. They will typically want to prepare the dying saint and his or her family for impending death with the use of the “Commendation of the Dying,” found in the *Pastoral Care Companion*.¹⁴⁵

Because of the focus on palliation of a terminally ill patient’s pain and symptoms, the priority falls on comfort and quality of life through the reduction of pain and suffering. Hospice provides an alternative to therapies aimed at prolonging life through means of therapies and procedures. Current treatments for cancer, for instance, carry with them potential unwanted side effects and additional symptoms that may prove extremely burdensome to an elderly patient. Outside the

United States, the term “hospice” often denotes facilities and institutions. Usage in the United States applies to both in-patient and out-patient (home-based) programs that began to spring up and proliferate in the early 1970s. In 2017, almost 1.5 million patients took part in hospice in the United States.

At present, the United States Medicare program only covers hospice care if the hospice provider is Medicare-approved. One can determine if the hospice provider qualifies as Medicare-approved by inquiring with your physician, the hospice provider, the state hospice organization or the state health department.¹⁴⁶ If the hospice has been Medicare-approved, “once your hospice benefit starts, Original Medicare will cover everything you need related to your terminal illness.”¹⁴⁷ Current law permits two 90-day benefit periods, followed by an unlimited number of 60-day benefit periods. This includes the right to change hospice providers once during each benefit period.

Depending on the specific needs of the terminally ill person, the number and quality of hospice programs in the area, and one’s own ability to assist in the care of the dying loved one, a person may prefer to opt for receiving hospice in a nursing home or long-term care facility where hospice services are added onto the regular nursing, housekeeping and dietary services. Most people profess to prefer dying in “my own bed” rather than in a hospital, nursing home or other institutional setting. However, if the spouse may be too frail or impaired to assist the hospice team actively, an in-home program may not be practical. At times, the decision whether or not to use home-based hospice will hinge on the availability of family members (and/or hired help) to support the terminally ill person. A frail, elderly spouse suffering from early stages of dementia, for instance, would not be a suitable person to attend to an obese patient with uncontrolled incontinence.

Increasingly, patients are encouraged to become intelligent consumers of their usage of medical science and its myriad benefits. In the area of hospice, differences of practical pain and symptom management exist. For instance, some hospices may not perform glucose monitoring for diabetics as they see it as “treatment toward a cure,” even though not monitoring glucose could cause hypoglycemia (critically low levels where a patient goes into coma and death) or hyperglycemia (critically high levels). Both are considered clinical emergencies. Other hospices recognize glucose monitoring is not curative, but that it prevents harm in maintaining acceptable levels and waiting for death from another condition (e.g., cancer, heart failure). Asking questions of the staff before entering into an agreement may assist patients and their families in making a wise selection. And while the Medicare website declares that “Original Medicare will cover everything you need related to your terminal illness,” that should not be understood to mean that nothing is expected of the family. Different hospice providers carry out their duties in myriad ways, some handling most of the care needs, others expecting family members or the hospital or senior facility to shoulder some of the responsibilities. Again, asking enough questions in advance and probing to ensure a full understanding of how a particular organization operates will increase the likelihood of having a satisfying relationship with their services and support in a time of need. Note that a person is not obligated to accept the leads and recommendations from hospital discharge planners. While they may be invaluable in a search for a provider, their information should not substitute for one’s own efforts to secure the hospice that will meet the family’s expectations.

¹⁴⁰ Bartlett and Rehder, “Ventilators, Feeding Tubes, and Other End-of-Life Questions.” Conley Holbrook identified his cousin as his attacker following awakening from his semi-comatose state, resulting in the man facing trial for attempted murder. “Brain-Damaged Man’s ‘Miracle’ Recovery Lands a Cousin in Jail: Tragedy: The Two Boyhood Chums Grew up to Be Drinking Buddies. A Head Injury Left One of Them Speechless for Eight Years. Was It Assault or Just Another Family Fight?” *Los Angeles Times*, April 21, 1991, [latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-04-21-mn-846-story.html](https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-04-21-mn-846-story.html).

¹⁴¹ “Awakening from 16 Years in near-Coma,” *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 3, 2000, [latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2000-feb-03-me-60571-story.html](https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2000-feb-03-me-60571-story.html).

¹⁴² This point is discussed in more detail under the section on advance directives, particularly as related to the durable power for health care proxy (see pages 17–21).

¹⁴³ The very notion of hospice care stands against the ideology of suicide and euthanasia. As Dyck notes, “Hospice was founded to provide comfort-only care that would help prevent suicide and euthanasia. Hospice physicians repeatedly report that once they provide comfort-only care, patients who expressed a desire to end their lives, or have it ended, change their minds, or no longer pursue ending their lives as an option.” *Life’s Worth: The Case Against Assisted Suicide* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 47.

¹⁴⁴ Hospice organizations may assume that they will be responsible for the spiritual care of the dying person. It may be necessary for the family to request that their pastor rather than the hospice chaplain provide spiritual care and counsel for the dying.

¹⁴⁵ “Commendation of the Dying,” in *Lutheran Service Book: Pastoral Prayer Companion* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 81–94.

Medicare suggests that the following questions may aid families in the selection of a hospice provider:

- Is the hospice provider certified and licensed by the state or federal government?
- Does the hospice provider train caregivers to care for you at home?
- How will your doctor work with the doctor from the hospice provider?
- How many other patients are assigned to each member of the hospice care staff?
- Will the hospice staff meet regularly with you and your family to discuss care?
- How does the hospice staff respond to after-hour emergencies?
- What measures are in place to ensure hospice care quality?
- What services do hospice volunteers offer? Are they trained?¹⁴⁸

IV. Pastoral and Spiritual Dimensions

A. Dealing with Our Uncertainty and Sinfulness

The discussion of end-of-life decision-making must also take account of the ambiguity inherent in all human experience. As fallible creatures with circumscribed consciousness, we must admit that we may not always know clearly what the “right thing to do” might be in a particular situation. More than one disciple of Christ has felt the force of St. Paul’s phrase “we see in a mirror dimly” (1 COR. 13:12) when confronted with the uncertainties attending to bedside decision-making for a dying loved one. After opining that the unbroken tradition from “Genesis to Heidegger” differentiates animal life from human life by the presence of “human consciousness of self,” Thielicke admits that there are no casuistic rules to offer us infallible direction on how to handle the bedside choices families and physicians must render. He resorts to the notion that “one must simply run the risk of making the decision — and be prepared in so doing to err, and thereby to incur guilt. As a Christian, I would say that whoever hopes to come through it all without illusions or repressions will have to live in the name of forgiveness.”¹⁴⁹

The 1993 document of the CTCR reminded us that “any decisions made in this highly complex area, and any actions taken that may later appear to have been wrong, have been redeemed by that forgiveness which is available to all who put their trust in the work and merits of mankind’s Savior and Redeemer.”¹⁵⁰ To sinners burdened in conscience by the guilt of the Law, our final word must always be one of Gospel and forgiving grace in Jesus Christ. Whether hindsight reveals the inadequacy of our calculations here or not, we dare not stop with the penultimate word of Law but press on to the ultimate word of Gospel. As Luther wisely observed, “Are we to rate the price of his blood so low as to say that it has redeemed only what is lowest in man, and that what is most excellent in man can take care of itself and has no need of Christ?”¹⁵¹

At one level, such counsel should reassure those who confess that all human efforts carry the taint of sin and that motives can never be 100% pure. We all live by faith and in light of the forgiveness of God, after all. For faithful loved ones carrying a burden of guilt over the death of a loved one and torturing themselves over whether they could have “done more” or done it differently, this message may be an important part of sensitive pastoral care.

One can hardly gainsay the liberating promise of divine forgiveness and the blessed state of absolution. However, we are never permitted to substitute divine pardon for legitimate human agency. We dare not adopt a cavalier attitude that it does not really matter what we decide to do since we know that God will forgive us in the end anyway. Neither are families exempt from the difficult prayerful conversations that attend to living in Christ through faith as we serve our neighbor through love.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Thielicke, *The Doctor as Judge*, 21. See the entire section, 16–21, for his argument.

¹⁴⁹ CTCR, *Christian Care at Life’s End*, 21.

¹⁵⁰ LW 33:227.

¹⁵¹ In Luther’s “The Freedom of the Christian,” he writes, “We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love.” LW 31:371.

¹⁴⁸ “How Hospice Works,” [medicare.gov/what-medicare-covers/what-part-a-covers/how-hospice-works](https://www.medicare.gov/what-medicare-covers/what-part-a-covers/how-hospice-works).

The principles and considerations laid out in this report provide concrete guidance for faithful end-of-life decisions amid the ambiguities of incomplete knowledge and often competing values. We all live under what Thielicke called that “alien dignity” that forbids us to be subjected to the “dictatorial rule” of our own technical capacities. We were created by a divine benevolence who bequeathed to us a value and dignity that remains, even this side of the fall. Whatever else we say about the value of God’s creation of man and woman, it implies a sanctity that must not be trampled under or made subservient to what human ingenuity and inventiveness can design by way of medical interventions and treatment protocols. We do well to seek counsel from physicians and pastors, consider the relative merits of the options, pray to the One who is the source and Lord of life, and exercise our duties as the designated surrogates of a dying loved one. But along the way of the entire process, we joyfully acknowledge and believe the forgiveness of God in Christ Jesus and His Holy Spirit as our real and present Comforter in every circumstance.

B. The Reality of Death and Our Struggle with Helplessness

Christians affirm both the unnatural nature of death as the curse that fell upon a sinful human race and the hope held out for us in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who came that death may die.¹⁵³ Luther never flinched from dealing with the severity of sin’s consequences. His handling of Psalm 90, for example, serves as a “corrective for therapeutic pastoral theologies.”¹⁵⁴ For the reformer, “The entire human race fell so far away from God and is so thoroughly blinded by original sin that man knows neither himself nor God. Indeed, he does not even know his own sorry state, although he feels it and languishes under it. He neither understands its origin nor does he see its final outcome.”¹⁵⁵ In his commentary, Luther rejects any minimizing of death as the “worst blindness” in the face of what one certainly knows and experiences to be the opposite.¹⁵⁶ Luther comments on Psalm 90: “First, Moses here stresses the tyranny of death and of God’s wrath, since he shows that human nature is subject to eternal death; he does this for the purpose of terrifying hardened and unbelieving despisers of God. Secondly, Moses prays for a remedy against despair, that men might not succumb to despair.”¹⁵⁷

We cannot escape God’s wrath and its inevitable consequences in death by wishing them away with flowery eulogies, which amount to little more than secular attempts at absolution by works and worthiness, or by exercising our self-determination by choosing when and how we will “die with dignity.”¹⁵⁸ Self-determination is what got humanity into the problem of sin in the first place! Luther thunders that it “is wicked to invent a new god and in this way to escape God’s wrath and so to attempt to avert something which we, because of sin, have justly deserved.”¹⁵⁹ The law focuses like a laser on what death is and remains: our enemy. Werner Elert rightly observed that God’s call deals a “destructive blow” to any notions of autonomous self-determination. But looked at “with the eyes of God,” all of this autonomy shrinks to the “mathematical point,” and we see that “the outer side of our life is death.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵³ The short piece, “What About Death and Dying” by A.L. Barry in the Synod’s “What about . . .” series, offers a succinct statement dealing with the types of questions laypersons often ask regarding death and dying. It can be downloaded online at The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s LCMS Document Library, <https://files.lcms.org/files/private/4C0b19c5fPpYt8M2GcADNhxEX-AhWAtzd>.

¹⁵⁴ John T. Pless, “Luther’s Reading of Psalm 90: The Eschatology of Pastoral Theology,” in *Take Courage: Essays in Honor of Harold Smedley* (Irvine: New Reformation Publications, 2016), Kindle Edition.

¹⁵⁵ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 13: Selected Psalms II, ed. Jaroslav J. Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 13 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 76.

¹⁵⁶ LW 13:77.

¹⁵⁷ LW 13:78. The old Henry Cole translation of Luther’s devotional thoughts on the Psalm, *A Manual on the Book of Psalms* (London: Seeley and Burnside, 1837), offers a wonderful summary of Luther’s view of Psalm 90. “This Psalm contains a very great and important doctrine; in which Moses teaches what is the origin and cause of that death to which the whole human race is subject, and the reason why so horrible a punishment was inflicted on the whole race of mortals: the Psalmist saith, it was on account of sin; and the guilt and desert of sin are greater than can be conceived by the human mind, unless God touch the heart with a knowledge of it; and yet, in this sin and guilt, and under this wrath, all the sons of Adam are born.”

¹⁵⁸ Pless, “Luther’s Reading of Psalm 90,” Kindle Edition.

¹⁵⁹ LW 13:96.

¹⁶⁰ Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, electronic ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 26.

into His kingdom (MAT 18:3). We revel in the grace of infant Baptism partly because it reminds us that God gives His gift of faith precisely when we are unable to obtain it on our own. The Baptism of an infant reminds us that God rewards only the helpless with heaven; those seeking to control the outcomes of life spend eternity separated from Him.

2. Facing Helplessness Due to Suffering

St. Paul reminds us that God specializes in manifesting Himself at exactly the point of our deepest need and showing Himself sufficient for our every need. Romans 5:6 declares that “while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.” Luther similarly observes that “through persecution the Gospel and God’s Word only advance and become stronger, and faith increases. This contradicts the way things work with worldly possessions, which decrease in misfortune and adversity and increase in prosperity and peace. Christ’s kingdom increases in affliction and decreases in peace and luxury, as St. Paul says, ‘My power is made stronger in weakness,’ (2 COR. 12:9).”¹⁶¹

Our sinful nature ever seeks to become a theologian of glory rather than a theologian of the cross. Luther’s words in his Heidelberg Disputation (1518) show our problem in stark relief when he writes, “This is clear: The person who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore, this person prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil . . . However, God can be found only in suffering and the cross, as has already been said.”¹⁶²

3. Facing Helplessness as a School for Learning to Trust God

Part of the often painful pedagogy of discipleship involves learning to submit to God in the muddle of our helplessness and feelings of futility. This is not the same as the famous “stiff upper lip,” nor is it a compliance through clenched teeth as would be unbefitting the Christian, “but a childlike, willing, glorious submission to God; even as the Christian in his entire life submits to God’s ways and permits God to guide him.”¹⁶³ We follow the Christ who is truly God but also truly one of us. His entire life was a life of faith, but His approach to His own end-of-life experience informs our understanding. In the Garden of Gethsemane, facing imminent death, He submitted to God’s will and committed His life into the hands of the Father (LUKE 22:42; LUKE 23:46; CF. 1 PETER 4:19).¹⁶⁴ Now He intercedes for us in heaven and invites us to approach the “throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (HEB. 4:14-16). Of all the discipleship challenges we face, none is more existentially pressing than our own death or that of a loved one.

In the last century, Dietrich Bonhoeffer similarly comprehended the uncertainties that faced him living as a follower of Christ, needing to learn the painful lessons of discipleship. For him those lessons came under the Nazi regime. Near the end of the war, Bonhoeffer wrote:

“Having patience in days of trouble” — this has been the focus recently of nearly our entire inner concentration. How do we accomplish it? By submitting to God’s blows and God’s law and saying, Happy are those who experience this! This is what those who call God “dear Father” must say. Those whom God disciplines through difficult life experiences, through war and deprivation, learn that they can insist on nothing from God; so they wait patiently and humbly until God again turns toward them kindly, and they know that this hour is coming.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ LW 76: 208.

¹⁶² Deane Bultsloh, “Heidelberg Disputation,” in *The Roots of Reform*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand, Kiri I. Sjoberg and Timothy J. Wengert, vol. 1, *The Annotated Luther* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 99-100.

¹⁶³ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 138.

¹⁶⁴ Samuel H. Nafziger et al., eds., *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 182.

¹⁶⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Conspiracy and Imprisonment: 1940-1945*, ed. Jürgen Glinz and Douglas W. Stott, vol. 16 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 627-628.

Reflecting upon Luther’s handling of Psalm 90, Pless sees it as establishing both a foundation and a framework for pastoral care in the face of death.¹⁶⁶ With Luther, the pastor is called to face death squarely and name it for what it is. Death, the alien work of God’s wrath, remains the last enemy and may only be overcome by the death and resurrection of the one “who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (ROM. 4:25). Secular notions of death as “natural” seek to keep it in the biology lab and treat it as merely another part of the “circle of life,” and a rather natural one at that. Paul, like Luther much later, had a much more realistic view of death as our true enemy. “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law,” Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 15:56. The trio of death, sin and the law are the unholy trinity of Luther’s exposition of Psalm 90.

But just as Easter follows Good Friday, the resurrection comes after the cross. The same Christ who gave His life as a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins guarantees us a final victory. Our words to the dying and their grieving families does not end with a grave or with the months of wrenching grieving that may follow. We offer the promise and hope of God in Christ. Pless states it well:

The one who died in our place gives us his indestructible life. The end of life’s story is not the obituary; the final destination is not the cemetery. The end of the story is Christ Jesus crucified and risen from the dead. The end of the story is your resurrection. In light of this truth, we are set free to face the questions of mercy and care at life’s end with the full confidence that the Lord who gives us life and who will one day recall this life to himself always has more to give. We will neither take our own lives or those of others, nor will we hold on to them selfishly when the Lord, who has already called us from death to life in Holy Baptism, calls us to die for that final time.¹⁶⁷

Pastoral preparation for the various stages of life should involve at the very least an orientation to the joys and rewards of each season of life, including the final one, despite the discomfort with helplessness and loss of control as we await union with Christ in glory. Meilaender offers insight into the wisdom of aging and the notion of a complete life: “No longer imagining, if he ever did, that he goes to meet God on his own terms, it is the old person’s ‘special opportunity’ to discover that the initiative always lies with God — and in this discovery to be an example for all who are younger.”¹⁶⁸

Thoughtful Christian leaders may consider the complexity of the issues that surround end-of-life care and despair of having a sure word from the Lord. Richard C. Eyer helpfully cuts through the clutter and affirms three key ideas: 1) The problem comes because we are afraid of being helpless and without control over our lives in a time of great ethical and relational crisis; 2) “It is only when we find ourselves helpless due to suffering and do NOT take matters into our own hands that we come to see God at work in our lives redeeming and remaking us through ‘death and resurrection’ of the spiritual self”; and 3) Part of the obedience of faith means that we use our sense of helplessness and inadequacy to learn to submit to God and trust Him despite the specific conditions and circumstances.¹⁶⁹ We may take each of these points in order.

1. Fear of Helplessness and Lack of Control

We fear helplessness and seek to project our own self-determination into the future’s uncertainties. God, the Creator, makes us His creatures. Creaturely existence must, by definition, be receptive and dependent. Finding ourselves afraid of dying, unable to control the outcome of the medical care we receive, can never be a comfortable place to be. But it is precisely in extreme situations like these that we become the instruments of God for our family and caregivers. And in their care, they become God’s instruments to us. We cannot forget that Jesus selected a helpless child to be emblematic of those who enter

¹⁶⁶ Pless, “Luther’s Reading of Psalm 90,” Kindle Edition.

¹⁶⁷ Pless, “Luther’s Reading of Psalm 90,” Kindle Edition.

¹⁶⁸ Gilbert Meilaender, *Should We Live Forever? The Ethical Ambiguities of Aging* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), Kindle Edition, location 1543.

¹⁶⁹ Richard C. Eyer, “A Christian Guide to End-of-Life Decisions” (Nevada, Iowa: Lutherans for Life), n.d.

C. Christ’s Comfort for the Dying

The comfort Christians offer those who are at the end of their earthly pilgrimage begins not in the hospital or hospice room, but at the cross.¹⁷⁰ The root for the English “comfort” comes from the Latin *com fortis*, with strength. While the farthest thing from the existential reality of a dying person may be said to be strength, that is exactly what Christian caregiving offers. We strengthen them because our God is the ultimate strength. Paul declares to the Corinthians, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too” (2 COR. 1:3-5).

But since this is no “whistling past the graveyard” kind of comfort, it does not ignore the ugly realities of the actual situation the person faces in the midst of suffering. Just as Jesus quoted the words of abandonment from Psalm 22 while He suffered on the cross, sometimes we may expect to hear words of bitter loneliness and even abandonment from those we minister to at their most dire moment. Our task does not involve looking the other way from their pain, their negative emotions or even their real doubts no matter how uncomfortable it makes us. As ministers of Christ, we represent the ultimate Suffering One. Hebrews reminds us that “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (HEB. 4:15-16). As one veteran chaplain put it after meeting with a struggling patient: “She was sustained by God and God’s care-giver. She was comforted with the comfort of God.”¹⁷¹

This was Luther’s pastoral approach, pointing to Christ and His saving work and promises as our source of comfort in the face of death. Luther rejected much of the *ars moriendi* (“the art of dying”) tradition of his times.¹⁷² Unlike those who focused their attention on the works that a Christian should perform in order to ensure a “blessed death,” Luther steadfastly held forth the promises of God in the Gospel. Reflecting on the finished work of his catechism, he observed, “Now it has come, praise God, to this men and women, young and old, know the catechism. They know how to believe, live, pray, suffer, and die.”¹⁷³ Luther began a 1522 Invocavit Sunday sermon with these words:

The summons of death comes to us all, and no one can die for another. All must fight their own battle with death by themselves, alone. We can shout into one another’s ears but everyone must individually be prepared for the time of death, for I will not be with you then nor you with me. Therefore each person must personally know and be armed with the chief things that concern a Christian.¹⁷⁴

In May 1519, while Luther was engaged in preparing to debate John Eck, he received a request from Mark Schart, a counselor in Elector Frederick’s court, to write on the topic of death and dying. Luther demurred due to the press of his debate preparation and other duties. Within weeks, Luther relented and promised to produce something on the topic if Schart would be patient. On Nov. 1, 1519, Luther’s “A Sermon on Preparing to Die” was published.¹⁷⁵ He took aim against

¹⁷⁰ Steinke, “Comfort in the Face of Death,” 126.

¹⁷¹ Steinke, 126.

¹⁷² Robert Kolb, “The Reformation of Dying and Burial: Preaching, Pastoral Care, and Ritual at Committal in Luther’s Reform,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 81 (2017): 77-93, especially 81-82.

¹⁷³ Luther’s Warning to His Dear German People,” LW 47:52; quoted in Robert Kolb, “Introduction,” *A Booklet of Comfort for the Sick & On the Christian Knight* by Johann Spangenberg, trans. Robert Kolb (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2007), 9. “In contrast to Jean Gerson’s *morituri* and other forms of late-medieval death literature, Martin Luther found in his theological breakthrough a means of approaching death through what Oswald Bayer called *promissia*.” Jones, *Promissia and Death*, ii.

¹⁷⁴ Martin J. Lohrmann, “The Invocavit Sermons,” in *Pastoral Writings*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand et al., vol. 4, *The Annotated Luther* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1322), 14-15. The “chief things” Luther has in mind are that we are “children of wrath” under God’s judgment, that God has given His Son so that whoever believes in Him is a child of God, and that we must love as God has loved us since true faith results in love.

¹⁷⁵ Martin Luther, “A Sermon on Preparing to Die,” LW 42.

the spirit of the times with its teachings about how to prepare for a “blessed death.” He warns that Satan would have us fix our gaze on death’s terror and God’s wrath, brooding over our sins.¹⁷⁶ Luther stressed that instead of looking to oneself and one’s own works, “we must turn our eyes to God, to whom the path of death leads and directs us.”¹⁷⁷ Specifically, he points to “the picture of Christ” or “the picture of grace” — the image of Christ suffering on the cross for the sins of the world.¹⁷⁸ Because of God’s promise of the forgiveness of sins, believers are encouraged to focus on “the glowing picture of Christ” in the confidence that “death, sin, and hell will flee with all their might.”¹⁷⁹ Or as Luther summarizes: “In Christ [God] offers you the image of life, of grace, and of salvation so that you may not be horrified by the images of sin, death, and hell!”¹⁸⁰

End-of-life issues at the bedside soon give way to those of the grieving ones left behind. The pastoral ministry at the point of death does not end with the one who died. Rather, it carries over into the ongoing ministry to the family and friends of the deceased. Here, too, the glorious promise of the Gospel needs to be heard. Perhaps no hymn captures the soaring truth of Christian hope based on the finished work of Christ and His promise to us better than the words of Hamburg pastor Erdmann Neumeister’s “God’s Own Child, I Gladly Say It” (1718). Every verse revels in the sacramental benefits of Christian Baptism as the believer’s “great treasure of redemption and eternal salvation” and being baptized into Christ as “the shower from heaven.”¹⁸¹ Such strong and certain hope offers strength not only to the dying but also to those who grieve in the face of death and loss.

D. Christ's Comfort for the Grieving

The *Pastoral Care Companion* provides a number of liturgies, prayers and counsel for the aftermath of death. We have referenced the “Commendation of the Dying” liturgy as a tool to use with families as they surround the bedside of a dying loved one. The *Pastoral Care Companion* also includes helpful sections on “Comforting the Bereaved,” “Entrance of the Body into the Church,” the “Funeral Service” and the “Committal.”¹⁸² Pastors may find these resources appropriate for their hospital and hospice room ministry as well as the funeral and committal services.

Rather than offering pat answers and pious platitudes to deal with death’s aftermath, pastoral care involves entering into the pain of the bereaved and helping them respond to it in a faithful Christian manner, including the use of lament.¹⁸³

This document has emphasized the importance of learning to accept our helplessness — and to embrace our Father’s merciful care and trustworthiness — in the face of death. Yet it is also true that the prayers of the faithful in the Scriptures, especially in the Psalms, teach us to cry out honestly, boldly and even impatiently to our faithful God. Our Lord Jesus Himself displayed such moments of raw lament when weeping over Jerusalem, when appealing to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane and when crying out from the cross (in the words of a “lament” psalm), “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (*MATT. 27:46. Cf. PSALM 22:1*). After all, as Bayer reminds us, “It is part of God’s own nature to let himself be petitioned . . . God reveals himself not as inexorable fate, but as biddable.”¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁶ LW 42:101.

¹⁷⁷ LW 42:99.

¹⁷⁸ LW 42:104–06.

¹⁷⁹ LW 42:106.

¹⁸⁰ LW 42:114.

¹⁸¹ Joseph Herl, Peter C. Reike and Jon D. Vicker, eds, *Lutheran Service Book: Companion to the Hymns*, Vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2019), 594.

¹⁸² *Lutheran Service Book Pastoral Care Companion*, “Comforting the Bereaved,” 95–106; “Entrance of the Body into the Church,” 107–109; “Funeral Service,” 110–124; “Committal,” 125–135; and “Burial for a Stillborn Child or Unbaptized Child,” 136–147.

¹⁸³ Two helpful resources for Lutherans in this respect are Dennis Ngien, *Fruit for the Soul: Luther on the Lament Psalms* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015) and Ronald K. Rittgers, A Widower’s Lament: The Poetic Meditations of Johann Christoph Oelshagen, Translated with an Introduction, Notes, and Epilogue (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021).

¹⁸⁴ Oswald Bayer, “Toward a Theology of Lament,” in *Caritas et Reformatio: Essays on Church and Society in Honor of Carter Lindberg*, ed. David Whitford (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 214.

when we cry to Him. “Lament does not become silent in light of the promise of an answer; rather, it becomes louder and sharper. The distress articulated in the lament gains painful depth.”¹⁸⁸

One of the most remarkable features of prayers of lament is the way in which they hold tightly together the seemingly opposite poles of grief and joy, despair and hope. Psalm 13, for example, opens with the aching cries: “How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day?” (*PSALM 13:1–2*). Yet just a few verses later, the psalmist declares, “But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation” (*PSALM 13:5*). On the one hand, this emotional ambiguity may be understood “not as . . . separate moments in the speaker’s life, but as states that exist simultaneously in his heart.”¹⁸⁹ On the other hand, there is a movement consistently exhibited by the biblical lament psalms, a movement from pain and lament to confidence, hope and praise. As Luther says regarding this psalm, “Hope itself despairs and despair nevertheless begins to hope.”¹⁹⁰

Psalm 22 is no different. As David concludes his convulsive paroxysm of pain, he breaks forth in praise of God:

22 I will tell of your name to my brothers;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
23 You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him,
and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
24 For he has not despised or abhorred
the affliction of the afflicted,
and he has not hidden his face from him,
but has heard, when he cried to him.
25 From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will perform before those who fear him.
26 The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD!
May your hearts live forever!

Lament offers a biblical template, then, for dealing with the bereaved, and it unites us together in the suffering, the prayer and the faithfulness of our Lord Jesus Himself. Glenn Packiam notes five additional aspects of such prayer. It expresses the anguish of the human heart in prayer, represents an act of praise of God, bears testimony to the dependence on Him even in sorrow, shows the way forward in our relationship with God, petitions Him as our dear Father to engage with us in our suffering, and takes us into the very midst of the broken hearts of God’s people. Packiam concludes by noting the movement toward praise that undergirds the lament of believers.

Lament is not our final prayer. It is a prayer in *the meantime*. Most of the lament psalms end with a “vow to praise” — a promise to return thanksgiving to God for His deliverance. Because Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, we know that sorrow is not how the story ends. The song may be in a minor motif now, but one day it will resolve in a major chord. When every tear is wiped away, when death is swallowed up in victory, when heaven and earth are made new and joined as one, when the saints rise in glorious bodies . . . then we will sing at last a great, “Hallelujah!”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ Bayer, “Toward a Theology of Lament,” in *Caritas et Reformatio*, 212.

¹⁸⁹ Timothy E. Salecka, *Psalms 1–50* (Concordia Commentary; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2020), 285, citing J. Clinton McCann Jr., *The Book of Psalms in The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leland E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 727.

¹⁹⁰ Quoted by Salecka, *Psalms 1–50*, 288.

¹⁹¹ Glenn Packiam, “Five Things to Know About Lament,” *N.T. Wright Online*, April 2020, ntwrightonline.org/five-things-to-know-about-lament/.

Lutherans may particularly benefit from a consideration of lament as a way of living out our faith in times of crisis and grief. Luther’s moving writings on his trials and afflictions, his *Anfechtungen* (variously translated as trials, temptations and assaults), coupled with his teaching on what it means to be a “theologian of the cross” speak eloquently to our pastoral task with the bereaved. Robert Kolb captures it well when he notes, “In the midst of *Anfechtungen* of various kinds, Luther recognized that he had no answer that would give him mastery over the question of the ‘why’ of sin and evil. Therefore, Luther let God be master and simply turned to him in days of trouble, often with the cry of lament.”¹⁸⁵

Luther likens the human heart to a ship on the seas driven by a storm. Sometimes the buffeting of circumstances and our particular experiences plunge us into the waters of despair. At other times, “the breezes of hope” bring us the prospect of potential happiness. Luther points to the biblical psalms as a rich resource for prayer in each of these seasons of life, including the darkest hours:

Where does one find finer words of joy than in the psalms of praise and thanksgiving? There you look into the hearts of all the saints, as into fair and pleasant gardens, yes, as into heaven itself. There you see what fine and pleasant flowers of the heart spring up from all sorts of fair and happy thoughts toward God, because of his blessings. On the other hand, where do you find deeper, more sorrowful, more pitiful words of sadness than in the psalms of lamentation? There again you look into the hearts of all the saints, as into death, yes, as into hell itself. How gloomy and dark it is there, with all kinds of troubled forebodings about the wrath of God! So, too, when they speak of fear and hope, they use such words that no painter could so depict for you fear or hope, and no Cicero or other orator so portray them. And that they speak these words to God and with God, this I repeat, is the best thing of all.¹⁸⁶

It is instructive to consider even our Lord’s own prayer with its seven petitions as a fitting prayer for the grieving and lamenting believer.¹⁸⁷ Each petition relates to the experience of a person in grief. In a world seemingly out of control with death stalking and then stealing from us those we love, we center our thinking by affirming from the depths of pain that God’s name is holy, and we ask that it be kept holy, even in this hurt. Second, while our minds may race to questions that all seem to begin with “why,” we petition our heavenly Father for the Spirit’s grace that enables us to “believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity” as members of His kingdom. Third, we pray that in the midst of loss that leaves us reeling, God will superintend in such a way that He “breaks and hinders every evil plan” and enables us to hallow His name even when we hurt too much to care, and that He “strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we [also] die.” Fourth, we ask for God to give us all that we need, even in our days of grieving, and to receive it all with thanksgiving. Fifth, those who are grieving often fall prey to anger and to thoughts of recriminations. Not uncommonly, the families of those who have died sometimes lash out at the physicians and institutions that provided support for their loved one at the end of life. We pray that God will assist us as we “sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.” Sixth, recognizing the emotional fragility of a person in grief, we petition the God of all comfort to “guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.” Finally, the Lord’s Prayer captures the aspiration of the disciple for God to “rescue us from every evil of body and soul” and “when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.”

Lutheran theologian Oswald Bayer rightly draws attention to the faith that undergirds a Christian’s lament. Rather than finding its voice in “a nihilistic vacuum of unbelief,” lament only occurs because our God speaks to us and hears us

¹⁸⁵ Robert Kolb, Foreword, in Ngien, *Fruit for the Soul*, xiii–ix.

¹⁸⁶ LW 35:255–256.

¹⁸⁷ Notice how applicable the words of Luther’s catechism are to the experience of the grieving Christian. His words sprinkle this section with the aspirations of one in grief and expressing lament. See “The Lord’s Prayer,” *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, 19–22.

V. Concluding Remarks

In concluding this report, we want to remind the reader once more of the CTCR’s earlier reports, *Christian Care at Life’s End* and *Euthanasia*. Those studies and their principles remain foundational for this report. As was the case with the Commission’s previous reports on how Christians are called to care and never to kill, we have sought herein to be faithful to a distinctively Christian understanding of death. We do not seek to avoid death as if it were a natural or medical obstacle to be overcome. Instead, we acknowledge it as the right and meet punishment we must all face as the wages of sin. Yet we do so with the hope of eternal life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

“Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints” (*PSALM 116:15*).

“When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’
‘O death, where is your victory?’
O death, where is your sting?’

“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (*1 COR. 15:54–57*).

Appendix

APPROPRIATE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION WITH MEDICAL PERSONNEL AND FAMILY

Richard C. Eyer helpfully offers guidance for how to deal with physician interactions in end-of-life situations.¹⁹² He offers several questions for the family members being approached by the physician for input on either initiating or continuing life support interventions. He recommends that the family member ask to speak directly with the physician if approached by a nurse or other hospital staff person. Eyer's proposed questions have been modified and expanded to take into account some of the end-of-life discussions in this paper, particularly the suggestions by John T. Pless.¹⁹³ As such, they are also directed as points for discussion with family members and one's pastor as well as with medical professionals.

1. Ask the doctor: "What is the medical condition of the patient at this time?" (You are asking for an objective medical evaluation, not a philosophical opinion, of the patient's condition.)
2. Ask the doctor: "What is the prognosis?" Has a "second opinion" been sought? Does this opinion confirm or call into question the original prognosis? (You are asking whether the patient is expected to recover or not.)
3. Ask the doctor: "Is the patient dying at this time?" Have the patient's vital processes already begun to shut down, indicating that death is inevitable unless God intervenes? (If the patient is not dying, it would be morally wrong to aim at causing the death of the patient.)
4. Is treatment being discontinued to hasten death (hence "choosing death") or because the treatment itself has become burdensome on the patient with no realistic hope of recovery?
5. Ask the doctor: "Is the patient awake?" (If so, you will want to be supportive by discussing with the patient his condition and by praying with him for guidance before a decision is made.)
6. Ask the doctor: "Is the patient in any pain at this time?" (You are asking whether pain gives urgency to your decision.)
7. Is adequate physical care (e.g., artificial nutrition and hydration) provided for the dying person even when other treatments are discontinued or life support systems are withdrawn?
8. If a decision is needed immediately, err on the side of life, not death. If a decision is not needed momentarily, say, "I need time to talk with my family and/or pastor and I will call you within [a stated length of time]." (You are saying you need the input of others concerned for the patient.)
9. If the situation allows, leave the hospital and meet with your family and pastor at church in a prayerful environment. This distance from the hospital environment sometimes helps you think more clearly. Inform the nurse that you are leaving, where you will be and when you will return.

¹⁹² Richard C. Eyer, "Medical Directives and Some Misunderstanding" (Mequon, Wis.: Concordia University, n.d.). A helpful, but unfortunately out of print, resource for group studies of end-of-life decisions that includes descriptions, biblical texts for each issue, case studies, small-group questions and even "things to do" in follow up can be found in John Klotz, ed., *Life Choices Who Decides? Following God's Word in Life and Death Decisions* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991).

¹⁹³ Pless, *Mercy at Life's End*, 16, was invaluable for adding to the excellent questions by Eyer.

Hospice — A program in which an interdisciplinary team of caregivers provides comfort, support and dignity to terminally ill people when medical treatment is no longer expected to cure the terminal disease or prolong life. Hospice service is provided wherever the person resides, most often at home. It is voluntary and also involves and supports the individual's family and/or loved ones.

Irretrievably dying — Irretrievably dying refers to the condition where a person's body has already begun to shut down and few, if any, medical treatments offer hope of healing. The term may be contrasted with "terminally ill," since one can be terminally ill but still expected to live for months or even years.

Living will — A document that expresses a person's end-of-life preferences if he or she becomes unable to speak. A living will is just one type of an advance directive (see above).

Medical aid in dying (MAID) — A provision that allows mentally capable, terminally ill adults to request a prescription from their physician for life-ending medication that the person may self-administer. The states that currently authorize MAID require that, prior to providing a prescription, doctors must confirm that a patient is fully informed about his or her prognosis and must provide the patient with information about additional end-of-life options, including comfort care, hospice and pain control. Other synonymous terms are commonly used: physician-assisted suicide, physician-assisted dying, physician-assisted death, physician aid in dying, medically-assisted dying, patient-administered hastened death. Advocates of the practice consider the term "physician-assisted suicide" to be a partisan description of the medical practice of aid in dying. They may cite the judgment of the American Psychological Association that suicide and aid in dying have "profound psychological differences." Lutheran ethicists have joined other Christians and non-Christians in opposing this as suicide or euthanasia under another name.

Medical (or physician) orders for life-sustaining treatment (MOLST/POLST) — A document available in some states that provides detailed guidance about an individual's wishes for end-of-life medical care. The order is part of advance health care planning and is prepared by a medical professional.

Nasogastric (NG) tube — A flexible tube inserted through the nose to deliver nutrition and medication to the stomach for those experiencing difficulty swallowing. NG tubes may administer nutrients and medication, remove liquids or air from the stomach, add contrast to the stomach for X-rays, or protect the bowel after surgery or during a bowel rest.

Palliative/total sedation — Also referred to as terminal sedation. The continuous administration of medication to relieve severe, unrelenting symptoms that cannot be controlled while keeping the person conscious. This state is maintained until death occurs.

Percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy (PEG) tube — A PEG tube is an alternative to an NG tube for patient nutrition. The PEG tube is surgically placed through the abdomen directly into the stomach.

Persistent vegetative state (PVS) or Post-coma unresponsiveness — PVS represents a disorder of consciousness in which patients with severe brain damage are in a state of partial arousal rather than true awareness. Typically the VS classification gets applied to such persons, with the classification "persistent vegetative state" coming after four weeks. While some describe those in a persistent vegetative state as "brain dead," in fact, the lower brain stem in PVS patients is still healthy and fully functioning. This results in the person's ability to blink and otherwise move his or her eyes, breathe independently, cry or laugh, though not as an emotional response to external events. Those with PVS enjoy normal circulation, experience regular sleep-wake cycles, move their limbs, though purely as reflex (PVS patients can't hold their limbs nor move them on command), open their eyes, smile and track objects with their eyes.

Power of attorney for healthcare (POAH) — A legal document that grants someone the authority to make health care decisions on behalf of another individual when that individual cannot do so. Synonymous terms include durable power of attorney for health care, medical power of attorney, health care power of attorney and health care proxy.

Refusal of medical treatment — The legal right of competent adults to refuse medical treatment even if that treatment is necessary to sustain life. These life-sustaining interventions can include ventilators, feeding tubes and pacemakers. If an adult is judged to be mentally incompetent by a psychiatric professional, the person can be treated against his will.

Terminal care period — The period during which there is evidence of progressive malignancy, and in which therapy cannot realistically be expected to prolong survival significantly. Patients enter this period either at the time of diagnosis or following a period of active treatment. The onset of the terminal care period should not be confused with the point at which the expectation of life is estimated to be short. A patient might be expected to die within a few months but have a treatable malignancy. This patient would still be in the active treatment period.

Terminal condition — As held by at least two appellate courts, "dying" or a "terminal condition" is a condition resulting from injury,

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

GLOSSARY: DEFINITIONS OF CURRENT END-OF-LIFE TERMS

Actively dying — The hours or days preceding imminent death during which time the patient's physiologic functions wane. Virtually all dying patients go through a stereotypical pattern of symptoms and signs in the days before death. This trajectory is often referred to as "actively dying" or "imminent death."

Advance directive — The most common types of advance directives are the living will and the power of attorney for health care. Called "advance" because such a document is prepared prior to a health crisis during which it would guide medical care, these directives vary by state and can include other documents, such as a dementia provision or a DNR ("do not resuscitate") order (see below). See also "living will" and "power of attorney for health care" below.

Artificial nutrition and hydration (AN&H/ANH) — ANH is most often delivered by means of a nasogastric (NG) or percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy (PEG) tube (see below). It often involves a surgical procedure to place a flexible feeding tube through the abdominal wall and into the stomach. PEG allows nutrition, fluids and/or medications to be put directly into the stomach, bypassing the mouth and esophagus. Whether delivered by an NG or PEG tube, the purpose of ANH is to provide short-term support for patients who are acutely ill. When employed near the end of life, ANH will most likely not prolong life and can lead to medical complications that increase suffering for the patient.

Coma — While differences of physical presentation exist within the classification of "coma" (e.g., open-eyed vs. closed-eyed), the Mayo Clinic defines a coma as "a state of prolonged unconsciousness that can be caused by a variety of problems — traumatic head injury, stroke, brain tumor, drug or alcohol intoxication, or even an underlying illness, such as diabetes or an infection." A coma "seldom lasts longer than several weeks."

Death with dignity — The term used by proponents of physician-assisted suicide/dying to describe death where the patient is viewed as being in control (either by an advance directive or by electing to request lethal medications). It is also the name given to aid-in-dying laws that have advanced in a number of states over the years. Oregon's landmark aid-in-dying law, enacted in 1997, is called the Oregon Death With Dignity Act. The state of Washington's 2008 law is the Death with Dignity Act. It is a term of art and part of the political landscape (e.g., pro-choice, pro-abortion). People who speak of "death with dignity" are not employing the word "dignity" in its Christian sense but as part of their efforts to legalize physician-assisted dying and/or euthanasia.

Do not resuscitate (DNR) — A medical order that no measures be taken to resuscitate a patient whose heart or breathing stops. The order is made while the individual is mentally capable and conscious, or by that individual's healthcare proxy if he or she is not. A variety of interventions may be specified. Some patients may choose to have "full code" with intubation and to be placed on a ventilator (short or long term). Another patient may decide not to be on a ventilator with a "DNR Select" code status where the heart would be shocked if it stops, but intubation/ventilation is not performed. Some in this category choose to be placed on a BiPAP (bilevel positive airway pressure) machine (similar to a CPAP — continuous positive airway pressure — for sleep apnea). A third option involves a patient who chooses to have a status of "do not resuscitate" (DNR). Various "treatments" (i.e., antibiotics, tube feeding) and other care preferences desired/not desired can be specified on some DNR forms in some jurisdictions to guide health team members.

End of life — In clinical medicine, the "end of life" can be thought of as the period preceding an individual's natural death from a process that is unlikely to be arrested by medical care. For insurance purposes, the "end of life" has been operationalized to represent the last six months of a patient's life. It refers to a final period — hours, days, weeks, months — in a person's life in which it is medically obvious that death is imminent or a terminal moribund state cannot be prevented.

Euthanasia — Also known as "mercy killing." In the act of euthanasia, the physician — not the dying person — chooses and acts to cause the death of the patient.

disease or illness from which there likely can be no return to health, and which, without life-prolonging procedures, will lead to natural death. In other words, a person with a terminal condition is one for whom no medical cure exists.

Terminal prognosis, terminally ill — An illness for which the medical expectation is death within a few months. Aid-in-dying laws typically define a patient as terminal whose life expectancy is six months or less. Those suffering from a fatal pathology because medical treatment in their cases will not lead to a restoration of health and will prolong the dying process may be deemed terminally ill or have a terminal prognosis. People in an irreversible coma (IC) and/or a persistent vegetative state (PVS) are, ipso facto, terminally ill. For the sake of simplicity, most clinicians consider IC and PVS to belong to this same class of terminally ill people and refer to them as permanently unconscious, though each group has different, but related, neurological impairments. The Medicare hospice benefit is limited to persons whose physicians attest that the patient has "a terminal illness with a life expectancy of six months or less."

Transition of care — Transition of care during the end of life includes: 1) changing place of care, 2) changing goals of care, 3) changing teams of care. The term refers to support given to patients when they move from one phase of the disease or treatment to another, such as from hospital care to home care. It involves helping patients and families with medical, practical and emotional needs as they adjust to different levels and goals of care.

Voluntarily stopping eating and drinking (VSED) — VSED is a legal right for any individual who wishes to shorten the dying process by refusing nourishment orally or through a tube.

CHRONOLOGY OF ASSISTED DYING EFFORTS IN THE U.S.¹⁹⁴

Ian Dowbiggin offers two of the most useful histories of the euthanasia movement in America.¹⁹⁵ Readers wishing to deal with the philosophical and historical factors leading to success and failure of the efforts to push for physician-assisted suicide/dying would be rewarded by reading his volumes. Dowbiggin roots the emergence of right-to-die agitation in a “combination of a fervent quest to maximize human freedom and the reformist urge to socialize individual identities in the service of utilitarian goals” within a larger mindset of progressivism in the early twentieth century.¹⁹⁶ The following chronology was compiled by noted physician-assisted dying advocate, Derek Humphry. Usage of this chronology for informational purposes does not, obviously, imply support for or agreement with Humphry’s views or interpretations of these events.

Pre-1950s

- 1906** First euthanasia bill drafted in Ohio. It does not succeed.
- 1935** World’s first euthanasia society is founded in London, England.
- 1938** The Euthanasia Society of America is founded in New York by Unitarian minister Rev. Charles Potter.

1950s

- 1954** American professor Joseph Fletcher publishes *Morals and Medicine*, predicting the coming controversy over the right to die.
- 1957** Pope Pius XII issues Catholic doctrine distinguishing ordinary from extraordinary means for sustaining life.
- 1958** Oxford law professor Glanville Williams publishes *The Sanctity of Life and the Criminal Law*, proposing that voluntary euthanasia be allowed for competent, terminally ill patients.

1960s

- 1967** The first living will is written by attorney Louis Kutner, and his arguments for it appear in the *Indiana Law Journal*.
- 1967** A right-to-die bill is introduced by Dr. Walter W. Sackett in Florida’s legislature. It arouses extensive debate but is unsuccessful.
- 1968** Doctors at Harvard Medical School propose redefining death to include brain death as well as heart-lung death. Gradually this definition is accepted.
- 1969** A voluntary euthanasia bill is introduced in the Idaho legislature. It fails.
- 1969** Psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross publishes *On Death and Dying*, in which she proposes the five-stages model for those facing death.

1970s

- 1970** The Euthanasia Society (U.S.) finishes distributing 60,000 living wills.
- 1973** The American Hospital Association creates the Patient Bill of Rights, which includes informed consent and the right to refuse treatment.
- 1973** Dr. Gertruida Postma, who gave her dying mother a lethal injection, receives a light sentence in the Netherlands. The furor launches the euthanasia movement in that country. The Dutch Association for a Voluntary End of Life (NVEV).
- 1974** The Euthanasia Society in New York is renamed the Society for the Right to Die. The first American hospice opens in New Haven, Conn.
- 1975** Henry P. Van Dusen, 77, and his wife, Elizabeth, 80, leaders of the Christian ecumenical movement, commit suicide rather than suffer from disabling conditions. Their note reads, “We still feel this is the best way and the right way to go.”
- 1976** The New Jersey Supreme Court allows Karen Ann Quinlan’s parents to disconnect her respirator, saying it is affirming the choice Karen herself would have made. The Quinlan case becomes a legal landmark. Quinlan lives another eight years.
- 1976** The California Natural Death Act is passed. The nation’s first aid-in-dying statute gives legal standing to living wills and protects physicians from being sued for failing to treat incurable illnesses.

¹⁹⁴ The following chronology is taken from Derek Humphry’s book *Final Exit: The Practicalities of Self-Deliverance and Assisted Suicide for the Dying*. Delta, 2002. It is also available at finalexit.org/chronology_right-to-die_events.html.

¹⁹⁵ Ian Dowbiggin, *A Merciful End: The Euthanasia Movement in Modern America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. From *A Concise History of Euthanasia: Life, Death, God, and Medicine* (Lanham, Md.: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2005).

¹⁹⁶ Dowbiggin, *A Merciful End*, xiii.

- 1991** Choice in Dying is formed by the merger of two aid-in-dying organizations, Concern for Dying and Society for the Right to Die. The new organization becomes known for defending patients’ rights and promoting living wills, and grows in five years to 150,000 members.
- 1992** California voters defeat Proposition 161, which would have allowed physicians to hasten death by actively administering or prescribing medications for self-administration by suffering, terminally ill patients. The percentage vote is 54–46.
- 1993** Derek Humphry starts ERGO (Euthanasia Research and Guidance Organization), a nonprofit group to research and publish literature on the right to die.
- 1993** Compassion in Dying is founded in the state of Washington to counsel the terminally ill and provide information about how to die without suffering and “with personal assistance, if necessary, to intentionally hasten death.” The group sponsors suits challenging state laws against assisted suicide.
- 1993** Oregon Right to Die, a political action committee, is founded. It writes and subsequently passes the Oregon Death with Dignity Act by way of a citizens ballot initiative.
- 1994** All 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia now recognize some type of advance directive procedure.
- 1994** Washington’s anti-suicide law is overturned. In *Compassion v. Washington*, a district court finds that a law outlawing assisted suicide violates the Fourteenth Amendment. Chief District Judge Barbara Rothstein writes, “The court does not believe that a distinction can be drawn between refusing life-sustaining medical treatment and physician-assisted suicide by an uncoerced, mentally competent, terminally ill adult.”
- 1994** In New York State, the lawsuit *Quill et al. v. Koppell* is filed to challenge the New York law prohibiting assisted suicide. Quill loses and files an appeal.
- 1994** Oregon voters approve Measure 16, a Death with Dignity Act ballot initiative that would permit terminally ill patients, under certain guidelines, to obtain a physician’s prescription to end life. The vote percentage is 51–49. But U.S. District Court Judge Michael Hogan issues a temporary restraining order against the measure, followed by an injunction barring the state from putting the law into effect.
- 1995** Washington’s Compassion ruling is overturned by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, reinstating the anti-suicide law.
- 1995** U.S. District Judge Michael Hogan rules that Oregon Measure 16, the Death with Dignity Act, is unconstitutional on the grounds that it violates the equal protection clause of the U.S. Constitution. His ruling is immediately appealed.
- 1995** Surveys find that doctors disregard most advance directives. The *Journal of the American Medical Association* reports that physicians were unaware of the directives of three-fourths of all elderly patients admitted to a New York hospital; the California Medical Review reports that three-fourths of all advance directives are missing from Medicare records in that state.
- 1995** Oral arguments in the appeal of *Quill v. Vacco* contest the legality of New York’s anti-suicide law before the Second Circuit Court of Appeals.
- 1995** The *Compassion* case is reconsidered in Washington by a Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals panel of 11 judges, the largest panel ever to hear a physician-assisted suicide case.
- 1996** The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals reverses the *Compassion* finding in Washington, holding that “a liberty interest exists in the choice of how and when one dies, and that the provision of the Washington statute banning assisted suicide, as applied to competent, terminally ill adults who wish to hasten their deaths by obtaining medication prescribed by their doctors, violates the Due Process Clause.” The ruling affects laws of nine states. It is stayed, pending appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.
- 1996** A Michigan jury acquits Kevorkian of violating a state law banning assisted suicide.
- 1996** The Second Circuit Court of Appeals reverses the *Quill* finding, ruling that “The New York statutes criminalizing assisted suicide violate the Equal Protection Clause because, to the extent that they prohibit a physician from prescribing medications to be self-administered by a mentally competent, terminally ill person in the final stages of his terminal illness, they are not rationally related to any legitimate state interest.” The ruling affects laws in New York, Vermont and Connecticut. On April 17, the court stays enforcement of its ruling for 30 days pending an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.
- 1996** The U.S. Supreme Court announces that it will review both cases sponsored by Compassion in Dying, known now as *Washington v. Glucksberg* and *Quill v. Vacco*.
- 1997** On May 13, the Oregon House of Representatives votes 32–26 to return Measure 16 to the voters in November for repeal (H.B. 2954). On June 10, the Senate votes 20–10 to pass H.B. 2954 and return Measure 16 to the voters for repeal. No similar attempt to overturn the will of the voters has been tried in Oregon since 1908.
- 1997** On June 26, the U.S. Supreme Court reverses the decisions of the Ninth and Second Circuit Courts of Appeals in *Washington v. Glucksberg* and *Quill v. Vacco*, upholding as constitutional state statutes that bar assisted suicide. However, the court also validates the concept of “double effect,” openly acknowledging that death hastened by increased palliative measures does not constitute prohibited conduct so long as the intent is the relief of pain and suffering. The majority opinion ends with the pronouncement: “Throughout the nation, Americans are engaged in an earnest and profound debate about the morality, legality and practicality of physician-assisted suicide. Our holding permits this debate to continue, as it should in a democratic society.”

- 1976** Ten more U.S. states pass natural death laws.
- 1976** The first international meeting of right-to-die groups is held in Tokyo.
- 1977** A people’s initiative asking the Swiss Federal Parliament to allow euthanasia for incurably ill people in the Swiss canton of Zurich is passed by a vote of 203,148 to 144,822, but the Federal Parliament does not follow the initiative.
- 1978** Doris Portwood publishes *Common Sense Suicide: The Final Right*. It argues that old people in poor health might justifiably kill themselves.
- 1978** *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*, a play about a young artist who becomes quadriplegic, is staged in London and on Broadway, raising questions about the right to die. A film version appears in 1982. Simultaneously, *Jean’s Way* is published in England by Derek Humphry, describing how he helped his terminally ill wife to die.
- 1979** Two right-to-die organizations split. The Society for the Right to Die separates from Concern for Dying, a companion group that grew out of the Society’s Euthanasia Education Council.

1980s

- 1980** The advice column “Dear Abby” publishes a letter from a reader agonizing over a dying loved one, after which the Society for the Right to Die receives 30,000 advance care directive requests.
- 1980** Pope John Paul II issues the “Declaration on Euthanasia,” which opposes mercy killing but permits the greater use of painkillers to ease pain and the right to refuse extraordinary means for sustaining life.
- 1980** The Hemlock Society is founded in Santa Monica, Calif., by Derek Humphry. It advocates legal change and distributes how-to-die information. This launches the campaign for assisted dying in America. Hemlock’s national membership grows to 50,000 within a decade. Right-to-die societies are formed in France, Germany and Canada.
- 1980** The World Federation of Right to Die Societies is formed in Oxford, England. It comprises 27 groups from 18 nations.
- 1981** Hemlock publishes a how-to suicide guide, *Let Me Die Before I Wake*.
- 1984** Advance care directives become recognized in 22 states and the District of Columbia.
- 1984** The Netherlands Supreme Court approves voluntary euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide under strict conditions.
- 1985** Karen Ann Quinlan dies.
- 1985** Betty Rollin publishes *Last Wish*, her account of helping her mother die after a long battle with breast cancer. The book becomes a bestseller.
- 1986** Roswell Gilbert, 76, is sentenced in Florida to 25 years without parole for shooting his terminally ill wife. He is granted clemency five years later.
- 1986** Elizabeth Bouvia is granted the right to refuse food by an appeals court but ultimately declines to take advantage of the permission. She was still alive in 2008.
- 1987** The California State Bar Conference passes Resolution #3-4-87 to become the first public body to approve of physician aid in dying.
- 1988** The Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations passes a national resolution favoring aid in dying for the terminally ill, becoming the first religious body to affirm a right to die.

1990s

- 1990** The American Medical Association adopts the formal position that, with informed consent, a physician can withhold or withdraw treatment from a patient who is close to death and may also discontinue life support of a patient in a permanent coma.
- 1990** Dr. Jack Kevorkian assists in the death of Janet Adkins, a middle-aged woman with Alzheimer’s disease. Kevorkian subsequently flaunts the Michigan legislature’s attempts to stop him from assisting in additional suicides.
- 1990** The U.S. Supreme Court decides the Cruzan case, its first aid-in-dying ruling. The decision recognizes that competent adults have a constitutionally protected liberty interest that includes a right to refuse medical treatment; the court also allows a state to impose procedural safeguards to protect its interests.
- 1990** Congress passes the Patient Self-Determination Act, requiring hospitals that receive federal funds to tell patients that they have a right to demand or refuse treatment. It takes effect the next year.
- 1991** Dr. Timothy Quill writes about “Diane” in the New England Journal of Medicine, describing his provision of lethal drugs to a leukemia patient who chose to die at home by her own hand rather than undergo therapy that offered a 25% chance of survival.
- 1991** A nationwide Gallup poll finds that 75% of Americans approve of living wills.
- 1991** Derek Humphry publishes *Final Exit*, a how-to book on “self-deliverance.” The book becomes a U.S. bestseller, with subsequent editions published in 1996 and 2002.

- 1997** Britain’s Parliament rejects, by 234 votes to 89, the seventh attempt in 60 years to change the law on assisted suicide, despite polls showing 82% of British people want change.
- 1997** On Nov. 4, the people of Oregon vote by a margin of 60–40% against Measure 51, which would have repealed the 1994 Oregon Death with Dignity Act. The law officially takes effect (ORS 127.800-897) on Oct. 27, when court challenges are disposed of. Actual implementation of the law starts on the first day of 1998.
- 1998** The Oregon Health Services Commission decides that payment for physician-assisted suicide can come from state funds under the Oregon Health Plan.
- 1998** Sixteen people die by making use of the Oregon Death with Dignity Act, receiving physician-assisted suicide in its first full year of implementation.
- 1998** Measure B on the Michigan ballot to legalize physician-assisted suicide is defeated by a margin of 70–30%.
- 1998** The Swiss association DIGNITAS is founded. It offers assisted suicide and accepts members from abroad.
- 1999** Kevorkian is sentenced to 10 to 25 years in prison for the second-degree murder of Thomas Youk after showing a video of Youk’s death by injection on national television. His appeals are dismissed.

2000s

- 2002** A Dutch law allowing voluntary euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide — which had been permitted under certain guidelines for 20 years — takes effect on Feb. 1.
- 2002** Belgium passes a law similar to the Dutch law, allowing both voluntary euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide.
- 2003** U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft asks the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals to reverse the finding of a lower court judge that the Oregon Death with Dignity Act of 1994 does not contravene federal powers. Up to this point, 129 dying people have used the law to obtain physician-assisted suicide. The losers of this appeal ask the U.S. Supreme Court to rule, which it agrees to do.
- 2003** The British Parliament rejects the Patient (Assisted Dying) Bill introduced by Lord Joffe. Identical to the Oregon law, it was fiercely opposed by the churches. This was the eighth time in 60 years that a right to die bill was refused by Parliament.
- 2004** Hemlock Society USA is renamed End-of-Life Choices and within months is merged with Compassion in Dying to become Compassion & Choices (C&C). The Final Exit Network is formed to provide volunteers across America to help dying people who request assistance.
- 2004** Lesley Martin of New Zealand completes a seven-month prison sentence for the attempted murder by morphine overdose of her terminally ill mother. She vows to continue to work for lawful voluntary euthanasia.
- 2005** Terri Schiavo of Florida dies when her feeding tube is removed after she lived for 14 years in a persistent vegetative state. President George W. Bush, Florida Governor Jeb Bush, Schiavo’s parents and right-to-life advocates had fought to keep her on life support, but her husband, Michael Schiavo, successfully used the legal system to have her feeding tube removed.
- 2006** The U.S. Supreme Court refuses the U.S. Attorney General’s application to repeal the Oregon Death with Dignity Act. The George W. Bush administration wanted the law struck down on the grounds that states do not control lethal drugs, but Oregon successfully argued that states control medical practice and that the drugs required for this form of death were never meant to be banned.
- 2006** Dr. Philip Nitschke publishes *The Peaceful Pill Handbook*, outlining ways to bring one’s own life to an end. It is immediately banned in his own country, Australia, as well as in New Zealand.
- 2007** Jack Kevorkian is released from prison on parole after serving nine years. He helped some 130 people to die, all within his home area.
- 2008** Voters in Washington approve, by 59-41%, a physician-assisted suicide law similar to that in Oregon. In the first year, 63 people are recorded as having used it.
- 2009** The Montana Supreme Court rules that physician-assisted suicide is not against the law in that state.

2010s

- 2011** After a two-week trial, an Arizona jury acquits Dr. Lawrence Egbert in the suicide of Jana Van Voorhis, whom prosecutors said he had assisted in killing herself. Egbert, who also is indicted in Georgia on charges that he helped a man with cancer kill himself, is one of four people charged by Arizona authorities in Van Voorhis’ death. Jurors are unable to reach a verdict for a co-defendant, Frank Langsner. According to Maricopa County prosecutors, the other two defendants in the case, Wye Hale-Rowe and Roberta Massey, had pled guilty to one count of facilitation to commit manslaughter and had agreed to testify in the case.
- 2011** Charlotte Hydorn, 92, a retired school teacher who was selling helium hood kits designed to help people commit suicide, pleads guilty in a San Diego federal court to a misdemeanor charge of failing to file a tax return. According to court records, Hydorn sold approximately 1,300 suicide kits since 2007.

APPENDIX

- 2012** In *Final Exit Network*, Inc., vs. *State of Georgia* (511A1960), the Georgia Supreme Court unanimously strikes down the state's assisted-suicide law, finding it violates the free speech clauses of the Georgia and U.S. Constitutions. The court's ruling means that four members of the Final Exit Network do not have to stand trial on felony charges in Forsyth County. They were charged in connection with the 2008 suicide of 58-year-old John Celmier, who killed himself two years after he had been diagnosed with cancer.
- 2012** The world's first mobile euthanasia unit begins to operate in the Netherlands.
- 2012** In *Search of Gentle Death: The Fight for Your Right to Die with Dignity* by Richard N. Côté (with a foreword by Derek Humphry) is published by Corinthian Books, South Carolina.
- 2012** The Georgia Senate passes a bill making assisting in a suicide a crime. The Senate bill was a reaction to the Supreme Court of Georgia's decision, on Feb. 6, declaring the existing law unconstitutional in violation of First Amendment free speech principles. The Georgia Supreme Court ruling terminated the prosecution of the "Georgia Four," Final Exit Network volunteers who had been arrested and charged in February 2009 under the old law. The Georgia House passed a similar bill on March 7.
- 2012** The International Congress of World Federation of Right-to-Die Societies is hosted in Zürich, Switzerland.
- 2013** Vermont becomes the first legislature in the U.S. to pass a physician-assisted suicide law. (Oregon and Washington passed their laws via citizen initiative vote; Montana's came about through a court case.)
- 2015** The Final Exit Network (FEN), Inc., is convicted in Minnesota on a charge of assisting in a suicide because FEN volunteers instructed a Minnesota resident on the process of "self-deliverance." The Supreme Court of Minnesota redefined the word "assist" to prohibit speech that enables a suicide. The U.S. Supreme Court declined to review the case.
- 2015** Vermont's legislature passes a bill removing "sunset" measures from the original Act 39, Patient Choice and Control at the End of Life Act.
- 2015** A death with dignity bill narrowly fails, by a single vote in the Senate, in Maine.
- 2015** The California legislature passes ABX-15, End of Life Option Act, a death with dignity law.
- 2016** The Washington D.C. Council passes the Death with Dignity Act.
- 2016** Colorado voters pass the End of Life Options Act on the November ballot.
- 2017** In February, the Washington D.C. Death with Dignity Act goes into effect; implementation begins in June.
- 2018** In April, Hawaii becomes the seventh U.S. jurisdiction to enact an assisted dying law similar to Oregon's original law.
- 2018** In May, the California End of Life Option Act is suspended for three weeks following a district court ruling. On June 15, an appellate court reinstates the law.
- 2019** The Our Care, Our Choice Act in Hawaii takes effect on Jan. 1.

Since Humphry's Chronology

2021 In April, New Mexico becomes the 10th jurisdiction to enact an assisted dying law. On April 9, New Mexico Governor Lujan Grisham signs AB47, the Elizabeth Whitefield End of Life Options Act, which goes into effect on June 18.

49

APPENDIX

- Cranford, Ronald E. "Patients with Permanent Loss of Consciousness." In *By No Extraordinary Means*, edited by J. Lynn. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Davis, John Jefferson. *Evangelical Ethics*, 3rd ed. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2004.
- Dunlop, John. "A Physician's Advice to Spiritual Counselors of the Dying." *Trinity Journal* 14:2 (Fall 1993): 202–14.
- Downbiggin, Ian. *A Concise History of Euthanasia: Life, Death, God, and Medicine*. Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield, 2005.
- , *A Merciful End: The Euthanasia Movement in Modern America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Dyck, Arthur J. *Life's Worth: The Case Against Assisted Suicide*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.
- Eyer, Richard C. "A Christian Guide to End of Life Decisions." *Lutherans for Life*. <https://lutheransforlife.org/article/a-christian-guide-to-end-of-life-decisions/>.
- , "Ethical Decision-Making at the End of Life." Presentation to End-of-Life Think Tank. St. Louis: Nov. 13, 1991.
- , *Holy People, Holy Lives: Law and Gospel in Bioethics*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000.
- , *Medical Directive and Some Misunderstandings*. <https://files.lcms.org/file/preview/7F0B3AF8-7ED1-4267-B0A0-C029C58C8A78>.
- Foley, Kathleen. *The Case against Assisted Suicide: For the Right to End-of-Life Care*, ed. Kathleen Foley, M.D., and Herbert Hendin. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.
- Foster, Daniel W. "Religion & Medicine: The Physician's Perspective." In *Health/Medicine and the Faith Traditions*, edited by Martin Marty and Kenneth Vaux. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982.
- Fowler, Marsha D. "Christian Teaching and the Church's Authority." In *BioEngagement: Making a Christian Difference Through Bioethics Today*, edited by Nigel M. de S. Cameron, Scott E. Daniels and Barbara J. White, 235–48. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.
- Frame, John M. *Medical Ethics: Principles, Persons, and Problems*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1988.
- Gabriel, Trip. "A Fight to the Death." *New York Times Magazine*, Dec. 8, 1991.
- Gerhard, Johann. *Handbook of Consolations: For the Fears and Trials That Oppress Us in the Struggle with Death*, trans. Carl L. Beckwith. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2009.
- Gorsuch, Neil M. *The Future of Assisted Suicide*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.
- "Gov. Lamm Asserts Elderly, If Very Ill, Have 'Duty to Die.'" *New York Times*. March 29, 1984.
- Grobien, Gifford A. "The Future of Bioethics." *For the Life of the World* 25: 3 (Fall 2021): 4–6.
- Gula, Richard M. "Moral Principles Shaping Public Policy on Euthanasia." *Second Opinion* 14 (1990): 72–83.
- Hamel, Ronald P. *Choosing Death: Active Euthanasia, Religion, and the Public Debate*. Norcross, Ga.: Trinity Press International, 1991.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. *Suffering Presence: Theological Reflections on Medicine, the Mentally Handicapped, and the Church*. South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986.
- Hertl, Joseph, Peter C. Reske and Jon D. Vieker, eds. *Lutheran Service Book: Companion to the Hymns*, Vol. 1. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2019.
- "Hippocratic Oath." *Britannica Online*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hippocratic-oath>.
- "How Hospice Works." *Medicare.gov*. <https://www.medicare.gov/what-medicare-covers/what-part-a-covers/how-hospice-works>.
- Humphry, Derek. "Chronology of Right-to-Die Events During the 20th Century and into the Millennium [sic], 1900–2019." https://www.finalexit.org/chronology_right-to-die_events.html.

51

APPENDIX

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Active Euthanasia, Religion, and the Public Debate*. Chicago: The Park Ridge Center, 1991.
- "Always to Care, Never to Kill: A Declaration on Euthanasia." The Ramsey Colloquium of the Institute on Religion and Public Life. First Things (February 1992): 45–47.
- Anderson, Kirby. *Euthanasia: A Christian Perspective*. Plano, Texas: Probe Ministries, 1998.
- Arand, Charles. "Personal Autonomy versus Creaturely Contingency: The First Article and the Right to Die." *Concordia Journal* (October 1994): 385–401.
- "Ars Moriendi." *The Lutheran Witness* (September 2020): full issue.
- Bartlett, Linda D., and Karen Rehder. "Ventilators, Feeding Tubes, and Other End-of-Life Questions." *Lutherans for Life* (Feb. 28, 2020). lutheransforlife.org/article/ventilators-feeding-tubes-and-other-end-of-life-questions.
- Barry, A.L. "What About ... Death and Dying." St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1998. <https://files.lcms.org/file/preview/4C9b11p5FPBy18M2tCdDXh2jXAfw1Azd/>.
- Bayer, Oswald. "Toward a Theology of Lament." In *Caritas et Reformatio: Essays on Church and Society in Honor of Carter Lindberg*, edited by David Whitford, 211–20. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002.
- , "Self-Creation? On the Dignity of Human Beings." *Modern Theology* 20 (April 2004): 275–90.
- , "Martin Luther's Conception of Human Dignity." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, eds. Marcus Düwell, Jens Braarvig, Roger Brownsword and Dietmar Mieth. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- , *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
- Beauchamp, Tom L., and James F. Childress. *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, 8th ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Blefeldt, Dennis. "Heidelberg Disputation." In *The Roots of Reform*, vol. 1 (The Annotated Luther), edited by Hans J. Hillerbrand, Kirs I. Sjerna and Timothy J. Wengert. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015.
- Biermann, Joel. *A Case for Character: Toward a Lutheran Virtue Ethics*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014.
- Billings, J. Todd. *Rejoicing in Lament: Wrestling with Incurable Cancer and Life in Christ*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2015.
- Bluerock, Grace. "The 9 Most Common Regrets at the End of Life." *Mindfulness* (Feb. 24, 2020). mindbodygreen.com/0-23024/the-9-most-common-regrets-people-have-at-the-end-of-life.html.
- Britannica ProCon.org. "Euthanasia & Medical Aid in Dying (MAID) Around the World." euthanasia.procon.org/euthanasia-physician-assisted-suicide-pas-around-the-world/.
- Brock, Peter. "A New Kind of Founding: The Church's Life of Mercy in an Aging Nation." In *Toward a Theology of Mercy: Student Essays for 2007*. St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2007.
- Callahan, Daniel. "Public Policy and the Cessation of Nutrition." In *By No Extraordinary Means*, edited by J. Lynn. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Cohen, C., ed. *Casebook on the Termination of Life-Sustaining Treatment and the Care of the Dying*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.
- "Commendation of the Dying." *Lutheran Service Book: Pastoral Prayer Companion*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007.
- Commission on Theology and Church Relations. *Christian Care at Life's End*. St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1993. <https://files.lcms.org/file/preview/37664F4B-35B0-4FF2-A950-5C28F9BA20D0>.
- , *Euthanasia With Guiding Principles*. St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1979.
- , *Final Exit: The Practicalities of Self-Deliverance and Assisted Suicide for the Dying*. New York: Dell Publishing, 2002.
- Humphry, Derek with Ann Wickett. *Jean's Way*. New York: Quartet Books, 1978.
- Johnson, Anna Marie. Introduction to "A Sermon on Preparing to Die." *The Annotated Luther*, Vol. 4: *Pastoral Writings*, edited by Timothy J. Wengert et al. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016.
- Jones, Ken Sundet. "Death and Dying." In *Dictionary of Luther and the Lutheran Tradition*, edited by Timothy J. Wengert. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017.
- , *Promissio and Death: Luther and God's Word for the End of Life*. Ph.D. Thesis, Luther Seminary, 2003.
- Kamisar, Yale. "Some Non-Religious Views Against Proposed 'Mercy Killing' Legislation." *Minnesota Law Review* 42 (1958): 969–1042.
- Kass, Leon R. *Life, Liberty and the Defense of Dignity: The Challenge for Bioethics*. San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2003.
- Kaufman, Matthew. "Euthanasia and the Christian." *Lutherans for Life*. <https://lutheransforlife.org/article/euthanasia-and-the-christian/>.
- Kennedy, Thomas D. "Eating, Drinking, and Dying Well." *Christian Scholar's Review* 20 (March 1991): 339–49.
- Klotz, John. *Life Choices: Who Decides? Following God's Word in Life and Death Decisions*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991.
- Kolb, Robert and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Kolb, Robert, ed. *A Booklet of Comfort for the Sick, & On the Christian Knight* by Johann Spangenberg, trans. Robert Kolb. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2007. Introduction.
- , "The Reformation of Dying and Burial: Preaching, Pastoral Care, and Ritual at Committal in Luther's Reform." *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 81 (2017): 77–93.
- Küng, Hans. "A Dignified Dying." In *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives in Medical Ethics*, 3rd ed., edited by M. Therese Lysaught and Joseph J. Kotva Jr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.
- , "Questions and Answers Concerning the End of Life." *Lutherans for Life*. <https://lutheransforlife.org/article/questions-and-answers-concerning-the-end-of-life/>.
- , "The Other End of Life." Sermon. *Lutherans for Life*. <https://lutheransforlife.org/sermon/the-other-end-of-life/>.
- Leroux, Neil. *Martin Luther as Comforter: Writings on Death*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Lifeway Research. *American Views on Assisted Suicide*. <http://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Sept-2016-American-Views-Assisted-Suicide.pdf>.
- Lohrmann, Martin J. "The Invocavit Sermons." In *The Annotated Luther*, Vol. 4: *Pastoral Writings*, edited by Hans J. Hillerbrand et al., 14–15. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1522.
- Luther, Martin. *A Manual on the Book of Psalms*. London: Seeley and Burnside, 1837.
- , "A Sermon on Preparing to Die." *The Annotated Luther*, Vol. 4: *Pastoral Writings*, edited by Timothy J. Wengert et al. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016.
- , "Disputation Against Scholastic Theology." *Luther's Works* 31: *Career of the Reformer I*, edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999.
- , "Gospel for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany." *Luther's Works* 76: *Church Postil II*, edited by Benjamin T.G. Mayes, James L. Langebartsels and Christopher Boyd Brown. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013.
- , *Letters of Spiritual Counsel (Library of Christian Classics)*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert. Reprint, Vancouver, B.C.: Regent College Publishing, 2003.

52

APPENDIX

- , *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017.
- , "Preface to the Palates," *Luther's Works 35: Word and Sacrament I*, edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999.
- , "Psalm 90" (1534), trans. Paul M. Bretschger. *Luther's Works* 13, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956.
- Lutheran Service Book: Pastoral Care Companion*. Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007.
- Lynn, Joanne and James F. Childress. "Must Patients Always Be Given Food and Water?" In *No Extraordinary Means*, edited by J. Lynn. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Lysaught, M. Therese and Joseph J. Kotva Jr., eds. *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives in Medical Ethics*, 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.
- Marty, Martin E. *Health and Medicine in the Lutheran Tradition*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983.
- , Review of *Regulating Death: Euthanasia and the Care of the Netherlands* by Carlos Gomez. *Commonweal* 8 (Nov. 8, 1991): 665.
- Meilaender, Gilbert. *Bioethics and the Character of Human Life*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2020. Particularly see the following chapters: "How Not to Write (or Think) about Euthanasia" (103–08), "Gifts of the Body: Procuring Organs for Transplant" (109–20), "Comforting When We Cannot Heal: The Ethics of Palliative Sedation" (121–32), and "Christian Living Toward Dying" (133–43).
- , *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, 4th ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020.
- , "I Want to Burden My Loved Ones," *First Things* (Oct. 1991): 12–14. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2010/03/i-want-to-burden-my-loved-ones>.
- , "Living Life's End," *The Freedom of a Christian: Grace, Vocation, and the Meaning of Our Humanity*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006. www.firstthings.com/article/2005/05/living-lifes-end.
- , *Neither Beast Nor God: The Dignity of the Human Person*. San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2009.
- , *Should We Live Forever? The Ethical Ambiguities of Aging*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013.
- , "The Confused, the Voiceless, the Perverse: Shall We Give Them Food and Drink?" *Issues in Law & Medicine* 2 (1986): 133–48.
- , "Who Decides?" *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives in Medical Ethics*, 3rd ed., Section 154, edited by M. Therese Lysaught and Joseph J. Kotva Jr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.
- Mueller, Norbert and George Kraus. "Applying Word and Sacrament to the Dying and Bereaved." In *Pastoral Theology*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1990.
- Neuhaus, Richard John. "Death and Dignity." *The Religion and Society Report* October/November 1987.
- Ngien, Dennis. *Fruit for the Soul: Luther on the Lament Psalms*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015.
- Nicolai, Philipp. *Freuden Spiegel des Ewigen Lebens*. Halle: Bertag von Richard Mühlmann, 1854.
- , *The Joy of Eternal Life*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2021.
- Nolan, Kathleen. "In Death's Shadow: The Meanings of Withholding Resuscitation." *Hastings Center Report* (Nov. 1987): 9–14.
- Oten, Joyce. "The Spiritual Dilemma." *Illness, Crises and Loss: Multidisciplinary Linkages* 1 (Summer 1991): 22–26.
- Paulson, Steven. "Endings and Beginnings: Death and Resurrection." *Dialog* 38 (Winter 1999): 26–34.

53

APPENDIX

- Stahl, Ronit Y., and Ezekiel J. Emanuel. "Physicians, Not Conscripts — Conscientious Objection in Health Care." *New England Journal of Medicine* 376 (6 April 2017): 1380–85.
- Steinke, Paul. "Comfort in the Face of Death." *The Lutheran Witness* (May 1998).
- Taking Care: Ethical Caregiving in Our Aging Society*. President's Council on Bioethics. https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/539378/taking_care.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.
- "The Basics on Advance Directives: Thy Will Be Done." Lutherans for Life. <https://lutheransforlife.org/article/the-basics-on-advance-directives-thy-will-be-done/>.
- Thielicke, Helmut. *Death and Life*. Trans. Edward Schroeder. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970.
- , *Living with Dying*. Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983.
- , *The Doctor as Judge of Who Shall Live and Who Shall Die*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976.
- , *Theological Ethics*, vol 1: *Foundations*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966.
- Trueman, Carl R., *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2020.
- "UAE Woman Mumira Abdulla Wakes Up After 27 Years in a Coma." BBC News (April 23, 2019). <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-48020481>.
- "Unexplained 7-fold Variation in Euthanasia Rates Across Netherlands." *British Medical Journal*. <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-01-unexplained-fold-variation-euthanasia-netherlands.html>.
- Uhlmann, Michael. *Last Rights? Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia Debated*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
- VanDruen, David. *Bioethics and the Christian Life*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2009. See especially "Suicide, Euthanasia, and the Distinction Between Killing and Letting Die."
- Van Gijn, Dionne Frijns, Esther M. M. van de Glind, Barbara C. van Munster and Marije E. Hamaker. "The Chance of Survival and the Functional Outcome After In-Hospital Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation in Older People: A Systematic Review." *Age and Ageing* 43.4 (July 2014): 456–63. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ageing/afu035>.
- Warneck, Richard H. *Pastoral Ministry: Theology and Practice*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2018.
- Waters, Brent. *This Mortal Flesh: Incarnation and Bioethics*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Christians for Life (WELS): christianlifeforlife.org
- Concordia Bioethics Institute: cuw.edu/departments/institutes/bioethics
- LCMS Life Ministries: lcms.org/life
- Lutherans for Life: lutheransforlife.org
- The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity: cbhd.org

55

APPENDIX

- Pless, John T. and Jacob A. Corzine. *Faith in the Shadow of a Pandemic*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2020.
- Pless, John T. *A Small Catechism on Human Life*. St. Louis: LCMS World Relief and Human Care, 2006.
- , "Luther's Answer to the Purpose Driven Death." In *Martin Luther: Preacher of the Cross*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013.
- , "Luther's Reading of Psalm 90: The Eschatology of Pastoral Theology." In *Take Courage: Essays in Honor of Harold Senkbeil*, edited by Timothy J. Pauls and Mark A. Pierson. Irvine: New Reformation Publications, 2020.
- , *Mercy at Life's End: A Guide for Laity and Their Pastors*. St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2013.
- Pollard, Brian, *Current Euthanasia Law in the Netherlands*. Catholic Education Resource Center, 2003. <https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/controversy/euthanasia-and-assisted-suicide/current-euthanasia-law-in-the-netherlands.html>.
- "Polling on Medical Aid in Dying." Compassion & Choices. <https://www.compassionandchoices.org/resources/polling-medical-aid-dying>.
- "Position Statements: Artificially-Administered Nutrition and Hydration." Christian Medical & Dental Associations" (CMDA), March 23, 2022. <https://cmda.org/policy-issues-home/position-statements/>.
- Quill, Timothy E. "Death and Dignity." In *Last Rights? Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia Debated*, edited by Michael M. Uhlmann. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
- , "Death with Dignity: A Case of Individualized Decision Making." *New England Journal of Medicine* 324, no. 10 (March 7, 1991): 691–94.
- Rae, Scott B. and Paul M. Cox. *Bioethics: A Christian Approach in a Pluralistic Age*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
- Ramsey, Paul. "The Indignity of 'Death with Dignity'." In *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives in Medical Ethics*, 3rd ed, edited by M. Therese Lysaught and Joseph J. Kotva Jr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.
- "Rare Diseases." PhRMA. <https://phrma.org/scientific-innovation/progress-in-fighting-rare-diseases?>
- Regional Euthanasia Review Committees. <https://english.euthanasiacommission.nl/the-committees/documents/publications/annual-reports/2002/annual-reports/annual-reports>.
- Reinis, Austra. *Reforming the Art of Dying: The Ars Moriendi in the German Reformation (1519–1528)*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2001.
- Rittgers, Ronald K. *A Widower's Lament: The Pious Meditations of Johann Christoph Oelshafen*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021.
- , *The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Ronnevik, Andrew. "Lutheran Conceptions of Human Dignity in a Global Context: A Conversation with Indian Dalits and European Americans." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 59, no. 4 (December 2020): 325–33.
- Salemink, Michael. *Going Gracefully: Lutherans for Life*. <https://lutheransforlife.org/article/going-gracefully/>.
- Sauter, Gerhard. "Dying with Dignity?" In *God and Human Dignity*, edited by R.K. Soulen and Linda Woodhead. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.
- Schulz, Gregory P. *The Fellowship of His Sufferings: Four Briefings*. Gregory P. Schulz, 2020.
- Shmerling, Robert H. "Where People Die." Harvard Health Blog Oct. 31, 2018. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/where-people-die-2018103115278>.
- Shuman, Joel and Volck. *Reclaiming the Body: Christians and the Faithful Use of Modern Medicine*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006.
- Smith, David H. *Health and Medicine in the Anglican Tradition*. New York: Crossroad, 1986.
- Smith, Wesley J. *Culture of Death: The Assault on Medical Ethics in America*. San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000.

54



R62.2

February 2, 2024

Wyoming District Board of Directors
ATTN: The Rev. John Hill
2400 Hickory St.
Casper, WY 82604

Re: 2021 Wyoming District 1-01 “To Confess the Immortality of the Soul and to Clarify the Synod’s Public Doctrine”

Dear President Hill,

Greetings in Christ!

We write in response to the 2021 Wyoming District Resolution 1-01, “To Confess the Immortality of the Soul and to Clarify the Synod’s Public Doctrine,” which was received via correspondence dated July 28, 2021 and which asked the Commission to clarify the following: “Does the Synod, in its teaching, affirm that man has in any way an immortal soul, deny this, or leave it as an open question?” The Commission apologizes for any delay in responding to this matter. As is our custom, this assignment was placed on our agenda during the last triennium and referred to one of our standing subcommittees, which discussed it at length. However, due to the need to complete several pressing assignments from the Synod in convention and from the Synod president before the end of the triennium, we placed your request on hold. It was also anticipated that other overtures to the 2023 convention might be submitted on this topic which would allow us the opportunity to address your concern, perhaps together with other concerns, in the new triennium. (Ultimately no such overtures were submitted to the 2023 convention.) Again, we sincerely apologize for any delay and offer the following determination in response.

First, in reviewing 2021 Wyoming District Resolution 1-01, several factual errors were cause for confusion on the Commission, leading in part to a delay in responding sooner. The resolution specifically cites a 1969 paper by J.A.O. Preus II, entitled “Immortality of the Soul and Resurrection of the Body,” suggesting that the paper was submitted to the CTCR for discussion immediately prior to the adoption of its report, “A Statement on Death, Resurrection, and Immortality.” However, the Commission has no record of this paper in its files. After downloading the paper from the Wyoming District website, the CTCR noted that this appears to be a personal copy of the draft belonging to then-CTCR secretary Ralph Bohlmann, who wrote in Dr. Preus’s name as author and a date of (what appears to be) March 6-8, 1969, and who noted it as “Draft #1.” After extensive study in our minutes, it was found that, in the first place, the date of this paper is actually March 6-8, 1967. The CTCR did not meet on March 6-8 in 1969, but it did meet on those dates in 1967. Furthermore, Dr. Preus was not the sole author of this draft, but served as the reader of the draft at the March 1967 meeting. In fact, our minutes indicate that this document was drafted by a committee consisting of Preus and four other authors or contributors. According to

Wyoming District Board of Directors
February 2, 2024
Page 3

LCMS does hold to the biblical doctrine of the immortality of the soul. It steadfastly rejects related errors such as “soul sleep” and pagan notions of immortality. Yet it has always been hesitant to say more about the immortality of the soul than Scripture does.

The Commission acknowledges that neither its report, nor Synod in convention, have addressed this topic as comprehensively or as definitively as some might wish. The concern for greater precision on such matters is understandable given our commitment to preaching and teaching the Scriptures with utmost clarity. We commend the Wyoming District for the seriousness with which it takes that task. At the same time, we would intone the words of Franz Pieper—included in the 1969 report, yet well worth stating again—concerning the importance of hewing closely to the words of Scripture on these challenging eschatological matters: “Holy writ reveals but little of the state of souls between death and resurrection. In speaking of the last things, it directs our gaze primarily to Judgement Day and the events clustering around it” (*Christian Dogmatics* 3:511). On this matter, we must say no more—and no less—than Scripture.

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations

Adopted Unanimously, February 2, 2024

Wyoming District Board of Directors
February 2, 2024
Page 2

the January 1967 CTCR minutes, this drafting committee appears to have included Martin Franzmann, parish pastor Alvin Wagner, and CTCR executive secretary Richard Jungkuntz, along with Concordia Seminary’s Herbert J.A. Bouman and Hebert T. Mayer. It is uncertain how any or all of these individuals specifically contributed to the draft document. By our count, the paper included on your website was the sixth of eleven such drafts reviewed before acceptance of the final version.

Second, the draft ultimately approved by the Commission in March 1969 was, in fact, principally written by Preus himself. He had revised the aforementioned March 1967 paper for review at the Commission’s February 10-12, 1969, meeting. That paper was then condensed by Herbert Mayer and approved at the March 13-15, 1969, meeting, subsequently being published as “A Statement on Death, Resurrection, and Immortality.” Based on this background research, it should be noted that the paper cited in your resolution and posted on your website was not an alternate draft by Preus that was rejected by the CTCR, but an earlier committee draft that was revised by Preus himself and was eventually condensed into the final 1969 CTCR report.

Third, and to the matter at hand, the Commission believes its 1969 report clearly affirms the immortality of the soul. It does so primarily by rejecting two very different alternatives to the biblical affirmation of the soul’s immortality. On the one hand, it unequivocally rejects “soul sleep” as the teaching that “between death and resurrection” the soul of the Christian is “not conscious of bliss” (III.6f). On the other, it specifically rejects the pagan view of the immortality of the soul, namely, “that the soul is by nature and by virtue of an inherent quality immortal, as the pagans thought and as is taught in a number of fraternal orders today.” It furthermore goes on to claim that this latter view of the immortality of the soul “denies the Christian Gospel of the resurrection of our Lord and of the resurrection of the believers through Him alone” (III.6e). In these statements, as throughout the document, it amplifies the assertion of 1967 Resolution 2-30: “That the soul of man does not cease to exist after death and that only those who believe in Christ receive eternal life.” In the Commission’s view, the Synod and our own 1969 report categorically reject any definition of the soul that denies the immortality of the soul or teaches an immortality other than that found in Scripture (whether “soul sleep” or pagan iterations of immortality).

We note further that the position of Synod and its explanation in the 1969 report were not a serious matter of contention at that time, nor—in the CTCR’s view—are they a major subject of contention in the Synod today. The 1973 convention *unanimously* commended the 1969 report, finding “the doctrinal content of this position paper to be in agreement with Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions” (1973 Res. 2-03). In the decades since, no concern was officially raised regarding this issue until a single overture in 2019 (Ov. 5-28, “To Encourage Our Pastors to Preach and Teach in a Very Clear Way the Promise of Everlasting Life”).

To respond as unambiguously and directly as possible to the Wyoming District question regarding Synod’s teaching on the immortality of the soul, the Commission answers in the affirmative: the

R62.3

Mission and Ministry Principles and Practical Observations and Suggestions

Theological Principles

Introduction

In 2023 Res. 1-02A, the Synod directed the Commission on Theology and Church Relations [CTCR] “expeditiously to prepare a document on Lutheran theological principles for mission and ministry that would address the theological and practical issues faced by small congregations and multi-congregational parishes.” It also asked “that these principles be disseminated to the Office of the President, the Council of Presidents, and the Pastoral Formation Committee as a basis for considering how the Synod might provide for the ongoing pastoral needs of small congregations and multi-congregation parishes.”

At its February 2024 meeting, the CTCR adopted a document titled “Mission and Ministry Principles and Suggestions—for COP Discussion.” This document was presented to and discussed by the COP at its February 2024 meeting. Input by the COP was considered by the CTCR, and a revised document was approved for wider distribution, use and discussion at the CTCR’s May 2024 meeting.

It is important to note that this document has two distinct (and distinctly different) sections. The first section, “Theological Principles,” was drafted and approved by the CTCR with the conviction that the principles enunciated here are theologically sound and fully in keeping with historic Lutheran and LCMS doctrine and practice. Although these principles are (by their very nature) summary statements and therefore do not say everything that could be said on the issues they address, the Commission believes that they are fully correct and orthodox in what they do say and affirm. These principles should not engender debate or disagreement among Lutherans committed to the authority of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

The second section of the document contains “Practical Observations and Suggestions.” Although the Commission believes that there is nothing in this section that is theologically incorrect or erroneous, it does not expect or anticipate that all readers of this document who are equally committed to the authority of Scripture and the Confessions will agree about the relevance of the observations offered or the wisdom of the practical suggestions made in this section. In fact, as the Commission “brainstormed” and developed this section of the document, it did so fully recognizing that there was not complete unanimity on the Commission itself about the helpfulness or feasibility of every suggestion offered here—only that none of them was theologically out of bounds. Moreover, the CTCR does not claim to have the competence—nor, for that matter, the responsibility or authority—to determine or dictate practical solutions to the serious, disparate and localized challenges that prompted this assignment.

Readers and users of this document are urged to bear in mind what the CTCR explicitly says in point 2 of the second section of the document, “**The following ideas are for discussion and consideration especially among members of the COP, but ultimately including districts, circuits, and congregations (especially vacant congregations). While some may be deemed inadvisable or unworkable in certain circumstances, it is the opinion of the CTCR that all are theologically legitimate**” (emphasis added).

1

5. The church selects those who will occupy the pastoral office through an orderly process.
- a. Only one who is rightly called by God through the church is to preach and administer in the congregation’s assembly (1 Cor 12:29; AC XIV; AC XXVIII, 8-9; Ap XIII, 11-13).
 - b. The right calling (*rite vocatus, ordentlicher Beruf*) may take place in various ways, but it always includes the choosing, calling, and ordaining of ministers (Titus 1:5; Tr 67).¹ A right calling is necessary so that the congregation knows that God has placed this man into the office of preaching and administering the sacraments (Ap XIII, 12).²
 - c. The *manner* of choosing, calling, and ordaining ministers for confessional Lutherans is determined not by biblical mandate, but by mutual agreement in love for one another.
 - d. The LCMS process for right calling includes *choosing* candidates for the office by the Synod’s seminary faculties or colloquy committee, *calling* them by a congregation, and *ordaining* (appointing them) under the ecclesiastical supervision of a district president (see Tr 67).
6. Exceptional circumstances do not make the pastoral office optional for congregational life.
- a. While it is common for congregations at some point to lose the pastor who has served them, such loss is to be addressed in an orderly manner so that another LCMS pastor can serve them; this includes during their time of vacancy.
 - b. If a pastor is not available to serve a congregation for a given time, the congregation still assembles to give thanks, hear Scripture, pray for a pastor to be available to serve them, and be catechized in the truth of God’s Word.³
 - c. If a congregation lacks an ordained pastor to carry out the responsibilities of the public ministry in an orderly and regular manner and persistently remains in this status, it is no longer functioning in accordance with God’s design for the local expression of the church.⁴
 - d. Therefore, congregations unable to secure pastoral care in such an orderly and regular manner should consider working together with one or more other congregations in some manner, in consultation with the district president, so that regular pastoral care can be secured (a dual or multiple point parish or a “circuit rider” type of ministry).
 - e. Congregations and pastors of the Synod should not shirk the responsibility to help other congregations address legitimate needs for pastoral ministry (2 Corinthians 8:14).
 - f. A vacant congregation that refuses arrangements for pastoral care when they are available, and instead prefers to meet without a rightly called pastor, ceases to be a Lutheran congregation.⁵
 - g. While the foregoing points (6. a-f) refer to vacant congregations, the important work of evangelism and outreach also goes beyond sharing the Gospel with individuals and always includes the eventual goal of incorporation in a congregation that is served by a pastor.

¹ For example, at the time of the Reformation, different entities (e.g. consistories or city councils) called ministers. While such a practice is different from our process that ends with a voters assembly decision, it is nonetheless an acceptable approach to a “right calling.”
² See also CTCR, *Theology and Practice of “the Divine Call”* (2003).
³ See CTCR, “President of Synod Request for Opinion on Lay Reading of Sermons and Conduct of Worship in the Absence of a Pastor” (April 2023).
⁴ That is, the preaching office or the pastoral office is established by God and is not optional for the church.
⁵ The district president, in consultation with colleagues, will need to define such a refusal.

3

2

1. Salvation comes to God’s people through Word and Sacrament.
- a. God sent His Son to redeem sinners and only in the holy life, atoning suffering and death, and glorious resurrection of Christ Jesus is there life and salvation (John 3:16-18; LC III, 54, KW edition throughout).
 - b. Salvation is bestowed by the Holy Spirit who makes God’s gracious promises known to sinners as they hear and believe the Word of the Gospel proclaimed, read, and enacted in the sacraments (Rom 10:17; AC V; LC II, 37, 45).
2. The church receives and extends this Gospel through the ministry of Word and Sacrament.
- a. Those who hear and believe the Gospel are the church—Christ’s baptized, holy, priestly people, his disciples (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 2:37-41; 1 Peter 2:9; AC V).
 - b. Even as Christ, by the Holy Spirit, gathers the church by the Gospel, he also sends forth the church with the Gospel to all nations, for faith is “sparked by the word” (Luke 24:44-49; Ap IV 73).
 - c. The church extends the Gospel as believers make provision for the Gospel to be proclaimed and administered in their assembly and in the daily lives (vocations) of believers (Rom 10:17; 1 Pet 2:9; AC VII, VIII; Ap XIII, 11).
 - d. The local church, or assembly of Christians, is the primary place for sinners to hear the Word and receive the sacraments for their salvation (for examples, see Acts 15:30 or the first verses of Paul’s epistles to churches such as Rom 1:7, 1 Cor 1:2, 2 Cor 1:1, etc.).
3. God extends the Gospel through baptized believers in the various circumstances of daily life.
- a. Baptized believers are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).
 - b. Christians share the Gospel in the context of their vocations at home, with coworkers, and with others (Acts 8:1b-8; 1 Peter 2:9; 3:14-15).
 - c. Parents have the special responsibility and privilege to bring their children to baptism and to nurture and catechize them in the home (Matt 19:13-15; Acts 2:39; Eph 6:4; AC IX; SC heading for each part).
4. The pastoral ministry is the means God uses to preach the Word and administer the sacraments in the local congregation.
- a. God sets apart biblically qualified men for the office of making the Gospel known (the office of public ministry or pastoral office) in both word and sacred act in the church’s congregations (John 20, 21; Acts 20:17-32; 1 Cor 12:9; Eph 4:11; AC XIV; Ap XIV, 4).
 - b. Those who serve in the pastoral office are to meet certain biblical qualifications of a moral, vocational, and theological nature (1 Tim 3:1-7; 2 Tim 2:15-16a, 22-25a; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet 5:1-3).
 - c. Therefore, the local congregation is comprised of pastors and laity, preachers and hearers, who work together reciprocally in the ministry of the church (1 Cor 4:1-5; Tr 11).
 - d. The office of the public ministry is required for a congregation and is not merely optional, so that the Gospel may be heard and received sacramentally (1 Cor 12:29; Eph 4:11; Titus 1:5; AC XXVIII 5, 8; Ap XIII, 12; FC SD II, 38).

Practical Observations and Suggestions

1. The LCMS cannot assume that the challenges of providing pastoral care for its congregations will lessen in the foreseeable future. Several demographic factors are significant here, namely,
- a. The aging of the total population and, in particular, White Americans (Synod’s predominant racial/ethnic group);
 - b. The shrinking of rural and small town America’s population (where the LCMS has many congregations);
 - c. The declining level of religious involvement in the youngest age cohorts of the US;
 - d. In addition the increasing numbers of immigrant and non-White populations in the US are a missionary and evangelistic challenge that the LCMS must seek to address and for which the Synod needs to choose, call, and ordain ministers.
2. These factors strongly suggest that the Synod must engage in a multi-pronged approach to address the need for pastoral care. The following ideas are for discussion and consideration especially among members of the COP, but ultimately including districts, circuits, and congregations (especially vacant congregations). While some may be deemed inadvisable or unworkable in certain circumstances, it is the opinion of the CTCR that all are theologically legitimate.
- a. Extending the service of the Synod’s ordained ministers.
 - i. Encourage LCMS pastors to serve as vacancy pastors whenever possible.
 - ii. Confident in the work of the Holy Spirit through the divine call, encourage LCMS pastors to be open to consider calls to underserved areas of the country, intercultural congregations and missions, urban mission and outreach, and other ministry settings where the harvest is plentiful but our laborers are few.
 - iii. Encourage pastors and candidates to learn second languages for ministry, especially when they are serving in places where there are significant populations that speak a language other than English.
 - iv. Encourage our pastors and candidates to be open to calls to multipoint parish ministries.
 - v. Encourage retired pastors of the LCMS in good health to serve vacancies and to consider short-term relocations to serve in areas where there are many congregations that need assistance.
 - b. Increasing our commitment to residential seminary education
 - vi. Continue and expand high school summer experiences (“camps”) for male students from Synod’s congregations that provide an exposure to the pastoral calling, and to college and seminary life.
 - vii. Identify potential ministry undergraduate students and subsidize their education on the college level, with special attention and commitment to students from ethnic and racial minorities.
 - viii. Encourage multi-lingual skills by funding intensive summer studies in Spanish and Mandarin (English, Mandarin, and Spanish are the most widely spoken languages; we also emphasize the need for theological literature in these and other languages).
 - ix. Continue the seminary policy of covering the cost of all tuition.
 - x. Reshape the seminary experience to prepare more students for intercultural and urban ministries in order to enable work in places with increasing immigrant and minority populations.

4

- xi. Develop more robust continuing education programs and expectations for all LCMS pastors—general and SMP.
- c. Strengthening our commitment to high quality theological education by extension
 - i. Continue the SMP program and emphasize the need for ongoing mentoring and intellectual/theological growth.
 - a) Adhere rigorously to SMP criteria for admission, discouraging the temptation to make SMP a means of avoiding the residential route toward ordination.
 - b) Ensure vigorous, ongoing mentoring for SMP candidates, vicars, and pastors with clear lines of accountability.
 - c) Encourage SMP individuals to continue their studies toward general ministry and to pursue further theological education.
 - d) Provide needed financial assistance for SMP candidates.
 - e) Develop a process by which, in limited and controlled circumstances, worthy individuals may be colloquized as Specific Ministry Pastors. This may include provision for strict background checks, additional theological education as needed, strong supervision and mentoring during and beyond the colloquy process, and other steps to discourage any temptation for this to become a means of avoiding the highest possible training for ministerial candidates.
 - ii. Continue the EIIT and Center for Hispanic Studies programs.
 - a) This is necessary in order to increase the numbers of confessional Lutheran pastors who can serve interculturally. (We should not, however, direct qualified and capable minority students away from residential pastoral education.)
 - b) Provide needed financial assistance for EIIT candidates.
 - c) Ensure vigorous, ongoing mentorship for all EIIT graduates.
- d. Expanding immigrant ministries by working with international partner churches to provide pastors for specific immigrant groups (e.g., African Immigrant congregations).
- e. When over a prolonged period of time there are no available pastors to serve a congregation, mission, or ministry, the Synod may address immediate and ongoing needs for care of such congregations through auxiliary ministers and lay leaders. It should be understood that any implementation of the following suggestions is to be done while continuing to make every effort to provide pastors to serve such congregations.
 - i. Flexibility regarding both service times and even the day of worship should be explored when there is a prolonged vacancy. Such changes as time and date may allow the development of a dual parish call or enable an ordained pastor to serve the congregation either regularly or occasionally.
 - ii. Called male commissioned ministers may lead Sunday services without the Lord's Supper as needed, utilizing sermons prepared by ordained ministers.
 - iii. Male laymen who are approved by districts and trained to lead services may lead Sunday worship without the Lord's Supper, utilizing sermons prepared by ordained ministers.
 - iv. Congregations may utilize commissioned ministers and other members of the royal priesthood to visit the sick, evangelize, catechize, and carry out other duties which are frequently carried out by pastors (not including the Sacrament of the Altar).
 - v. Our seminaries may be tasked with preparing sermons for use in vacant congregations and circumstances when a pastor is unavailable to lead a service, as

well as developing curricula for training programs to equip commissioned ministers and designated laymen to serve in the foregoing ways.

- vi. In such circumstances, districts and circuits could develop ways to share the time and services of pastors. For example, a congregation might be asked to share its pastor on a monthly or other regular basis with congregations that have no other access to an ordained minister.

As helpful background to the preceding considerations and suggestions the reader may wish to consult some of the following documents:

1. *The Ministry in Its Relation to the Christian Church* (CTCR 1973)
2. *Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper* (CTCR 1983)
3. *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature* (CTCR 1981)
4. *Theology and Practice of the Divine Call* (CTCR 2003)
5. 2013 *Resolution 4-06A Task Force Report* (report to 2016 Convention)
6. 2016 *Resolution 13-02A To Regularize Status of Licensed Lay Deacons Involved in Word and Sacrament Ministry*
7. *The Royal Priesthood: Identity and Mission* (CTCR 2018)
8. *To Exhort and Equip the Blessed Partnership between the Royal Priesthood and the Office of the Public Ministry* (2016 Resolution 13-01A Task Force, report to 2019 Convention)
9. *Opinion on Lay Reading of Sermons and Conduct of Worship in the Absence of a Pastor* (CTCR Opinion, 2023).
10. 2019 Res. 6-03A To Enhance the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) Program

Adopted
Commission on Theology and Church Relations
October 4, 2024

R62.4

Response of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
Commission on Theology and Church Relations to
*Final Report of the Theological Conversations between the Churches Associated with the
International Lutheran Council and the Roman Catholic Church*
(International Lutheran Council and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity [2021]).

Introduction

A bilateral working group of representatives from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) and the International Lutheran Council (ILC) met four times in conversations over a span of five years (2014-2019). The genesis of these conversations, or this “informal dialogue,” lies in the recognition that because prior Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues had involved interactions only between the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), significant Lutheran voices were thereby excluded from those earlier conversations. That is, most of the more theologically traditional Lutheran church bodies do not hold membership in LWF and even those that were members had no significant role to play in LWF—RCC discussions. Most of the theologically conservative Lutheran churches are, however, members of the International Lutheran Council. The ILC is a worldwide association of churches that maintain a high view of Scripture as inspired and infallible and hold strictly to the entire *Book of Concord* as an authoritative exposition of the teachings of Holy Scripture. In order to gain an appreciation of the teaching and priorities of these churches, discussions between the PCPCU and ILC began.

The group’s *Final Report of the Theological Conversations between the Churches Associated with the International Lutheran Council and the Roman Catholic Church (Final Report or Report)* included two Addenda clarifying the position of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) on ordination.¹ Subsequent to the publication of the *Final Report*, the churches of the ILC were invited to submit responses. The LCMS was among the churches invited to respond. The request for a response was unfortunately unnoticed during the pressures and confusion brought on by COVID-19 and only recently recalled to the attention of LCMS leadership. President Matthew C. Harrison then asked the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations to prepare the response that follows.²

- I. Preamble
- a. Review and questions

The *Final Report* frames the conversations around a concept of catholicity. The first “ecumenical task” is “to determine (more) precisely the intersection between a Concordia-Lutheran and a Reform-Catholic catholicity.” That is, “the Lutheran documents” are to be re-examined in light of “their original intention to confess the Catholic faith and the history of their reception in

¹ The LCMS is the single largest member of the ILC.
² President Harrison promised a CTCR response on behalf of the LCMS in a February 25, 2024 email to Bishop Juhana Pohjola, Chairman of the International Lutheran Council. In the same email Dr. Harrison expressed his thankfulness for the conversations and his support for the efforts of the participants.

While conversations with a non-Lutheran church body are less likely to result in altar and pulpit fellowship than those with a like-minded Lutheran church body, they may nevertheless help to provide a defense against sectarianism as the talks can reveal and emphasize areas that the LCMS and that church body hold in common. A shared confession of the creeds, for example, stands as an important testimony against many forms of heresy, even if it does not result in the full agreement necessary for altar and pulpit fellowship.⁷

We appreciate the changing circumstances of the reformers in the period after Augsburg. We therefore find helpful the distinction between “confessional” and “confessional” catholicity.⁸ It is important that the *Final Report* traces the increasing reality of disjunction between the theology and practice of Wittenberg and “those theologians faithful to Rome and the Pope, but also in contrast to the movements on the ‘left wing’ of the Reformation.”⁹ The *Report* helpfully summarizes the theological movement from the earliest context of the AC to the later historical period in which the *Book of Concord* (1580) is published.¹⁰

Of similar value is the discussion of the distinctive “normative structures” of Lutherans and Roman Catholics. Here the claims of catholicity that are replete in the theology of the *Book of Concord* must be recognized.¹¹ Thus the Preamble concludes by emphasizing the “enduring theological significance [of] the intentional catholicity implicit in the normative structure that is decisive for both Lutherans and Catholics.”¹²

Consequently, we rejoice in the conversations between representatives of the ILC and the Roman Catholic Church. Even as President Harrison expressed his desire “to further the relationship between the ILC and the PCPCU,”¹³ we too strongly affirm the importance of the ecumenical work represented by the *Final Report* and urge continuing conversations between both groups.

- II. Mass as Eucharistic Sacrificial Banquet
- a. Review and questions

In the section titled **1. What We Perceive**, the ILC-PCPCU representatives affirm certain conclusions of previous Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues, even though ILC member churches played no role in those dialogues. These positive acknowledgements include the joint recognition that the sacrifice of Jesus is once-for-all “and can be neither continued, nor repeated, nor

⁷ “Theological Dialogue with Other Christian Church Bodies,” September 17, 2011, document link is at <https://files.lcms.org/dl/f7f44df93e-1ADB-45DB-ABDC-D128581EEA15>.
⁸ See *Final Report*, Preamble, 1.3 and accompanying footnote on p. 1. The footnote indicates that “confessional” is a translation of the German *konfessorisch* and reflects “a strong profession of faith within the bounds of churchly communion, by way of contrast with *konfessionell* ‘confessional,’ which carries with it the sense of a profession of faith that results from or issues in a breach of church fellowship.” Since the AC was drafted prior to Roman condemnations of Wittenberg’s theology and the subsequent excommunications, the *Final Report* applies “confessional” to the AC.
⁹ *Final Report*, Preamble, 2.4, p. 3.
¹⁰ *Final Report*, Preamble, 2.2-2.7, pp. 2-5.
¹¹ See especially *Final Report*, Preamble, 3.1-3.4, pp. 5-7.
¹² *Final Report*, Preamble, 4, p. 9.
¹³ See letter from Matthew C. Harrison, in Appendix I of the *Final Report*, p. 23.

the era of confessionalisation.”¹³ The intention of the Augsburg Confession (AC) is understood to be both an explanation of Wittenberg reforms and also a confirmation of “the foundational Catholic consensus” present in its opening articles. Thus the AC is viewed first in an “inner-Catholic context.”¹⁴

We note here that “Catholic” in these first paragraphs of the Preamble is exclusively upper-case. We are not certain about the significance of the capitalization, but assume that the upper case usage indicates the papal Roman Catholic Church and not what Lutherans would understand as “the church catholic.” If that is the case, then some of the initial claims of the Preamble may be questioned. Is it true that the first goal of the AC is to claim alignment of the Wittenberg reforms with the teachings of the Roman Church? On the contrary, we would hold that the claims of the AC are broader from the outset. The AC is setting forth the truth of Scripture above all else. And, with regard to catholicity, the view of catholic goes beyond the Roman church. After all, Melanchthon buttresses the AC claims based on Nicea (AC I), rejection of Pelagius (AC II), affirmation of the Apostles’ Creed (AC III), and calls on the Fathers to support teachings on faith (AC IV, V, VI). This is not to say that the Augustana sees itself as confessing something contrary to Rome, but its chief concerns are to be faithful to Scripture and to the universal (catholic) church. Therefore Melanchthon writes: “Since, then, this teaching is clearly grounded in Holy Scripture and is, moreover, neither against nor contrary to the universal Christian church—or even the Roman church—so far as can be observed in the writings of the Fathers, we think that our opponents cannot disagree with us in the articles set forth above.”¹⁵

Clarification of this matter would be helpful since it is obviously germane to the stated “ecumenical task” as defined in the first sentence of the Preamble. An assumption that the first goal of the Confessors at Augsburg was an alignment with Roman *teaching* as the ongoing standard of catholicity is simply incorrect. At the same time, the desire for maintaining unity in the whole church is explicit: “Inasmuch as we are all enlisted under one Christ, we are all to live together in one communion and one church.”¹⁶

- b. Affirmation

Our question about the term “Catholic” (or “catholic”) should not be misunderstood as anything other than an encouragement to continue the kinds of discussion as reported in this document. As the CTCR stated in a 2011 statement:

The first objective of the LCMS in our Constitution is to “work through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism, and heresy.” This objective points in two directions—“toward fellowship” and away from “schism, sectarianism, and heresy.”

³ *Final Report* coins the terms “Reform-Catholic” and “Concordia-Lutheran” to describe respectively “the early and late 16th-century forms of the Lutheran movement.”
⁴ *Final Report*, Preamble, 1.2, p. 1.
⁵ AC [Conclusion of Part One], 1, KW, 58.
⁶ AC, Preface, 4, German, KW, 30.

replaced, nor complemented.” However, the sacrifice “should become effective ever anew.” In addition, “the real and essential presence of Christ’s body and blood in the consecrated elements” is confessed together with some common understandings of the vocabulary of the Lord’s Supper. Also, a *synergeia* (intertwining of human and divine action) is affirmed as a way to express “God’s action” “through created means” namely, “men who proclaim his gospel and administer his sacraments.” However, given the long history of Lutheran opposition to all theological synergism,¹⁴ we would like to see further discussion of this particular topic in future meetings. Lastly, “the central importance of the Words of Institution” is affirmed.¹⁵

Section 2, is titled **What Is Important**. One may summarize the view therein in this statement from the *Final Report*:

The interrelation between theological reflection and liturgical action helps to explain why central points of controversy were especially connected with the doctrine and the celebration of this sacrament. Conversely, this connection can lead to a resolution of the fundamental differences related to it by articulating common grounds and commonalities.¹⁶

The identification of the relationship between doctrine and liturgy is both important and necessary. And we note with appreciation that the report’s discussion of The Mass as Eucharistic Sacrificial Banquet speaks of a “relecture” or re-examination of both the Lutheran confessions and the decisions of Trent.¹⁷ But we question § 2.2.2’s framing of the unresolved relationship between Christ’s sacrifice on the cross and the sacrifice of the Mass on page 10 as a simply disingenuous claim. Moreover, while we agree with the stress on responsible liturgical language, we are not entirely comfortable with the statement: “Dogmatic language in the abstraction of its way of speaking must not prevent legitimate varieties of liturgical expression.”¹⁸ The concern would be in the question of “legitimate varieties of liturgical expression.” How does one define a legitimate versus an illegitimate expression? It seems to us that dogma is the critical—and indeed, the only—authoritative arbiter for such a question. We do not understand how dogmatic and liturgical language can really be equivalent. Dogma—doctrine—a church’s confession of faith—stands above liturgical expression.

Given this concern, we appreciate the move of the *Final Report* from **2. What Is Important** to a consideration of **3.1 Systematic-Theological Affirmations** as it begins section **3. Commonalities**.¹⁹ We also appreciate the quotation from the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration that is added to § 3.1.1 and its emphasis on the “entire action” of the Sacrament from the consecration of the elements by the Word through distribution and reception. And we welcome the joint affirmation of the Holy Spirit’s work in and through “created, earthly means”

¹⁴ One might argue that confessional Lutherans have represented a decidedly intentional “one-sided” view, in contrast with the statement in the *Final Report* that “the concrete liturgical action must guard the theological thinking from becoming one-sided.” “Mass as Eucharistic Sacrificial Banquet, 1.4, p. 10.
¹⁵ *Final Report*, Mass as Eucharistic Sacrificial Banquet, 1.1-1.6, pp. 9-10.
¹⁶ *Final Report*, Eucharistic Sacrificial Banquet, 2.1, p. 10.
¹⁷ The two previous references to the re-examination or relecture referred only to re-examination of Lutheran positions (Preamble, 1.1, p. 1; Preamble, 1.4, p. 2).
¹⁸ *Final Report*, Eucharistic Sacrificial Banquet, 2.3.2, p. 10.
¹⁹ *Final Report*, Eucharistic Sacrificial Banquet, 3.1, p. 10.

in 3.1.2 as well as the connective unity between Christ's sacrificial death and the Sacrament of the Altar (3.1.3).

However, some terminology and emphases in section 3. **Commonalities** give pause. Here we mention the *Final Report's* rather nebulous claim that there is a "way of proclaiming the unity of the sacrifice on the cross and the Eucharistic sacrifice."²⁰ Perhaps a more accurate description might indicate that both sides find ways to proclaim both the sacrifice on the cross and a Eucharistic sacrifice. Even that more modest claim, however, should acknowledge the fact that the term sacrifice in the context of the Lord's Supper is jealously restricted in the Lutheran confessions.²¹ This restriction is, of course, for the sake of opposing the teaching of the sacrifice of the Mass and the view that the Lord's Supper itself is an atoning sacrifice in any sense whatsoever. As a result, Melancthon refers only to the reality that a sacrifice of *praise* occurs as one rejoices in the gift of Christ in the Lord's Supper. And the Apology uses the term "eucharistic sacrifice" for practices that have no direct connection to the Sacrament of the Altar.²² So, the claim that both sides link the cross of Christ with his holy Supper is valid, but it is not also necessary to acknowledge more openly the fact that each side links them in significantly different ways.²³ The matter of the unity between the cross and the Sacrament deserves continuing conversation, as the *Final Report* indicates in 4. **Open Questions**.

We can affirm the important "commonalities" identified in 3.1.4 through 3.1.6, but we would like there to be further clarification. The discussion of remembrance is helpful, but there is a question of order: that is, does our remembrance come in response to the gift of Christ's body and blood for us to eat and drink? Or, does our act of remembrance make Christ's body and blood present to be distributed and received?²⁴

The brief characterization of *ex opere operato* again gives pause (§ 3.1.7). The conditional characterization of that controversial term to mean only that there is an objective reality in the Sacrament, while unobjectionable, does not deal adequately (in our view) with the reality of the concerns raised by Reformers.²⁵

Our consideration of 3.2 **Liturgical-Theological Affirmation** is colored by the concerns expressed in our comments on the preceding **Systematic-Theological Affirmations**. The affirmation here appears in great measure to be a defense for the notion that, in some sense, the priest offers an atoning sacrifice to God. However, the claim is carefully stated and underpinned by saying that "divine action is theologically primary and the human action is secondary."²⁶ Moreover, the *Report* adds that the Epiclesis for Rome understands that the Church's action depends on the Spirit's action.

²⁰ *Final Report*, Eucharistic Sacrificial Banquet, 3.1.3, p. 11.

²¹ *Final Report*, Eucharistic Sacrificial Banquet, 3.1.3, p. 11. AC XXIV, 25, 30, KW 70 and Ap XXIV, 22, KW 261. See also SA II.2.1, KW 301; FC SD VII. 83, KW 607.

²² Ap. XXIV, 25, KW 262.

²³ We note the language of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) at §1367, which says "The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*," affirming the doctrine of Trent. CCC, 2nd ed. §1367 (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1997), p. 344.

²⁴ The *Final Report*, seems to imply the latter view. Eucharistic Sacrificial Banquet, 3.1.5, p. 11.

²⁵ *Final Report*, Eucharistic Sacrificial Banquet, 3.1.7, p. 11. See e.g. AC XXIV, 29, KW 70; 259, 11-12.

²⁶ *Final Report*, Eucharistic Sacrificial Banquet, 3.2.4, p. 12.

5

a. Review and Questions

In section three of the *Final Report* the representatives share the results of their discussions concerning the doctrine of justification by faith alone. *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (JDDJ), issued by LWF and the Roman Catholic Church in 1999, plays a pivotal role in the conclusions of the participants. The *Final Report* acknowledges "statements" and "reservations" from ILC churches,³¹ but declares that there have been "valuable rapprochements between the two parties involved."³²

We are unclear about the point of reference intended by the term "valuable rapprochements." Does this mean that the *Final Report* authors have fewer reservations about JDDJ than the ILC churches had earlier identified in their past reactions to JDDJ? The ensuing paragraphs in the *Final Report* seem to suggest such a perspective.

Rome is said to have adopted a different "orientation" regarding justification in Vatican II.³³ So, for Vatican II, "Obedience and faith are parallel, not prior to the message of faith, but to faith's enactment."³⁴ The authors note that the "*sola gratia* is supplemented by the *sola fide*" for the first time in Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues.³⁵ They add that "the critical function of the doctrine of justification is upheld."³⁶

These points, in paragraphs 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, and 1.5 raise questions for us. Is the changed orientation as described anything more than an increasing inclusion of faith terminology with regard to justification? Is not the connection of obedience and faith continued evidence of a transformative rather than a declarative understanding of justification? If so, to what degree is that a rapprochement? Does *sola fide* merely supplement a right understanding of *sola gratia*, or is it in fact absolutely necessary for a right view? Lastly, while we welcome language about "the critical function of justification" for all doctrine, we also find the language to be less than precise. We recall the textual change in justification as "criterion" between the 1996 draft of JDDJ and the final draft—a change from justification as the paramount criterion to justification as "an indispensable criterion." In light of that, what does it mean to speak of "the critical function of justification"?³⁷

Regarding section 1.6, we are also pleased that the matter of "reward is being dealt with." The bullet points are, in our judgment, examples of JDDJ's achievements, especially since the *Final Report* modestly refers only to "a certain consensus." We too see movement toward a greater understanding of the differing historic teachings of Rome and Wittenberg.

³¹ The *Final Report*, footnote 23, references the LCMS seminary responses which were published by the CTCR in 1999 with a summary and study guide.

³² The *Final Report*, *Sola Fides Numquam Sola—Justification by Faith (Sola Fides)*, 1.1, p. 14. For the response of the LCMS see The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in Confessional Lutheran Perspective* (1999), <https://files.lcms.org/dl/f90BD9722-8E11-4DCF-96D3-869B579EC336>.

³³ *Final Report*, *Sola Fides*, 1.2, p. 14.

³⁴ *Final Report*, *Sola Fides*, 1.3, p. 15.

³⁵ *Final Report*, *Sola Fides*, 1.4, p. 15.

³⁶ *Final Report*, *Sola Fides*, 1.5, p. 15.

³⁷ On the textual change that Rome required, see The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in Confessional Lutheran Perspective* (1999), pp. 16-17.

7

As the *Report* moves on to section 3.3 **The Sacramental Presence of Christ's Sacrifice in the Eucharist**, we are especially grateful for the note in § 3.3.2 about the absence of any language in the Lutheran Confessions "about a presence of the sacrifice of Christ in the Lord's Supper." It is true that some liturgies used in some confessional Lutheran churches have indicated something along these lines.²⁷ At the same time, as confessional Lutherans, we dispute that such language adequately represents Lutheran theology. This matter is therefore of vital importance to us and we hope it is explored more fully as part of the discussion of representation as one of the open questions.²⁸

With regard to section 4. **Open Questions**, we believe the points are generally well-stated and identify many of the uncertainties and clarifications noted in our comments in this section. They are well-balanced and inclusive of both Roman Catholic and confessional Lutheran concerns.²⁹

Section 5. **Intermediary Results: We have discovered**, helpfully distinguishes the terms "consensus" and "convergences."

b. Affirmation

Our preceding "Review and Questions" should indicate two things. First, we recognize the value of the work of the ILC and PCPCU participants and give thanks to God for the many important points of agreement the discussions uncovered. Second, precisely because of the importance of such conversations, we pray that there will be continued discussion of the theology and practice of the Sacrament of the Altar between confessional Lutheran and Roman Catholic representatives.

LCMS teaching on the Lord's Supper is, in some ways, rather simple. For example, the LCMS CTCR published a report titled *Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper* (1983) that briefly emphasizes the central teachings of Holy Scripture on the Sacrament as those teachings are explained in the *Book of Concord*. (1) "The Lord's Supper offers and conveys forgiveness of sins." (2) "The Lord's Supper offers the truly present body and blood of Christ." (3) "The Lord's Supper strengthens faith." (4) "The Lord's Supper imparts power for Christian living." (5) "The Lord's Supper is an act of thankful adoration." And (6) "The Lord's Supper is a celebration of Christian fellowship."³⁰

Given such a simple characterization, one can see why we appreciate the work encapsulated in the *Final Report*. The "Commonalities" identified in the report are substantial and they indicate important elements of agreement. At the same time, there is more work to be done with regard to the Sacrament and the CTCR strongly encourages continuing discussions.

III. Justification by Faith

²⁷ *Final Report*, Eucharistic Sacrificial Banquet, 3.3.2, p. 12.

²⁸ *Final Report*, Eucharistic Sacrificial Banquet, 4.8, p. 14.

²⁹ *Final Report*, Eucharistic Sacrificial Banquet, 4.1 to 4.8, pp. 13-14.

³⁰ The report is available for download at <https://files.lcms.org/dl/716D9CF2-0F4B-45C5-A250-065A446F3E83>.

6

Sections 1.7 through 1.10 move the discussion away from dogma to "the liturgical and sacramental dimension."³⁸ We note that these paragraphs no longer reference JDDJ, but instead rely entirely on references from the *Book of Concord*. The connection between justification and baptism was already introduced in section 1.6, but in § 1.8 the *Final Report* emphasizes the language in the Latin text of AC IV that those justified through faith "believe that they are received into grace."³⁹ The *Final Report* notes this as significant, but does not indicate why. Is it understood to be consistent with a more Roman Catholic understanding of grace? What Lutherans mean is that by faith alone without works we are justified, i.e., declared righteous for Christ's sake and made heirs of heaven.⁴⁰

We find these liturgical-sacramental paragraphs about baptism, absolution, and preaching to be helpful, but not in contrast with dogmatic language. Rather, they illumine the dogmatic truth emphasized in the biblical doctrine of justification: that God manifests his righteousness solely "through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe" (Romans 3:22). Even as justification means that God "reckons" or "counts" faith as righteousness (Romans 4:3-5), so also it is enacted only as the gospel of forgiveness is made known in word and sign, promising the one who "believes in him who justifies the ungodly," that "his faith is counted as righteousness" (Romans 4:5).

We find the discussion of "**What Is Important for Our Dialogue between the ILC and the PCPCU**" to be very helpful.⁴¹ The centrality of justification for understanding the Gospel is affirmed, as is the recognition that Vatican II has enabled "a spirit of fraternal dialogue, not polemical exchange."⁴² And we commend the *Final Report* for its frank admission that "mutual congruence" is not possible given the differing understanding of terms between the two sides.⁴³ Paragraphs 2.4, 2.5, and 2.6 then expand on the terminological distinction in discussing the all-important term "faith." There are certainly points of agreement and the different views are better understood now, yet the critical difference remains over whether faith alone justifies.

We also find section 3. **Commonalities**, to be generally helpful in terms of the stated items.⁴⁴ That only Christ is "righteous and holy" (§ 3.1) and so only he can sanctify the church is a vital truth. But we miss any discussion of how that relates to Roman teachings on the cult of the saints. The discussion of Justification by Faith in § 3.2 rightly points out convergences, and notes that the language of faith alone (*sola fide*) was "finally" affirmed in JDDJ's Annex and by Benedict XVI. It also, in our opinion, modestly claims no more than that the formula "*may* no longer be the strong centre" (emphasis added). (This judgment must be considered alongside the comments in the preceding paragraphs on faith in 2.4-2.6.)

We are displeased with the title of 3.3, **Faith Becomes Effective through Love**, together with the particular sentence, "Faith precedes love; in love does faith become effective." The Lutheran

³⁸ *Final Report*, *Sola Fides*, 1.7, p. 16.

³⁹ *Final Report*, *Sola Fides*, 1.8, p. 16.

⁴⁰ Kolb-Wengert understands that "*in gratiam recipe*" is using grace to mean "divine favor." Kolb-Wengert, AC IV, Latin Text, footnote 52, p. 41.

⁴¹ *Final Report*, *Sola Fides*, 2., p. 17.

⁴² *Final Report*, What Is Important, 2.1, 2.2, p. 17.

⁴³ *Final Report*, What Is Important, 2.3, p. 17.

⁴⁴ *Final Report*, Commonalities, sections 3.1 through 3.7, pp. 17-20.

8

stress on justification by faith *alone*, full stop, must be preserved. Lutheran theology forthrightly declares that justification means to be declared righteous by God for Christ's sake (Ap IV, 72). It indicates that faith's primary effect must be seen apart from any emphasis on our love or our sanctification because faith *effectively* receives what it is promised: the forgiveness of sins for Jesus' sake. We understand that the main point of this section is that for both sides faith never remains alone (*sola fides numquam sola*). So also, faith is never divorced from sanctification.⁴⁵

Similarly, as the *Final Report* goes further into **3.4 Shared Aspects of Justification**, we appreciate the concern to emphasize the levels at which participants found agreement. Here the main point of agreement is that for both sides justification requires a faith that is dependent on grace as mediated by the church where the gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered. And, again, that such faith is never alone—never without works.

Thus the *Report* argues that the Council of Trent and *Book of Concord* are closer than “previously supposed.” If there are indeed such “closer affinities,” does that judgment give proper recognition to the discontinuity that remains? As “Concordia Lutherans” we would never reject the teaching of sanctification or that faith is active in love. Yet, the Lutheran confessors were always also wary about any emphasis on sanctification that called into question the chief article—that justification is by faith *alone*.

Therefore, even if the converted and believers have the beginnings of renewal, sanctification, love, virtues, and good works, yet these cannot, should not, and must not be introduced or mixed with the article of justification before God, so that the proper honor may continue to be accorded our Redeemer Christ and (because our new obedience is imperfect and impure) so that the consciences under attack may have a reliable comfort.⁴⁶

Section “3.5 Cooperation?”—human cooperation in justification—is appropriately stated as a question. The *Report* indicates that Rome would answer with an unambiguous affirmative, insisting on “man’s personal consent” to justification, even if such “consent to God’s will” is not by human power (left unsaid is the assumption of infused grace). Lutherans, however, can only speak of cooperation as something that occurs *after* God’s justification of sinners.

Another difference remains regarding **3.6 Certainty of Salvation**. The Lutheran side holds that the certainty of God’s undeserved favor toward sinners results in the certainty of salvation. The Roman view claims only a certainty about God intending salvation.

The last portion of the discussion of justification in the *Final Report*, **4. Open Questions**, is a vital addendum to the previous discussions. We affirm the need for a discussion of eschatology (§ 4.1). We are particularly grateful for § 4.2’s characterization of the different views on “Christian renewal.” Sections 4.3 and 4.4 are also helpful as clarifications.

b. Affirmation

⁴⁵ *Final Report*, Commonalities, section 3.3, p. 19.

⁴⁶ FC SD III, 34; KW 568.

clarification of the LCMS understanding of ordination by including a letter from President Matthew C. Harrison and a document provided by the staff of the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations.

In closing, we would suggest some additional topics for discussion. We encourage further meetings to consider the cult of saints and purgatory, especially in the context of ongoing discussions of the doctrine of justification. With regard to church and ministry, we hope the topics of apostolic succession, the ordination of women, and the papacy as well as the priesthood of all believers might be given attention. In addition, we think a thorough discussion and comparison of views on the doctrine of the church is of great importance. And, lastly, we believe that attention to moral teachings and social issues would be a particularly beneficial discussion and may be an encouragement for confessional Lutherans and Roman Catholics to cooperate in these areas.

Thank you for inviting our response. And thank you for your patience and understanding given the length of time between your request and this response.

Adopted
Commission on Theology and Church Relations
October 4, 2024

The essential claim of JDDJ was the existence of “a common understanding of our justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ” (Preamble, § 4.). That is, past differences between Lutherans and Roman Catholics do not overrule a present “consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification” (Preamble, § 5.). The response of the LCMS did not affirm such a consensus, finding that JDDJ adopted a transformational view of justification rather than the Lutheran understanding: that justification is God’s declaration of righteousness based on his utterly undeserved favor for fallen, un-transformed, sinners, on account of Christ and his merits alone.⁴⁷

We see a milder and more modest claim here in the *Final Report* that we can generally affirm. It argues that there is common ground on the doctrine justification as illustrated in sections 3.3 and 3.4 (**Faith Becomes Effective through Love Commonalities**). This common ground is most evident in the affirmation that faith never remains alone (*sola fides numquam sola*). However, what Lutherans mean is that sanctification always flows from faith, but is never its cause.

At the same time, we want to emphasize the points of disagreement that remain. And, contrary to JDDJ, the mutual condemnations of the 16th century remain as an ecumenical challenge because of the central question—Is justification solely on account of the undeserved favor of God received only by faith or is it finally dependent on a man’s transformation (the process of sanctification)?

However, we also hasten to add that such a frank assessment of the remaining differences is not a repudiation of these discussions between the ILC and the Roman Catholic Church. Rather, it points to the value—indeed the necessity—of ongoing respectful conversations for the sake of the church catholic and her mission. Moreover, honest assessments are the only way that meaningful ecumenical progress can be envisioned.⁴⁸

IV. Conclusion

In our extensive review of the *Final Report* we have emphasized questions and points of concern—some of which may be viewed as disagreements with the conclusions of the discussion participants. For that reason we want to emphasize yet again our overall support for the ongoing conversations. Our response is intended to indicate our profound appreciation for the obviously cordial and respectful character of these conversations, our acknowledgment of important points of agreement and clarification, and our encouragement that such ecumenical meetings between ILC church representatives and Roman Catholics would continue.

With regard to further meetings, we gladly affirm section **IV. Ecumenical Tasks in the Horizon of Intentional Catholicity**. We also appreciate section **V. Ministry and Ordination—Addendum**. Given that the conversations surfaced a legitimate concern by an LCMS participant on the matter of ordination, we are grateful that the discussion process allowed for a further

⁴⁷ The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in Confessional Lutheran Perspective* (1999), pp. 17-18. We also note a recent document that distinguishes the LCMS from the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) *The LWF Today* (2024), especially pages 12-14.

⁴⁸ Please see the document cited earlier: “Theological Dialogue with Other Christian Church Bodies,” September 17, 2011, document link is at <https://files.lcms.org/dl/DF44DF93E-1ADB-45DB-ABDC-D128581EEA15>.

R62.5

CTCR Response to the Lutheran Church of Australia's "Way Forward" Proposal
December 2024

Preface

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations [CTCR] of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod [LCMS] has received a request from LCMS President Matthew Harrison to prepare a response to proposed action by the Lutheran Church of Australia at its 2024 General Synod that would result in the LCA's beginning to "operate as 'one church with two different practices of ordination'" (*WAY FORWARD Detailed Framework*, 3; hereafter WFDF, released and published on July 19, 2024; see Appendix A). Central and essential to this proposal was that "the Church [the LCA] changes its teaching to allow for the ordination of women and men" to the pastoral office (WFDF, 3).

On October 5, 2024, at the LCA's 2024 General Synod, the "Way Forward" proposal was essentially and substantially adopted (see "Synod endorses the ordination of both women and men" at <https://www.lca.org.au/synod-endorses-the-ordination-of-both-women-and-men/>). This response of the CTCR to the proposal was substantially drafted before the LCA's 2024 General Synod, even though it was finally adopted by the CTCR at its December 5-6, 2024 meeting. This document seeks to evaluate the proposal as it was originally submitted, therefore, not (obviously) to impact the outcome of the LCA's 2024 General Synod or to comment on or evaluate statements and actions resulting from the General Synod (see the article referenced above).

The LCMS's official position on the ordination of women is clear and well-known, so it will not come as a surprise to anyone that the CTCR of the LCMS is deeply troubled and saddened by this proposal and how its adoption will profoundly and negatively impact church workers and congregations within and outside the LCA, the LCMS's relationship with the LCA, and (potentially) other church bodies (including partner churches of the LCMS) which are confronting this critical issue. Our intention here, however, is to evaluate the LCA's proposal on its own terms. The CTCR believes that even proponents of the ordination of women, or those who are perhaps undecided on the issue, will find this proposal to be deeply flawed in numerous ways (both in terms of

3

together peaceably, harmoniously, and in good conscience with contradictory convictions about what God, in His holy Word, permits or does not permit. Having acknowledged the irreconcilable impasse, the proposed framework simply goes on to offer what it describes as "*practical* solutions and steps to implement the changes required to introduce the ordination of women in the LCA" (3; emphasis added). The framework has five key points, each of which we will comment on briefly later in this evaluation:

- Part A: The Church makes the commitment to maintain its identity and form.
- Part B: The Church changes its teaching to allow for the ordination of women and men.
- Part C: The Church makes a commitment to pastors and pastoral ministry candidates that they will continue to be received and welcomed by the whole church in a respectful environment.
- Part D: The Church makes a commitment to congregations and parishes that they may call a pastor who best aligns with their ministry plans.
- Part E: The Church introduces a tenure-based provision for nomination for the roles of bishop and assistant bishop.

Even the most charitable reading of WFDF must regard the proposed "solution" to this serious and longstanding impasse in the LCA as nothing short of breathtaking. It lacks not only theological substance and seriousness but also ethical integrity. It strains credulity to think that even honest *proponents* of the ordination of women can in good conscience accept a proposal that allows for the full acceptance of a position (i.e., the rejection of women's ordination) that uses Scripture in a way that they believe Scripture simply "cannot be used."

It is clear from the very outset of the document, therefore, that what is being proposed here is little more than an atheological pragmatism which prioritizes an attempt to maintain institutional "unity" over concern for what the Bible teaches or concern for what individual pastors, congregations and laity believe about what the Bible actually teaches. There is little attempt to disguise this pragmatic motivation and approach:

"Overall, since the first vote in 2000, the votes for and against the ordination of women have shown little movement one way or another. There remain two

2

its theological presuppositions and assertions and in terms of its logical argumentation) and a completely unworkable "solution" to the problem of longstanding division on this issue within the LCA.

Introduction, Background, Overview

The *WAY FORWARD Detailed Framework* begins with an introduction, background, and overview of the proposal's framework (pages 3-8). The very first sentence of the introduction acknowledges the serious nature of the "impasse" that exists in the LCA on the ordination of women: "Despite more than three decades of theological study and debate within the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand (LCANZ), we remain divided on whether or not the Scriptures permit the ordination of women" (3). Note the phrase: "whether or not *the Scriptures* permit." While elsewhere in the document the division is described in terms of different "views" or "understandings" or even "opinions," here at the outset, at least, it is explicitly acknowledged that the critical question is "What does God in Holy Scripture teach about this matter? What does He permit or not permit?" One can hardly minimize the significance of that question in evaluating this proposal.

This point is reiterated on page 4: "Some among us maintain that *these Scriptures* clearly support the LCA's public teaching that prohibits a woman from being called into the office of the public ministry. Others believe that *these [Scripture] passages* cannot be used this way and that ordination of women to the office of the public ministry is consistent with the *teaching of the Scriptures* and with the doctrine of the ministry as articulated in the Lutheran Confessions" (emphasis added). Logically speaking, these are two contradictory positions. They cannot be reconciled. Only one of the two positions can be correct and the other must be a false view. As the proposal itself acknowledges, either Scripture itself *clearly prohibits* the ordination of women, or Scripture *does not prohibit* the ordination of women.

Any reasonably objective reader, therefore, even someone who cares nothing about the issues involved (or even about Scripture or what it teaches), should reject the framework's proposed solution. The *Way Forward* essentially shrugs aside the impasse and simply asserts or assumes that the two sides can live

4

widely held positions on ordination within the LCA, that of: (1) men only, and (2) both men and women. We are at an impasse. *It is clear that resolution of the ordination issue requires a different approach to any taken previously*" (4; emphasis added)—namely, a pragmatic "resolution" rather than a theological one.

The authors of this proposal and framework might argue that such pragmatism (with no apparent concern for genuine theological unity or ethical integrity) was forced upon them by decisions made at the 2021-2023 LCA convention, at which "delegates voted by a strong majority to direct the General Church Board and College of Bishops (GCB-CoB) to find a way for us to operate as 'one church with two different practices of ordination' and to report back with a detailed framework to the 2024 General Pastors Conference and General Synod" (3). A more honest approach, however, would have been to say: "What we have been asked to do is impossible," or perhaps to propose some sort of institutional model or structure whereby some outward institutional cooperation could be maintained (perhaps even temporarily) while recognizing that the two differing theological views and practices are mutually exclusive and cannot coexist in the same church—at least in a church that claims to regard Scripture as "the infallible Word of God," "the only source and norm of Christian doctrine," the "sure and authoritative guide for life and practice," and "the only and true source, norm, rule and standard for all teaching and practice in the Christian Church" (DSTO 1A Theses of Agreement, 1-3; see Appendix 3 of the WFDF).

Nonetheless, the authors of the proposal and framework assert that they have "diligently worked through the *theological*, constitutional and governance requirements to allow this directive [of the 2021-2023 convention] to be accomplished" (3; emphasis added).

In section 4, the proposal's authors provide this overview: "The Framework recognizes the different theological beliefs on ordination held by members of the Church, that on the matter of the ordination of both women and men to the office of the public ministry, the current male-only teaching of the Church does not accommodate the different theological beliefs held by members of the Church" (8). Note the repeated reference here to "different theological beliefs." Also note, however, the not-so-subtle shift in language in the next

paragraph: “In fulfillment of the resolution of the 2021-23 General Synod, the Framework offers an approach whereby both *practices* can exist within the Church” (8; emphasis added). “Different theological beliefs” have now been reduced to two differing (and presumably complementary) “practices,” all for the sake of the pragmatic goal of institutional “unity.” “The Framework provides details of how this way forward might operate in practical ways, so that people holding either view on ordination might remain together” (7; emphasis added). This by no means solves the problem or contradiction, of course, because the LCA’s own Theses of Agreement point to the inerrant Scriptures as “the only true source, norm, rule and standard for all teaching and practice in the Christian Church” (emphasis added).

In what follows, we will briefly examine the five parts of the proposed framework and offer some additional comments and questions for reflection and consideration.

Framework Part A: Commitment to continuity of identity and form (9).

In an effort to give “reasons for hope” that the proposed framework will be “welcomed” by “the majority of members” of the LCA, the “Background” section of the document states: “Importantly, while the Framework acknowledges the division among us, it also articulates the strong theological foundations on which we agree (see Section 5)” (7).

Section 5 (page 9) comprises the discussion of Part A of the Framework, a commitment to continuity of “identity and form.” Notably (and strikingly), it is the shortest part of the Framework and contains almost nothing of any real theological substance as pertains to the issue at hand. It has five points. The first says “we uphold our teaching on the Office of the Ministry as expressed in Theses of Agreement VI:1-10 and confessed in Augsburg Confession V.” It then quotes paragraphs 1-3 of AC V, with no further commentary or discussion—as if simply quoting this section of the Confessions somehow “proves” that the ordination of women is consistent with the teaching of the Lutheran Confessions. Of course, the ordination of women was not an issue in the 16th century, so to pretend as if AC V and XIV “support” or “condone” or “do not forbid” or “are consistent with” this practice is nothing more than an unwarranted argument from silence. Similarly unfounded arguments are

The opening paragraph is contradictory on its face: “The Church in Synod changes its public teaching, amending the wording of TA VI:11 to allow both men and women to be ordained, acknowledging the change under Clause 3 of the Document of Union and *continuing as one church with one teaching on ordination*” (10; emphasis added). So: we are *changing* our teaching to incorporate two *contradictory* teachings, which we will simply characterize as “one teaching.”

The next paragraph adds to the confusion, since after asserting that the LCA will continue as “one church with one teaching on ordination,” it “acknowledges the different theological *positions* on the gender (male and female) of pastors but considers them non-divisive of church fellowship, enabling the LCA to remain as one Church.” (10; emphasis added).

Perhaps the best critique of this kind of “logic” is simply to let it speak for itself. Two “different theological *positions*” are acknowledged, but somehow this does not equate to “two different (and contradictory) teachings.” How can this be? As they regularly remind us throughout the document, the authors of WFDF simply have a job to do. Their job is not to determine what the Bible says (that approach has been attempted for years, and found wanting), but to carry out the mandate of the LCA’s General Synod. They are bound not by Scripture, but by pragmatically-driven resolutions of the Synod:

“The current public teaching of the LCA does not permit two practices of ordination (TA VI:11). In carrying out the resolution of the General Synod (2021-23) to develop a framework for the LCA to ‘operate as one church with two different practices of ordination’, the Convention of General Synod is advised that any proposal put forward to meet this synodical resolution requires a change to the teaching of the Church with regards to male only ordination” (11).

Moreover: “A change to public teaching in the LCA will require more than a simple rescinding or removal of TA VI:11. Any such decisions would result in the Church having no clear public teaching on the eligibility of duly qualified women to be regularly called by a congregation or the Church, and publicly acknowledged through the rite of ordination (TA VI:7,8). On the other hand, if a

sometimes proffered about the lack of a clear confessional position on the authority of Scripture (since there is no distinct article on this topic in the Lutheran Confessions), but, of course, this too is an argument from silence since the authority of Scripture was not a contested issue at the time.

Point 2 quotes Clause 7 of the LCA’s Document of Union: “We declare that wherever continued cooperation in the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments and worship exists, there we have a witness to the world of unity in the faith and a profession of church fellowship.” Again notably (and strikingly), there is no reference at all to the “Principles governing church fellowship” in the Theses of Agreement, which contain the strong references to the authority of Scripture cited earlier and many other statements that contradict the notion of “unity” or fellowship presumed in WFDF.

Points 3 and 4, consisting of one sentence each, simply point out that Churchwide structures and understanding of “membership” will remain as they currently are. Point 5 is also one sentence: “The Church continues to uphold its ecumenical and international relationships.”

If these five points constitute “the strong theological foundations on which we agree,” it is hard to fathom how they can serve to give “hope” and assurance that the Framework is theologically sound and well-grounded. The fact that what is identified by the WFDF itself as the main and foundational *theological* basis of the proposal virtually ignores the LCA’s own (and theologically substantive) Theses of Agreement (certain portions of which are reduced to mere inclusion in three appendices) is quite telling—and deeply disconcerting.

Framework Part B: Changing the teaching to allow for ordination of women and men (10-13).

This is the longest of the five parts of WFDF, and also the most confusing, troubling and self-contradictory. It seeks to tackle the key issue at stake here, an admitted “change of teaching” in the LCA on an admittedly controverted issue, yet all the while attempting to argue that nothing of any real *theological* substance or consequence will be impacted by this change of teaching.

proposed amendment of TA VI:11 to permit the ordination of women and men were to meet *the necessary constitutional requirement* to change the public doctrine of the church, then it would become the credible teaching of the LCA and would be afforded the same authority as any other part of the Theses of Agreement” (11; emphasis added).

If proper *constitutional* procedures have been followed, it does not matter, apparently, that the LCA’s new public teaching is self-contradictory theologically. The Synod’s public teaching is necessarily “credible teaching,” because the church has followed “the process outlined for changing the public teaching of the church” (11). Scripture and the Confessions have not been compromised, “because our public teaching on ordination *claims* to clearly represent the position of Scripture and the Confessions” (11; emphasis added). Claiming this is apparently enough to make it so, even though the new public teaching admittedly incorporates two different positions that understand Scripture in contradictory ways.

Since claiming something apparently makes it so, WFDF can also simply claim that such contradictory positions and practices “are not divisive of fellowship,” with the following caveats (required by the LCA’s Theses of Agreement):

- (i) There be readiness in principle to submit to the authority of the Word of God
- (ii) Thereby no clear Word of Scripture is denied, contradicted, or ignored
- (iii) Such divergent views in no wise impair, infringe upon, or violate the central doctrine of Scripture, justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ
- (iv) Nothing be taught contrary to the *publica doctrina* of the Lutheran Church as laid down in its Confessions
- (v) Such divergent views are not propagated as the *publica doctrina* of the Church and in no wise impair the doctrine of Holy Writ.

Of course, these (substantive and far-reaching!) caveats are the very issues at stake in the LCA’s long-standing debate on this issue. To pretend as if those who are convinced that women’s ordination is clearly forbidden by Scripture

9

can accept this new “public teaching” of the LCA with the understanding that “thereby no clear Word of Scripture is clearly, contradicted or ignored” is disingenuous at best. By the same token, as noted earlier, to pretend as if those who are convinced that women’s ordination is clearly *not* forbidden by Scripture can accept this new “public teaching” of the LCA with the understanding that “thereby no clear Word of Scripture is denied, contradicted or ignored” is equally disingenuous. Proponents of the ordination of women should be honest enough to admit this, and to oppose this proposal on grounds of conscience—i.e., their own conscience-bound conviction that Scripture “cannot be used” to prohibit the ordination of women.

This section of WFDF closes by citing several points from a 2018 report of the LCA’s CTICR offering its own “rationale” for “why the ordination of both women and men need not be divisive” (12). In some ways this is the most disturbing part of the entire document. It further obfuscates matters by asserting, for example, that “divergent views” on matters such as the ordination of women (which are here relegated to the level of “exegetical opinion”) ought not affect “foundational teachings of the Christian faith” (such as the doctrine of the Trinity, Christology, justification). “Division may occur only when teachings that contradict such foundational teachings are held and openly taught” (13).

Implicit in this kind of thinking is a denial (or failure to recognize) that the doctrine we confess has a unified and organic wholeness. In Matthew 28:20 Jesus instructs his disciples to teach the baptized “to observe all that I have commanded you.” In Acts 20:27 Paul soberly testifies that “I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” The *satis est* of AC VII must be read in light of the proviso of FC SD X 31 that we are bound to agree with one another “in the doctrine and all its articles,” all of which are inextricably intertwined. It is impossible to “change the doctrine” in one area with no resulting ramifications for the other interrelated articles of the same, one, unified doctrine.

WFDF characterizes the serious and longstanding disagreement about the ordination of women in the LCA as merely a “matter of exegetical opinion.”

11

The question, of course, is: what will this look like in practice? Who decides what constitutes “harmful behavior,” or “discrimination” or “harassment?” Who decides when “dialogue” and “conversation” become less than “respectful?” As is amply demonstrated by current cultural dynamics and tensions, individuals and groups can (and typically do) have radically different perspectives, feelings and perceptions about when and how these lines are crossed. The same questions and tensions will almost certainly surface in churchly settings, with little or no certainty about what the consequences may be if someone is suspected or accused of “harmful” or “disrespectful” speech, attitudes or behavior.

WFDF says: “The Framework does not impose any requirements for pastors to affirm or disclose (publicly or privately) their views on women’s ordination” (15). No *requirements* are imposed. But what about *restrictions*? To what extent will pastors who oppose the ordination of women be free—privately and publicly—to confess and defend and publicize and teach and preach as their consciences compel them to do, without fear of being accused of showing disrespect or causing harm or threatening the “unity” of the church?

The final paragraph on “worship” acknowledges that in this area “there are matters that will need to be worked through in the 2024-2027 synodical period.” Aside from the serious (fatal) flaws in the proposal itself, it seems highly irresponsible to offer a proposal like this for formal adoption while leaving critical, real-life issues like worship completely unaddressed and unresolved. Will pastors who oppose the ordination of women be expected to commune at altars where women are presiding? Will they be asked or expected to participate in jointly leading worship or co-officiate with women, at the risk of showing “disrespect” if they refuse? Simply to say, “we’ll have to work through those issues later—trust us!” shows a lack of respect for those whose conscience-bound beliefs will almost certainly force them to make decisions that may well have harmful (!) consequences for them.

Framework Part D: Commitments to congregations and parishes (16-20).

Like the previous section, this part of the framework purports to address differing “conscience views” among individuals, congregations and parishes

10

Who decides, however, when and on what basis longstanding and deeply-held divergent teachings can simply be characterized as “mere opinions” that are no longer divisive of fellowship? WFDF never seriously addresses this question. (See the CTCR’s February 2000 document *The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship*, which references the [orthodox] principles of church fellowship affirmed at the founding of the LCA in 1965 through its *Theses of Agreement* [p. 26, fn. 57] as well as the 1961 “Statement of the Overseas Committee” which reflects this same understanding of church fellowship as rooted in agreement in doctrine and practice [p. 27, fn. 61]).

The CTICR’s unsubstantiated assertions about “divergent views” and “foundational teachings” also raise inevitable (and ultimately unanswerable) questions about who decides (and on what basis) what is or is not a “foundational teaching,” and when, whether and how a “non-foundational teaching” might contradict a “foundational teaching.” Further, it implies that opponents of the ordination of women who believe and maintain that this false teaching does, in fact, have implications for more “foundational teachings,” and/or who sincerely believe that the ordination of women is, in fact, a church-dividing issue, are the real schismatics (“division may occur *only*...”), even as they are assured (in the next two sections of WFDF) that they will be warmly welcomed and that their different (wrong!) beliefs and practices will be tolerated as part of “one church with one teaching on ordination.” If conscience-bound opponents of the ordination of women are skeptical about the nature and workability of such warm and welcoming “unity,” such skepticism might well be excused.

Framework Part C: Commitments to pastors and pastoral ministry candidates (14-15).

The opening paragraph under “Conscience views” sums up this entire section: “Our commitment is that every pastor in the Church will be received and welcomed by the whole Church in an environment of mutual respect and understanding, where differing consciences are acknowledged while ensuring that harmful behavior is not tolerated” (14). There follow repeated warnings against “discrimination” and “harassment,” and multiple calls for “mutual respect,” “respectful conversations” and “respect for different views.”

12

of the LCA. Nowhere in the entire proposal, however, is the term “conscience” defined or discussed. In fact, in the section titled “Conscience views” in Part D, the term “conscience” does not even occur. Note the various alternative terminology used:

“Individuals, congregations and parishes within the Church may hold differing *beliefs* on the issue of women’s ordination, including cases where pastors hold different *views* than members of their congregations. We affirm the right to hold diverse *perspectives*, while making a commitment that every pastor in the Church will be received and welcomed by the whole church in an environment of respect, understanding and unity” (16; emphasis added). Here matters of “conscience” are characterized variously as “differing beliefs” or “different views” or “diverse perspectives” (or, as noted earlier, “differing opinions”)—which ultimately empties the term “conscience” of any real meaning or significance. Whatever is meant here, it is certainly not what Luther had in mind at Worms when he said: “To go against conscience is neither right nor safe.” The main concern in Parts C and D of WFDF, it seems, is to warn against questioning or disrespecting *someone else’s* “conscience” (i.e., “perspective” or “opinion”).

As in the previous section it is noted that “Congregations and their members will not be *required* to adopt a specific conscience view or belief [or] explain or defend their position regarding women’s ordination” (17). But (again) that is hardly the most pressing question. Will they be *free* to “explain and defend” their position under the vague provisions of the WFDF? That question is never clearly addressed.

Framework Part E: Tenure-based provision for nomination for bishop (21).

For those who have may concerns about a newly ordained woman pastor being immediately eligible for nomination as bishop or assistant bishop, this simply “kicks the can down the road” by requiring “minimum service” of six years before eligibility to stand for nomination. Previously (i.e., currently, at the time of this writing), no such “minimum service” was required for eligibility to serve in these offices. So why this change, and why now? The answer is obvious: this is an attempt to appease in some way, and at least initially, those who oppose (or have concerns about) women’s ordination itself, and who

would therefore have especially grave concerns about the possibility of an ordained woman being elevated to these important leadership positions in the church. Once again, it is the proponents of women's ordination who should object most strenuously to this clear restriction of women's service in important positions of leadership merely to seek to appease those who hold a position that (the proponents believe) cannot be justified by Scripture.

Concluding Remarks

Article 2 ("Confession") of the Constitution of the LCA states:

The Church accepts without reservation the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as a whole and in all their parts, as the divinely inspired, written and inerrant Word of God, and as the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine and life. (2.1)

Tragically, the 2024 "Way Forward" proposal renders this confession meaningless. As noted earlier, WFDF rightly frames the impasse in the LCA as rooted in a disagreement about what the inspired, inerrant and infallible Holy Scriptures teach on the question of the ordination of women. Some in the LCA are convinced that the Scriptures clearly prohibit the ordination of women; others are convinced that the Scripture passages in question "*cannot* be used this way." If members of the LCA truly believe what they confess in Article 2 of the LCA's Constitution, namely, that the Scriptures are "the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine and life," then they would have to insist that this profound disagreement over what the Scriptures teach cannot be allowed to stand. The disagreement must be resolved, in one way or another, on the basis of the church's "only infallible source and norm."

What WFDF says, however, is that what Scripture says or doesn't say on this matter doesn't really matter. Those who are convinced that it teaches one thing and those who are convinced that it teaches the opposite thing can nonetheless live together in peace and harmony, as "one church with one teaching on ordination" (10). Perhaps the most damning aspect of WFDF is the utter disrespect it shows to Scripture itself while giving lip service to the LCA's strong and clear confessional article. If the LCA can accept and tolerate contradictory convictions about what Scripture teaches about ordination, one

prayers and any feasible support we can offer to those who find themselves in either of these painful, unenviable positions.

Adopted Unanimously
Commission on Theology and Church Relations
December 6, 2024

cannot help but wonder (and one is even obligated to seriously ponder) what other differences and disagreements can and will be tolerated on critical "matters of faith, doctrine and life," all for the sake of a pragmatic, institutional "unity" that cannot possibly be sustained in any meaningful way.

We noted at the outset of this evaluation the clear, consistent and well-known position of the LCMS on this issue. We also indicated that our primary goal in this document has been to evaluate WFDF on its own terms, not on the basis of the LCMS position. However, lest there be any question or doubt, the CTCR firmly and unanimously believes that the LCMS position on the ordination of women is fully in accord with the teaching of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. For those interested in knowing more about what the LCMS believes and teaches in this regard, and why, we are providing in Appendix B a selected list of resources that further explicate the position of the LCMS on this issue. In brief, that position honors (1) the enduring truth and goodness of the order of creation within the family and within Christ's Church, (2) the male-only Old Testament offices of prophet, priest, and king fulfilled in the Son of God Incarnate, (3) the Son's own institution of His Office of the Holy Ministry (limited to qualified men—1 Cor. 14:34-35, 1 Tim. 2:11-12), and (4) the Holy Spirit's gift of the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God as the sole authority for the Church's doctrine and practice, which also offers many excellent testimonies of the godly service of women.

Finally, the CTCR is compelled to offer a sincere and fraternal word of consolation, support and encouragement to those in the LCA who remain committed to the LCA's historic, Scripture-based position on the ordination of women, who are therefore also deeply troubled by this proposal, and who have been placed in a terrible position by the LCA's decision to prioritize pragmatic institutional "unity" over genuine theological agreement and true unity in doctrine and practice. Some will undoubtedly be compelled by their consciences to leave the LCA despite all the attendant sacrifices and challenges that will entail. Others will undoubtedly make the equally difficult decision to remain, even if they cannot accept any or all of the assumptions, claims and promises of WFDF and will thus inevitably be thrust into assuming a posture of *in statu confessionis* of some sort, likely without any clear understanding of what that means in this situation or what implications or consequences it might have on "the way forward." We pledge our heartfelt



WAY FORWARD Detailed Framework

Prepared for Convention of General Synod 2024

Approved for publication in the Book of Reports
by General Church Board and College of Bishops
19 July 2024



Way Forward Detailed Framework



1. Table of contents

1.	Table of contents	2
2.	Introduction	3
3.	Background	4
3.1.	The impasse on ordination	4
3.2.	Towards a way forward – the General Synod resolution	5
3.3.	Development of the framework	5
3.4.	Biblical and theological references	6
3.5.	Reasons for hope	7
4.	Framework overview	8
5.	Framework Part A: Commitment to continuity of identity and form	9
6.	Framework Part B: Changing the teaching to allow for ordination of women and men	10
7.	Framework Part C: Commitments to pastors and pastoral ministry candidates	14
8.	Framework Part D: Commitments to congregations and parishes	16
9.	Framework Part E: Tenure-based provision for nomination for bishop	21
10.	Other considerations	22
10.1.	Oversight of bishops	22
10.2.	Synods and Pastors Conferences	22
10.3.	District considerations	22
10.4.	Churchwide considerations	24
11.	Framework implementation	38
12.	Matters for proposals	39
12.1.	Theses of Agreement	39
12.2.	LCA constitution and by-laws	40
12.3.	District constitutions and by-laws (if any)	44
12.4.	Model constitutions and by-laws for a congregation and parish (if any)	45
Appendix 1.	DSTO 1A Theses of Agreement, The status of the Theses of Agreement and other doctrinal statements, CICR, 1975	47
Appendix 2.	DSTO 1A Theses of Agreement, The permanent status of Theses of Agreement, CICR, 1976	48
Appendix 3.	DSTO 1A Theses of Agreement, I: Principles governing church fellowship	49

Page 2 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



3. Background

3.1. The impasse on ordination

At the foundation of the Lutheran Church of Australia ('LCA' or 'Church') in 1966, the newly formed LCA contended that 1 Corinthians 14:34,35 and 1 Timothy 2:11–14 speak about the leadership of women in public worship and that these passages prohibit a woman from being called into the office of the public ministry for the proclamation of the Word and administration of the Sacraments [Theses of Agreement [TA] VI:11].

Since then, despite more than three decades of thorough scriptural, confessional and prayerful examination, and theological debate regarding these passages, we remain divided on the questions of whether: (a) the command for the silence of women and the prohibition of them speaking/teaching in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 and 1 Timothy 2:11–15 applies to all churches at all times; and (b) Paul's declaration about the Lord's command in 1 Corinthians 14:37 refers to the one same prohibition in 1 Corinthians 14:34, and whether Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 14:38 applies to those who advocate the ordination of women.

Some among us maintain that these Scriptures clearly support the LCA's public teaching that prohibits a woman from being called into the office of the public ministry. Others believe that these passages cannot be used this way and that ordination of women to the office of the public ministry is consistent with the teaching of the Scriptures and with the doctrine of the ministry as articulated in the Lutheran Confessions.

At all five Conventions of General Synod at which a proposal on this matter has been put, more than 50 per cent of delegates have voted in favour of the ordination of women, reaching 63.5 per cent of the vote in 2015. For proposals requiring a change to the teaching of the Church, a two-thirds majority is required.

Overall, since the first vote in 2000, the votes for and against the ordination of women have shown little movement one way or the other. There remain two widely held positions on ordination within the LCA, that of: (1) men only, and (2) both men and women. We are at an impasse. It is clear that resolution of the ordination issue requires a different approach to any taken previously.

In its advice to General Synod, General Pastors Conference (GPC) 2022 said it 'supports the advice of the College of Bishops that the agenda of General Synod 2023 must include proposals on the matter of ordination which do not continue debate which leaves us divided'. GPC further advised that General Synod consider a proposal that anticipates the ordination of women to the office of public ministry and also the continuity of the ordination of men-only in communities of the LCA.

Subsequently, at the in-person sessions of the 2021–23 Convention of General Synod, a strong majority (73.5 per cent) of delegates directed GCB–CoB to find a way for the LCA to operate as one church with two practices of ordination.

Page 4 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



2. Introduction

- Impasse:** Despite more than three decades of theological study and debate within the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand (LCANZ)¹, we remain divided on whether or not the Scriptures permit the ordination of women. There remain two widely held views on ordination within the Church.
- Towards a way forward:** At the 2023 in-person sessions of the 2021–23 Convention of General Synod, delegates voted by a strong majority to direct General Church Board and College of Bishops (GCB–CoB) to find a way for us to operate as 'one church with two different practices of ordination' and to report back with a detailed framework to the 2024 General Pastors Conference and General Synod. The Way Forward project appointed by GCB–CoB has diligently worked through the theological, constitutional and governance requirements to allow this directive to be accomplished.
- The framework:** The Way Forward Detailed Framework (Framework) offers an approach whereto both practices of ordination can exist within the LCA. The Framework has five key parts:
 - Part A: The Church makes the commitment to maintain its identity and form.
 - Part B: The Church changes its teaching to allow for the ordination of women and men.
 - Part C: The Church makes a commitment to pastors and pastoral ministry candidates that they will continue to be received and welcomed by the whole church in a respectful environment.
 - Part D: The Church makes a commitment to congregations and parishes that they may call a pastor who best aligns with their ministry plans.
 - Part E: The Church introduces a tenure-based provision for nomination for the roles of bishop and assistant bishop.
- Implementation:** The Framework offers practical solutions and steps to implement the changes required to introduce the ordination of women in the LCA. Attention is given to what changes might be required by congregations, parishes and District and Churchwide agencies. The Framework also articulates the many areas of church life in which no changes are required. Fundamental principles of the implementation processes include respect for all pastors and people of the Church, and a churchwide program of pastoral care.
- Proposals:** The Framework includes the proposals to be put to General Synod 2024 developed in response to the resolution of the 2021–23 General Synod.
- Commitments of the Church:** In working through all these issues, the Church commits to respectful dialogue and pastoral care in the gatherings of the Church. In particular, the Church commits to continued study of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, acknowledging the divergent views of the role and service of women in the Church are upheld by faithful sister and brothers in Christ. Moreover, the Church will always provide for concerns of conscience when providing for the official public worship gatherings in the life of the Church.

¹ The Lutheran Church of Australia and the Lutheran Church of New Zealand are commonly referred to as the Lutheran Church of Australia & New Zealand ('LCANZ' or 'Church'). To align with the Constitution, however, further references to the Church in this document will be 'LCA'.

Page 3 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



3.2. Towards a way forward – the General Synod resolution

The resolution of the 2021–23 General Synod reads:

RESOLVED: That General Synod direct the LCANZ General Church Board and the College of Bishops to:

a) Work through the theological, constitutional, and governance requirements to operate as one church with two different practices of ordination and establish a detailed framework through which this could be accomplished, such as one or more existing LCANZ Districts becoming Districts that teach and practice the ordination of both women and men to the office of the public ministry or by establishing a non-geographical LCANZ 'District' that does so.

b) Submit the fruit of this work in the form of a proposal that should be discussed by the LCANZ General Pastors Conference for Convention of General Synod 2024.

c) It is the expectation of this General Convention of Synod that both women and men will be ordained in a District of the LCANZ during the 2024–2027 synodical period.

3.3. Development of the framework

3.3.1 Initial three frameworks

In June 2023 the Way Forward project issued a churchwide call for models that might meet the requirements of the General Synod resolution. More than 60 models, as well as general comments, were submitted for evaluation by the working groups.

A key criterion for evaluation was the extent to which the submissions met the intent of the General Synod resolution for 'one church with two different practices of ordination'. Three frameworks (Confessional Communities, Congregations Decide, District Alignment) were shortlisted by a process drawing on input from the chairpersons of the project working groups.

The three frameworks were developed for release to the church for feedback. Members of the church were invited to submit comments and questions via the Way Forward website. More than 460 comments and questions were received, including 270 submissions. Around 20 per cent of the submissions were provided by congregations that gathered especially to consider and pray about the frameworks. All submissions from the church were passed on to the working groups. An extensive set of questions and answers was developed for the information of members and to assist the working groups to shape the final framework.

Some key points in the feedback included:

- A strong call to maintain the unity of the church was the primary theme of the submissions, with responders overwhelmingly naming Congregations Decide as

Page 5 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



providing the best chance of achieving this outcome. Conversely, fewer than 4 per cent of responses called for the church to separate by 'peaceful dismissal'.

- Pastoral considerations were raised, including caring for: (a) people across the church experiencing anxiety and pain over this issue; (b) women who may become candidates for the public ministry and subsequently pastors; and (c) people whose consciences differ from the majority view (in LCA, congregation, family) on the ordination of women.

3.3.2 Way Forward Framework

The working groups took into account the feedback from the church on each of the three frameworks as they developed what was to be the final framework, called the Way Forward Framework. The Theological, Constitution and Governance working groups assessed how each framework could be adapted to allow the members of the church to continue to live and worship in fellowship with each other in a manner that caused minimal disruption to congregations.

Ultimately, GCB-CoB asked the Way Forward project team to develop a framework that addresses the change of teaching, preserves the key positive elements of each of the three original frameworks, and introduces features that reflect the approach to church fellowship being asked for by the church and the advice of the working groups.

At its April 2024 meeting, GCB-CoB approved the Way Forward Framework for release to the church for discussion and feedback. The framework included for the first time the concept of a 'Conference' to provide a theological-pastoral place for pastors and members who uphold the practice of male-only ordination.

Responses from the church included significant concerns that the Conference would not achieve the aims it was designed for. In May 2024, GCB-CoB resolved to remove the Conference component from the proposed framework, and directed the Theological, Constitutional and Governance working groups to develop an alternative mechanism by which the LCA might operate as one church with two practices of ordination.

The fruit of this work was received by GCB-CoB at its July 2024 meeting. The revised and detailed Framework was approved for publication in the General Synod Book of Reports.

3.4. Biblical and theological references

In February 2024, the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations (CTICR), it was noted that much work had already been undertaken at previous meetings, on addressing the biblical and theological basis for the ordination of both women and men. It was determined that key historical documents from the CTICR be re-released with the Framework for the Church. These key documents are:

- 1991, *The Ordination of Women*, Special Committee to the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations, Lutheran Church of Australia

Page 6 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



4. Framework overview

The Framework recognises the different theological beliefs on ordination held by members of the Church, that on the matter of the ordination of both women and men to the office of the public ministry, the current male-only teaching of the Church does not accommodate the different theological beliefs held by members of the Church. These differences are:

- that criteria for the ordination of a pastoral candidate does not include the candidate's gender (male/female) and that both male and female pastors can serve as pastors in the Church; and
- that criteria for the ordination of a pastoral candidate includes the candidate's gender (male/female), limiting ordination to men, and hence only men can serve as pastors in the Church.

In fulfilment of the resolution of the 2021-23 General Synod, the Framework offers an approach whereby both practices can exist within the Church. The Framework has five key parts:

Part A: The Church makes the commitment to maintain its identity and form.

Part B: The Church changes its teaching to allow for the ordination of women and men.

Part C: The Church makes a commitment to pastors and pastoral ministry candidates that they will continue to be received and welcomed by the whole church in a respectful environment.

Part D: The Church makes a commitment to congregations and parishes that they may call a pastor who best aligns with their ministry plans.

Part E: The Church introduces a tenure-based provision for nomination for the roles of bishop and assistant bishop.

Page 8 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



- 2000, *The Final Report of the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations on the Ordination of Women*, CTICR, Lutheran Church of Australia
- 2004, *Controversial matters in the LCA Debate on the Ordination of Women*, CTICR, Lutheran Church of Australia
- 2005, *1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 permit the ordination of women*, CTICR, Lutheran Church of Australia
- 2018, *A Theological Basis for the Ordination of Women and Men*, CTICR, Lutheran Church of Australia

3.5. Reasons for hope

In bringing this proposal to the 2024 General Synod, the members of GCB-CoB acknowledge that the Framework may not be welcomed by everyone in the Church. They do, however, expect that it will provide a clear and helpful way forward for the majority of members. It acknowledges the division within the Church on the matter of ordination and the desire to bring this matter to a conclusion.

Importantly, while the Framework acknowledges the division among us, it also articulates the strong theological foundations on which we agree (see Section 5).

Like no other previous proposal for the ordination of women, this proposal is the result of 18 months of intensive prayerful work by brothers and sisters in Christ with expertise in the fields of theology, governance, constitutions and pastoral care, among others. Moreover, the Framework reflects the feedback of many hundreds of church members, holding different views on ordination, who responded to churchwide calls for feedback. Based on that feedback, iterations of the framework were developed and improved on.

As required by the delegates of the 2021-23 General Synod, the Framework provides details of how this way forward might operate in practical ways, so that people holding either view on ordination might remain together.

In jointly submitting the Way Forward Detailed Framework to General Synod, GCB and CoB complete the work asked of them by delegates gathered in the face-to-face sessions of the 2021-23 General Synod in February 2023. Those delegates called for a framework through which we can work, witness and worship side by side in the cause of the gospel of our Lord, while providing for the different understandings of some parts of Scripture among us.

Our Lord has promised, 'I will build my church' (Matt 16).

Page 7 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



5. Framework Part A: Commitment to continuity of identity and form

The Church makes the commitment to maintain its identity and form.

- We uphold our teaching on the Office of Ministry as expressed in Theses of Agreement (TA) VI:1-10 and confessed in Augsburg Confession (AC) V: 'To obtain such faith God instituted the Office of preaching, giving the gospel and the Sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel' (1-3).
- We uphold Clause 7 of our Document of Union as a key guiding principle: 'We declare that wherever continued cooperation in the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments and worship exists, there we have a witness to the world of unity in the faith and a profession of church fellowship'.
- The Church maintains its Churchwide, District, zone, parish, congregational and auxiliary structures, as expressed in its constitution and by-laws.
- The Church maintains its membership model, in which congregations are members of the Church and individuals are members of a congregation.
- The Church continues to uphold its ecumenical and international relationships.

Page 9 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



6. Framework Part B: Changing the teaching to allow for ordination of women and men

The Church in Synod changes its public teaching, amending the wording of TA VI:11 to allow both men and women to be ordained, acknowledging the change under Clause 3 of the Document of Union and continuing as one church with one teaching on ordination.

The Framework acknowledges the different theological positions on the gender (male and female) of pastors in the Church but considers them non-divisive of church fellowship, enabling the LCA to remain as one Church.

6.1 Proposed amendment to TAVI:11

A baptised person who is duly called (Luke 10:16; AC Apology 7 and 8,28; TA VI:7,8) thereby enters the office of the public ministry for the proclamation of the Word and administration of the Sacraments. Scripture that underpins the Church's teaching on the office of the ministry and the rite of ordination (John 20:21-23; Matt 28:18-20; 1 Cor 11:23-26) applies to duly qualified called baptised persons although some understand that 1 Corinthians 14:34,35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 prohibit baptised women from being called into the office of the public ministry.

6.2 Background to the proposed amendment to TAVI:11

1. The resolution of General Synod (2021-23) directed the GCB-CoB to develop a framework for the LCA to 'operate as one church with two different practices of ordination'. Subsequently, the Way Forward Theological Working Group² consulted the CTICR to examine and either confirm or amend guidance to be given to the Way Forward project on some key theological matters. Included in this consultation was the question: 'How would the Church properly proceed with changing its teaching with respect to TA VI:11 in the light of the Church's statements on "The status of the Theses of Agreement and other doctrinal statements" (1975), and "The permanent status of Theses of Agreement" (1976)?'
2. This document and selected attachments provide theological and procedural advice relating to proposed changes to the Theses of Agreement and LCA public teaching on ordination as outlined in the Framework. This advice includes information about both the necessity for these changes and how discussion on change to the Church's teaching might be treated in an orderly manner by the LCA.
3. Selected documents have been identified by the Theological Working Group to be included with this advice. This material serves as a summary and evidence of long, thorough theological discussion and debate in the LCA, including controverted matters of the Church's teaching on ordination (see Section 3.4 above)

² The Theological Working Group, appointed by GCB-CoB, consisted of seven members. Five of these members were current members of CTICR, including the Churchwide bishop, who was appointed as chair.



Way Forward Detailed Framework



- (iii) such divergent views in no wise impair, infringe upon, or violate the central doctrine of Holy Scripture, justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ
- (iv) nothing be taught contrary to the *publica doctrina* of the Lutheran Church as laid down in its Confessions
- (v) such divergent views are not propagated as the *publica doctrina* of the Church and in no wise impair the doctrine of Holy Writ.

The Way Forward Framework proposal to amend TA VI:11 that then would permit the ordination of women and men, cites both scripture and confession — including 'Principles governing church fellowship' detailed in the Document of Union and Theses of Agreement (DU 1-7; TA 1:1-7) — in support of its conclusion that divergent views on the practice of ordination, arising from differences of interpretation regarding scriptural texts, such as 1 Cor 14:33b-38 and 1 Tim 2:11-15, can be held in the LCA without dividing the whole Church (TA 1:4c; 1:4e).

Following a General Synod 2024 vote on the Way Forward Framework proposal to amend TA VI:11, that meets the constitutional requirements to change the teaching of the church, those who in good conscience wish to uphold an interpretation of the scriptural texts currently cited in TA VI:11, and maintain the option for congregations to call and ordain only men into the office of the public ministry, would be free to remain in fellowship with those who practice the call and ordination of both women and men.

6.4 Church fellowship

6.4.1 Theses of Agreement 1.4E

At its February 2024 meeting the CTICR considered the application of Theses of Agreement TA 1.4e to any proposed amending of TA VI:11. The meeting determined that one part of the Theses of Agreement (TA) cannot be used to amend another part of the TA.

In the same way, an amendment of TA VI:11 adopted by the Church, will become the credible teaching of the LCA and is afforded the same authority as any other part⁴. TA 1.4e cannot be applied to refute a newly introduced amendment of TA VI:11.

The principles of church fellowship articulated in the Theses, guide the approach to determining doctrinal matters in the Church. These principles have guided the Church's consideration of this matter of ordination in the same way that they have guided previous considerations in the Church (for example, the debate on Scripture and Inerrancy at the 1984 Convention of General Synod).

6.4.2 Church-divisive?

In 2018, the Convention of General Synod received a report from the CTICR which gave a theological basis for why the ordination of both women and men need not be divisive. The rationale included the following:

⁴ See Appendix for DSTO Vol 1 A30 'The status of the Theses of Agreement and other doctrinal statements'



Way Forward Detailed Framework



6.3 One church – two practices

The question of the ordination of women to the office of the public ministry has been regarded as a doctrinal matter in the life of the LCA. It is a doctrinal issue for the LCA because our public teaching on ordination claims to clearly represent the position of Scripture and the Confessions. Therefore, all arguments either to maintain the teaching of the Church or to change it, need to work within the LCA's own attitude towards the Theses of Agreement and the process outlined for changing the public teaching of the church (*The Status of the Theses of Agreement* [1975] and *The Permanent Status of the Theses of Agreement* [1976]).

The LCA doctrinal statement on the *Status of the Theses of Agreement and other Doctrinal Statements*, adopted by General Synod (1975) affirms as follows: 'It is clearly the right and the duty of the Church, in the face of current challenges, to define how it understands the Scriptures and the Confessions. Therefore, explanations and amendments of the Theses, as well as any other statements of a doctrinal nature, submitted to the entire Church after thorough theological examination and discussion and adopted by it, must be accorded the same authority in the Church as the Theses themselves.'

The current public teaching of the LCA does not permit two practices of ordination (TA VI:11). In carrying out the resolution of General Synod (2021-23) to develop a framework for the LCA to 'operate as one church with two different practices of ordination', the Convention of General Synod is advised that any proposal put forward to meet this synodical resolution requires a change to the teaching of the Church with regards to male-only ordination.

A change to public teaching in the LCA regarding ordination will require more than a simple rescinding or removal of TA VI:11. Any such decision would result in the Church having no clear public teaching on the eligibility of duly qualified women to be regularly called by a congregation or the Church, and publicly acknowledged through the rite of ordination (TA VI:7,8). On the other hand, if a proposed amendment of TA VI:11 to permit the ordination of women and men were to meet the necessary constitutional requirement to change the public doctrine of the church, then it would become the credible teaching of the LCA and would be afforded the same authority as any other part of the Theses of Agreement³.

What could follow from such a scenario is that TA 1:4e might then be applied to the Way Forward Framework proposal to operate as one church with divergent views on the practice of ordination. Some congregations, bishops, pastors, and individual members may still feel conscience bound to uphold an interpretation of the scriptural texts currently cited in TA VI:11, and regularly call qualified men to serve as pastors. According to the Theses of Agreement (1:4e), such divergent views and practices arising from differences of interpretation are not divisive of church fellowship, providing that:

- (i) there be the readiness in principle to submit to the authority of the Word of God
- (ii) thereby no clear Word of Scripture is denied, contradicted, or ignored

³ DSTO 1A: Status of the Theses of Agreement and other doctrinal statements A25



Way Forward Detailed Framework



1. Divergent views should not affect a foundational teaching of the Christian faith, such as the teaching of the Trinity, the person and work of Christ, or justification by grace through faith in Christ, as these teachings are articulated in the Book of Concord. Division may occur only when teachings that contradict such foundational teachings are held and openly taught.
2. The ongoing disagreement about the interpretation and application of the two texts that have been at the centre of the LCA debate (1 Cor 14:33b-36; 1 Tim 2:11-15) is a matter of exegetical opinion, does not affect such a key church teaching and is therefore not church divisive.
3. The Lutheran doctrine of the ministry, clearly spelled out in Augsburg Confession 5 and 14, contains nothing that excludes women from entering the ranks of the ministry. On the contrary, the Lutheran teaching on the ministry undergirds and reaffirms the central teaching of the Scriptures, that we are justified by God's grace for Christ's sake by faith alone, the very teaching by which the Church lives and breathes.
4. The Theses of Agreement themselves make it clear that, as new issues and new questions arise, the Church has the liberty to examine its teachings afresh in the light of the Scriptures and the Confessions, 'and accordingly confirm them, or amend or repudiate them when further study of God's Word shows them to be inadequate or in error'.
5. Pastors and lay members uphold the official teachings and practices of the LCA as a matter of good order and church discipline, including those teachings with which they disagree. Their consciences are not bound to confess those teachings that they believe are at variance with the biblical witness.
6. There are implications in a church which practises the ordination of 'both women and men' and the ordination of 'men only' for church polity and for people's reception of the means of grace within the worship life of the Church. The Church has a responsibility to engage in the ongoing task of addressing this in such a way that the ministry of the gospel is not hindered, Christian love is upheld, and every effort is made 'to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (Eph 4:3).



Way Forward Detailed Framework



7. Framework Part C: Commitments to pastors and pastoral ministry candidates

The Church makes a commitment to pastors that they will continue to be received and welcomed in a respectful environment.

1. Every pastor will be afforded a respectful environment, free from discrimination and harassment.
2. All current pastoral calls will remain unchanged.
3. There will be common candidacy requirements and call procedures for male and female pastors.
4. There will be prompt resourcing, under the oversight of CoB, to provide ongoing pastoral care and support to all pastors with issues that may arise from the introduction of female pastors to the LCA pastorate.
5. Any pastor on the Roll of Pastors is eligible to be elected or appointed into any pastoral position of the Church, including leadership roles such as bishop.

7.1 Conscience views

Our commitment is that every pastor in the Church will be received and welcomed by the whole Church in an environment of mutual respect and understanding, where differing consciences are acknowledged while ensuring that harmful behavior is not tolerated.

In support of this, the LCA offers the following commitments to pastors:

1. Welcoming environment: Every pastor will be received and welcomed by the entire Church, ensuring a respectful environment, such as being free from discrimination and harassment as they serve in the work of their call.
2. Ongoing support: The College of Bishops will promptly provide resources and support to pastors dealing with issues related to the introduction of female pastors.
3. Pastoral calls unchanged: Existing pastoral calls will remain unaffected.

When pastors hold differing views on women's ordination compared with their congregation, fostering open dialogue and mutual respect is crucial. The following guidelines might be helpful:

1. Encourage respectful conversations and active listening to assist in understanding the perspectives of others.
2. Pastors can lead by example, demonstrating respect for differing views.
3. Focus on shared goals and mission.
4. Ensure that pastoral care extends to all members, including the pastor.
5. Consider asking the District bishop for support.

7.2 Call process

The Church commits to pastors that their existing pastoral calls will remain unchanged.

Page 14 of 30



Way Forward Detailed Framework



8. Framework Part D: Commitments to congregations and parishes

The Church makes commitments to congregations and parishes, including the following:

- a) The constitutional acknowledgement of the right of a congregation to call a pastor who best aligns with its ministry plans
- b) The constitutional acknowledgement of the right of a congregation and parish to stipulate that only male pastors be included as candidates for its call list
- c) The resourcing of ongoing support to congregations to address issues that may arise from introducing female pastors into the LCA pastorate
- d) CoB to provide oversight, guidance and consistency of the pastoral support provided through the District bishops
- e) The mutual understanding that should the District bishop or the bishop of the Church be female, the congregations may request a male pastor to be deputised for oversight
- f) The Church's statement 'Responsible Communion Practice' continues to guide the Church's communities in their provision of the sacrament of the altar.

8.1 Conscience views

Individuals, congregations and parishes within the Church may hold differing beliefs on the issue of women's ordination, including cases where pastors hold different views than members of their congregations. We affirm the right to hold diverse perspectives while making a commitment that every pastor in the Church will be received and welcomed by the whole church in an environment of respect, understanding and unity. We commit to treating one another with kindness, even when our convictions differ, and to uphold the values of love, compassion and mutual support.

In support of this, the LCA offers the following commitments to congregations:

1. Congregations have the constitutional right to call pastors aligned with their ministry plans.
2. Congregations may stipulate that only male pastors are included as candidates for their call lists.
3. Ongoing support will be provided to address issues relating to introducing female pastors.
4. CoB will offer oversight and guidance through District bishops.
5. If the District bishop or Churchwide bishop is female, congregations may request that a male bishop or another pastor be deputised for oversight.

Page 16 of 30



Way Forward Detailed Framework



The Framework provides constitutional acknowledgement for a congregation to call a pastor who best aligns with its ministry plans by permitting both situations outlined below during the call process:

- the inclusion of male and female candidates for consideration on congregational call lists; and
- congregations and parishes stipulate that only male pastors be included as candidates for their call.

The Framework does not impose any requirements for pastors to affirm or disclose (publicly or privately) their views on women's ordination.

The Framework allows for the freedom of movement of duly qualified women and men pastors between calling bodies of the LCA.

7.3 Worship

There are matters that will need to be worked through in the 2024-2027 synodical period to address when pastors gather for conference and worship at local, District or Churchwide levels. These include: the recognition of ordination validity (pastors should acknowledge that pastors and bishops may hold different views on the validity of ordination, especially when it comes to female pastors); sacrament presiding and validity (the organiser of gatherings should provide for clarity on sacrament administration for conferences).

Page 15 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



Congregations and their members will not be required to:

- adopt a specific conscience view or belief
- explain or defend their position regarding women's ordination.

8.2 Call process

The Way Forward Framework proposes that congregations have the right to call a pastor who best aligns with their ministry plans. The congregation may choose whether to call a male or female pastoral candidate.

If the congregation discerns through prayer, interviews and conversations that it is not ready to include a female pastoral candidate, the congregation will be granted the right to stipulate that only male pastors be included as candidates for its call list.

The congregation may also receive support from the District throughout this process.

8.3 Worship

The Church's statement 'Responsible Communion Practice' 3 continues to guide the Church's communities in their provision of the Sacrament of the Altar.

8.4 Membership

The Framework does not require changes to the definition of membership in Article 5 of the LCA model constitutions for parishes and congregations.

Individuals (baptised, confirmed, communing, guest and voting members) continue to remain as members of their respective congregations in accordance with the constitution of their congregation.

8.5 Constitution

The changes to the LCA model constitutions outlined in this section are recommended for parishes and congregations wishing to call male or female pastors.

Further details about implementation can be found in Section 11:11 Framework implementation.

This approach respects the autonomy of individual congregations while encouraging alignment with the wider church where possible. It also maintains the proper distinction between Church by-laws and congregation-specific constitutions.

The following changes to remove gender references from the Model Constitution for a Congregation are proposed:

Page 17 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



Paragraph	From	To
6.2	The Pastor of the Congregation shall be a man whose soundness in faith, aptness to teach, and other qualifications for office have been examined and approved by the Church in accordance with the Scriptures and Confessions of the Church regarding the public office of the ministry.	Add a notation to Article 6.2 of the model constitution. The Pastor of the Congregation shall be a man ¹ whose soundness in faith, aptness to teach, and other qualifications for office have been examined and approved by the Church in accordance with the Scriptures and Confessions of the Church regarding the public office of the ministry. ¹ Congregations may modify this article to include 'or woman'.
9.3.1	The Pastor, by virtue of his office, shall attend all meetings of the Church Council.	Replace 'his' with 'the': The Pastor, by virtue of the office, shall attend all meetings of the Church Council.
9.6.14	The Pastor, by virtue of his office, shall have the right to attend all meetings of the committees.	Replace 'his' with 'the': The Pastor, by virtue of the office, shall have the right to attend all meetings of the committees.
9.9.5	The pastoral assistants shall assist the Pastor in his ministry and for this purpose they shall concern themselves with the spiritual life of the Congregation and its members by...	Remove 'his': The pastoral assistants shall assist the Pastor in his ministry and for this purpose they shall concern themselves with the spiritual life of the Congregation and its members by...



Way Forward Detailed Framework



8.6 Relationships

The Framework does not require changes to the relationship between parishes and congregations with either the Church or the District.

Parishes and congregations will continue to follow the rules outlined in their own constitution regarding relationships. Article 3 of the LCA Model Constitutions for parishes and congregations outlines the relationship to the Church and the District.

A multi-point parish may have congregations which hold differing views on women's ordination. During the call process, it will be important to foster open dialogue and mutual respect. The following guidelines might be helpful:

1. Encourage congregations to engage in respectful conversations and active listening to assist in understanding the perspectives of others.
2. Pastors can lead by example, demonstrating respect for differing views.
3. Focus on shared goals and mission.
4. Ensure that pastoral care extends to all members.
5. Consider asking the District bishop for support.

8.7 Governance and structures

The Framework does not require changes to the governance structure of congregations or parishes.

8.8 Finance and risk management

The Framework does not require changes to the operating finances or asset/liability ownership of congregations or parishes.



Way Forward Detailed Framework



The following changes to remove gender references from the Model Constitution for a Parish are proposed:

Paragraph	From	To
Footnote #2, para 5	Individual congregations should expect to have the services of the pastor and his time relative to the number of members in the congregation compared to the total number of members in all the congregations in the parish.	Add a notation to Footnote #2, para 5 of the model constitution, and correct spelling: Individual congregations should expect to have the services of the pastor and his ¹ time relative to the number of members in the congregation compared to the total number of members in all the congregations in the parish. ¹ Parishes may modify this article to include 'or her'.
6.2	The Pastor of the Parish shall be a man whose soundness in faith, aptness to teach, and other qualifications for office have been examined and approved by the Church in accordance with the Scriptures and Confessions of the Church regarding the public office of the ministry.	Add a notation to Article 6.2 of the model constitution. The Pastor of the Parish shall be a man ¹ whose soundness in faith, aptness to teach, and other qualifications for office have been examined and approved by the Church in accordance with the Scriptures and Confessions of the Church regarding the public office of the ministry. ¹ Parishes may modify this article to include 'or woman'.
9.3.1	The Pastor, by virtue of his office, shall attend all meetings of the Parish Council.	Replace 'his' with 'the': The Pastor, by virtue of the office, shall attend all meetings of the Parish Council.
9.6.12	The Pastor, by virtue of his office, shall have the right to attend all meetings of the committees.	Replace 'his' with 'the': The Pastor, by virtue of the office, shall have the right to attend all meetings of the committees.



Way Forward Detailed Framework



9. Framework Part E: Tenure-based provision for nomination for bishop

The Church introduces a tenure-based provision for nomination for the role of bishop and assistant bishop(s).

The Framework introduces into the constitution of the LCA provisions that require pastors to have been on the Roll of Pastors for a minimum period and served in various settings in the Church prior to their nomination for any bishop role within the LCA.

It is proposed that the minimum required service on the Roll of Pastors be six years (being two general synodical periods) before being eligible to stand for nomination.

The rationale for the criteria are to ensure that nominees for both bishop and assistant bishop(s) have:

- i. demonstrated exemplary conduct in their pastoral ministry
- ii. established themselves in the life and polity of the Church (including at Conventions of Synod and Pastors Conferences)
- iii. gained substantial experience in addressing the challenges and responsibilities of church leadership
- iv. had sufficient opportunity to interact with and become known to pastors, laity, and bishops throughout the LCA
- v. established themselves as recognised leaders by their peers
- vi. shown an ability to manage pressure, exercise authority responsibly and navigate complex pastoral situations
- vii. developed a deep understanding of the LCA's mission, theology, values, governance and operational structures.



Way Forward Detailed Framework



10. Other considerations

10.1. Oversight of bishops

In the Lutheran Church of Australia, pastors vow to uphold the public teaching of the LCA and promise to accept pastoral and doctrinal oversight of their bishop at their ordination. Pastors reaffirm their vows upon installation into subsequent ministries. This practice ensures that pastors remain committed to upholding the public teaching of the LCA.

Under this Framework, the Church introduces a tenure-based provision for nomination for the role of bishop and assistant bishop(s). Refer to Part E for further information.

10.2. Conventions of Synod and Pastors Conferences

The Framework does not require changes to the governance arrangements of the LCA, including its District and General Synods. The processes regarding the election or appointment of delegates, both lay and pastor, continue unchanged. The entitlement to submit proposals is unchanged.

The Framework does not propose any changes to the duties and role of Pastors Conferences.

10.3. District considerations

10.3.1 Constitution

The following change to the constitution of Districts, in the By-laws of the Church, is proposed to address gender pronouns:

Paragraph	From	To
1.2.12	'pastor' or 'member of the Ministry' means any person ordained to the Holy Ministry according to the rites and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church who has been received into the Ministry of the Church according to Article 5.1;	Replace 'person' with 'man or woman': 'pastor' or 'member of the Ministry' means any man or woman ordained to the Holy Ministry according to the rites and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church who has been received into the Ministry of the Church according to Article 5.1;

Page 22 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



10.3.4 Governance and structures

The Framework does not require changes to governance and organisational structures of Districts.

10.3.5 Finance and risk management

The Framework does not require changes to the operating finances or asset/liability ownership of a District.

10.3.6 Agencies (eg schools and aged-care services)

Under the Framework, an agency that is a calling body may call the pastor who best aligns with its ministry plans.

10.3.7 Auxiliaries

The Framework does not require changes to the operation of District auxiliaries.

10.4. Churchwide considerations

10.4.1 Theses of Agreement

As outlined earlier, the Church changes Theses of Agreement TAVI:11 to allow for the ordination of women and men. Theses of Agreement TAVI: 1, 2, 5, 7 and 8 are updated as part of this change and to make these statements more inclusive.

Section	From	To
VI:11	Though women prophets were used by the Spirit of God in the Old as well as in the New Testament, 1 Cor 14:34,35 and 1 Tim 2:11-14 prohibit a woman from being called into the office of the public ministry for the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. This apostolic rule is binding on all Christendom; hereby her rights as a member of the spiritual priesthood are in no wise impaired.	A baptised person who is duly called (Luke 10:16; AC Apology 7 and 8,28; TA VI:7,8) thereby enters the office of the public ministry for the proclamation of the Word and administration of the Sacraments. Scripture that underpins the Church's teaching on the office of the ministry and the rite of ordination (John 20:21-23; Matt 28:18-20; 1 Cor 11:23-26) applies to duly qualified called baptised persons although some understand that 1 Corinthians 14:34,35 and 1 Tim 2:11-14 prohibit baptised women from being called into the office of the public ministry.

Page 24 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



The following changes to the constitution and by-laws part A of Districts, in the by-laws of the Church are proposed to implement a requirement for pastors to serve a minimum period before eligibility for nomination for bishop or assistant bishop(s):

Paragraph	From	To
Article 8.1	The Officials of the District shall be a Bishop, one or more Assistant Bishops, a Secretary, and a Treasurer. They shall be elected for a term of office determined by the District. The Bishop and Assistant Bishops shall be pastors of the Church in the District.	The Officials of the District shall be a Bishop, one or more Assistant Bishops, a Secretary, and a Treasurer. They shall be elected for a term of office determined by the District. The Bishop and Assistant Bishops shall be pastors of the Church in the District who have served on the LCA Roll of Pastors for at least six [6] years.
7.4.2	All pastors whose names are recorded on the Roll of Pastors of the Church are eligible for the position of Bishop; only pastors of the District are eligible for the position of Assistant Bishop(s) in the District.	All pastors whose names are recorded on the Roll of Pastors of the Church, excluding pastors emeriti , are eligible for the position of Bishop; only pastors of the district are eligible for the position of Assistant Bishop(s) in the District, subject to: 7.4.2.1 Having served on the LCA Roll of Pastors for a minimum of six [6] years prior to nomination. 7.4.2.2 Having served in various settings within the Church, demonstrating breadth of experience and adaptability. 7.4.2.3 The nominations committee verifying that all nominees meet these eligibility requirements before presenting their names for consideration.

10.3.2 Call process

The Framework does not change how the District bishop or delegate guides a congregation or parish in the call process.

10.3.3 Relationships

The Framework does not require changes to relationships between Districts and other entities.

Page 23 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



Section	From	To
VI:1	The New Testament ministry is the office instituted by Christ for the public administration of the means of grace, that is, the preaching of the Gospel and the administering of the Sacraments, through which as through instruments the Holy Ghost works saving faith in the hearts of men. Matt 10; Matt 28:18-20; Luke 9:1,2; 1 Cor 3:5-8; Augsburg Confession V; Form.Conc., Sol.Decl. XI,29.	Replace 'men' with 'people': The New Testament ministry is the office instituted by Christ for the public administration of the means of grace, that is, the preaching of the Gospel and the administering of the Sacraments, through which as through instruments the Holy Ghost works saving faith in the hearts of people . Matt 10; Matt 28:18-20; Luke 9:1,2; 1 Cor 3:5-8; Augsburg Confession V; Form.Conc., Sol.Decl. XI,29.
VI:2	The office of the ministry is therefore an office instituted not by man, but by God. 2 Cor 5:18-20; Eph 4:11; Acts 20:28; Apology XIII,11.	Replace 'man' with 'humans': The office of the ministry is therefore an office instituted not by humans , but by God. 2 Cor 5:18-20; Eph 4:11; Acts 20:28; Apology XIII,11.
VI:3	Since it is Christ's will that His Gospel be preached and the Sacraments administered, and since the use of the means of grace is essential to the existence of the Church on earth, and since according to the Lord's promise the Church on earth is to remain until the end of time, Matt.16:18, the office of the ministry is an office, which is simultaneous with the Church and to which the Church is bound from its beginning to the end of time. Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16; Rom 10:8-17; 1 Cor 1:21; Rom 16:25,26; Augsburg Confessions XXVIII, 8-10, 20,21.	No change

Page 25 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



Section	From	To
Vi:4	Though the power to remit or retain sin, to make known the Law and the Gospel, was originally and immediately given by the Lord of the Church to all Christians, that is, to the whole Church and also to the individual congregation, and though all believers are a spiritual priesthood, yet the office of the ministry is not identical with the spiritual priesthood of all believers in Christ. But there is a vital connection between the two inasmuch as the ministry by the institution of the Lord necessarily exists within the Church which is the royal priesthood and the people of God. Matt 16:15-19; Matt 18:15-20; 1 Pet 2:9; John 20:19-23; Luke 24:33-36; Rev 1:6; 5:10; 1 Cor 12:28,29; Rom 10:15; Smalc. Art., Tract.24, 67-69.	No change

Page 26 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



Section	From	To
Vi:7	'No one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called' (C.A. XIV). The Lord calls individuals into the office of the ministry through the Christian congregations, Acts 13:1-4; and the Christian congregation, either alone or together with other congregations, or through properly appointed representatives, calls qualified persons (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9; 2 Tim 2:24,25; Acts 1:24) into the office of the ministry publicly to exercise the functions of this office. The minister of the Word is thus called by the Lord through His Church, and by the Church as through human agency and authority, but in obedience to the command of the Lord. He is therefore the servant of the Lord Jesus, a minister of the New Testament, a steward of the mysteries of God, called to serve by publicly administering the means of grace. 2 Cor 4:5; Rom 10:15; 2 Cor 5:18; 1 Thess 5:12,13; Augsburg Confession XIV; Apol.VII.28(end of paragraph); Smalc. Act. Tractatus: 14, 15, 24, 26, 67-69.	Replace 'he' with 'they': 'No one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless they be regularly called' (C.A. XIV). The Lord calls individuals into the office of the ministry through the Christian congregations, Acts 13:1-4; and the Christian congregation, either alone or together with other congregations, or through properly appointed representatives, calls qualified persons (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9; 2 Tim 2:24,25; Acts 1:24) into the office of the ministry publicly to exercise the functions of this office. The minister of the Word is thus called by the Lord through His Church, and by the Church as through human agency and authority, but in obedience to the command of the Lord. They are therefore servants of the Lord Jesus, ministers of the New Testament, stewards of the mysteries of God, called to serve by publicly administering the means of grace. 2 Cor 4:5; Rom 10:15; 2 Cor 5:18; 1 Thess 5:12,13; Augsburg Confession XIV; Apol.VII.28(end of paragraph); Smalc. Act. Tractatus: 14, 15, 24, 26, 67-69.

Page 28 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



Section	From	To
Vi:5	The office of the ministry is essentially an office of service to the Lord and His Church with the Word and the Sacraments, which office the ministers of the Church must exercise in obedience to their Lord and the directions given in the Word. Therefore, the office of the ministry does not give to those who bear it, arbitrary power over Christians, nor does it deliver the ministers of the Word up to the arbitrary directions and commands of men. Likewise, it is not a Levitical priesthood of the New Testament (Apol. XIII,7-11; XXIV, 58,59); nor are those who bear it an exclusive class distinct from Christians generally; nor do they possess a peculiar sanctity or an indelible character; nor does the ministry possess the power of self-perpetuation. Matt 23:8-12; 1 Cor 3:5; 4:1,2; 2 Cor 4:5; Col 1:23-25; 1 Pet 5:1-3; Matt 20:25-28; Apol.XXVIII, 13,14; XXII,9; XXIV, 86 (German and English text re Liturgia); Smalc. Art., Pars II, IV, 9; Form.Conc., Sol. Decl. XII, 30; XI, 29.	Replace 'men' with 'people': The office of the ministry is essentially an office of service to the Lord and His Church with the Word and the Sacraments, which office the ministers of the Church must exercise in obedience to their Lord and the directions given in the Word. Therefore, the office of the ministry does not give to those who bear it, arbitrary power over Christians, nor does it deliver the ministers of the Word up to the arbitrary directions and commands of people . Likewise, it is not a Levitical priesthood of the New Testament (Apol. XIII,7-11; XXIV, 58,59); nor are those who bear it an exclusive class distinct from Christians generally; nor do they possess a peculiar sanctity or an indelible character; nor does the ministry possess the power of self-perpetuation. Matt 23:8-12; 1 Cor 3:5; 4:1,2; 2 Cor 4:5; Col 1:23-25; 1 Pet 5:1-3; Matt 20:25-28; Apol.XXVIII, 13,14; XXII,9; XXIV, 86 (German and English text re Liturgia); Smalc. Art., Pars II, IV, 9; Form.Conc., Sol. Decl. XII, 30; XI, 29.
Vi:6	According to the New Testament the spiritual functions of the Apostolate are continued only in the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. Acts 6:1-4; Acts 24:23; Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; Col 4:17; 1 Tim 3:1ff; 5:17; Titus 1:5ff; 1 Pet 5:1; Heb 13:17; Apol.XV, 42 (44); Smalc. Art. Tractatus: 10, 13-15, 60-65; Smalc. Art., Pars II, IV,9; Form. Conc., Sol. Decl. X,10.	No change

Page 27 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



Section	From	To
Vi:8	Ordination, though not a Sacrament, is the solemn ecclesiastical rite in which a duly qualified person (1 Tim 3:2-7); Titus 1:5-9), having accepted a call by a congregation or the Church, is received by the Church as a gift from the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 4:11; Titus 1:5) and publicly declared to be a minister of the New Testament, his call thereby being ratified and publicly acknowledged, and the blessing of the Lord is invoked upon him with the laying on of hands. The laying on of hands is an old and biblical rite, but it has no divine command and is not essential for the validity and efficacy of the office. Acts 6:6; 8:17; 13:3; 1 Tim 5:22; 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; Num 27:18; Smalc. Art. Tractatus 70.	Replace 'his' or 'him' with 'their' or 'them': Ordination, though not a Sacrament, is the solemn ecclesiastical rite in which a duly qualified person (1 Tim 3:2-7); Titus 1:5-9), having accepted a call by a congregation or the Church, is received by the Church as a gift from the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 4:11; Titus 1:5) and publicly declared to be a minister of the New Testament, their call thereby being ratified and publicly acknowledged, and the blessing of the Lord is invoked upon them with the laying on of hands. The laying on of hands is an old and biblical rite, but it has no divine command and is not essential for the validity and efficacy of the office. Acts 6:6; 8:17; 13:3; 1 Tim 5:22; 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; Num 27:18; Smalc. Art. Tractatus 70.
Vi:9	Although the office of the ministry is the only office ordained by Christ for His Church of the New Testament, yet the Christian congregation has the authority to establish auxiliary offices (elders, deacons, teachers, Sunday-school teachers and superintendents, trustees, wardens, etc.) after the example of the apostles and the early Christian Church (eg. diaconate). Acts 6:6; Rom 16:1.	No change

Page 29 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



Section	From	To
VI:10	Similarly, the Church at large has the liberty and authority from Christ to establish various ecclesiastical and administrative offices for the common prosecution of various undertakings in obedience to the Lord's command to make disciples of all nations. 1 Cor 12:4-13, 26-28; Acts 11:21-23. This necessitates proper guidance and direction, spiritual and otherwise, 1 Cor 14:40; 2 Cor 8:18-21; 9:5, because the Lord has commanded that everything be done decently and in order and in accordance with the law of love. Such arrangements may vary according to time and circumstances. All external arrangements in congregations and in church bodies and all ranking of the ministers are purely of human right and the efficacy of the ministry of the Gospel is not bound to any human institution. Matt 23:8; 1 Cor 3:21-23; Augsburg Confession XV; XXVIII, 5-29; Smalc. Art. Tractatus:10, 11, 61-65.	No change

10.4.2 Constitution

The following changes to the LCA Constitution are proposed to address gender pronouns:

Paragraph	From	To
1.2.1.1	'pastor' or 'member of the Ministry' means any person ordained to the Holy Ministry according to the rites and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church who has been received into the Ministry of the Church according to Article 5.1;	Replace 'person' with 'man or woman'; 'pastor' or 'member of the Ministry' means any man or woman ordained to the Holy Ministry according to the rites and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church who has been received into the Ministry of the Church according to Article 5.1;

Page 30 of 30



Way Forward Detailed Framework



Paragraph	From	To
5.4.1.5	parishes which for many years have been blessed through the talents of their pastor do not selfishly seek to prevent him from rendering similar service in another field.	Add 'or her': parishes which for many years have been blessed through the talents of their pastor do not selfishly seek to prevent him or her from rendering similar service in another field.
5.4.4	The relationship between a pastor and the Church, District, parish, congregation or other body the call of which he has accepted is personal, spiritual and sacred and is not intended to create any legal relationship or any employment relationship between the pastor and any member of any part of the Church.	Add 'or she': The relationship between a pastor and the Church, District, parish, congregation or other body the call of which he or she has accepted is personal, spiritual and sacred and is not intended to create any legal relationship or any employment relationship between the pastor and any member of any part of the Church.
5.4.16.2.3.1	the pastor has a serious physical or mental disability which substantially impedes the effectiveness of his ministry; or	Add 'or her': the pastor has a serious physical or mental disability which substantially impedes the effectiveness of his or her ministry; or
5.4.16.3.1	A relevant Bishop shall arrange a fraternal discussion of the situation between the pastor, the governing committee, himself and any other person he considers appropriate in an endeavour to achieve a peaceable resolution of it.	Add '- or herself' and 'or she': A relevant Bishop shall arrange a fraternal discussion of the situation between the pastor, the governing committee, him- or herself and any other person he or she considers appropriate in an endeavour to achieve a peaceable resolution of it.

Page 30 of 30



Way Forward Detailed Framework



Paragraph	From	To
5.1	The Church recognises and upholds the Office of the Ministry as the office divinely instituted for the public administration of the Means of Grace. For this purpose it shall receive into its Ministry, by ordination or by colloquy of ministers ordained elsewhere, men whose qualifications for the office have been established and who 5.1.1 accept and hold the Confession of the Church; 5.1.2 accept the Constitution and By-laws of the Church; and 5.1.3 undertake to participate in the work of the Church and to promote its Objects. Such members of the Ministry shall be recorded in the official Roll of Pastors	Add 'or women': The Church recognises and upholds the Office of the Ministry as the office divinely instituted for the public administration of the Means of Grace. For this purpose it shall receive into its Ministry, by ordination or by colloquy of ministers ordained elsewhere, men or women whose qualifications for the office have been established and who 5.1.1 accept and hold the Confession of the Church; 5.1.2 accept the Constitution and By-laws of the Church; and 5.1.3 undertake to participate in the work of the Church and to promote its Objects. Such members of the Ministry shall be recorded in the official Roll of Pastors

The following changes to the By-Laws of the Church are proposed to address gender pronouns:

Paragraph	From	To
5.4.1.2	every call and transfer rests upon a basis of mutual confidence and a sense of responsibility toward each other and before God, in which the Bishop and Church Council of the respective District and the responsible committees of the congregation or parish consider each case with due care before a recommendation is made, every parish gives earnest and serious consideration to the recommendations placed before it, and every pastor duly weighs the recommendations placed before him;	Add 'or her': every call and transfer rests upon a basis of mutual confidence and a sense of responsibility toward each other and before God, in which the Bishop and Church Council of the respective District and the responsible committees of the congregation or parish consider each case with due care before a recommendation is made, every parish gives earnest and serious consideration to the recommendations placed before it, and every pastor duly weighs the recommendations placed before him or her .

Page 31 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



Paragraph	From	To
5.4.16.3.3	If the Bishop's arrangements referred to in the preceding Section 5.4.16.3.1 do not achieve a peaceable resolution of the situation, he shall make a report in respect of the situation, the arrangements he made for discussion and the outcome of the arrangements and discussions to the Church Council of the relevant District or of the Church (as the case may require). The report shall be deemed to be the submission to the Church Council of a Miscellaneous Issue pursuant to the following Section 10.3.5.	Add 'or she': If the Bishop's arrangements referred to in the preceding Section 5.4.16.3.1 do not achieve a peaceable resolution of the situation, he or she shall make a report in respect of the situation, the arrangements he or she made for discussion and the outcome of the arrangements and discussions to the Church Council of the relevant District or of the Church (as the case may require). The report shall be deemed to be the submission to the Church Council of a Miscellaneous Issue pursuant to the following Section 10.3.5.
5.4.16.3.9	At all stages of the procedure, the Bishop may take such further steps as he considers pastorally appropriate.	Add 'or she': At all stages of the procedure, the Bishop may take such further steps as he or she considers pastorally appropriate.
8.2.1.1.6.1	assure himself and thereby the Church that the teaching and practice of Australian Lutheran College is in accord with the public teaching and practice of the Church;	Add '- or herself': assure him- or herself and thereby the Church that the teaching and practice of Australian Lutheran College is in accord with the public teaching and practice of the Church;
8.2.1.1.6.3	satisfy himself that the appropriate pastoral care is available for the staff of Australian Lutheran College;	Add '- or herself': satisfy him- or herself that the appropriate pastoral care is available for the staff of Australian Lutheran College;

Page 33 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



Paragraph	From	To
10.2.5	Upon the receipt of a written allegation pursuant to the preceding Section 10.2.3 or an appeal pursuant to the preceding Section 10.2.4, the Bishop shall endeavour to meet the intent stated in the preceding Section 10.1. If successful, the Bishop shall record that the case is closed. If unsuccessful, the Bishop may, in his discretion	Add 'or her': Upon the receipt of a written allegation pursuant to the preceding Section 10.2.3 or an appeal pursuant to the preceding Section 10.2.4, the Bishop shall endeavour to meet the intent stated in the preceding Section 10.1. If successful, the Bishop shall record that the case is closed. If unsuccessful, the Bishop may, in his or her discretion
10.2.5.5	take such other steps as he considers pastorally appropriate.	Add 'or she': take such other steps as he or she considers pastorally appropriate.
10.3.4	Upon the receipt of an appeal pursuant to the preceding Section 10.3.3, the Bishop of the respective District shall endeavour to meet the intent stated in the preceding Section 10.1. If successful, the Bishop of the respective District shall record that the case is closed. If unsuccessful, the Bishop of the respective District may, in his discretion	Add 'or her': Upon the receipt of an appeal pursuant to the preceding Section 10.3.3, the Bishop of the respective District shall endeavour to meet the intent stated in the preceding Section 10.1. If successful, the Bishop of the respective District shall record that the case is closed. If unsuccessful, the Bishop of the respective District may, in his or her discretion
10.3.4.4	take such other steps as he considers pastorally appropriate.	Add 'or she': take such other steps as he or she considers pastorally appropriate.
10.4.10	The Tribunal which determines the pastor, teacher or other church worker has breached Article 10.1.2 of the Constitution shall make a recommendation to the respective Bishop as to the disciplinary action to be taken by him. The recommendation shall be officially recorded by the respective Secretary.	Add 'or her': The Tribunal which determines the pastor, teacher or other church worker has breached Article 10.1.2 of the Constitution shall make a recommendation to the respective Bishop as to the disciplinary action to be taken by him or her . The recommendation shall be officially recorded by the respective Secretary.

Page 34 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



Paragraph	From	To
7.4.1.2	All pastors whose names are recorded on the Roll of Pastors of the Church, excluding pastors emeriti, are eligible for the position of Bishop and Assistant Bishop.	All pastors whose names are recorded on the Roll of Pastors of the Church, excluding pastors emeriti, are eligible for the position of Bishop and Assistant Bishop, subject to: 7.4.1.2.1 Having served on the LCA Roll of Pastors for a minimum of six [6] years prior to nomination. 7.4.1.2.2 Having served in various settings within the Church, demonstrating breadth of experience and adaptability. 7.4.1.2.3 The nominations committee verifying that all nominees meet these eligibility requirements before presenting their names for consideration.

10.4.3 Ordination, Roll of Pastors and calls

The Framework removes gender as a criterion for ordination but does not require other changes in the candidacy requirements for ordination in the LCA. The Framework does not require changes to the processes for receiving pastors onto, or removing pastors from, the LCA Roll of Pastors.

Under the Framework, congregations and parishes are able to stipulate that only males are on their call lists.

10.4.4 Relationships

The Framework does not require changes to the relationship between implementation of the Churchwide office and District offices or the relationship between these offices and congregation or parishes.

10.4.5 Governance and structures

The Framework does not require changes in governance, incorporation or structure of the Church (LCA), including the composition of the College of Bishops.

10.4.6 Finance and risk management

The Framework does not require changes to the operating finances or asset/liability ownership of the LCA.

Page 36 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



The following changes to the LCA by-Laws are proposed to enable congregations and parishes to stipulate male-only candidates on call lists.

Paragraph	From	To
5.4.9.1	The Bishop of the District or the Bishop's representative shall convene a meeting of representatives of the parish to consider candidates proposed by the Bishop or the Bishop's representative on behalf of the Church Council of the District, by the representatives of the parish, and by any member of the parish through its secretary.	A parish may stipulate that only male pastors be included on the candidates' list for call. The Bishop of the District or the Bishop's representative shall convene a meeting of parish representatives to consider candidates proposed by the Bishop or the Bishop's representative on behalf of the Church Council of the District, by the representatives of the parish, and by any member of the parish through its secretary.

The following changes to the LCA constitution and by-laws are proposed to implement a requirement for pastors to serve a minimum period before eligibility for nomination for bishop or assistant bishop:

Paragraph	From	To
Article 8.1	The Officials of the Church shall be a Bishop and an Assistant Bishop. They shall be elected for a term of office determined by the Church. The Bishop and the Assistant Bishop shall be pastors of the Church.	The Officials of the Church shall be a Bishop and an Assistant Bishop. They shall be elected for a term of office determined by the Church. The Bishop and the Assistant Bishop shall be pastors of the Church who have served on the LCA Roll of Pastors for at least six [6] years.

Page 35 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



10.4.7 Agencies (eg Australian Lutheran College, Lutheran Education Australia, ALWS)

Under the Framework, an agency that is a calling body may call the pastor who best aligns with its ministry plans.

10.4.8 Auxiliaries

The Framework does not require changes to the operation of LCA auxiliaries.

Page 37 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



11. Framework implementation

11.1 Assumptions

Implementation of the Framework is based on the following starting assumptions:

1. That GCB–CoB are delegated with the appropriate powers of the General Synod to implement the Way Forward Framework as approved at the Convention of General Synod, with particular attention to the provision of pastoral support.
2. Any pastors or communities that desire to transfer to any new Lutheran church body formed in Australia or New Zealand will be guided by the policies and procedures of the LCA.
3. The LCA will not place any unreasonable barriers before congregations that resolve to leave the LCA, having met their constitutional requirements.

11.2 Considerations

The key considerations during the implementation process are:

1. The implementation of the Framework is guided by GCB–CoB under the authority of General Synod.
2. Implementation is conducted with pastoral care for all members of the Church.
3. The LCA Standards of Ethical Behaviour and Principles for Respectful Dialogue will apply to all members throughout and after the implementation process.

11.3 Implementation costs

The majority of the costs associated with implementing the Framework has already been incurred with the Way Forward project. The remaining costs, which will primarily support congregations and agencies to implement the Framework, are estimated to be up to \$60,000. This covers communications, materials to support congregations and ancillary costs.

An additional allowance of \$50,000 will be set aside to provide pastoral care resources to the District bishops should this be required to support the pastoral care commitments outlined in the Framework. This will be deployed at the discretion of the bishops.

Page 38 of 30



Way Forward Detailed Framework



Section 7

'No one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless ~~he~~ they be regularly called' (C.A. XIV). The Lord calls individuals into the office of the ministry through the Christian congregations, Acts 13:1–4; and the Christian congregation, either alone or together with other congregations, or through properly appointed representatives, calls qualified persons (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:6–9; 2 Tim 2:24,25; Acts 1:24) into the office of the ministry publicly to exercise the functions of this office. The minister of the Word is thus called by the Lord through His Church, and by the Church as through human agency and authority, but in obedience to the command of the Lord. ~~He~~ **They** **are** therefore servants of the Lord Jesus, ministers of the New Testament, stewards of the mysteries of God, called to serve by publicly administering the means of grace. 2 Cor 4:5; Rom 10:15; 2 Cor 5:18; 1 Thess 5:12,13; Augsburg Confession XIV; Apol.VII, 28(end of paragraph); Smalc. Act. Tractatus: 14, 15, 24, 26, 67–69.

Section 8

Ordination, though not a Sacrament, is the solemn ecclesiastical rite in which a duly qualified person (1 Tim 3:2–7; Titus 1:5–9), having accepted a call by a congregation or the Church, is received by the Church as a gift from the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 4:11; Titus 1:5) and publicly declared to be a minister of the New Testament, ~~his~~ **their** call thereby being ratified and publicly acknowledged, and the blessing of the Lord is invoked upon ~~him~~ **them** with the laying on of hands. The laying on of hands is an old and biblical rite, but it has no divine command and is not essential for the validity and efficacy of the office.

Acts 6:6; 8:17; 13:3; 1 Tim 5:22; 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; Num 27:18; Smalc. Art. Tractatus 70.

12.2. LCA constitution and by-laws

12.2.1 Constitution of the Church

PROPOSED THAT the Constitution of the Church be amended as follows (Words to be deleted – ~~strike through~~; word to be added – **bold**):

Article 1.2 - Definitions

- 1.2.11 'pastor' or 'member of the Ministry' means any ~~person~~ **man or woman** ordained to the Holy Ministry according to the rites and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church who has been received into the Ministry of the Church according to Article 5.1;

Article 5 – The Ministry

- 5.1 The Church recognises and upholds the Office of the Ministry as the office divinely instituted for the public administration of the Means of Grace. For this purpose it shall receive into its Ministry, by ordination or by colloquy of ministers ordained elsewhere, ~~men~~ **or women** whose qualifications for the office have been established and who
 - 5.1.4 accept and hold the Confession of the Church;
 - 5.1.5 accept the Constitution and By-laws of the Church; and

Page 40 of 30



Way Forward Detailed Framework



12. Matters for proposals

12.1. Theses of Agreement

PROPOSED THAT the Theses of Agreement TA VI be amended as follows (Words to be deleted – ~~strike through~~; word to be added – **bold**):

Section 11

~~Though women prophets were used by the Spirit of God in the Old as well as in the New Testament, 1 Cor 14:34,35 and 1 Tim 2:11–14 prohibit a woman from being called into the office of the public ministry for the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. This apostolic rule is binding on all Christendom; hereby her rights as a member of the spiritual priesthood are in no wise impaired.~~

A baptised person who is duly called (Luke 10:16; AC Apology 7 and 8,28; TA VI:7,8) thereby enters the office of the public ministry for the proclamation of the Word and administration of the Sacraments. Scripture that underpins the Church's teaching on the office of the ministry and the rite of ordination (John 20:21–23; Matt. 28:18–20; 1 Cor. 11:23–26) applies to duly qualified called baptised persons although some understand that 1 Corinthians 14:34,35 and 1 Timothy 2:11–14 prohibit baptised women from being called into the office of the public ministry.

Section 1

The New Testament ministry is the office instituted by Christ for the public administration of the means of grace, that is, the preaching of the Gospel and the administering of the Sacraments, through which as through instruments the Holy Ghost works saving faith in the hearts of ~~men~~ **people**. Matt 10; Matt 28:18–20; Luke 9:1,2; 1 Cor 3:5–8; Augsburg Confession V; Form.Conc., Sol.Decl. XI,29.

Section 2

The office of the ministry is therefore an office instituted not by ~~men~~ **humans**, but by God. 2 Cor 5:18–20; Eph 4:11; Acts 20:28; Apology XIII,11.

Section 5

The office of the ministry is essentially an office of service to the Lord and His Church with the Word and the Sacraments, which office the ministers of the Church must exercise in obedience to their Lord and the directions given in the Word. Therefore, the office of the ministry does not give to those who bear it, arbitrary power over Christians, nor does it deliver the ministers of the Word up to the arbitrary directions and commands of ~~men~~ **people**. Likewise, it is not a Levitical priesthood of the New Testament (Apol. XIII,7–11; XXIV, 58,59); nor are those who bear it an exclusive class distinct from Christians generally; nor do they possess a peculiar sanctity or an indelible character; nor does the ministry possess the power of self-perpetuation. Matt 23:8–12; 1 Cor 3:5; 4:1,2; 2 Cor 4:5; Col 1:23–25; 1 Pet 5:1–3; Matt 20:25–28; Apol.XXVIII, 13,14; XXII,9; XXIV, 86 (German and English text re Liturgia); Smalc. Art., Pars II, IV, 9; Form.Conc., Sol. Decl. XII, 30; XI, 29.

Page 39 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



- 5.1.6 undertake to participate in the work of the Church and to promote its Objects.
Such members of the Ministry shall be recorded in the official Roll of Pastors

Article 8 – Officers and Administration

- 8.1 The Officials of the Church shall be a Bishop and an Assistant Bishop. They shall be elected for a term of office determined by the Church. The Bishop and the Assistant Bishop shall be pastors of the Church **who have served on the LCA Roll of Pastors for at least six [6] years.**

Page 41 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



12.2.2 By-laws of the Church

PROPOSED THAT the By-laws of the Church be amended as follows (Words to be deleted – ~~strike through~~; word to be added – **bold**):

Section 5.4 – Calls and Transfers

- 5.4.1.2 every call and transfer rests upon a basis of mutual confidence and a sense of responsibility toward each other and before God, in which the Bishop and Church Council of the respective District and the responsible committees of the congregation or parish consider each case with due care before a recommendation is made, every parish gives earnest and serious consideration to the recommendations placed before it, and every pastor duly weighs the recommendations placed before him **or her**;
- 5.4.1.5 parishes which for many years have been blessed through the talents of their pastor do not selfishly seek to prevent him **or her** from rendering similar service in another field.
- 5.4.4 The relationship between a pastor and the Church, District, parish, congregation or other body the call of which he **or she** has accepted is personal, spiritual and sacred and is not intended to create any legal relationship or any employment relationship between the pastor and any member of any part of the Church.
- 5.4.9.1 **A parish may stipulate that only male pastors be included on the candidates' list for call.** The Bishop of the District or the Bishop's representative shall convene a meeting of parish representatives to consider candidates proposed by the Bishop or the Bishop's representative on behalf of the Church Council of the District, by the representatives of the parish, and by any member of the parish through its secretary.
- 5.4.16.2.3.1 the pastor has a serious physical or mental disability which substantially impedes the effectiveness of his **or her** ministry; **or**
- 5.4.16.3.1 A relevant Bishop shall arrange a fraternal discussion of the situation between the pastor, the governing committee, him- **or herself** and any other person he **or she** considers appropriate in an endeavour to achieve a peaceable resolution of it.
- 5.4.16.3.3 If the Bishop's arrangements referred to in the preceding Section 5.4.16.3.1 do not achieve a peaceable resolution of the situation, he **or she** shall make a report in respect of the situation, the arrangements he **or she** made for discussion and the outcome of the arrangements and discussions to the Church Council of the relevant District or of the Church (as the case may require). The report shall be deemed to be the submission to the Church Council of a Miscellaneous Issue pursuant to the following Section 10.3.5.
- 5.4.16.3.9 At all stages of the procedure, the Bishop may take such further steps as he **or she** considers pastorally appropriate.

Page 42 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



Section 10.4 – The Judicial System of the Church

- 10.4.10 The Tribunal which determines the pastor, teacher or other church worker has breached Article 10.1.2 of the Constitution shall make a recommendation to the respective Bishop as to the disciplinary action to be taken by him or her. The recommendation shall be officially recorded by the respective Secretary.

12.3. District constitutions and by-laws

12.3.1 Constitution of the Districts

PROPOSED THAT the Constitution of the Districts, in the By-laws of the Church be amended as follows (Words to be deleted – ~~strike through~~; word to be added – **bold**):

Article 1.2 – Definitions

- 1.2.12 'pastor' or 'member of the Ministry' means any ~~person~~ **man or woman** ordained to the Holy Ministry according to the rites and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church who has been received into the Ministry of the Church according to Article 5.1;

Article 8 – Officers and Administration

- 8.1 The Officials of the District shall be a Bishop, one or more Assistant Bishops, a Secretary, and a Treasurer. They shall be elected for a term of office determined by the District. The Bishop and Assistant Bishops shall be pastors of the Church in the District **who have served on the LCA Roll of Pastors for at least six [6] years.**

12.3.2 By-laws of Districts

PROPOSED THAT the By-laws Part A of the Districts, in the By-laws of the Church be amended as follows (Words to be deleted – ~~strike through~~; word to be added – **bold**):

Section 7.4 – Nominations

- 7.4.2 All pastors whose names are recorded on the Roll of Pastors of the Church, **excluding pastors emeriti**, are eligible for the position of Bishop; only pastors of the District are eligible for the position of Assistant Bishop(s) in the District, **subject to:**
- 7.4.2.1 **Having served on the LCA Roll of Pastors for a minimum of six [6] years prior to nomination.**
- 7.4.2.2 **Having served in various settings within the Church, demonstrating breadth of experience and adaptability.**
- 7.4.2.3 **The nominations committee verifying that all nominees meet these eligibility requirements before presenting their names for consideration.**

Page 44 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



Section 7.4 – Nominations and Elections

- 7.4.1.2 All pastors whose names are recorded on the Roll of Pastors of the Church, **excluding pastors emeriti**, are eligible for the position of Bishop and Assistant Bishop, **subject to:**
- 7.4.1.2.1 **Having served on the LCA Roll of Pastors for a minimum of six [6] years prior to nomination.**
- 7.4.1.2.2 **Having served in various settings within the Church, demonstrating breadth of experience and adaptability.**
- 7.4.1.2.3 **The nominations committee verifying that all nominees meet these eligibility requirements before presenting their names for consideration.**

Section 8.2 – Officials

- 8.2.1.1.6.1 assure him **or herself** and thereby the Church that the teaching and practice of Australian Lutheran College is in accord with the public teaching and practice of the Church;
- 8.2.1.1.6.3 satisfy him **or herself** that the appropriate pastoral care is available for the staff of Australian Lutheran College;

Section 10.2 – Ecclesiastical Discipline by a Congregation

- 10.2.5 Upon the receipt of a written allegation pursuant to the preceding Section 10.2.3 or an appeal pursuant to the preceding Section 10.2.4, the Bishop shall endeavour to meet the intent stated in the preceding Section 10.1. If successful, the Bishop shall record that the case is closed. If unsuccessful, the Bishop may, in his **or her** discretion
- 10.2.5.5 take such other steps as he **or she** considers pastorally appropriate.

Section 10.3 – Ecclesiastical Discipline by the Church against a Pastor

- 10.3.4 Upon the receipt of an appeal pursuant to the preceding Section 10.3.3, the Bishop of the respective District shall endeavour to meet the intent stated in the preceding Section 10.1. If successful, the Bishop of the respective District shall record that the case is closed. If unsuccessful, the Bishop of the respective District may, in his **or her** discretion
- 10.3.4.4 take such other steps as he **or she** considers pastorally appropriate.

Page 43 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



12.4. Model constitutions and by-laws for a congregation and parish

12.4.1 Model Constitution of a Congregation

PROPOSED THAT the Model Constitution for a Congregation be amended as follows (Words to be deleted – ~~strike through~~; word to be added – **bold**):

Article 6 – The Ministry

- 6.2 The Pastor of the Congregation shall be a man¹ whose soundness in faith, aptness to teach, and other qualifications for office have been examined and approved by the Church in accordance with the Scriptures and Confessions of the Church regarding the public office of the ministry.
¹ **Congregations may modify this article to include 'or woman'.**

Article 9.3 – Church Council

- 9.3.1 The Pastor, by virtue of ~~his~~ **the** office, shall attend all meetings of the Church Council.

Article 9.6 – Officers and Committees

- 9.6.14 The Pastor, by virtue of ~~his~~ **the** office, shall have the right to attend all meetings of the committees.

Article 9.9 – The Committee of Pastoral Assistants

- 9.9.5 The pastoral assistants shall assist the Pastor in ~~his~~ ministry and for this purpose they shall concern themselves with the spiritual life of the Congregation and its members by...

12.4.2 Model Constitution of a Parish

PROPOSED THAT the Model Constitution for a Parish be amended as follows (Words to be deleted – ~~strike through~~; word to be added – **bold**):

Footnote #2, paragraph 5 (page 5)

~~Individual congregations~~ **Individual congregations** should expect to have the services of the pastor and his¹ time relative to the number of members in the congregation compared to the total number of members in all the congregations in the parish.
¹ **Parishes may modify this article to include 'or her'.**

Page 45 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



Article 6 – The Ministry

- 6.2 The Pastor of the Parish shall be a man¹ whose soundness in faith, aptness to teach, and other qualifications for office have been examined and approved by the Church in accordance with the Scriptures and Confessions of the Church regarding the public office of the ministry.
¹ **Parishes may modify this article to include 'or woman'.**

Article 9.3 – Parish Council

- 9.3.1 The Pastor, by virtue of ~~his~~ the office, shall attend all meetings of the Parish Council.

Article 9.6 – Officers and Committees

- 9.6.12 The Pastor, by virtue of ~~his~~ the office, shall have the right to attend all meetings of the committees.

Page 46 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



Appendix 2. DSTO 1A Theses of Agreement, The permanent status of Theses of Agreement, CTCR, 1976

As the name of the document indicates, the Theses of Agreement were written and adopted to bring about a consensus, in those doctrines of the Church and in those areas of churchly practice in which there had been actual or supposed disagreement and division between the two former Lutheran Churches in Australia. The theses are therefore the official record of the outcome and the conclusion of the dialogue and debate between those two Churches as they sought a solution under the guidance of the Word of God to those doctrinal differences that divided them. They were therefore the instrument through which church fellowship and fraternal relationships between the two Churches were established.

However, in many respects the Theses of Agreement exhibit the marks of confessional statements as Lutherans understand them. The Theses claim to be a fair and accurate exposition of the Word of God and in particular of the doctrine of the Gospel, as it is understood and preached and taught in the Lutheran Church of Australia. At the same time they explicitly express a complete consensus with the Lutheran fathers and reaffirm their exposition and understanding of God's Word as contained in the Book of Concord, and together with them also reject **all** heresies that are condemned in the Lutheran Confessions.

Like all confessional statements, the Theses of Agreement are always under the authority of the Word of God, and therefore there must always be a readiness to submit them to the critical scrutiny of God's Word and accordingly confirm them, or amend or repudiate them when further study of God's Word shows them to be inadequate or in error.

In that sense their permanent status and authority are entirely determined by the faithfulness and accuracy with which they reflect the teaching of God's Word, in particular the doctrine of the Gospel.

All this, however, does not elevate the Theses of Agreement to the level of the Lutheran Confessions. A Church cannot claim to be Lutheran if it does not subscribe to the Book of Concord, or at least hold to the Confessions in the manner referred to in Theses of Agreement IX 9; on the other hand, the absence of subscription to the Theses of Agreement certainly cannot call into doubt the Lutheran character of a Church that subscribes to the Book of Concord. The purpose and intention of the Theses of Agreement is related specifically to the Lutheran Church of Australia, and the permanency of their status therefore rests with this Church.

Page 48 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



Appendix 1. DSTO 1A Theses of Agreement, The status of the Theses of Agreement and other doctrinal statements, CTCR, 1975

1. In the exercise of their teaching function, whether dealing with a group or a congregation or with individuals, pastors of the LCA should not run counter to the letter and the spirit of the Theses of Agreement.
2. The Theses of Agreement, the fruit of prayerful labours extending over many years, have been adopted in all seriousness and in good faith by both the former UELCA and ELCA as a unifying document. They should be respected and treated accordingly. Should amendments become desirable in the course of time, such amendments would have to be submitted to the entire Church after thorough theological examination and discussion. Meanwhile, a deliberate disregard of the Theses in teaching and preaching would appear as evidence of bad faith, and would constitute a serious threat to the unity of the Church. There may, of course, be inadvertent disregard of the Theses due to ignorance of their content.
3. It is clearly the right and the duty of the Church, in the face of current challenges, to define how it understands the Scriptures and the Confessions. Therefore, explanations and amendments of the Theses, as well as any other statements of a doctrinal nature, submitted to the entire Church after thorough theological examination and discussion and adopted by it, must be accorded the same authority in the Church as the Theses themselves (see 1 and 2 above).

Page 47 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



Appendix 3. DSTO 1A Theses of Agreement, I: Principles governing church fellowship

1. We believe that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the infallible Word of God, written by inspiration of God, 2 Tim 3:16, by the holy men of God, 2 Pet 1:21, as the Spirit gave them utterance, Acts 2:4.
2. We believe that the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments are the infallible and only source and norm of Christian doctrine and the sure and authoritative guide for life and practice, 2 Tim 3:15-17; 1 Cor 14:37; Psalm 119:160, etc.
3. We agree that for church fellowship the uniting churches must be one in the acceptance of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as the inspired Word of God and as the only and true source, norm, rule, and standard of all teaching and practice in the Christian Church.
4.
 - a. We believe that where differences in teaching and practice exist or arise between churches uniting, these differences are to be removed by willingly submitting to the authority of the Word of God. Where a difference in teaching or practice is a departure from the doctrine of the Bible, such difference cannot be tolerated, but must be pointed out as an error, on the basis of clear passages of Holy Writ; and if the error is persisted in, in spite of instruction, warning, and earnest witness, it must at last lead to a separation.
 - b. We believe that all doctrines of Holy Writ are equally binding; nevertheless not all things in Scripture are of the same importance, when viewed from the centre and core of the Scriptures, Christ and justification by Him through faith.
 - c. We admit that there are some things hard to be understood in Holy Writ, 2 Pet 3:16; but no doctrine can be based on Scripture passages that are not clear, especially if no light is thrown upon them by clear passages.
 - d. Differences in exegesis that do not affect doctrine are not church divisive.
 - e. In case of differences in exegesis that affect doctrine, agreement on the basis of God's Word must be sought by combined, prayerful examination of the passage or passages in question.

If this does not lead to agreement, because no unanimity has been reached on the clarity of the passage or passages in question and hence on the stringency and adequacy of the Scriptural proof, divergent views arising from such differences of interpretation are not divisive of church fellowship, providing that

- i. there be the readiness in principle to submit to the authority of the Word of God;
- ii. thereby no clear Word of Scripture is denied, contradicted or ignored;
- iii. such divergent views in no wise impair, infringe upon, or violate the central doctrine of Holy Scripture, justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ; nothing be taught contrary to the *publica doctrina* of the Lutheran Church as laid down in its Confessions;
- iv. such divergent views are not propagated as the *publica doctrina* of the Church and in no wise impair the doctrine of Holy Writ.

Page 49 of 50



Way Forward Detailed Framework



5. We believe that the formal and the material principles must not be brought into opposition to each other, for the Scriptures are the Word of Christ and they testify of Him. Loyalty to Christ requires loyalty to His Word, and loyalty to the Scriptures requires loyalty to Christ, His person, His work, His means of grace. We dare not stress the material principle at the expense of the formal principle, or vice versa. Churches uniting should make their pledge of loyalty to both Christ and His Word (cf Eph 4:1–16).
6. We believe that it is a solemn obligation of the Church to teach the whole counsel of God, rightly dividing the Word of Truth, feeding milk or meat as the case may demand, but never compromising the truth of Scripture, never permitting reason or feeling to undermine the authority of the Word, or substituting for it any form of subjectivism.
7. In the application of these principles, particularly in the holding of such divergent views as are mentioned in Theses 4 (e), the material principle, agreement in which constitutes the fundamental unity in Christ, is not to be ignored contrary to the law of Christian love but is to be upheld and applied in full agreement with the formal principle.

APPENDIX B Resources

The Creator's Tapestry: Scriptural Perspectives on Man-Woman Relationships in Marriage and the Church. A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2010.

Harrison Matthew C. and Pless John T, eds. *Women Pastors? The Ordination of Women in Biblical Lutheran Perspective.* A Collection of Essays, Third Edition, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012.

Lehenbauer, Joel D. "Godly Women and the Way of the Cross." Chapter Four in *Confessional Lutheran Leadership Under the Cross: Collection of Theological Presentations from the International Church Relations Conference, 2023.* The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2024.

The Order of Creation: Theology, History, Definition. A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2022.

Shaw, Jonathan, ed. *Women's Ordination through the Lens of the Apostles' Creed.* A Fraternal Theological Dialogue of the Lutheran Church in Korea and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Revised Edition. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2024. <https://resources.lcms.org/reading-study/lcms-church-relations-booklet-womens-ordination-through-the-lens-of-the-apostles-creed/>

Women in the Church: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice. A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1985.

R62.6

Online Technology in the Church: Study Materials

Preface

2023 Resolution 5-13A asked the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), in conjunction with the Council of Presidents and the Office of the President of the Synod, to produce a joint document on uses of online technology in the church. The document would provide for “appropriate theological reflection and study,” to take place over a period of “not less than a year that allows for much fraternal discussion.” After consulting with representatives of both the Council of Presidents and the Office of the President, it was decided the CTCR would provide a study document on the uses of online technology in the church that would then be shared with the above-named entities, who would disseminate it throughout the Synod.

To that end, the Commission, jointly with the Council of Presidents and the Office of the President, submits the present study document for consideration. Rather than attempting to address comprehensively all technologies that are presently being used in the church, or might be used in the future, this document has selectively chosen only some of the more representative examples likely to be employed within our congregations, and which have either incited controversy or engendered differences of opinion and practice. The Commission has sought to provide a fair presentation and evaluation of these practices and has also attempted to offer its own theological and practical perspective on their appropriateness in the church. However, this is a study document and therefore does not propose an “official” position the Synod should take on these matters. In fact, in most cases of rapidly evolving technologies and their application in church life, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the Synod to take a firm position (the practice of virtual Communion being a notable exception — see 2023 Resolution 5-08A).

The Commission asks the responsible entities — the Council of Presidents and the Office of the President of the Synod — to distribute this study document to those under their oversight, in accordance with 2023 Resolution 5-13A. The CTCR wishes to make this document available for Synodwide study and use.

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations
December 2024

they may problematize that shared faith and life. The Commission does not offer its opinion on these matters on a technological basis, nor does it necessarily weigh in on the larger cultural, social, ethical and bioethical concerns that these technologies raise. Those matters may be the subject of further study based upon the feedback received to this document, as the Commission considers a broader discussion of online technology and how the church should respond to it.

1. Livestreamed Worship Services

Due to church closures during the Covid-19 pandemic, many congregations began to broadcast their live services online using streaming technology. For some, this has raised questions about whether streaming services could potentially lead to privacy concerns, whether they might induce people to no longer gather together in a local congregation for worship with fellow believers, or even whether congregations or pastors might use online services to induce members of other congregations to join and support theirs. Should LCMS congregations be encouraged to use livestreamed online worship services alongside of — or as alternatives to — their local, in-person gatherings?

Our churches have actively participated in online media for decades. Since the World Wide Web went online in the 1990s, Missouri Synod congregations — like so many others around the world — have increasingly adopted technological means of reaching out and making their faith and ministries known. For years, email prayer chains, downloadable MP3 sermons and recorded services were the primary ways congregations used digital means as part of their work. Congregational websites have become ubiquitous. Churches operate social media pages now to promote events, share Scripture passages or church news, and celebrate milestones from the church’s life together (confirmations, weddings, baptisms, etc.). All of these are examples of extending the shared experiences of that congregation to others through digital means. These raise few serious concerns or engender little controversy. Other practices, like livestreaming services, are more complicated.

On a theological level, internet technologies like livestreaming provide the congregations of the Synod a tangible, accessible way to do what Christ has called them to do: proclaim the Word (Luke 24:44–47; Acts 8:1–4). Whether spoken in open-air preaching, as by the apostles of the New Testament church; preached in pulpits of European cathedrals or A-frame American churches; signed by those ministering to the deaf and hearing-impaired; or, yes, mediated through fiber-optic cables, the Word is able to create and sustain saving faith in the hearts of those who hear it, for the Holy Spirit is at work through that Word (Rom. 10:14–17; Augsburg Confession 5). Online services can be used profitably to communicate that Word to all people: to the sick, hospitalized or homebound, whom the pastor may be unable to reach; to the wandering, erring or unbelieving, who are unwilling to step foot in a church; to those under political regimes where Christianity is forbidden and the gathering of Christians for worship prohibited.

There are also legitimate hesitations on the part of many congregations. As noted above, privacy concerns may result from the advance of facial recognition software that those averse to Christianity could use to target Christians, especially children. Certain preachers or congregations among us may use online services irresponsibly, in such a way as to recruit members of other Synod congregations or to promote ideas that violate the Eighth

Introduction

Lutherans have long availed themselves of new technologies to communicate the Gospel. For Lutherans during the Reformation, the relatively new printing press supplied a means to publish Luther’s works and other theological writings that addressed biblical views of justification and related issues of the day.¹ LCMS pastor and professor Walter A. Maier, speaker of *The Lutheran Hour* from 1930 to 1950, became a household name for his powerful preaching of the Gospel via radio, and his ministry touched many lives for Christ and influenced generations of preachers to follow.² The Missouri Synod even began a television ministry that notably won an Emmy in 1980 for religious programming.³ None of these were seen as compromising the ministry or worship of the church, but rather as opportunities for proclaiming God’s Word to those who might otherwise not hear it. With respect to digital technologies, our congregations have long had an internet presence, even if they were not livestreaming worship services every Sunday. The question was never *if* we should use such technologies.

The great question facing the church in an age of rapid technological change is *how* it should use these technologies in a way that supports rather than detracts from our understanding of its mission and ministry. Technology, as many like to say, is not neutral, and from a Christian perspective that is because sinful humans use technology. We overuse it, use it for sinful purposes, use it in ways that detract from the good things God has given us. Churches, families and society more generally may use technology to their detriment when that technology draws us away from contact with fellow humans created in the image of God; tempts us to seek solace in isolation from others or through digital means; or tricks us into believing artificial intelligence is a replacement for human contact, human learning or human wisdom. We dare not discourage the wise use of technology, which is already a necessary part of the fabric of human life. There is no “going back.” Yet we also must urge the cautious, morally responsible and theologically alert use of technology in a way that reflects what we know from Holy Scripture about who we are, how God has made us, how God seeks to save us in Christ, and how God has ordered and directed His church to confess its faith and share its life together.

In this brief document, the Commission wishes to present five different applications of online technologies within the church and her ministry — livestreamed worship services, virtual multi-parish arrangements, online reproof and church discipline, online-only congregational membership, and artificial intelligence-based sermons — for evaluation and discussion. In each case, these practices have emerged in recent years, received attention within the Synod, and been adopted or become the subject of controversy for our congregations. This document will assess the positives and negatives of each from a decidedly theological basis (as they relate to not only the doctrine we confess, but also the agreement in certain practices that those doctrines imply). It will also recommend where these online technologies may be helpfully incorporated into the church’s life in a way that furthers the shared faith and life we have together, as well as where

¹ See, for instance, Mark Edwards Jr., *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), or Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther: 1517, Printing and the Making of the Reformation* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015).

² Kirk Farney, *Ministers of a New Medium: Broadcasting Theology in the Radio Ministries of Fulton J. Sheen and Walter A. Maier* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), and Paul L. Maier, *A Man Spoke, A World Listened: The Story of Walter A. Maier and the Lutheran Hour* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963).

³ Ardon Albrecht, *Lutheran Television: Glory Years* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2018).

Commandment in our midst — though we hope that collegiality and mutual trust would prevail between fellow laborers in Christ’s harvest. The burden of digital infrastructure, upkeep and delivery may detract from or unnecessarily influence the pastor’s preaching, the congregation’s style of public worship, or even the gathered believers’ active participation in the life of the local congregation (for instance, one may opt for viewing services online rather than attending in person). Might a preacher change his sermon content if he believes the sermon will be heard more broadly than simply by the hearers in his congregation? Might a congregation be tempted to make its worship more acceptable to others viewing online (whether more liturgical or less liturgical)? Should communicants be shown receiving the Sacrament of the Altar, or might the prospect that one could be viewed online impact the way that he or she receives the Sacrament, or even *whether* he or she does? These are genuine concerns that must be considered by each and every congregation.

The primary theological objection to the presence of online services is that they could tempt congregants to simply view those services online rather than attend them at their local congregation. It must be said that online services are no replacement for the local gathering of believers. *Lutheran Hour* speaker Walter Maier directed his hearers to a local congregation and did not consider his program a replacement for it. The church has always gathered locally in congregations to hear the Word, receive the Sacrament and be strengthened in its faith together as Christians in need of a respite from the attacks of the devil, the world and their sinful natures. The congregation does not exist for corporate weekly worship services alone — though, sadly, some Christians live as though it does. In the gathering or assembly of believers (as Augsburg Confession 7–8 describes the church), Christians are to build up one another in the faith by exercising the gifts God has given them (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12:4–21; 1 Cor. 14:1–13). They are to support one another personally with encouragement, consolation and conversation, even with gifts to meet the physical needs among them (Acts 2; Smalcald Articles III 4). They are to protect one another from sin through reproof and correction (Heb. 10:24–25; 1 Cor. 5). This goes well beyond solitary worship services into the common life they share together as a congregation. Moreover, it simply cannot happen to a full degree behind the relative anonymity of online participation.

Finally, while the Word may be preached profitably and to the end of salvation through online services — and other digital means — the Lord’s Supper itself is reserved for the locally gathered congregation. There, the body and blood of Jesus Christ is present for believers to receive with their mouths for the forgiveness of sins, according to Christ’s Word. There, the Word of Christ is proclaimed, and the believers can be confident that the Sacrament consecrated, distributed and received is the true body and blood of Christ. There, the presiding pastor ensures that communicants are rightly instructed in the faith, that open and unrepentant sinners and heretics are denied the Sacrament, and that the Sacrament is administered according to our Lord’s Words, to the benefit of those who receive it in faith.

For these reasons, the Commission encourages the use of online services as instruments to proclaim the Gospel, yet it urges caution and care in doing so. Online services should not be used in a way that sows division within our fellowship, exposes parishioners (particularly children) to certain online predatory risks, replaces or makes negligible the local gathering of Christians in fellowship and worship, or uses any means of participating in the Lord’s Supper virtually.

2. Virtual Multi-Parish Arrangements (“Video Venue”)

In part due to the growing pastoral shortage within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, there has been conversation about whether a single pastor could service multiple congregations virtually. That is, rather than the traditional arrangement of a multipoint parish, where a pastor would conduct in-person services at two or more congregations at different times, conducting services virtually means the ordained pastor would preach in one congregation and his sermon would be streamed live at the other congregation(s). Also known as “video venue” ministry, the rest of the service at other sites would be officiated by a layman, with the exception of the Lord’s Supper.

The practice of multi-parish arrangements is not new to the Missouri Synod. Planting churches and ministering to churches that cannot afford a pastor have often taken place by way of an ordained minister serving multiple congregations at a time. In a certain sense, virtual multi-parish or video-venue arrangements are a technologically mediated way of carrying out such ministries. Rather than having a congregation or church plant hold services at odd hours or on unconventional days, or the parish pastor traversing snow-covered roads or traveling long distances, the use of virtually delivered services (preferably synchronously) means a congregation otherwise unable to afford a pastor would have the benefit of doctrinally sound preaching from a rostered, ordained and preferably called minister.

There is clearly a need for the Synod — while remaining theologically faithful to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions — to be adaptable in how it provides pastoral care for congregations that cannot procure pastoral service. In its recent *Mission and Ministry Principles and Practical Observations and Suggestions*, the CTCR specifically proposed extending the service of the Synod’s ordained ministers, including the arrangement of more multipoint parish ministries.⁴ A virtual multi-parish arrangement might be an example of that. As noted elsewhere in this document, the Word itself can be faithfully and profitably communicated through virtual means. The Spirit works through the oral Word (Rom. 10:14–17; Augsburg Confession 5) but is not restricted to an oral Word declared in the confines of a church building. That digitally proclaimed Word is also capable of mediating the faith-giving work of the Spirit.

Such an arrangement could obviously not include the Lord’s Supper.⁵ The pastor would have to make other provisions for the administration of the Lord’s Supper under the care of an ordained minister. Arrangements would also have to be made for pastoral care at the virtual sites — ideally, though not necessarily in every case, by the ordained minister — including visitation of the sick and the homebound, confirmation instruction, funerals, preparation for and officiating of weddings, preparation for and administration of baptisms, and so on. Moreover, the conduct of

⁴ Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Mission and Ministry Principles and Practical Observations and Suggestions* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2024), www.lcms.org/ctcr-observations-and-suggestions.

⁵ On the LCMS response to the practice of online Communion during the Covid-19 pandemic, see 2023 Resolution 5-08A (“To Affirm In-Person Communion”), as well as opinions by the CTCR, *Communion and Covid-19* (2020), www.lcms.org/ctcr-communion-and-covid, and *One Little Word Can Fell Him: Addendum to Communion and Covid-19* (2020), www.lcms.org/ctcr-communion-and-covid-addendum.

practice creates more obstacles than it removes. Under ordinary circumstances, it would urge traditional multipoint parish ministry.

3. Online Reproof and Church Discipline

In recent decades, social media has become a new public space for conversation, debate and the airing of concerns. This has not gone without impact on the church and how it handles personal reproof, church discipline and other matters pertaining to the resolution of disagreements. For Christians both inside the Missouri Synod and in other churches, it has become common to publicly identify errors of doctrine or practice, call upon those with administrative or oversight responsibilities to address these errors, and even interject oneself into the process by commenting on matters of church discipline. Should members of our congregations, and particularly church workers who are members of the Synod, use the internet (specifically social media) to engage in accusations, reproof or other forms of church discipline ordinarily reserved for private, congregational, district or Synod mediation?

It is inevitable that those who use social media as a primary means of communication would take to social media to discuss matters of importance for the faith and life of their church. Concern for right doctrine and practice has been a hallmark of the Missouri Synod since its founding. That concern is laudable and should not be disregarded because of the particular means one may use to express that concern. Indeed, there has long been a precedent for addressing certain sins in a public way, provided those sins are known publicly. Martin Luther himself said that it was not a violation of the Eighth Commandment to call attention to a public sin. In the Large Catechism, he spoke of it this way: “But where the sin is so public that the judge and everyone else are aware of it, you can without sin shun and avoid those who have brought disgrace upon themselves, and you may also testify publicly against them” (LC 1 284).

In an age when social media has become a “digital commons” for discussing social, political and theological matters, we should expect that one’s opinions expressed online may be regarded as public statements of their faith, especially in the case of pastors. It is also true that services, sermons and other congregational acts formerly not known outside of those involved are now broadcast online and available to anyone who wishes to find them, thus making them “public” in a sense. Where any of the above exhibit doctrine or practices that are contrary to Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions or the doctrinal positions of the Synod, then it is entirely understandable for someone to take to online media to identify errors, express concern, and even solicit the Synod and its members to condemn such errors.

That said, there are any number of problems with this practice. First, these online statements, services and so on may not be intended for broader, public consumption. While this does not excuse the error, it does mean that we should not assume the offending party is making a public declaration of faith or committing a public sin. As the CTCR said concerning “public sin” in 2006: “When Luther speaks about *public* sins, we might better translate ‘public’ as *notorious* or *scandalous*. In other words, it is not simply a matter of a sinful action that is known to some other person or a few other people. All of sixteenth century life was public in that sense. The situation Luther envisioned was a sin so widely known that it could no longer be covered without

services by a layman in place of a pastor is no intrinsic obstacle. Specific guidelines for that practice were laid out by the CTCR in order to prevent confusion with the pastoral office.”⁶

There are also reasonable objections to this practice. In the first place, there may be confusion about who is responsible for oversight in the congregation. Theologically speaking, the Synod has understood the oversight (from the Greek *episkopos* in the New Testament, e.g., Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7, among others) by pastors to be a ministry conferred on him by his call to a given congregation. He exercises that ministry through his preaching of the Word, administration of the Sacraments and pastoral care among his flock. While we have the example of vacancy pastors, for instance, who serve a congregation without a “call” per se, a pastor exercising this ministry of oversight through preaching, Sacraments and pastoral care ordinarily requires a call, especially for any extended length of time.

Second, and more pertinently, the ministry of a pastor is not simply one of preaching or communicating content or data. The pastor is charged with pastoral care, and that pastoral care entails things such as instruction (not just in a sermon, but individually and in other groups), private counsel and spiritual nurture of all those in his flock. Part of that pastoral care includes chance conversations that arise in the course of routine church tasks. In an important sense, a pastor’s faith and life in general as lived in the presence of his flock are to be an example to the believer (1 Tim. 4:12; see also 1 Cor. 11:1; Heb. 13:7). While Lutherans have long valued the preaching of the Word as the principal task of the pastoral office, the pastoral office must not be reduced to congregational preaching. Nor should the called and ordained minister delegate all other (or even most) aspects of his pastoral responsibilities besides preaching to another. If he is called to more than one parish, the pastor must provide care as responsibly as possible to all those entrusted to him, so far as that is within his power to do.

Finally, given these concerns, it is hard to see how virtual multipoint parishes are preferable to the traditional model. In the case of severe weather conditions or other immediate challenges that would preclude the presence of a pastor in other congregations he serves, a video alternative may be possible. However, such a scenario does not necessitate the permanent arrangement of a virtual multipoint parish ministry. Under exceptional circumstances, the CTCR has encouraged the option of a layman reading a sermon written by the pastor.⁷ If the changing of service times is considered a burden to the congregation, the CTCR has urged flexibility when it comes to times and days in order to facilitate regular preaching, administration of the Sacrament and pastoral care from an available ordained minister.⁸ Moreover, the opportunity to receive the Lord’s Supper with some degree of regularity (not to mention corporate or individual absolution, as well as other pastoral acts) makes the traditional model of multipoint parish ministry a less problematic option than its virtual alternative.

While virtual video arrangements may be used in emergencies or in hybrid arrangements, such as alternating weekly services (where one is in-person, the other not), the Commission believes the

⁶ Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Opinion on Lay Reading of Sermons and Conduct of Worship in the Absence of a Pastor* (2023), www.lcms.org/ctcr-absence-of-a-pastor.

⁷ CTCR, *Opinion on Lay Reading of Sermons*.

⁸ CTCR, *Mission and Ministry Principles, and Opinion on Lay Reading of Sermons*, 6.

scandalizing the community. But the publicity would also end with that community.”⁹ In fact, that report argues, making public accusations of a perceived sin not known widely may serve the exact opposite purpose: “The rebuke has the side effect of publicizing the sin more widely, of making it known to an audience that had no prior knowledge of it.”¹⁰ In such cases, it would be far preferable to address these errors personally and privately rather than publicly and online, following Matthew 18. Through personal, private reproof, one may find that the error was unintentional and the individual repentant, or possibly that the offending issue was misunderstood or easily explainable.

Second, in the case of legitimate error in doctrine or practice, the Synod has adopted very specific procedures for addressing such offenses. All members of the Synod in any capacity — elected officers, faculty, church workers, congregations — submit themselves to ecclesiastical supervision. Concerns regarding false teaching or practice should be directed first to the individual (in keeping with Matthew 18), then to the appropriate ecclesiastical supervisor. The ecclesiastical supervisor is entrusted with the oversight of those under his care, and therefore concerns should be raised with the supervisor privately rather than broached publicly, especially online. The Bylaws of the Synod provide for a dispute resolution process, which covers theological, doctrinal and ecclesiastical matters, including the appeal of excommunication or specific call-related disputes (Bylaw 1.10). There are specific Bylaws addressing the expulsion of congregations and individual members (ordained or commissioned), officers of the Synod, and those guilty of sexual or criminal misconduct (2.14-2.17). The Bylaws also allow for appeals to the certification of materials by doctrinal review (3.9.3.2). In nearly all cases, confidentiality is required to allow time for fraternal correction and repentance without calling attention to the dispute publicly, as well as to ensure unbiased review or the possibility of selecting unbiased panelists to consider appeals. Likewise, “circularizing” (or attempting to sway opinion) of the Synod on these matters may be expressly prohibited in certain cases (3.9.3.2.2[d]). By publicizing accusations or opinions on matters mediated through one of these processes, the confidentiality necessary may be unintentionally eroded and the ability to resolve or appeal these cases compromised. Moreover, since the purpose of these various bylaws and procedures is to bring about reconciliation through biblically based reproof and repentance, intervening in, publicizing or politicizing conflicts may have the opposite effect of inhibiting such fraternal conversations and resolution.

Finally, what may be appropriate for online debate in a secular world is not necessarily appropriate in the church. We should not treat internal theological or ecclesiastical concerns as reasons for public dissension that compromises our witness to the world. St. Paul makes this point clear in 1 Corinthians, when condemning Christians who bring accusations against one another in the civil courts of his day: “So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, but brother goes to law against

⁹ Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Public Rebuke of Public Sin: Considerations in Light of the Large Catechism Explanation of the Eighth Commandment* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2006), 21, www.lcms.org/ctcr-public-rebuke-of-public-sin.

¹⁰ CTCR, *Public Rebuke of Public Sin*, 23.

brother, and that before unbelievers?” (1 Cor. 6:4–6).¹¹ In its 2019 report on social media, the CTCR underscored this point: “Even as they attempt to proclaim Christ, believers may undermine the good news of salvation by causing (or supporting) division or conflict in their online conversations with fellow believers or with unbelievers.”¹²

The Commission believes that, while the line between public and private has undoubtedly been blurred due to digital media, Lutherans — and especially members of the Synod — should refrain from engaging in online public reproof or online comment on matters of church discipline, particularly on social media. These are best reserved for private, personal conversation and for the processes established by our commonly agreed upon bylaws that regulate church discipline in our midst.

4. Online-Only Membership

With the expanded use of online technology by congregations, specifically in the form of livestreamed services, there is a greater possibility of members joining a congregation and participating solely online. The most obvious and potentially controversial or divisive form of this might occur if an LCMS parishioner in one locality were to watch the online services of a congregation located somewhere geographically that would prevent them from attending worship in person, then ask to join that congregation. Should LCMS congregations accept into their membership those who do not reside in a proximate geographical area and cannot (or do not intend to) join the new congregation for in-person worship or to actively participate in the life of that local congregation?

Missouri Synod congregations have often dealt with this dilemma when it comes to members of a congregation that do not reside locally. It may be a college student, an elderly person who has moved to a care facility or a member who has simply moved to another town. For any number of reasons, the person has chosen to retain membership at the home congregation. If it is a temporary — or potentially temporary — move, congregations will ordinarily keep them on the rolls but urge them to attend worship or procure pastoral care in the interim. In the event of a more permanent situation, pastors will advise them to visit a local congregation and speak to a pastor there about transferring their membership.

However, there are closer similarities to holding membership in a congregation that one does not or cannot attend. For instance, many LCMS congregations have a practice of “guest membership,” especially in the case of those who may live part of the year in one locale and part of the year in another, for reasons of weather or family. In these cases, the parishioner wishes to be an active member of an additional congregation, possibly with voting rights in both

¹¹ On this concern and its implications for the Gospel, see Christian Preus, “Suing Your Brother: 1 Corinthians 6:1–9 in the Lutheran Exegetical Tradition,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 86 (2022): 257–278. Also note Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *1 Corinthians 6:1–11: An Exegetical Study* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1991), www.lcms.org/ctcr-1-corinthians-6-1-11-exegetical-study.
¹² Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *A Snapshot of Trending Tools: Christians and Social Media* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2019), 28, www.lcms.org/ctcr-christians-and-social-media.

cultural phenomenon, impacting not only education, academic research, journalism and other writing-related professions, but also preaching. Pastors could now submit a simple query on the text for their sermon, and ChatGPT — using large language models that draw content from everything accessible to it online — could draft full text sermons, literally in seconds. One can even specify that the sermon be “Lutheran” or “LCMS,” and the generator will provide theologically and denominationally specific versions. Should Missouri Synod pastors use generative AI to write (or assist in writing) sermons?

At first glance, it may seem highly implausible that Missouri Synod pastors, who have received substantial training in preaching — not to mention the theological disciplines that inform their preaching — would make use of potentially controversial technology such as artificial intelligence. However, several points should be taken into consideration. First, we must ask whether or not an AI text generator is capable of producing a theologically correct Lutheran sermon. It is conceivable that large language models, when trained with actual LCMS sermons and other Lutheran literature, may generate sermon texts that would essentially reflect the theology already preached in our pulpits and written in our publications. One might even say, in that case, that it is modestly *more likely* to avoid serious theological error, since any such serious theological error would have to be widespread within existing LCMS sermons and publications.

The question is less the theological correctness of a sermon (which one hopes any Missouri Synod pastor would review before preaching), but whether or not it is appropriate to preach a sermon that the pastor himself did not write. On that score, it might also be said that there is precedent for preaching sermons — or at least *adapting* sermons — drafted by someone else. For instance, Martin Luther published two different series of “postils” — essentially model sermons that could be read devotionally, but also used as inspiration for a sermon writer, adapted for his own preaching or, in a pinch, preached largely as his own.¹⁴ In our day, it is not unheard of for LCMS preachers on a special occasion (for instance, on a Holy Week, Lenten or Christmas Eve service) to read a short sermon from a Luther work or a church father in place of his own sermon.

Granting these concessions, however, the Commission believes there are important reasons to discourage the practice of using AI-generated sermons. First, pastors are not called simply to deliver ideas. Their sermons are exercises in pastoral care. They should know their flocks and preach to them. They do not simply read sermons written by others, or sections of a commentary or pages from a devotional. Their “aptness” for preaching (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:24) involves not only their knowledge of doctrinal content, but their ability to explain it in a way that their people can understand and affirm, in a way that personally calls them to repentance and persuasively delivers the Gospel to be received in faith. A Lutheran sermon — like a Lutheran pastor — is not replaceable with doctrinally correct data. The pastor must take that theological truth and deliver it to the people God has given him to serve in a way personalized to them and the challenges and trials they face. No sermon will be exactly the same, whether preached to a different congregation or preached at a different time in a pastor’s ministry. Pastors will preach the same biblical passages in different ways based upon the believers they are called to serve at any given time.

¹⁴ “In 1526 Luther suggested that less-capable preachers could occasionally recite one of his postils as their sermon, though in 1543 he did not want preachers to use postils as a crutch for their own laziness,” *Luther’s Works* 75: xxiv.

congregational assemblies.¹³ Similarly, the homebound who lack the physical ability to attend services without great assistance retain membership in that congregation, despite the likelihood of never stepping foot inside the church building again for corporate worship.

In the case of online-only membership, there are some important differences to bear in mind. One is the availability of pastoral care. The homebound may be unable to attend worship at a local congregation, but pastors will routinely visit them to share the Word, pray and offer the Lord’s Supper. If a parishioner from Baltimore were to join a congregation in Chicago, for instance, that would not be possible. The Chicago pastor could not reasonably visit the Baltimore parishioner. Likewise, there will be a limit to the pastor’s ability to get to know the parishioner, to be with the parishioner in the event of a spiritual or personal crisis, or to be available to officiate the parishioner’s funeral. Caring for the souls of one’s flock is a fundamental part of Lutheran pastoral ministry and a reason why that pastoral ministry has long been referred to as “soul-care” (from the German *Seelsorge*). To simply be unable to provide that care for reasons of geographical proximity would unnecessarily detract from the very calling and responsibility of the pastoral office — all the more unnecessarily if there is a pastor in that locality who can provide such pastoral care.

The same is true for other elements of the local congregation’s life. If one were to be a non-local member of a congregation who only participates online, there would be precious little opportunity to establish and build relationships. As noted above, the congregation does not exist solely to conduct worship services. The members of the church who gather together offer mutual instruction, encouragement, consolation and admonition. The ability to develop relationships where that might happen — in conjunction with a worship service or apart from it — would be severely hampered, and any resulting fellowship limited to digital communication itself. Moreover, since our churches reject the practice of online Communion as inconsistent with our Lord’s institution of the Supper and its intended use, online members would be unable to receive the Lord’s Supper at their congregation of membership, or from the pastor of that congregation. One wonders how, in this event, we can even speak of the communion or fellowship (*koinonia*) expressed at the table by virtue of our shared reception of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 10:14–22; 1 Cor. 11:17–34). There would be no shared participation at the Lord’s table or shared partaking of Christ’s body and blood with the fellow members of one’s own congregation.

While there may conceivably be exceptional circumstances under which one participates in a ministry of a local congregation, despite only being able to do so online, the Commission urges against online membership. Pastors who receive queries about online membership would do well to inquire about the reasons for interest in such membership and, if not local, direct the interested individuals to a congregation close to them where they might attend and potentially join.

5. Artificial Intelligence-Generated Sermons

In 2022, ChatGPT-4 was made available to the public. This generative artificial intelligence platform enabled anyone to draft full texts using a simple online prompt. It quickly became a

¹³ 1989 Resolution 5-19 (“To Provide for Guest Membership”) urged congregations to allow for guest memberships that may entail, among other things, “attendance and participation in voters’ assemblies as advisory or associate members” (1989 *Proceedings*, 139).

Second, Lutheran pastors are trained not simply to be communicators of the distinction between Law and Gospel, but to be practitioners of Law and Gospel. That is, they are to know how to judiciously and sensitively, yet adroitly and intentionally, apply the Law and the Gospel in ways pertinent to the congregants they serve. There is no single formula for or balance of how much Law and how much Gospel should be in a sermon. Where Law is clearly present in a text of Scripture, the pastor is to apply that to the congregation in a way that addresses them and the sins prevalent in their midst or in their community or in their culture at large. Where Gospel is clearly present in a text of Scripture, the pastor is to apply that to the specific personal, spiritual or communal needs and threats of conscience those parishioners feel. As C.F.W. Walther wrote in his third thesis on Law and Gospel, “Rightly distinguishing the Law and the Gospel is the most difficult and the highest art of Christians in general and of theologians in particular. It is taught only by the Holy Spirit in the school of experience.”¹⁵

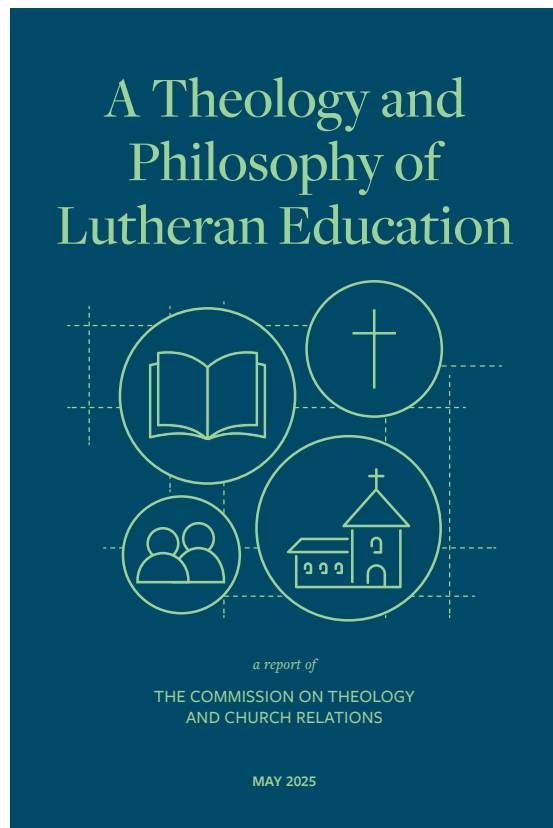
Finally, by preaching sermons drafted using artificial intelligence, a pastor unnecessarily creates doubts about his theological competence and ability to write sermons that meet the needs of the people he is called to serve. Scripture urges pastors time and again to shepherd their flocks by protecting them against false teaching and guiding them to correct doctrine (e.g., Eph. 4:1–16; 2 Tim. 2:14–26). Pastors are trained theologically and homiletically to write and deliver sermons, and the abdication of that responsibility to a text-generator — no matter how doctrinally correct the generated sermon may be — potentially creates suspicion that the pastor will not be able to identify false teaching and guide his flock to correct doctrine. That is a risk not worth taking.

While the critical use of artificial intelligence in developing sermons (outlines, illustrations, cross references, etc.) may be of limited help in sermon research, the Commission strongly urges against Synod pastors preaching sermons generated using this technology.

Adopted by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations
December 2024

¹⁵ C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, trans. W.H.T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 42. By “theologian,” Walther — himself a seminary professor — has in mind the preacher. The seventh lecture (in explanation of thesis 3) repeatedly makes this clear, 50–58.

R62.7



A THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY OF LUTHERAN EDUCATION

A Report of the Commission on Theology
and Church Relations

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

May 2025

Abbreviations

AC	Augsburg Confession
AE	<i>Luther's Works</i> . American Edition. 82 vols. Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, 1955–.
FCSD	Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration
LC	Large Catechism
SC	Small Catechism



Copyright © 2025 The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295
1-888-843-5267 • lcms.org

All rights reserved. This resource may be copied for personal study and classroom or congregational use only. Other usage is prohibited. Unless specified, it is not permissible to make modifications, omissions, or adaptations to this copyrighted resource without the prior written permission of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Quotations from the Small Catechism in this publication are from Luther's Small Catechism © 1986 Concordia Publishing House. All rights reserved.

The quotations from the Lutheran Confessions in this publication are from *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, second edition © 2006 Concordia Publishing House. All rights reserved.

The quotation from *Luther's Works* in this publication is from *Luther's Works*, American Edition, vol. 45 © 1962 Fortress Press. Used by permission of the publisher.

Manufactured in the United States of America

Contents

Preface	4
A Theology and Philosophy of Lutheran Education: The Overarching Principle	6
The First Article: Lutheran Education and Creation	8
The Second Article: Lutheran Education and Redemption	13
The Third Article: Lutheran Education and Sanctification	16
Conclusion	20
Further CTCR Resources	21
2023 Convention Proceedings: Resolution 5-10	22

PREFACE

The 2023 Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod convention passed Resolution 5-10, which tasked the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) with articulating a “theology and philosophy of Lutheran education.”¹ The convention specifically asked the CTCR to “develop principles of Lutheran education rooted in Lutheran doctrine,” including doctrines such as “justification, biblical creation, first article gifts, right and left kingdom perspectives, and Lutheran anthropology.” The process was to include consultation with representatives of the Concordia University System universities and Synod education executives, among others, with the goal of producing a “clear, concise, and readable” pamphlet that would be accessible to “workers, lay leaders, and families” and applicable to all levels of education, from preschool through secondary education.

The CTCR’s primary task is to provide guidance to the Synod in explaining and defending what it believes, teaches, and confesses, in accord with Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. Its charge from the constitution and bylaws of the Synod is to “conserve and promote the unity of the true faith,” “provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism . . . , and heresy,” and “aid congregations by providing a variety of resources and opportunities for recognizing, promoting, expressing, conserving, and defending their confessional unity in the true faith.”² This report aims to fulfill that charge and the Synod’s resolution, but it is not comprehensive, nor does it provide actionable directions for pedagogy. It provides an overarching principle that drives all of Lutheran education and a theological analysis of select doctrinal themes that pertain most directly to the current intellectual, pedagogical, and social concerns facing classrooms at every level and which were named in the resolution.

Ultimately, this is a theological report. It focuses more on explaining the relevance of these doctrines for Lutheran education than on educational method or practice. Many other themes and topics could have been considered (for instance, explaining the sacraments to students and families from nonsacramental churches, the

1 2023 Resolution 5-10, 2023 Convention Proceedings, 155. The resolution is provided in full at the end of this booklet.
2 LCMS Constitution, Article III, 1 and 6; cf. Bylaw 3.9.5.

A THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY OF LUTHERAN EDUCATION

THE OVERARCHING PRINCIPLE

What guides Lutheran education?

The truth of Holy Scripture—God’s Word—is the guiding principle in Lutheran churches, in the schools of those churches, and in the education those schools provide. Lutheran Christians affirm that Scripture is the ultimate authority for our faith and life together.³ The books of the Old Testament and New Testament are the inerrant Word of God—inspired by the Holy Spirit, trustworthy and true in all that they teach (John 10:35; Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:16–21).⁴ We also believe that the Lutheran Book of Concord, which contains theological statements from sixteenth-century Lutheran reformers, is a correct interpretation of that Word of God, and we require that all pastors and rostered teachers in our churches and schools affirm those teachings without reservation or alteration. The teachings of Holy Scripture govern what we believe (our doctrine) and what we do (our practice). Wherever that Word of God speaks, we must abide by it and conform our minds to it. That extends to matters of science, creation, and history, or any other subject, in addition to the teaching of the church’s faith. Where and to what extent it does not speak on a matter, we are free to exercise the God-given reason that all humans have, yet always bearing in mind that human reason is fallible and subservient to what God has clearly said in His Word.

We believe that the center of this Word of God and of these Lutheran Confessions is Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God and Second Person of the Holy Trinity, who is true God and true man. He is the Word of God made flesh (John 1). With all Christians of every time and in every place, we believe in the saving death and res-

3 See FC SD Comprehensive Summary, 9.
4 See also *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* (Adopted 1932), sections 1–3, available at <http://www.lcms.org/doctrine/doctrinalposition>, and *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles*, available at <http://www.lcms.org/doctrine/scripturalprinciples#IV>.

use and role of classical or biblical languages, curriculum and methodology, among other perennial concerns). However, the Commission does not envision this document as the end of the discussion. Rather, it intends that other, more educationally specific entities of the Synod (such as the Concordia University System and its universities, Synod education executives, and others not named in the resolution, like school administrators and educators) might take up these ideas and augment them, expand on them, apply them, or otherwise use them in their context as they see fit.

In the process of drafting this report, the Commission engaged specialists in Lutheran education—including Concordia University System presidents and administrators and Lutheran school administrators and teachers—in the hopes of addressing concerns that are most relevant to them. Yet it concluded that those educational professionals are more apt to evaluate competing educational theories and prescribe more specific applications than the Commission itself. This report is submitted for the purpose of clearly and faithfully articulating how these Lutheran doctrines could and should govern education within Lutheran institutions.

urrection of Jesus Christ, and we proclaim the forgiveness of sins through faith in this Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:16; 2 Cor. 5:11–21; 1 Peter 1:23–25). While that may not necessarily provide concrete direction for all practical matters related to education, it must be said that Jesus, the forgiveness of sins He offers through His Gospel, and the mission and ministry carried out in His name and at His command (Matt. 28:16–20) are the reason for the work Lutherans do in their congregations and in their schools and give focus to our proclamation, worship, and education.⁵

How does this Lutheran understanding of the Word of God as the overarching principle of Lutheran education (and Christ as the incarnation and center of that Word), then, impact the work of our schools on a practical level? We may divide matters such as these into three different spheres or domains, corresponding to the three articles of the ancient Christian creeds: one dealing primarily with our daily, bodily lives, or the gifts of creation; one dealing with salvation, or redemption from sin; one dealing with the Christian life, or sanctification.

5 See also LC II, 54–55.

THE FIRST ARTICLE

Lutheran Education and Creation (or Our World, Lives, and Everything in Them)

What role does human reason play in Lutheran education?

Lutherans believe that God has created every person and has given each of them the gift of human reason, which helps all people—including those without Christian faith—to understand and appreciate the world around them. Martin Luther's Small Catechism says that God has given me "my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, *my reason* and all my senses, and still takes care of them."⁶ God has given us human reason to understand the world which He has created, to support and protect our bodily lives, and to love and serve our neighbors. As the Lutheran Confessions say (citing St. Augustine):

We grant that all people have a free will. It is free as far as it has the judgment of reason. This does not mean that it is able, without God, either to begin, or at least to complete, anything that has to do with God. It is free only in works of this life, whether good or evil. Good I call those works that spring from the good in nature, such as willing to labor in the field, to eat and drink, to have a friend, to clothe oneself, to build a house, to marry a wife, to raise cattle, to learn various useful arts, or whatsoever good applies to this life.⁷

Human reason in this sense is not reduced to strictly logical, cerebral expressions, but also includes creative expressions such as art and music. We are free to use this human reason, but only in a way that does not contradict what God has revealed to us in His Word.

⁶ SC Explanation of the First Article; emphasis added.

⁷ AC XVIII 4-5.

8

we cannot accept an evolutionary theory that contradicts this six-day creation. On the other hand, Scripture does not teach how we are to conduct scientific research, such as the use of scientific methods of experimentation, so we are free to teach that method as human reason best sees fit, at the same time always conscious of the truths revealed in Scripture about creation. Lutherans are not opposed to science. Nicolaus Copernicus found support in Wittenberg among the Lutherans. Even when scientific views contradict the Bible, we do not deny the use of reason within its domain. Rather, we revel in the advance of science where it confirms the complex ordered nature of the world from subatomic particle to the far reaches of the universe or identifies a common human as ancestor of all living people, thereby pointing to a creator.

The arts and literature are approached in a similar way. We teach, study, and practice the visual or fine arts using our God-given "eyes, ears, and all [our] members"⁹ to create and appreciate the beauty of the sung word, painted canvas, or architectural design. This is a gift of God's creation. To take but one example, Martin Luther himself extolled the ancient histories, poetry, and literature of the classical period, even though they were composed by pagans who did not know the God of the Holy Scriptures. They provided illustrations of beauty, skill, and citizenship that could be admired by Christians. On preparing youth for participation in government, for instance, Luther says,

Here we are excelled and put to shame by the pagans of old, especially the Romans and Greeks. Although they had no idea of whether this estate was pleasing to God or not, they were so earnest and diligent in educating and training their young boys and girls to fit them for the task.¹⁰

There are no strict rules in Scripture governing history or poetry, music or art. Yet we must not use those created gifts in a way that undermines what God has revealed or in a way that misuses His creation. In the case of the humanities or social sciences, we are free to create, read, and interpret all the literature in these fields as expressions of God-given human reason, but we do so with a discriminating eye. Like the natural sciences, we dare not teach the findings of non-Christian social theories as if they were certain or categorically true. Moreover, we must reject them when they conflict with scripturally based beliefs about humanity or the created world or morality. Social theories can and may be wrong, for their authors are not infallible—only God's Word is infallible and trustworthy.

⁹ SC Explanation of the First Article.

¹⁰ Luther, "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools," AE 45:367.

10

Lutherans have often referred to this as the *ministerial* use of reason, which helps us understand the truths God has revealed in His Word, the truths that are present in His observable creation, and the basic conventions of language, grammar, logic, and rhetoric that we use to communicate and debate. This is different from the *magisterial* use of reason, by which sinful humans force Holy Scripture to conform to our natural understanding of the world and everything in it.⁸ Human reason, as we see it exercised in education, must not undermine or contradict Holy Scripture. Where Scripture speaks, we must believe and teach that truth. Where Scripture does not speak, we are free to use the human reason given to us by God to pursue an understanding of our world. Even non-Christians have the gift of human reason and use it to the benefit of those around them—think of the innumerable advances in science, technology, the fine arts, literature, history, to name but a few, where we have learned and benefited greatly from those who do not share our Christian faith. Nevertheless, this does not mean Lutherans divide or oppose faith and reason. On the contrary, we believe that Christians should always use human reason in light of the truths God Himself has revealed in Holy Scripture. Human reason informed by God's Word will prevent its misuse or misapplication, which is especially harmful in areas like morality and ethics. Moreover, Lutherans also understand that human reason—unlike God's Word—is not infallible. The human understanding of the world around us will invariably change as we gain more information or as we revise our prior knowledge through experimentation, logic, etc. We cannot trust human reason to be correct in all things; we can, however, trust God's Word in all that it tells us.

How do Lutherans study subjects not clearly revealed in Scripture?

When it comes to biblical teachings on the faith or morality (these teachings are most often referred to as "theology"), what Scripture says is clear and must be reflected in our own teaching. But what about subjects like the sciences, art, or music? Where Scripture does not directly address these subjects, we are free to use our God-given human reason to explore them. This is because God has established His world in an orderly way that is open to human study and observation. However, our teachers must distinguish between the complete certainty of what God has revealed in Holy Scripture and the provisional nature of what is known by other means. For instance, in relation to disciplines such as the natural sciences, it is scripturally clear that God created the world in six days (Genesis 1). That means

⁸ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 1:196–200.

9

Why do Lutherans value the study of nontheological disciplines?

Lutherans seek to educate students in subjects and disciplines not expressly revealed in Scripture because we also believe such studies contribute greatly to the life of the mind, to the well-roundedness of the individual, and to the betterment of the common good. We encourage that the study of engineering, agriculture, art, architecture, history, literature, music, and other such disciplines be rooted in and subservient to God's Word. God has created a world that testifies to Him in its order and beauty. A Christ-centered education will help students cultivate their God-given faculties: They will learn to use their "eyes, ears, and all [their] members" and their "reason" and "senses" to observe and delight in the beauty and order throughout God's creation that testifies to Him. As the psalmist says, "Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them" (Psalm 111:2).

Through these studies, students and teachers practice good stewardship of their God-given mental faculties. In addition to cultivating a delight in God's handiwork, studies in various fields also prepare students for their vocations of service to their neighbor—whether as doctors, musicians, artists, engineers, architects, or in any other career. Lutherans encourage all educational disciplines—from practical vocational skills to liberal arts, fine arts, social sciences, and STEM disciplines—to celebrate God's creation as His creatures, to give glory to the God who created the world and everything in it, and to recognize simultaneously both our distinct status as the image-bearers of God and the humility we should have as fallen sinners standing in awe of the heavens and earth that God has created.

How does a biblical view of humanity inform Lutheran education?

Since Lutheran Christians believe God has created each individual, as Scripture declares, this will have important implications for how Lutheran educators talk about humanity and the moral and ethical choices all humans must make. Scripture clearly reveals not only the six-day creation but also how God has created humanity and desires all humans to live in accordance with their created design. God has made us either male or female, according to our biological anatomy (Gen. 1:27; Gen. 2:21–23). He has created marriage as a lifelong bond between one man and one woman (Matt. 19:3–9; 1 Cor. 7:10–11). He has instituted marriage between one man and one woman for the purposes of companionship and procreation (Gen. 2:18–25). He has reserved sexual activity solely for marriage between that one man and that one woman (Ex. 20:14; Matt. 5:27–30). Through the sexual union of that one man and one woman, God fills the earth (Gen. 1:28). God gives life—from

11

conception through natural death—as a precious gift, and that gift of life must be respected and protected (Psalm 51:5; Psalm 139:13–17; Jer. 1:5). God creates every human—no matter ethnicity, language, or nationality—and therefore condemns racism or bigotry of any sort (Acts 10:34–35; Acts 17:26).

That which is rooted in God’s Word must be upheld and practiced in our schools even when it does not resonate with wider cultural opinion. We abide by what Scripture teaches—in our classroom instruction, student discipline, or personal counsel. However, Lutheran educators also understand that many within our schools may not share the same beliefs about how God has made us biologically or how he commands us to live sexually. We trust our administrators and instructors to exercise responsible discretion in attending to these conflicts and addressing them with sensitivity and patience. At the same time, we require a commitment to biblical teachings concerning marriage and sexuality and also require our teachers to support and be committed to the same. Only through “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) might our educators remain faithful to God’s Word and bring it to their students (and their parents) in a way that contradicts unbiblical, immoral beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors condoned by the larger non-Christian culture (and even many misled or erring Christians).

to allow students to make mistakes, learn from their errors, and improve. Student discipline is also a valuable opportunity to teach repentance and offer forgiveness.

What role does the Gospel play in Lutheran education?

Lutheran theology clearly distinguishes between the Law and the Gospel. Certain passages of Scripture in both the Old and New Testaments set forth the Law, God’s requirements for our lives (or His “unchanging will”). These requirements reflect the moral standards for how we are to live in accordance with how God has made us and what He has told us to do, especially as we see this in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:2–17). We believe that obedience to this Law will help to protect us from temporal consequences and bring temporal blessings in this life, that the preaching of this Law makes us aware of our sins against God and His Word, and that this Law provides concrete guidance for how we should lead our Christian lives. The teaching of the Law is distinct from the Gospel. The Gospel, also found in both the Old and New Testaments, is the promise of the forgiveness of sins on account of Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection, which we receive by faith alone. We unreservedly proclaim the forgiveness of sins for all who believe in Jesus, that Jesus is the only hope and path for salvation, and that God brings sinners to repentance and faith and forgives their sins through the preaching of the Word—rightly divided between Law and Gospel—and administration of the sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

While we believe the Law provides shape and form to the moral life and should govern our instruction and behavioral expectations in Lutheran schools, it cannot be an end in itself when dealing with fallen sinners. It must be accompanied by a proclamation of the Gospel. Teaching the Law may provide clear moral expectations to students, but only the teaching of the Gospel (through which the Holy Spirit gives and sustains faith) will lead to changed hearts, renewed lives, and eternal salvation. Ultimately, all truly good works are fruits of the Spirit that arise solely and freely from faith in the Gospel (Gal. 5:22–23) rather than from the fear of the Law (Gal. 2:16), as the Lutheran Formula of Concord says.¹² We desire that all students in Lutheran schools hear the Gospel of what Christ has done for them, believe in Jesus Christ, and receive Baptism for the forgiveness of their sins. We do this in the confidence that, through faith in the Gospel, they will grow to have the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16), conform themselves to God’s Word, and live

12 FC SD VI.5

THE SECOND ARTICLE

Lutheran Education and Redemption
(or the Gospel of Jesus Christ)

How does the reality of sin inform Lutheran education?

Lutheran Christians believe that human beings were created in the image and likeness of God, perfectly reflecting His righteousness as His good creation (Gen. 1:27). However, we also believe sin entered the world with the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). The entrance of sin has removed our original purity, holiness, and godliness, and placed us under God’s judgment and wrath (Rom. 5:12–21; 7:21–25). This sin has infected every human being at conception (“original sin”).¹¹ Sin has twisted our desires toward things God has prohibited or things that are unhealthy for us spiritually or physically (“concupiscence”). Acting upon these desires, we believe, think, and do things contrary to God’s Word (“actual sins”). All of these forms of sin—whether we know of them or not—are against God’s will. Yet we believe that Jesus alone offers the forgiveness of sins to those who believe in His Gospel.

This understanding of sin impacts our education in several ways. First, on an intellectual level, we believe that sin has led to the misunderstanding and misuse of God’s creation (Rom. 1:18–32). We must correct that misunderstanding and misuse through our instruction. For instance, we are obligated to correct mistaken theories and views often taught in classrooms that deny God’s creation or that condone sexual sins. Second, on a personal level, we must instruct our students about the nature of sin, its implications for their spiritual lives, its temporal consequences in their daily lives, and the need for repentance of those sins. Third, we believe that we must also offer students grace for their sins by sharing with them the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and we seek to model that grace in the care we offer our students. That also means we do not withhold disciplinary action as a consequence for their disobedience (Heb. 12:9–11), yet we also give teachers discretion

11 AC II.

according to God’s Law. Lutheran schools also maintain the distinction between Law and Gospel when it comes to the discipline of students. Though there may be consequences and punishments for misbehavior, these are also occasions for the declaration of the forgiveness of sins in Christ.

Why do Lutheran schools teach theology and gather for worship?

Lutheran Christians do not provide a strictly secular or intellectual educational experience, free from religious curriculum or practice. A central part of education in a Lutheran institution is to provide for instruction in the Christian faith (“catechesis”), primarily from the Holy Scriptures and Luther’s Small Catechism. That may come in the classroom, in the form of theology classes required for all students (Lutheran or not), as well as in teaching within other disciplines where the faith of Lutheran teachers informs their instruction in the humanities or sciences. There is no “religion-free” space in Lutheran schools. While theology is taught unapologetically from a Lutheran perspective to students, Lutheran or not, that faith should also come through in other areas of the curriculum.

Likewise, worship is essential to every Lutheran school (e.g., in regularly scheduled chapel services, classroom prayers or devotions, Scripture memorization, and the like). Such worship opportunities allow Lutheran schools to share what makes them most unique: the faith that they believe, teach, and confess. Lutherans do not simply speak about their faith, they also sing about it, and they sing about it in worship. We read Scripture, confidently pray according to our Lord’s promises, sing hymns or psalms, and preach the Gospel in a way that children come to learn and believe the truths of the Christian faith and commit them to the head and the heart. The worship life of a Lutheran school enables students, faculty, and staff to hear the Word as it is read, taught, proclaimed, prayed, or sung.

THE THIRD ARTICLE

Lutheran Education and Sanctification (or the Christian Life)

What is the relation between Lutheran schools and the state (laws, educational regulation, etc.)?

Lutherans typically distinguish between God's two ways of working in the world. This is sometimes described as God's right-hand and left-hand "kingdoms." His right-hand, eternal, spiritual kingdom is where He works through the preaching of His Word, and His left-hand, temporal, earthly kingdom is where He works through the authorities He has instituted in the civil government. In the left-hand kingdom, God has established authorities in the form of governments, politicians, judges, militaries, and law enforcement to protect the lives and property of citizens (Rom. 13:1–7; 1 Peter 2:13–14). This also includes state regulations concerning education. Our Lutheran schools seek to abide by all civil laws and regulations, including those that govern education. Our Lutheran schools also urge their families to be good citizens, pray for their leaders, and play an active role in our political system. Lutheran institutions serve this left-hand, civil realm by preparing law-abiding citizens to contribute to society in many practical ways, from the politician to the social worker, from the accountant to the elementary school teacher.

At the same time, our Lutheran schools are institutions of the church that also ultimately serve the right-hand realm: the ministry of God's Word. These schools have many different missions to serve many different populations. Some seek to educate Lutherans or train them for church service, some seek to aid underserved populations by providing quality education, some see themselves as evangelistic outposts and alternatives to secular schools, and some provide higher education to a broader public. In all cases, however, they are institutions of the church, which is called to the right-hand work of proclaiming the Gospel and teaching the Scriptures in accordance with the Lutheran understanding of the faith. The government must not impede the confession and mission of our schools by overstepping its left-hand authority (e.g., when laws or regulations dictate or limit what our insti-

tutions teach about the faith, who may teach in our schools, and what behaviors we must allow). If civil government trespasses into right-hand matters (faith, morality, and the like), our schools may appeal to their constitutional right to religious freedom in opposing those actions and will obey God, not man (Acts 5:29).

What is the Lutheran understanding of vocation?

Lutheran Christians believe God has called each of us to a variety of holy vocations where we might serve God and our neighbor in word and deed. Vocations are callings from God, who places all people into a number of different roles and responsibilities in the course of their lives. The primary vocation for every Christian is the call of the Gospel. We are called to be baptized children of God who lead lives of service to God and neighbor in the freedom God has given us through forgiveness and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives (Romans 8; Galatians 5). There is no greater or holier calling than to be a baptized child of God. God has also called each of us to various places in life with specific responsibilities.¹³ In the family or household, one may be a husband or wife, parent or child, breadwinner or homemaker (Eph. 5:21–6:9; 1 Peter 3:1–7). In the church, one may be a pastor or parishioner, church worker, church official, elder, deacon, teacher, or student. We believe whatever place we find ourselves in, there God has called us to act as His baptized children. We live according to God's Word and serve Him as His children wherever He has placed us.

Lutheran schools seek to train students for specific vocations into which God will call them. Our schools must provide a well-rounded education that prepares students for work or further schooling in everything from the natural sciences to the humanities, from technical trades to church work. It also means that all students from a Lutheran school should understand what the Scriptures teach about the world and everything in it, about sin and the redemption we have in Christ, and about how we are to lead our lives in accordance with God's design and Word. As students are formed in the theological and moral foundations of the Christian faith, and are trained to excel in their specialized vocations in the world, they will be prepared to serve not just the church, but also society as a whole. In Luther's words, we should "especially urge magistrates and parents to rule well and to send their children to school" that they might be of service to "both God's kingdom *and* that of the world."¹⁴

¹³ See SC, Table of Duties.

¹⁴ SC, Preface, emphasis added.

What is the vocation of a Lutheran teacher?

In the first place, Lutheran educators function as extensions of parental authority in the lives of the children they teach. The responsibility for the instruction of children ultimately belongs to parents. The Large Catechism says that all authority—governmental, religious, even educational—"flows and is born from the authority of parents."¹⁵ Parents are charged with raising their children in the faith (Deut. 6:7), supporting and protecting their children in their lives and bodily needs, and providing for, overseeing, and involving themselves in their education. Parents are the primary teachers of their children. Lutheran educators work with and alongside parents in this task. Teachers do not replace or compete with parents, but rather act in place of them (*in loco parentis*) in classroom instruction or in disciplinary matters. Parents delegate this care of their children to teachers in the subjects they teach and the supervision they provide.

In another sense, however, Lutheran educators also function as extensions of the ministry of the Word through their associated congregations. Since the schools are ministries of the church, our teachers are considered "ministers" of the church too. Lutherans believe that God has established the ministry of pastors (what we call the "Office of the Public Ministry") to preach and teach the Word, administer the Sacraments, conduct the public services of the church, and oversee the doctrine and worship life of the congregation that has called them. As servants of the church's school ministry, however, teachers assist in the church's work of teaching the Word (what we call the "public ministry"), not in the form of public preaching or conducting public worship services, but rather through teaching the Word to the students under their care. That means everything the teacher does in the life of the school—whether the administrative work of the principal, the religious instruction of the theology teacher, or the discipline-specific instruction of the science or art teacher—brings the Word of God to bear upon the life of the school and ministers to the spiritual as well as the intellectual needs of the students. In Lutheran schools, teachers play an instrumental role in this ministry of the Word. This is a high and noble calling, yet also one of Christlike service. At the same time, no one should take advantage of the dedication of our teachers. It is vital for the future of Lutheran schools that educators be honored, respected, and supported financially.

Lutheran teachers often receive a formal "call" from the school as a public recognition of their training and fitness for this service. Called teachers are usually installed into their positions in public worship services, as an indication of their

¹⁵ LC I 141.

service to the church. Teachers eligible for a "call" receive training, either in a university or seminary of the church, or through some other educational program, to instruct them in the basics of Lutheran theology. All teachers in Lutheran schools are obligated to uphold the teachings of the church in their instruction and personal conduct, to submit themselves to oversight of their instruction and personal conduct by appropriate representatives of the church, and to abide by the constitution and bylaws of the school's congregation and larger church body. In schools which cannot be staffed solely by trained Lutheran faculty, teachers are still to understand that they are serving an institution of the Lutheran Church and shall teach in accordance with the faith of the Lutheran Church.

CONCLUSION

This proposed theology and philosophy of Lutheran education derives from the Lutheran understanding of Holy Scripture and the doctrines that we believe, teach, and confess. Lutherans do not seek to be contrarians in their approach to education, yet these core approaches to Holy Scripture and to the doctrines taught by Scripture cannot help but contradict some theories of education. In many respects, this is what makes Lutheran education unique. Theology is at the core of our faith and life together, and therefore it will impact the education we offer in ways that are incompatible with secular models of education that reject our theology. What St. Paul urges the Romans should be true for Lutherans educationally: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2).

There is and can be no single, definitive “Lutheran” approach to education that will prescribe all acceptable forms of classroom instruction or subjects of study. Lutherans have used many different models of education over the centuries that do not contradict their confession of faith. Therefore, the ideas articulated here are not to be seen as binding us to a particular model of education, nor are they exhaustive. They do not address practical matters of pedagogy or curriculum or school policy. They are not intended for a particular level of Lutheran education (seminary, undergraduate, high school, K–8, early childhood). Nor do they advocate for a particular form of education (parochial school, classical school, homeschooling). On the contrary, this document provides some foundational theological direction on commonly asked questions which might be of use to administrators, teachers, parents, and students at every level and in every form of education. We commend this exploration of a theology and philosophy of Lutheran education to the educators and educational institutions of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, that it may support them in the work they undertake, together with us all, of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

Further Resources from the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

A Chaste and Decent Life: An Update to Human Sexuality 1981; 2023

Creation in Biblical Perspective; 1970

In Christ All Things Hold Together: The Intersection of Science and Christian Theology; 2015

The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature; 1981

Render unto Caesar . . . and unto God: A Lutheran View of Church and State; 1995

To Articulate Theology and Philosophy of Lutheran Education

RESOLUTION 5-10

Reports R1, R1.2.1, R14 (CW, 1–3, 14, 64–69)

WHEREAS, Our Lutheran schools at every level face constant challenges in a world of competing philosophies; and

WHEREAS, Our Synod would benefit from a clearly articulated theology and philosophy of Lutheran education that considers sound principles from the doctrine of justification, biblical creation, first article gifts, right and left kingdom perspectives, and Lutheran anthropology, to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of various educational philosophies; and

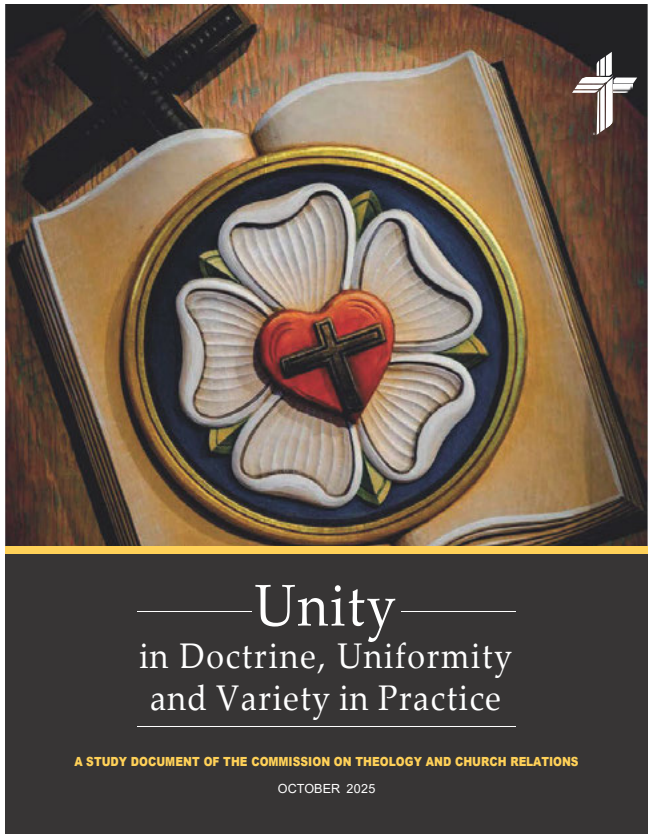
WHEREAS, A clear, concise, and readable theology and philosophy of Lutheran education could help guide our workers, lay leaders, and families from preschool, grade school, high school, and secondary education as they make curriculum, discipline, and other decisions on a daily basis; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Commission on Theology and Church Relations—in consultation with representatives from Concordia University System universities, Synod education executives, and others—develop principles of Lutheran education rooted in Lutheran doctrine; and be it further

Resolved, That a pamphlet be produced for written and electronic distribution to help guide congregations, schools, workers, and parents in the task of faithfully leading students in their education.

2023 Convention Proceedings
Page 155

R62.8



Unity

in Doctrine, Uniformity and Variety in Practice

A Study Document

Contents

Preface	1
Introduction	3
Early Church	5
Case Study 1	
Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)	5
Case Study 2	
Date of Easter (Second Century)	7
Lutheran Reformation	11
Case Study 3	
Lutherans Invocavit Sermons (1522)	11
Case Study 4	
Adiaphoristic Controversy (16th Century)	15
The Missouri Synod	19
Case Study 5	
Formation of the Synod (1847)	19
Case Study 6	
Lay Lectors (1989)	22
What Now?	27

© 2026 The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod 1333 S. Kirkwood Road St. Louis, MO 63122-8888 THE LCMS • lcms.org
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2011 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
Cover Image: LCMS Communications/Erik Lamford



Preface

The 2019 convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) passed Resolution 5-11, which asked the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) to produce a study document addressing questions about unity in doctrine and uniformity and variety in practice. The short resolution may be quoted in its entirety:

WHEREAS, Questions and concerns continue to arise in the Synod about the relationship between unity in doctrine and uniformity and variety in practice (Constitution Article III 7); and

WHEREAS, Certain practices in the church are divinely mandated while other practices are in the realm of adiaphora (neither commanded nor forbidden by the Scriptures) but serve to edify the church (see Augsburg Confession VII; Formula of Concord Solid Declaration X); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod direct the Commission on Theology and Church Relations to prepare a study document on the issue of the relationship between unity in doctrine and uniformity and variety in practice, together with a Bible study on this issue specifically designed for congregational use, discussion, and guidance. (2019 *Proceedings*, 155)

From the perspective of the CTCR, a “study document” is a very narrowly defined category. The CTCR’s policy guidelines specify different types of study documents, including study guides of an existing report, Bible studies or more specific studies intended to stimulate discussion. It is in the vein of this last category that the CTCR has chosen to fulfill the resolution’s mandate for a study document and Bible study “designed for congregational use, discussion, and guidance.” The Commission hopes that this document will foster discussion about the relationship between unity in doctrine and uniformity and variety in practice.

The current (2023) version of LCMS Constitution Article III 7, which is cited in the resolution precipitating this study, describes one of the objectives of the Synod in this way: “Encourage congregations to strive for uniformity in church practice, but also to develop an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith.” After its study of this constitutional article, the CTCR determined there could be no absolute or undisputed delineation of precisely which practices require uniformity and which practices allow for diversity in every case and under every circumstance. Nonetheless, the church has long wrestled with these tensions in her history and has found ways faithfully to resolve controversy over any number of disputed practices. For this reason the CTCR decided to submit a study document to the Synod intended to foster discussion of these important matters historically, how Christians have sought to resolve their differences over them, and how these instances relate to our Synod theologically.

1

“Encourage congregations to strive for uniformity in church practice, but also to develop an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith.”

LCMS Handbook (2023), Constitution Article III 7

Introduction

The 2019 LCMS convention charged the CTCR with producing a study document addressing the relationship between “unity in doctrine” and “uniformity and variety in practice.”¹ This language comes from Article III 7 of the Synod’s Constitution, which states as one of its objectives that the Synod should “encourage congregations to strive for uniformity in church practice, but also ... develop an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith.” What exactly does this objective of the Synod mean for its members? First, it assumes unity in doctrine — a “common profession of faith” — which is the confessional basis for our fellowship as a denomination. Article II of the Constitution expressly identifies the canonical Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions as our church body’s basis for doctrine and practice. Article VI requires unqualified acceptance of this confessional basis for membership in the Synod. The Constitution says later that all matters of doctrine and conscience shall be decided by the Word of God, which includes the doctrinal teachings of the Lutheran Confessions since they are in accord with Holy Scripture (Article VIII C). This much is unobjectionable for all members of the Synod. This unity of the true faith is the foundation of our fellowship, while disagreement on the doctrines taught by Holy Scripture threatens that fellowship.

The other two terms raised by Article III 7 of the Constitution and by 2019 Resolution 5-11 are more complicated. The Constitution asserts that we should “strive for uniformity in church practice.” By church practice, it has in mind primarily — though not exclusively — matters of worship. That is why the original form in the 1847 LCMS Constitution (as we will discuss later) had it as “ceremonies” instead of “church practice.”² Thus, the Synod’s congregations should seek uniformity in worship practices. At the same time, the present (2023) Constitution also urges us to “develop an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith.” This would suggest that, while we seek uniformity in worship practices, we not only accept, but even *appreciate* various worship practices, provided they are used *responsibly* and that they are in harmony with the unity of doctrine we share.

It goes without saying that this raises many thorny issues among us. How can uniformity be desirable, yet variety be appreciated? Should we seek uniformity in any and all practices, or is uniformity in some practices more desirable than in others? What makes for a responsible use of practices and customs, and, conversely, what makes for their irresponsible use? How do we determine which practices demand uniformity and which practices should be appreciated in their diversity? The Synod has been and remains divided over the answers to these questions.

¹ 2019 Resolution 5-11 (*Convention Proceedings*, 155).

² It should be noted that the concept of church “practice” is much larger than simply ceremonies. The 1917 revision of the Constitution expanded the article to include three related categories: “The endeavor to bring about the largest possible uniformity in church-practice (*kirchlicher Praxis*), church-customs (*Kirchengewohnheiten*), and, in general, in congregational affairs (*Gemeindefragen*).” It is hard to know exactly what these three categories related to. *Kirchengewohnheiten* is the term used in Formula of Concord X, where it pertains mostly (but not necessarily exclusively) to church ceremonies.

3

The CTCR offers the present study document as a series of historical case studies involving six specific conflicts over church practice, all of which bear some relation to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod or to the Lutheran Confessions themselves. The first two are drawn from the Early Church: the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, which is cited as one of the reasons for forming the Synod, and the Quartodeciman Controversy, which concerned the date of Easter and is repeatedly cited in the Lutheran Confessions. The next two are drawn from the Reformation-era church: Martin Luther’s 1522 *Invocavit Sermons*, which provide guidance in Christian freedom and evangelical reform that will be taken up by the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, and the Adiaphoristic Controversy, which resulted in the drafting of Formula of Concord X. The final two are drawn from LCMS history itself: the 1847 Constitution’s approach to uniformity in practice, giving rise to our current constitutional Article III 7, and the more recent adoption of lay lectors and women’s suffrage, which continue to receive attention and foster debate (including multiple overtures at the 2023 Synod convention). By putting forward these case studies, the Commission neither endorses the outcomes nor offers its opinion on the issues. It rather believes that these historical examples model how the church can discuss disagreements over matters of practice without threatening the unity it has doctrinally.

Rather than producing an independent or accompanying Bible study, the Commission has embedded study questions at the end of each section that may be used to guide discussion in circuit pastors’ meetings, congregational Bible classes and similar opportunities. The Commission commends this document and the cases it studies in the hopes that this will stimulate further conversation about how we might, like those before us, patiently and fraternally address areas of practice where we might disagree and, where possible, achieve greater agreement.

2

INTRODUCTION

Yet it must also be said that the LCMS has long dealt with this tension — as did 16th-century Lutheranism and as has the church of all ages. The term Lutherans have customarily used to describe this tension is *adiaphora*, a Greek word meaning “things indifferent.”³ The term *adiaphora* (singular *adiaphoron*) is not used in Scripture but arises from ancient Greek philosophers in relation to actions they considered neither good nor bad, but neutral.⁴ Christian theologians later used it to describe works or practices that are neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture and are thus in the realm of Christian freedom. This, of course, does not mean we should be indifferent toward all matters that are *adiaphora*. Nothing could be further from the truth. Lutherans of the past were willing to protest, even to suffer death or imprisonment, for a rightful use of practices deemed *adiaphora*. Our practices, even those not specifically mandated by God, reflect the faith that we profess in common. Moreover, when *adiaphora* are either required or forbidden (by church or state), we must resist that coercion (as the discussion of Formula of Concord later in this document will make clear).

Lutheran churches since the time of the Reformation have maintained that our unity in the faith does not consist in man-made practices, but in our common confession of doctrine (Augsburg Confession VIII and XIII). That does not mean that “anything goes” outside of our unity in doctrine. On the contrary, Lutherans have wrestled with the delicate balance between, on the one hand, Christian freedom in matters of *adiaphora* and, on the other, exhibiting the unity we share by the way we practice our faith corporately.⁵ For this tension, there is no easy solution, nor does this document aim to provide one. On the contrary, the Commission believes greater discussion and mutual understanding might be fostered through a close study of how Christians have maintained their doctrinal integrity despite disagreements over church practice and how they have resolved those differences without damage done to their doctrinal unity or to their fellowship. We have intentionally chosen examples from three very different periods in the church’s life — the Early Church, the Reformation-era church and the Missouri Synod — and from across a wide spectrum of debated issues, mostly dealing with worship customs, to show how Christians of good faith have navigated these differences.⁶

³ The Greek term *adiaphora* is not found in the New Testament. Its opposite, *ta diapheronta* (“things that matter”), is found in Romans 2:18 and Philippians 1:10. The closest cognate to be found is *diaphoros* (“to be different”) in Galatians 2:6 and 4:11. On the terminology, usage and related concepts for *adiaphora* in the New Testament, see James Jaquette, *Discerning What Counts: The Function of Adiaphora Topics in Paul’s Letters* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995), especially 97–154.

⁴ The term *adiaphora* entered theological discussion not necessarily through biblical interpretation, but philosophical usage. Ancient Cynic and Stoic philosophers used the term to describe their differing views on the external customs and affairs of Greek culture. Cicero translated it as *indifferentia*, and medieval theologians applied these *indifferentia* to works of supererogation, which went beyond that required of Christians. Lutherans, with their emphasis upon the original biblical languages — as well as classical authors — brought this term into the theological discussion in its original Greek form. See Bernard Verkamp, *The Indifferent Mean: Adiaphorism in the English Reformation to 1554* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1977), 1–40.

⁵ A common way of framing the relationship between our worship practices and the faith we confess is the dictum *lex orandi, lex credendi* (“the law of prayer [is] the law of belief”). This saying, first articulated by Prosper of Aquitaine in the fifth century, is often cited as a reason for insisting upon specific forms of the liturgy as a way of reflecting or confessing our Lutheran theology. For good reason, confessional Lutheranism has never wholeheartedly adopted this phrase, as it could imply (and did for much of the church’s history) that the way we worship determines what we believe. On the contrary, Lutherans believe the doctrine we confess should shape the way we worship. However, a correct understanding of *adiaphora* (as the Formula of Concord puts it) or human traditions (as the Augsburg Confession frames it) means that there may be worship practices that do not correlate exactly with a specific theological teaching of Lutheranism and so may actually be *free*. In these matters, Christians have the latitude to choose which practices suit their local custom, piety or other particular needs. As will be discussed more fully later, per our agreement to practice in accordance with the resolutions adopted by the Synod in convention, we may also agree to use or not use specific practices — in worship or otherwise — even though those practices are, properly speaking, free and neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture.

⁶ As noted in the preface, the Commission is not advocating for the solutions that Christians of the past have reached in these disagreements over church practice. The Commission sets these case studies before the Synod as examples of how those Christians have dealt with disagreements in practice that they did not consider necessarily church-dividing and thus sought to — and ultimately did — find agreement in those matters.

4

Early Church

CASE STUDY 1

Jerusalem Council (ACTS 15)

The church of the New Testament was not without its controversies and tensions. Whether it was the factions addressed by the Epistle of James, St. Paul's confrontation of St. Peter as described in Galatians 2, or the many problems besetting the Corinthian church, the apostolic era of the New Testament had divisions that required attention. Maybe the most foundational of these cases is the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, where the young church had to wrestle with the application of Old Testament ritual law to Gentiles. As converts began to repent and believe the Gospel, the church grew rapidly. After Peter himself, through his interaction with Cornelius, began to advocate for the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles and their inclusion in the church, what was once a community made up largely of Jewish converts soon became a mixed assembly of Jew and Gentile. It was unavoidable that those two cultures — with their distinct religious and social backgrounds — would collide.

Acts 15 details the convergence of teachers in Antioch (ACTS 14:26-28) who were at odds with Paul and Barnabas over the requirement of circumcision. The preaching of Paul and Barnabas led many Gentile converts to the faith. However, teachers from Judea began to teach that these Gentiles could not be saved without circumcision (ACTS 15:1). Due to the strife, Paul and Barnabas, among others, were sent to Jerusalem to seek the counsel of the apostles and elders gathered there (ACTS 15:2). Yet there were some in Jerusalem who identified with the Pharisees and agreed with the Judean teachers that circumcision was mandatory for Gentile converts (ACTS 15:5). In what is by all accounts the first council or synod of the church, the apostles and elders met to debate the issue. Peter delivered a stirring account of his mission to the Gentiles and urged the assembly not to burden fellow believers in Christ with a requirement for salvation beyond that which the Gospel declares — faith in Jesus Christ alone.

There were two problems facing the Jerusalem Council — one related to doctrine, the other to practice. The doctrinal was the first to be addressed and undoubtedly the most important. The church unambiguously rejected the teaching regarding the necessity of circumcision. James the Just (not one of the Twelve, but the brother of Jesus and the apparent leader of the church in Jerusalem) agreed with Paul. Theologically speaking, in the sight of God (*coram Deo*, as Lutherans later put it) only faith in Christ avails for salvation. These Gentiles have converted to the Gospel, not to ritual or sacrificial practices of Old Testament Israel. The practice of circumcision is not required for salvation. Faith alone is necessary. Since the Gentile converts have faith in Christ, they must not be burdened with this quite clearly false doctrine of justification by works of the law, or a works-righteousness alongside the righteousness of faith (see ROM. 4:1-25; GAL. 3:1-21). On this, there could be no ambiguity or dissension. To disagree about this was to disagree about the Gospel and therefore would be divisive of the fellowship of the church.

5

EARLY CHURCH

others concerning it. On the contrary, the very formation of the Synod — after the example of the apostolic church, as exemplified in Acts 15 — entails a commitment to conversing collegially about our life together and seeking to find resolution about disputed practices. That may ultimately mean a uniformity in certain practices or a variety in certain practices. The important thing is that the church comes together to talk about it, to do so on the basis of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, and to seek the best way forward without binding consciences in matters where Scripture has not spoken.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Since the Old Testament required circumcision, on what basis did the Early Church emphatically deny that it should continue as a requirement for believers?
2. How do the four proscriptions of the Jerusalem Council (things polluted by idols, sexual immorality, what has been strangled and from blood) indicate a commitment to love other believers?
3. Should the Jerusalem Council's decision have been retained for all subsequent church history? Why or why not?

CASE STUDY 2

Date of Easter (Second Century)

Another historical example of the tension between unity in doctrine and variety in practice, and one with pertinence for Lutheranism, is the Early Church's debate over the date of Easter. This is known as the Quartodeciman Controversy. "Quartodeciman" comes from the Latin term for "fourteen," as some early Christians believed Easter — the Christian Passover — should be celebrated on the Jewish Passover, which was observed on the 14th day of the Jewish month of Nisan (LEV. 23:5). The Jewish calendar followed a lunar cycle, which meant the 14th day after the full moon fell on or following the spring equinox. That also meant Easter could fall on any day, Sunday or not, and so Christians would celebrate it on any day — again, Sunday or not. This practice arose especially among Eastern Christians in Asia Minor and Syria in the Early Church. Quartodecimans sought to emphasize the relationship between the Passover and Christ as the church's Passover — or Paschal — Lamb. While Jews were sharing their Passover meal from sunset to midnight, Christians would fast and then, before dawn, celebrate their own Easter Passover with Scripture reading, song and the Lord's Supper.

While Quartodecimanism appears to be the more ancient practice, another approach emerged in Western churches, especially Rome, as increasing numbers of Gentiles converted to the faith. Western Gentiles were not as socially connected to the Jewish Passover and did not view Easter as the Christian Passover. Instead, the Roman churches came to emphasize the connection between Easter and the resurrection of Christ, which occurred on the Sunday after the Passover. Celebrating Easter on the Sunday after the Passover would become the common practice of the Roman churches sometime in the second century.⁵

⁵ A related issue was the difference in calendars themselves. The Jewish calendar was lunar and only contained 354 days, whereas the Julian calendar — predominant in the West since the first century B.C. — had 365 days. That meant, even if churches in the East shared the Roman practice of celebrating Easter on the Sunday after Passover, the date for Easter could differ by weeks depending upon the syncing of the calendars.

7

EARLY CHURCH

There was also a practical problem the Jerusalem Council had to address: how much of the Old Testament law Gentiles should be required to keep. In this case, James urges four specific items of the ritual and civil law upon the Gentiles, all seemingly drawn from the proscriptions of Leviticus 17–18 contained in the Mosaic Law, which "is read every Sabbath in the synagogues" (ACTS 15:21). Gentiles were "to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood" (ACTS 15:20; CF. 15:29). Why these four, among the many other regulations of the Old Testament? That is harder to say. It is obvious that there were divisions over consuming meats sacrificed to idols in the Early Church (ROM. 14:1-8; 1 COR. 8:1-12). That James and the council would ask Gentiles to abstain from this is reasonable. The request to refrain "from blood" and "from what has been strangled" likely relate to the prohibition against eating the blood of animals in Leviticus 17–18. The final request to abstain from sexual immorality (*porneia*) is less clear. It probably does not have in mind a general prohibition of sexual immorality, since sexual immorality is clearly against God's law and is not a matter of adiaphora that a human council could dispense with or institute. It may be underscoring some of the very specific sexual deviations prohibited in Leviticus 18:6–23 that were not seen as problematic or objectionable in Roman culture. It might also include such things as marriages with pagans, consanguineous marriages or simply more restrictive Jewish attitudes toward relationships between the two sexes, none of which would have been expressly condemned by Scripture but may have provoked controversy between Jewish and Gentile believers.⁶

We cannot be certain exactly why James chose these four "accommodations" to the that Jewish contingent, or what he hoped to accomplish by doing so. It may have simply been to keep the peace, or so that Jewish converts would not feel ritually unclean by joining with Gentile converts in worship or meals, or even to remove obstacles to the evangelism of ritually pure Jewish unbelievers. In any event, it is absolutely clear what the Jerusalem Council could not tolerate: disagreement over the Gospel. We are justified through faith in Christ and Christ alone. As Augsburg Confession VII later says, there can be no unity apart from agreement in the Gospel (as well as the Sacraments, which forgive our sins through and on account of that Gospel). Where it is a matter of doctrine, where Scripture has clearly spoken on a matter of the faith, there can be no disagreement. The faith we confess binds us together and constitutes our unity. The Jerusalem Council simply could not tolerate the teaching that circumcision is necessary for salvation. On the other hand, there are matters that are free and that may in Christian freedom be corporately adopted for the sake of unity in the church. These are not required for salvation, and must not be presented as such, but they may in brotherly love and mutual consent be adopted for the sake of peace and good order within the church (1 COR. 14:40).

Not only is Acts 15 relevant to the discussion of adiaphora, but it also held great significance for the Missouri Synod at its founding. The 1847 Constitution — and every iteration since — listed as one of the two reasons for forming the Synod "the example of the apostolic church," citing Acts 15:1–31. The Jerusalem Council provided the Synod with a clear, New Testament example of Christians of like faith joining together to discuss, deliberate and even disagree, but ultimately to seek unity in doctrine and practice. Those early members of the Synod sought to form a confessional fellowship rooted in such unity. That unity is founded only upon God's Word and is not subject to majority vote. Other matters, where Scripture has not expressly spoken, may be debated. The Synod, especially in convention or in other outlets for discussion over matters of concern, may reach agreement to practice (or not practice) in a certain way. That something is, technically speaking, an adiaphoron, which Scripture has neither commanded nor forbidden, does not mean members of the Synod may disregard the consciences or objections of

⁶ F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 209, holds the more traditional opinion of consanguineous marriages. He adds: "Ordinary fornication, like ordinary idol-worship, was ruled out by the most elementary principles of Christian instruction."

6

EARLY CHURCH

As a result of the divergence in the dating and observance of Easter, a series of minor controversies emerged, chiefly in the second century. After one synod affirmed the practice of the Roman church, the Roman bishop, Victor, threatened to excommunicate the bishop of Ephesus, Polycrates, and others who continued observing the Quartodeciman practice. Complicating matters was the fact that the practice of fasting prior to Easter — quite similar to the familiar custom of "giving things up," or fasting, during Lent — meant that some Christians were feasting while others fasted, potentially even in the same region. It would take none other than the eminent Early Church theologian and bishop of Lyons, Irenaeus, to help resolve the impasse. Irenaeus, himself from Asia Minor and well-acquainted with the Quartodeciman observance, argued that a diversity of practice on the date of Easter, as well as the fasting that preceded Easter, had long existed among Christians. "In spite of that, they lived in peace with one another, and so do we: the divergency in the fast emphasizes the unanimity of our faith."⁷

Ultimately, Irenaeus persuaded Victor to stand down, and the Quartodeciman practice existed alongside the Roman practice for a time. In the third century, churches gradually adopted Sunday for their celebration of Easter. In the fourth century, the Council of Nicaea opted for the Julian solar calendar and sanctioned the Roman practice of observing Easter on the first Sunday on or after the first full moon following the spring equinox. This would lead to Easter always being celebrated on a Sunday and always falling after the Jewish Passover. Yet, there were holdouts. Some Asian churches remained Quartodeciman until the fifth century. No British bishops were at the Council of Nicaea, so it would take several centuries for their churches to accept the Nicene practice. The Celtic churches planted by British missionary activity would retain the Eastern dating until the eighth century. Ultimately, though, the difference in practice did not result in a division in the church, precisely because, as Irenaeus argued, there was "unanimity of faith," that is, unity in doctrine.

Sixteenth-century Lutheran reformers took note of the Quartodeciman Controversy and how it was resolved. The Lutheran Confessions appeal to it multiple times. Article XXVI of the Augsburg Confession directly cites this axiom of Irenaeus. The article itself rejects the medieval Roman practice of requiring fasts from certain foods as human traditions instituted to merit grace and earn forgiveness. It argues that human traditions — not only fasting, but also worship practices — are kept in the Lutheran churches, provided no one teaches that they merit grace or permits them to burden consciences:

For in the East the festival of Easter was celebrated at a date different from that in Rome. When some wanted to divide the church over this difference, others admonished them that there was no need to have uniformity in such customs. As Irenaeus says: "Diversity in fasting does not dissolve unity in faith." (Augsburg Confession XXVI)⁸

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession would raise the Easter controversy itself multiple times in its discussion of the church. First, it uses the attempt of Victor to excommunicate Polycrates over the date of Easter as an example of how misguided opinions led to human traditions becoming "necessary acts of worship for meriting justification" (Apology VII/VIII 32). In the same article, the Apology would underscore the resolution to the Quartodeciman Controversy as an example of how human traditions should be regarded in the church and how disagreement over adiaphora should be treated:

⁷ 524 in Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, trans. G.A. Williamson (New York: Penguin, 1989), 173.

⁸ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 80. Hereafter abbreviated KW.

8

Before the Council of Nicaea, some observed Easter at one time, others at another time, but this difference did no harm to faith. Afterward, the arrangement was adopted by which our Easter falls at a different time from the Jewish Passover. However, the apostles had commanded that the churches observe the Passover with their fellow Christians who had been converted from Judaism. Thus, after the Council of Nicaea, certain nations clung tenaciously to this custom of observing the Jewish time. But the words of this decree show that the apostles did not wish to impose an ordinance on the churches. For they urge that no one should be troubled even though fellow Christians do not observe Easter at the correctly calculated time. The text of the decree is preserved in Epiphanius: “Do not calculate, but celebrate it whenever your brethren of the circumcision do; celebrate it with them at the same time, and even though they have erred, do not let this trouble you.” Epiphanius writes that these words are taken from an apostolic decree about Easter. From this the prudent reader can easily judge that the apostles wanted to remove from the people foolish opinions concerning the necessity of observing a set time, since they forbid them from being troubled even though a mistake is made in the calculations. (Apology VII/VIII 42)¹¹

Where there is agreement in doctrine, says the Augsburg Confession, exact similarity in rites need not be required. This rule of Irenaeus is referenced again in the Formula of Concord. Article X of both the Epitome and the Solid Declaration directly quote Irenaeus — “dissimilarity in fasting is not to disrupt unity in faith” — when arguing that churches should not condemn one another on the basis of legitimately free ceremonies, provided there is unity in their teaching of the faith and in their use of the Sacraments (Epitome X 7; Solid Declaration X 31).¹²

Lutherans in the present may be tempted to dismiss the Quartodeciman Controversy as unnecessary quibbling. To the minds of the participants in the Early Church, however, it was not. Quartodecimans could appeal to precedent or tradition, since the Jewish calendar had long been observed by Christians and the earliest practice of Easter was connected directly to the Passover. Both sides could also appeal to theology, since how one celebrated Easter had implications for how the feast was regarded. The Quartodecimans believed Easter reflected the crucifixion of Christ as Paschal Lamb on the Passover itself, while the Roman church believed Easter best embodied the resurrection of Jesus on Sunday, the Lord’s Day. These were not insignificant conflicts in the Early Church, and they lasted for centuries. Yet the resolution to that controversy, and in particular the words of Irenaeus so frequently cited in the Lutheran Confessions, provide a helpful example of how to approach conflicts over matters of adiaphora. We do not brush them aside but must take seriously the claims of those who disagree with this or that practice — claims not only of what Scripture says, but also tradition and precedent, as well as the theological implications of the practices we observe. It is not always easy to determine where the line is between truly free ceremonies and ceremonies that are inextricably bound up with our confession of the faith, yet those conversations need to take place. However, where there is agreement in the doctrines we confess, we should take great care not to let disagreement in matters of ceremony adversely impact the confession of the faith we share together. “Dissimilarity in fasting is not to disrupt unity in faith.”

¹¹ KW, 182.
¹² KW, 681.

Lutheran Reformation

CASE STUDY 3
Luther’s Invocavit Sermons (1522)

Moving forward to the time of the Lutheran Reformation, Martin Luther and his fellow reformers were presented with many challenges concerning specific church practices that were neither commanded nor prohibited by Scripture. While the Roman church sought to retain humanly instituted traditions and require them as necessary for salvation, other reformers rejected many of these practices simply because Rome retained them. Where these practices were at odds with Scripture, Luther himself insisted that they be changed. He addressed many of these, especially those related to the Lord’s Supper, in his 1520 *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. He criticized, and urged the rejection of, communing under one kind (withholding of the cup) and the canon of the mass (which presented each consecration of the Lord’s Supper as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins). By the time of his 1523 Latin Mass (*Formula Missae*), those errors were removed. However, on many other practices that Scripture did not directly command or prohibit, Luther was willing to preach and teach patiently rather than enforce a change against the will of the people, for fear that it would create a new threat to the consciences of those who did not understand the reasons for the change. He addresses this directly in a series of eight sermons preached in March 1522 — immediately after his return from seclusion in the Wartburg Castle — known as the Invocavit Sermons (named after the Latin term for the first Sunday in Lent).¹³

Between May 1521 and March 1522, Luther was sequestered in the Wartburg Castle for his protection following his courageous stand at the Diet of Worms in April 1521. In the meantime, others in Wittenberg and elsewhere began to take up his mantle and press for change in the church. In Wittenberg alone, several figures were involved. Luther’s brother in the Augustinian cloister, Gabriel Zwilling, urged their chapter to stop celebrating the mass. Philip Melancthon supported his students in communing with both kinds. However, it was another fellow professor at Wittenberg, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (or Carlstadt), who caused the most commotion. On Christmas Day 1521, he observed the first public Communion service in both kinds, with no vestments and with the Words of Institution spoken in German. He would contribute to the adoption of a new worship service, or church order, in January 1522, against the wishes of both Melancthon and the prince of Electoral Saxony, Frederick the Wise. He also began to speak and write against the presence of images in the church, claiming they violated the First Commandment’s prohibition of idols. Luther finally decided to return to Wittenberg and address how to undertake his proposed reforms in a way that would be theologically faithful and pastorally sensitive. This became the theme of the Invocavit Sermons.

¹³ These sermons may be found in *Luther’s Works, American Edition*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut T. Lehmann and Christopher Boyd Brown, 75 vols. (Philadelphia and St. Louis: Fortress Press and Concordia Publishing House, 1955–2025), 51a:67–100. Hereafter abbreviated LW.

- Questions for Discussion:**
1. How is it that different church customs can actually “emphasize the unanimity of our faith”?
 2. What are some contemporary examples of ceremonies or customs that should not disrupt unity of faith?
 3. When may a different church custom destroy or undermine unity of faith and doctrine?
 4. What are some customs/ceremonies that do undermine our unity of faith?

Luther preached these eight sermons upon his return from the Wartburg, addressing specific worship practices that were being reformed, yet causing controversy in the process. First, Luther lays out some basic considerations to prevent hasty, ill-conceived changes that might adversely affect the consciences of the faithful. He argues that those attempting to reform Wittenberg have a right faith, that is, a correct understanding of the Gospel. What they lack, however, are 1) love for their fellow Christians, whose consciences are being burdened by these premature reforms, and 2) the patience necessary to instruct those Christians adequately before changes are made.¹⁴ Luther separates these possible reforms into categories of “must” and “free”: The former refers to those things that Scripture necessitates, while the latter refers to those things that it does not.¹⁵ Where Scripture necessitates a change, the church “must” do so. Where Scripture does not, the church has freedom, but it may not turn a “free” matter into a “must.” Undergirding this is Luther’s principle of evangelical liberty: In matters where Scripture has not spoken, there is freedom to practice something or not, yet one must not exercise this freedom at the expense of the neighbor. “If we use our liberty unnecessarily, and deliberately cause offense to our neighbor, we drive away the very one who in time would come to our faith.”¹⁶ The Christian must oppose those who demand something Scripture does not demand, but must also refrain from expressing his liberty in a way that harms the neighbor who does not understand this principle of Christian freedom yet. Rather than forcing reform in a matter that is free when the weak may not be ready for the change, it is better to preach and teach so that they might be prepared to receive it. “Therefore no new practices should be introduced, unless the gospel has first been thoroughly preached and understood.”¹⁷

Luther then turns to specific practices that reflect different categories of adiaphora. In the first place, there are adiaphora that some seek to prohibit, such as images of the saints or the practice of private confession before receiving the Sacrament. While Scripture does not mandate these, those who prohibit them go beyond what Scripture says and treat as forbidden what is not forbidden. Luther is no fan of images, but he allows for them for the sake of the weaker brother. He steadfastly refuses to give up private confession, however, preferring to teach it rightly so others might receive it freely rather than under compulsion. In the second place, Luther addresses adiaphora that some seek to encourage (or even enforce) without providing sufficient theological rationale or despite objections to them. Eating meat on Fridays or in Lent and holding the host in one’s hands when receiving the Lord’s Supper belong to this category. Luther does not consider either practice inherently objectionable, but he fears that urging them despite reservations may harm the consciences of those who are not ready for the changes. Finally, Luther speaks of practices that are not adiaphora and should be implemented, but not until the people are adequately instructed. Receiving the Lord’s Supper under both kinds is an example of this category. The Gospels clearly institute reception of both kinds, but even here Luther wants to wait until consciences are instructed and embrace the change before they receive it.¹⁸ In each case, patient instruction is paramount. The preaching and teaching task of the ministry should precede and lead to changes of practice in the life of the church.

Luther will underscore these principles of Christian freedom and evangelical reform in relation to adiaphora a few years later in his 1525 *Against the Heavenly Prophets*. There he says, “There is to be freedom of conscience in

¹⁴ LW 51:71.
¹⁵ LW 51:74.
¹⁶ LW 51:87.
¹⁷ LW 51:90.
¹⁸ Luther finally came to the conclusion that sufficient instruction had been given by September 1523, and he subsequently urged the reception of both kinds in his December 1523 *Formula Missae*. See Martin Becht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation*, 1521–1532, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 124–125, and Luther’s comments in LW 53:34–35.

LUTHERAN REFORMATION

everything that God has not clearly taught in the New Testament, for example, in matters pertaining to various foods, beverages, attire, places, persons and various forms of conduct.”¹⁹ He lists other examples where both Karlstadt and Rome attempt to force Christians to accept or reject a certain practice that is truly an adiaphoron. Their error is the same:

They both destroy Christian freedom, and they are both anti-Christian. But the pope does it through commandments, Dr. Karlstadt through prohibitions. The pope commands what is to be done, Dr. Karlstadt what is not to be done. Thus through them Christian freedom is destroyed in two ways: on the one hand, when one commands, constrains, and compels what is to be done, which is nevertheless not commanded or required by God; on the other hand, when one forbids, prevents, and hinders one from doing that which is neither prohibited nor forbidden by God. For my conscience is ensnared and misled just as much when it must refrain from doing something, which it is not necessary to refrain from doing, as when it must do something, which it is not necessary to do. When men must refrain from doing that from which they need not refrain and are compelled to do what they need not do, Christian freedom perishes in either case.²⁰

Like his principle of Christian freedom in the *Invocavit* Sermons, it is imperative to understand that the practice of adiaphora cuts both ways. Whether commanding that which is not commanded or prohibiting that which is not prohibited, one is still requiring something that Scripture has not required and thereby establishing a law that binds consciences. True Christian liberty is exercised in love, where the consciences of weaker Christians are honored, matters that are free are left free, and a new law is not created by regarding as necessary that which Scripture does not regard as necessary.

While neither the *Invocavit* Sermons nor *Against the Heavenly Prophets* are in the Lutheran Confessions or cited authoritatively in them, Luther’s approach will shape how the Lutheran Confessions do talk about adiaphora. Both the Augsburg Confession and the Apology rebuke those who set up the traditions of the church as requirements. Where they are established as requirements for the purpose of pleasing God or earning salvation, they are clearly rejected. That is not a reason to act *carte blanche* in such matters. On the contrary, certain traditions may be retained, even where there is no scriptural command. As Apology XV describes this approach:

We teach that liberty in these matters should be exercised moderately, so that the inexperienced may not take offense and, on account of an abuse of liberty, become more hostile to the true teaching of the gospel. Nothing in the customary rites may be changed without good reason. Instead, in order to foster harmony, those ancient customs should be observed that can be observed without sin or without proving to be a great burden. In this very assembly we have sufficiently shown that, for the sake of love, we will reluctantly observe adiaphora with others, even if such things may prove to be somewhat burdensome. We judge that the greatest possible public concord which can be maintained without offending consciences ought to be preferred to all other interests. (Apology XV 51–52)²¹

¹⁹ LW 40:227.

²⁰ LW 40:128.

²¹ KW, 238.

LUTHERAN REFORMATION

CASE STUDY 4

Adiaphoristic Controversy (16th Century)

When Lutherans think of adiaphora, it is most likely the article on “church practices” (*Kirchengebräuche*) in Formula of Concord X that first comes to mind. This article helped conclude a long-running debate concerning whether and to what degree Lutherans could change practices considered adiaphora in times of persecution or when doing so might cause offense in the church. The controversy arose partly because of how German Lutherans — in the wake of Luther’s death and political turmoil in the Holy Roman Empire — sought to apply their view of adiaphora noted above in the Augsburg Confession and its Apology. Those confessions were clear that human traditions or ceremonies neither commanded nor prohibited by Scripture were not required for salvation. Neither should they be foisted upon the church in a way that binds consciences, as Luther warned in his *Invocavit* Sermons. However, the church is free to retain, adopt or dispense with such practices insofar as that is deemed beneficial for the people. They may be considered beneficial for the purpose of instruction or for the maintenance of peace and order in the church, or even (as noted earlier in the citation from Apology XV) for the sake of conciliation and broader church unity within the Holy Roman Empire. It was on this latter basis that certain German Lutherans made concessions in the worship and governance of the church that others considered a compromise in the doctrine the church had worked so hard to defend and a potential stumbling block for the laity.²²

The controversy began after the League of Schmalkald, a defensive alliance of German Protestants who subscribed to the Augsburg Confession, fell to the forces of Charles V, the Roman Catholic emperor, in 1547. Prince John Frederick of Electoral Saxony, nephew of Frederick the Wise (patron of the Reformation in Wittenberg and Luther’s prince), lost some of his lands to Duke Moritz of Ducal Saxony. Even though he was raised Lutheran, Moritz was favorable to Charles V and the Holy Roman Empire’s attempt to establish religious uniformity. In 1548, Charles commissioned a set of church regulations called the Augsburg Interim, which would govern churches in southern Germany until the recently convened Council of Trent could put permanent regulations in place. The Augsburg Interim allowed Protestants to commune in both kinds and to have married priests but otherwise rolled back many of the reforms already established in Lutheran churches, such as issues related to justification, Roman papal and episcopal authority, the medieval sacraments, and the traditional practice of the mass, among many other ceremonial matters.²³

Faced with this prospect, Wittenberg theologian Philip Melancthon began working with Moritz of Saxony to develop a more acceptable set of regulations that he hoped would protect the Lutheran churches in Moritz’s territories. The elder statesman of the Reformation and author of the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, Melancthon helped draft what became known as the Leipzig Interim — an alternative proposal that likewise conceded certain practices to Rome. Leipzig insisted upon justification by faith (albeit in a more ambiguous form than the Augsburg Confession or Apology), but also restored compulsory private confession and extreme unction, the Latin rite of the medieval mass with its traditional ceremonies, the canonical hours and services for the dead, the prohibition

²² Studies of the Adiaphoristic Controversy and its relationship to Formula of Concord X include: Charles Arand, Robert Kolb and James Nestingen, *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 171–180; Friedrich Bente, *Historical Introductions to the Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 107–112; Robert Kolb, “Historical Background of the Formula of Concord,” in *A Contemporary Look at the Formula of Concord*, ed. Robert D. Preuss and Wilbert H. Rouse (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 17–26; Kurt Marquardt, “Article X, Formula of Concord: Confession and Ceremonies,” in *Contemporary Look*, 260–270; and Oliver K. Olson, *Matthias Flacius and the Survival of Luther’s Reform* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002), 46–140.

²³ For the text of the Augsburg Interim, see *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and James A. Nestingen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 144–182.

LUTHERAN REFORMATION

Beyond the simple moderation of Christian freedom, the Augustana and Apology also see a positive function for those things categorized as adiaphora. They argue that certain practices may be retained and observed for the benefit of instructing the faithful and maintaining peace and order in the church. For instance:

For after all, all ceremonies should serve the purpose of teaching the people what they need to know about Christ. (Augsburg Confession XXIV 3)²⁴

For although the holy Fathers themselves had rites and traditions, they still did not maintain that these things were useful or necessary for justification. They did not obscure the glory and work of Christ. Instead, they taught that we are justified by faith on account of Christ and not on account of these human acts of worship. Moreover, they observed these human rites on account of their usefulness for the body, so that people may know at what time they should assemble, so that they may have an example of how all things in the churches might be done decently and in order, and finally, so that the common people may receive some instruction. (For different seasons and various rites are valuable in admonishing the common people.) (Apology XV 20)²⁵

Ceremonies should be observed both so that people may learn the Scriptures and so that, admonished by the Word, they might experience faith and fear and finally even pray. For these are the purposes of the ceremonies. (Apology XXIV 3)²⁶

Such practices are not irrelevant or unimportant, let alone should we be indifferent toward them. On the contrary, we may even use them positively within the church to the benefit of the faithful, provided the way they are communicated does not go beyond what Scripture says about them. Ultimately, for Luther, as for the Lutheran Confessions, our approach to questions of adiaphora requires both theological faithfulness and pastoral sensitivity. We must not treat as required those practices that are neither commanded nor prohibited, or we risk setting up a new law that binds the consciences of the people. Yet we may use such free matters profitably within the church if we speak about them rightly and instruct the faithful in them responsibly, and we may even decide to make use of the same ceremonies together uniformly as a corporate body. This is the balance the Lutheran Reformation sought to strike, and it is the balance we continue to seek.

Questions for Discussion:

1. If matters of adiaphora may be beneficial for instruction, can they also be detrimental to faithful instruction? Discuss some possible examples of each in the church today.
2. How would you explain the difference between “requiring” adiaphora and “retaining” adiaphora?
3. How do you evaluate Luther’s willingness to (temporarily) permit communing in one kind out of love for “the weak”? Does this violate the understanding that an adiaphoron is something Scripture does not teach or require?

²⁴ KW, 48.

²⁵ KW, 225–226.

²⁶ KW, 238.

LUTHERAN REFORMATION

of meats on Fridays and Saturdays or in Lent, and episcopal ordination.²⁷ Many of these concessions came with specific conditions (such as that bishops would not oppose the Gospel), but they also appeared to contradict arguments made earlier by Melancthon and adopted by Lutherans in the confessions he had written.

Opponents arose who accused Melancthon of conceding too much in the Leipzig Interim. Matthias Flacius Illyricus, in particular, led the church in arguing against the Interim. There were two very different concerns. One was that the doctrines articulated in the Interim were ambiguous at best, if not contrary to the Lutheran confession of faith. Melancthon denied this accusation. The other had to do with reinstituting practices that the Lutheran churches had already rejected because of their association with the Roman church and its teaching. The most curious of these was the use of traditional vestments, such as the surplice, which might give the impression to the unlearned that Lutherans were reverting to the old faith. According to Flacius, “Whoever puts on a surplice denies Christ’s teaching.”²⁸ Even where doctrine was not explicitly changed or where truly free practices were changed in accordance with the Augsburg Confession, there was still a concern for the reasons *why* changes were being made, namely, that the church was doing so under pressure from a civil government hostile to the Gospel, rather than freely for the sake of peace, good order and instruction in the church. Even though some of these practices were technically free, changing them due to societal pressures ran the risk of not giving faithful witness to the doctrines that separated them from Rome. In this event, adiaphora ceased to be truly neutral things.

The controversy was eventually resolved due to political changes. In 1552, the Treaty of Passau brought an end to the Schmalkaldic War between Protestants and Catholics. In 1555, the Peace of Augsburg granted Lutheran princes the right to permit the Lutheran confession of faith in their territories, provided they not prohibit Catholic churches. Neither the Augsburg Interim nor the Leipzig Interim remained in effect. Even Melancthon himself stood down, agreeing with Flacius that he had gone too far in making concessions to Rome in ceremonial matters.²⁹ Yet the controversy raised new questions regarding how Lutherans should treat adiaphora. Melancthon believed that, in accordance with the Augsburg Confession and the Apology, the church had freedom to change practices that were adiaphora, whatever the reason, including pressure from civil government or in order to be at peace with Rome. Flacius and others believed adiaphora ceased to be free if one changed them due to persecution or if changing them caused scandal in the church. In his words, “Nothing is an adiaphoron when confession or offense is involved.”³⁰ When is an adiaphoron no longer an adiaphoron?

This is the question addressed by Formula of Concord X. It does so with at least two pivotal arguments. First, it seeks to clearly define adiaphora. Ceremonies or other customs that are neither prescribed nor forbidden in Scripture count as true adiaphora. They exist strictly for proper decorum or good order, but are not properly speaking “divine worship,” that is, Word and Sacrament. The church is free to change these as it sees fit, provided it not do so frivolously or in such a way that causes offense (SD X 1–10). Second, under threat of persecution, the church is conscience-bound not to change adiaphora in such a way that it might imply a change in its confession of the Gospel. “When the enemies of God’s Word want to suppress the pure teaching of the holy gospel, the entire community of God, indeed, every Christian, especially servants of the Word as the leaders of the community of God, are obligated according to God’s Word to confess true teaching and everything that pertains to the whole of

²⁷ For the text of the Leipzig Interim, see *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord*, 183–196.

²⁸ Oliver K. Olson, “Adiaphora, Mandata, Damascia,” *Lutheran Forum* (Spring 2010): 23.

²⁹ Bente, *Historical Introductions*, 112.

³⁰ Bente, *Historical Introductions*, 110.

religion freely and publicly.”³¹ In these cases, the church is to consider itself in a state of confession³² and should not compromise on adiaphora by accepting practices that opponents (religious or secular) require, or by eliminating practices that opponents forbid (SD X 11–25).

Of course, Formula of Concord X did not — and could not possibly — identify exactly when the Gospel is being suppressed or how the church is to determine that. Nor did it address the question of the proper relationship between church and state, which lies behind the Adiaphoristic Controversy and has been a perennial Lutheran concern. The church in every age and under very different circumstances must wrestle with adiaphora. It cannot simply point to an adiaphoron and say the church is always free to do what it wishes with its practices. Formula of Concord X clearly says there are other considerations beyond whether Scripture commands or forbids something. Likewise, the church must use theological discernment, patience with and concern for the weak, even charity toward those who think differently, when it comes to evaluating whether a particular ceremony or other practice may be changed or not, whether the context or change of a ceremony rises to the level of a state of confession, or whether decisions on such matters constitute a compromise in doctrine. It is also worth saying that the appeal to adiaphora in the 16th century (namely, to adopt more traditional, liturgical ceremonies) is effectively the obverse of the discussion in the Missouri Synod in recent decades, when we have often debated it in terms of adopting less traditional liturgical practices.³³ One should exercise care when drawing direct correlations between such historical matters.

The purpose of this case study is not to exposit the Formula of Concord, nor to draw such correlations.³⁴ It is rather to show how Lutherans of another time and place wrestled with disagreements over practice that caused division within their churches. In the terms of our LCMS Constitution, 16th century Lutherans believed they already had unity in doctrine. They did not require uniformity in practice, yet they were conscious that *certain* forms of variety in practice could raise questions about the unity in doctrine they shared. Uniformity in practice (or restrictions on *certain* forms of variety in practice) when the Gospel is under attack is not only desirable but may even be necessary. Determining when this is the case requires wisdom, sensitivity and discernment. It also requires us to exercise love, by not availing ourselves of certain adiaphora that may cause conflict or give the impression of compromise on doctrine to the weak, but also by showing patience and charity to those who do avail themselves of certain adiaphora in cases where we might not. It is with these broader churchly concerns in mind that the Formula cites the dictum from Irenaeus already noted above in the discussion of the Quartodeciman Controversy: “For this reason the churches are not to condemn one another because of differences in ceremonies when in Christian freedom one has fewer or more than the other, as long as these churches are otherwise united in teaching and in all the articles of the faith as well as in the proper use of the holy sacraments. As it is said, ‘*Dissonantia ieiunii non dissolvit consonantiam fidei*’ (dissimilarity in fasting shall not destroy the unity of faith)” (Formula of Concord SD X 31).³⁵ That is to say, unity in doctrine is and must always be paramount. It precedes, informs and should be used to understand, direct and, at times, require certain church practices. Uniformity and

³¹ KW, 437.
³² For a definition and discussion of the term “state of confession” (in *stata confesio*) in the Lutheran tradition, see opinions rendered by the CTCR in 1971 (1971 Convention Workbook, 32) and 2005 (2007 Convention, Workbook 398-399). The 2005 opinion is available on the CTCR’s website at <https://research.lcms.org/reading-study/ctcr-lcms-key-policy-and-policy/>.
³³ See footnote 57.
³⁴ There is ample ink spilled on that confessional issue over the centuries, and the Commission commends many of those studies to the Synod for its study and consideration. See the references in footnote 24.
³⁵ KW, 681.

The Missouri Synod

CASE STUDY 5
Formation of the Synod (1847)

Like its ancestors in the Lutheran Reformation, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has since its formation wrestled with how to approach adiaphora in a way that is both theologically responsible and pastorally sensitive. At its very first convention, in fact, the Synod had to deal with debates over controversial worship practices, whether they should be permitted and how those practices impacted the unity in doctrine its members shared. The current (2023) constitutional Article III 7 (originally IV 10) concerning uniformity in ceremonies was included to address how the young church body might bring about a uniformity in practice that reflected its unity in doctrine. It also proposed numerous constitutional measures specifying practices that contradicted or raised questions about the doctrine it confessed. The Missouri Synod did not deny the implications of these worship practices for the unity in doctrine it shared or for the impression they gave to the surrounding culture or to other church bodies or congregations who might consider joining the Synod. Nonetheless, the Synod also acknowledged that a degree of discretion or prudence should be exercised so as not to damage the unity in doctrine it shared over a matter that is not categorically prohibited or required by Scripture. To that end, we can identify two distinct, yet complementary approaches to dealing with questions of adiaphora: 1) to permit certain practices temporarily until proper instruction could be given; and 2) to permit (or not explicitly forbid) certain practices despite the fact that they might be understood wrongly under particular conditions.

In the first place, there were ceremonies that, while theologically problematic, may be permitted temporarily until congregations are rightly instructed. This was immediately a concern for the first convention when it dealt with the constitutional article on uniformity. The proposed version of the Constitution first specified that one objective of the Synod was “to strive after the greatest possible uniformity in ceremonies.”³⁶ This caused objection from those who feared the church body would enforce or oppose certain rites legalistically. The 1847 convention proceedings record the following response from the Synod: “It only deems such uniformity wholesome, especially under the conditions in which our church finds itself here — the Synod also does not want any kind of coercion in introducing a ceremony, but everything should be placed into the liberty of the respective congregations, after preceding and thorough instruction of the consciences.”³⁷ Before enforcing or removing a ceremony against the wishes of the people, it urged those charged with the care of that congregation to instruct the people in the reasons for using one practice over another.

³⁶ The text of this is found in “Our First Historical Constitution,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 16.1 (1943): 5. Hereafter, CHIQ.
³⁷ 1847 Proceedings, 7, cited in Aug. R. Stefflow, “The Congregation-Synod Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in Historical Perspective, 1847–1872: A Report to the Synodical Survey Commission, Report 1A,” 4.

variety in practice, on the other hand, are and must remain questions of prudence, religious and political context, corporate decision-making in the church, and, especially, brotherly love.

Questions for Discussion:

1. As you consider the changes that were proposed in the Leipzig Interim, discuss how “outside” circumstances can affect decisions about church doctrine and practice.
2. What are the most effective ways to maintain a clear understanding of what is or is not a matter that demands unity?
3. The Formula of Concord condemns allowing practices that “give the appearance” or “impression” that the Lutheran confession and Roman Catholic views were not “completely different.” How would that standard be applied today in relation to Roman Catholic or non-Lutheran forms of evangelical Christianity?

The 1847 convention addressed the same concern in its article related to the use of unorthodox worship resources. The proposed Constitution included a stipulation that the Synod require “the exclusive use of doctrinally pure church books and schoolbooks (Agenda, hymnals, readers, etc.)” (Article II 4). However, the final version allowed that this may not be possible in every case. Where it is not, the pastor may retain the other materials “under open protest,” yet should still publicly speak against them and seek to introduce appropriate resources.³⁸ The Constitution did not outright refuse a pastor membership in the Synod in this case. Membership depended upon agreement in doctrine, as defined by unconditional subscription to our confessional basis of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. That said, if the use of unorthodox worship resources risks communicating false doctrine to the faithful in the pew, then it is the responsibility of the Synod to address it. Rather than requiring the pastor in question to cause a disturbance in his congregation by replacing the former hymnals with new ones, for instance, it offers another option: He can join the Synod under the express requirement that he use the unorthodox hymnal in “open protest.” Furthermore, he was to (this time in the language of the uniformity of ceremonies) “strive” to introduce an orthodox Lutheran hymnal. Doctrinally pure worship materials were not forced upon the congregation. The pastor was allowed time to persuade them evangelically to accept an orthodox hymnal, yet he was required as a condition of his membership in the Synod to make a clear confession of his orthodoxy by protesting these older (presumably Union or Reformed) resources. The Synod’s ultimate decision in this matter was consistent with how it responded to the question about enforcing ceremonies against consciences: Even though a ceremony may raise concerns or depart from what other Synod congregations are doing, the pastor’s first responsibility is to instruct the congregation under his care before making a change that could potentially cause great controversy. Instruction — not coercion — is the means to uniformity.

Second, the 1847 convention also identified worship practices that could potentially communicate something false under certain circumstances. However, since such practices were not prohibited by Scripture or the Confessions, neither did the Synod prohibit them. One such instance had to do with Reformed-influenced practices associated with the Lord’s Supper, such as the actual breaking of the bread (*fractio panis*); another was the use of the corporate form of general confession and absolution. It is important to take into account the context for this young church body. Alongside the Saxon immigrants of Perry County and the congregations of the Saginaw Valley (under the influence of men sent by Wilhelm Löhe), there was the influence of Pastor Wilhelm Sihler, first president of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. He led several congregations out of the Ohio Synod and into the Missouri Synod at its founding. Sihler expressed opposition to the Ohio Synod’s use of Calvinist language in the Lord’s Supper and its practice of confession and absolution, as well its permissiveness toward clergy serving Reformed or Union congregations.³⁹

This is likely why the proposed 1847 Constitution specifically cited ceremonies that “might weaken the confession of the truth or condone or strengthen a heresy.” It suggested that, because the Reformed used ceremonies in

³⁸ “It is impossible in some congregations to replace immediately the unorthodox hymnals and the like with orthodox ones, then the pastor of such a congregation can become a member of Synod only if he promises to use the unorthodox hymnal only under open protest and to strive in all seriousness for the introduction of an orthodox hymnal” (CHIQ, 3). This likely had in view pastors serving congregations that had inherited Union or Reformed worship resources — a common concern in the early 1800s, when confessional Lutheran resources were scarce. Nevertheless, the use of orthodox hymnals is an example of how thin the line separating doctrine and practice can be. On the worship concerns behind this constitutional article, see Jan D. Vieker, “The Fathers’ Faith, the Children’s Song: Missouri Lutheranism Encounters American Evangelicalism in Its Hymnals, Hymn Writers, and Hymns, 1889–1912” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Concordia Seminary, 2014), 48–50.
³⁹ Gerhard H. Bode Jr., “The Missouri Synod and the Historical Question of Unionism and Syncretism,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 78, no. 3–4 (2014): 39–58, this point at 48–50.

THE MISSOURI SYNOD

order to contradict Lutheran teachings, those practices should be rejected in the Synod.⁴⁰ It adds: “To this belongs the breaking of bread in the Lord’s Supper; the formula of distribution: ‘Christ says’; the taking of the consecrated bread and cup with the hands; the use of ordinary bread instead of the host except in an emergency; and others.”⁴¹ These practices were developed in Reformed circles as objections to Lutheran doctrine, implying that the Sacrament was not Christ’s body and blood. Yet the citation of these Reformed abuses was dropped in the adopted version of the Constitution. These were serious theological problems, yet it was also understood that the Synod did not share the beliefs behind these practices and so did not need to explicitly reject them in its Constitution.

A similar situation prevailed in the consideration of general confession and absolution. The Augsburg Confession clearly declared the Lutheran retention of private confession. While Lutheran churches also continued to practice corporate confession and absolution, the Reformed rejected the private version. In German Reformed or Union congregations of the 19th century, corporate confession and absolution was deemed the sole acceptable practice. The proposed Constitution explicitly stipulated that Synod pastors should insist upon the practice of private confession: “Where private confession is in use, it is to be kept according to Article 11 of the Augsburg Confession. Where it is not in use, the pastor is to strive towards introducing it.”⁴² However, it also implied a rejection of general absolution, as practiced by the Reformed. This raised problems since orthodox Lutherans had long practiced the corporate form and had not rejected it on theological grounds, nor claimed that Scripture prohibited it. To that end, the approved Constitution qualified this stricture: “Yet in congregations where the total abolishing of general confession and absolution is hindered by unsurmountable obstacles, general confession may be kept along with private confession.”⁴³

Unlike the case of using Reformed or Union worship resources, which was only to be done under protest, here the pastor was given the right to continue using general absolution without any such conditions. Though the Reformed had used general confession and absolution as a mutually exclusive alternative to private confession, Lutherans did not see it that way. The Synod *preferred* private confession because the Lutheran Confessions urged its retention. Yet Lutherans had long practiced general confession and absolution, believing it to be in accord with Scripture. To reject something other Lutherans affirmed simply because another Christian body misinterpreted it would have run afoul of the basic dictum cited by Luther himself in the Large Catechism: “Misuse does not destroy the substance, but confirms its existence.”⁴⁴

In each of these cases, the Missouri Synod took specific worship-related practices into consideration independently and came to different conclusions about different practices. In the first case, where doctrinally impure worship resources were in use that might contradict the orthodox Lutheran faith, pastors were allowed to use them under protest in order to instruct their congregations about potential errors. In the second, Reformed worship

⁴⁰ The footnotes (*Footerklaenger*) to the proposed Constitution make clear the danger of adopting Reformed practices that may give the appearance of compromise — or, in fact, actually compromise — the doctrine the church holds as constituting its unity simply under the pretense of Christian freedom: “Much less could it give in such matters and adopt such new ceremonies which were connected with their new heresies and were so to speak a confession of such false doctrine in action, as e.g., the breaking of the bread in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, which was supposed to depict the breaking of Christ’s body on the cross. . . in all of these things the Lutheran Church could [not] and cannot cede to the Reformed and adopt their churchly forms and customs, partly, as said, in order to preserve Christian freedom, so that nothing is lost upon it as essential and necessary what God has left free (Gal. 5:1) partly to avoid all bad appearance, as if it was not in great and holy seriousness in stating the pure doctrine and rejecting false doctrine, when it adopts ceremonies of the false teachers just in that place where it should avoid them most strictly, namely where, e.g. in the Lord’s Supper, the false teaching enters the churchly act and use; partly, in order not to give offense to its own children by such adoption.” Roland Ziegler, “A Translation of Parts of Die Verfassung der deutschen evangelisch-lutherischen Synode von Missouri; Ohio und andern Staaten nebst einer Erklärung und erläuternden Bemerkungen” (unpublished paper), 3–6.

⁴¹ CHQJ 11.

⁴² CHQJ 11.

⁴³ CHQJ 11.

⁴⁴ Large Catechism V 59 (KW, 84).

THE MISSOURI SYNOD

In this connection, it is important to highlight how the Synod arrives at its doctrinal positions and how it regards them. The confessional basis for membership in the Synod — for individual rostered church workers and congregations alike — is Holy Scripture and the Lutheran *Book of Concord*. However, in times of internal controversy or external opposition, the Synod may wish to express its collective position through the adoption of doctrinal statements or resolutions, which must be in harmony with Scripture and the Confessions. When a doctrinal statement or resolution is adopted, the members of the Synod are required to honor and uphold those statements and resolutions until or unless they are rescinded. At the same time, the right of brotherly dissent from the doctrinal position of the Synod is also granted to all members, who agree (by virtue of their membership in the Synod) to follow the guidance of the bylaws in doing so. That includes engaging in conversation within their fellowship of peers (defined as “those who are competent to evaluate the issue critically”), expression of that dissenting position to the CTCR, and finally submission of an overture to the Synod in convention. This process is not intended to stymie dissent, but to conduct it orderly and productively. This means respecting the conscience of the dissenter, as well as both the consciences of others who affirm the position of the Synod and the collective will of the Synod expressed in convention.⁴⁷

As the practice of laity reading the biblical lessons liturgically became more frequent in our denomination, it also became more controversial, and therefore a need to address it arose.⁴⁸ Most controversial was the use of women for the practice. In its 1985 report, *Women in the Church: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice*, the CTCR sought to address this directly.⁴⁹ Earlier Synod resolutions had taken the position that the New Testament statements forbidding women from teaching or exercising authority, and instead instructing them to keep silent in the church, meant “women ought not to hold the pastoral office or serve in any other capacity involving the distinctive functions of this office” (1969 Res. 2-17).⁵⁰ *Women in the Church* sought to explain this further by detailing four “distinctive functions of the pastoral office” that women should not exercise. They included: “preaching in the services of the congregation, leading the formal public services of worship, the public administration of the sacraments, [and] the public administration of the office of the keys.”⁵¹ While the report admitted that Scripture did not provide a comprehensive listing of such “distinctive functions,” it proposed those four as essential to avoid confusion with the Office of the Public Ministry. However, it did not specify the public reading of lessons as one of those functions.

Later, however, the report does address the question of whether it is appropriate for women to participate in this reading of the lessons. Its response addressed the broader issue of laypeople reading the lessons — male or female:

All Christians have access to the Scriptures. They do not require the church as an institution or another person to read and interpret them on their behalf. The reading of the Scriptures belongs to the priesthood of all believers, men and women. Moreover, there is no ceremonial law in the New Testament regarding the reading of Scripture in the context of public worship. Nor is there explicit apostolic prohibition of such reading by women. Nevertheless, it is the opinion of the CTCR that the reading of

⁴⁷ On this, see sections 1.6–1.8 in the LCMS *Handbook*.

⁴⁸ Whenever the actual practice in congregations, there were only four overtures related to lay readers — men or women — submitted to the six conventions from 1977 to 1989 (one in 1977, one in 1986, two in 1989).

⁴⁹ CTCR, *Women in the Church: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1985).

⁵⁰ 1969 Proceedings, 88.

⁵¹ CTCR, *Women in the Church*, 42.

THE MISSOURI SYNOD

practices related to the Lord’s Supper or corporate confession and absolution were not expressly prohibited because Synod members did not practice them with the same intent or understanding.

These approaches reflect a pastoral sensitivity to congregational dynamics and the discretion needed to bring about change. It was well within the scope of the Constitution to require that these practices be changed immediately as a condition of membership. Yet it was also acknowledged that this might cause greater harm by bringing about a change without adequate instruction or with the force of law that would bind consciences. Instead, the Synod trusted its faculty and clergy to instruct those under their care about the dangers, then allow pastors latitude in addressing them congregationally. While this may produce a degree of variety in worship that some found less “desirable” or “wholesome,” it was necessary so as not to confuse the church’s scriptural confession with ceremonial matters that were important — even *theologically* important — yet not expressly mandated or forbidden in Scripture.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How did the early LCMS understand what made uniformity in ceremonies desirable? What dangers did it seek to avoid by not forcing congregations to adopt ceremonies under coercion?
2. What sorts of practices raised concerns for the early Missouri Synod? Are some of those practices still with us, and, if so, what are they?
3. Are there contemporary examples of forces that seek to compel us to treat an indifferent matter (an adiaphoron) as something we are required to accept or adopt?
4. How should an ecclesiastical supervisor address a circumstance in which a pastor insists on a specific practice that is neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture?

CASE STUDY 6

Lay Lectors (1989)

Another example of how Missouri Synod Lutherans have attempted to resolve the relationship between uniformity and variety in practice can be found in its approach to the lay reading of lessons in public worship.⁴⁵ While there is no single passage of Scripture that stipulates who may — or who may not — read the biblical lessons in public worship, it is clear from the New Testament that public reading was part of first-century worship. For instance, St. Paul urges the young pastor Timothy to “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (1 *TIM. 4:13*).⁴⁶ Throughout the history of Christianity, a member of the clergy (often called a “deacon” or “lector,” yet still either ordained or usually on the path to ordination) would ordinarily read those lessons. Within the Missouri Synod, this “public reading of Scripture” was customarily reserved for the pastor. In any event, there was no expressly stated position of the Synod on the matter.

⁴⁵ 2022 Overture 4.09, “To Begin in Proclamation of God’s Word by His Called and Ordained Servants,” was referred to the CTCR by the 2023 Synod convention. In its response to the submitting congregation, the Commission suggested that it would seek to address the overture’s concerns regarding the liturgical reading of lessons in this report.

⁴⁶ The Greek term for reading here, *anaginosko* (ἀναγινώσκω), can mean either “public reading” or simply “reading.” Likewise, translators interpolate the phrase “of Scripture,” which is not in the original Greek. Prior to the RSV (1952), English translations simply had “to reading, to exhortation, and to doctrine.” Luther’s German translation also has only “reading” (Lesen). What Paul means by the phrase, however, may be something more specific. Luther understood this as a public reading, for instance, in LW 28:329.

THE MISSOURI SYNOD

the Scriptures is most properly the function of the pastoral office and should therefore not ordinarily be delegated to a lay person, woman or man. Pastors and congregations should therefore exercise great care in making decisions permitting the lay reading of the Scriptures or any other activity in the formal liturgical services which might be perceived as an assumption of the pastoral role or a disregard for the Scriptural principles concerning the service of women in the church (e.g., 1 *COR. 11:3–16; 14:33B–35*).⁵²

Two things should be noted. First, the CTCR report states that there is no specific scriptural directive governing the reading of lessons in public worship, let alone forbidding women — or the laity in general — from doing so. Second, at the same time, the CTCR also urged against the practice. It said that the public reading of Scripture in worship was “most properly the function of the pastoral office” and thus should not “ordinarily” be given to the laity — again, “woman or man.” To do so might give the impression of “an assumption of the pastoral role.” In essence, where there is neither scriptural command nor prohibition, the church must not make a command or prohibition as if it were biblically required. Nonetheless, the church *may* urge against, or even choose to restrict, a given practice should it stand to create confusion or cause dissension. In keeping with what the Lutheran Confessions often do, this reiterates St. Paul’s argument that “God is not a God of confusion” (1 *COR. 14:33*) and “all things should be done decently and in order” (1 *COR. 14:40*).

A different opinion on the issue would emerge at the 1989 Synod convention. When a convention resolution addressed the question of women reading the Scriptures in worship, it cited the first point of the CTCR report approvingly. In fact, it directly quoted the following from the report: “There is no ceremonial law in the New Testament regarding the reading of Scripture in the context of public worship. Nor is there explicit apostolic prohibition of such reading by women. Nevertheless, it is the opinion of the CTCR that the reading of the Scriptures is most properly the function of the pastoral office and should therefore not ordinarily be delegated to a lay person, woman or man.” Yet it came to the exact opposite implication. Whereas the CTCR had urged against the practice, 1989 Resolution 3-14 argued that, because it is permissible, then it is an entirely free matter left to the discretion of congregations. Thus, congregations may permit the lay reading of Scripture, “recognizing decisions in this regard lie in the arena of Christian judgment.”⁵³

Should laypersons read the Scriptures in public worship? The Missouri Synod never directly answered that question, and it did not answer that question because (it argued) there was no clear statement in Scripture either commanding or forbidding it. The CTCR urged against it, though acknowledged it was an adiaphoron. The Synod in convention — which determines the doctrinal position of our church body — also considered it a matter of Christian freedom yet offered no direction on whether it should or should not be done. It is important to acknowledge that the Synod did not say the lay reading of public lessons in the church is necessary and therefore *should* be practiced. That is because the Synod did not believe Scripture addressed that point, either. If it had made that point, then it would have stated positively what Scripture does not state positively and thus become a matter of doctrinal division that threatened our unity in the faith.

⁵² CTCR, *Women in the Church*, 45.

⁵³ 1989 Proceedings, 118.

Excursus: Women’s Suffrage

A parallel to this issue may be found elsewhere in recent Synod history: the adoption of women’s suffrage. The LCMS had long practiced male-only voting membership. This is entirely understandable given the emphasis upon the role of the voters assembly as the primary instrument for decision-making within the local congregation (and, by extension, the Synod convention as the primary instrument for decision-making within the Synod more broadly).³⁴ Some were concerned that allowing a woman to vote in congregational or Synod assemblies would contradict New Testament passages concerning a woman’s public role in the church (such as **1 COR. 11:3-10; 1 COR. 14:33-35; AND 1 TIM. 2:11-14**).³⁵ As early as the 1956 convention, the Synod sought to address concerns regarding women’s suffrage. That convention reaffirmed the longstanding practice of adult-only, male-only voting membership, even requiring the 10 “nay” votes at the convention to give their reasons for voting against the resolution to the secretary of the Synod. Nevertheless, the report of the commission making this proposal at the convention stated clearly that Scripture does not address women’s suffrage. Ultimately, it affirms the practice as a “Scripture-sanctioned” and “time-tested” custom that the Synod may retain if it wishes (as the 1956 convention voted to do).³⁶

That position would change in 1969, when the Synod convention voted to allow women’s suffrage. In a resolution cited above — 1969 Resolution 2-17 — the convention affirmed that Scripture did not have a congregational assembly, or other expressions of church polity, in mind in the prohibitions against women speaking publicly, teaching or exercising authority over men. These prohibitions had to do with holding the pastoral office and exercising its distinctive functions, that is, with the public preaching office in the church — the Office of the Public Ministry. In this sense, it took the same exegetical position as 1956, namely, that Scripture neither commanded nor prohibited women’s suffrage, yet it came to a different practical implication for the life of the church.³⁷ Women could participate in congregational assemblies; serve as delegates to Synod conventions; and hold positions on boards, commissions and committees. It concluded that the congregations and other entities of the Synod had “liberty to alter their policies and practices in regard to women’s involvement in the work of the church according to these declarations, provided the polity developed conforms to the general Scriptural principles that women neither hold the pastoral office nor ‘exercise authority over men.’”³⁸

³⁴ It is also worth saying that there were many subtle exceptions to this practice within the Synod, even if outright voting membership was not granted to women (in the United States itself did not until the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920). For instance, women had the right to express their voice in matters of excommunication or in vetoing the calling of church workers who may not possess the requisite biblical qualifications for their office. On this, see John Petz, *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1932), 315, and Theodore Grabner, *Pastor and People* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1952), 126. Additionally, the National Evangelical Lutheran Church (Finnish) practiced women’s suffrage at the time of its merger with the Missouri Synod in 1964, when its congregations were incorporated into existing Synod districts. It is uncertain whether they retained suffrage. On this, see Harold Austermann, “A History of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church to Merger with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod” (unpublished Bachelor of Divinity thesis, Concordia Seminary, 1970).

³⁵ For more on this, see LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *The Order of Creation: History, Theology, Definition* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2022).

³⁶ 1956 *Proceedings*, 569.

³⁷ This is worth comparison with a 1982 opinion of the exegetical department of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, which stated unequivocally — even against the earlier findings of the 1956 report that likewise opposed women’s suffrage — that women’s suffrage in the church “is contrary to at least ten clear testimonies of the Word of God.” See “The Opinion of the Exegetical Department of Concordia Theological Seminary concerning Woman Suffrage,” www.crls.net/media/pdf/CTSFWOpinionOnWomenSuffrage.pdf.

³⁸ 1969 *Proceedings*, 88.

compromise the unity we have in doctrine, nor turn something that is an adiaphoron into a law binding upon consciences.

Questions for Discussion:

- 1. How does the recency of a case study impact the way that these issues are evaluated?
- 2. How does our evaluation of adiaphora change when we have a personal investment or strong opinion about the issues involved?
- 3. To what extent should the Synod provide guidance, stipulate practice or set forth “rules” to settle a divisive issue that is in fact a matter of adiaphora? Is it helpful or harmful when it does?
- 4. How much of the wider church (circuit, district, Synod, other Christians) needs to be taken into account, and to what extent, when making a decision about a potentially divisive practice of adiaphora?

Notice again, however, what the 1969 resolution does not say. It does not require congregations to adopt women’s suffrage. It does not force women to vote. It does not oppose the consciences of those who choose to remain with the traditional practice of the Synod, nor does it claim there must be uniformity of practice on this matter within the Synod precisely because it is a custom of the church on a position that Scripture does not address. On the contrary, it urges “cautious and deliberate action in the spirit of Christian love.” Had this been a matter of doctrine, then the case would have been different. The Synod would have required unity, and it would have required unity based upon the clear Word of God. In this matter, however, it believed Scripture neither prohibited nor required the exercise of voting rights by women. It took this position in part because Scripture does not require certain forms of polity, such as congregational assemblies or Synod conventions, just as it does not require bishops or state churches (as was customary throughout European Lutheranism since the Reformation).³⁹ Ultimately, the Synod did not believe women’s suffrage threatened the unity of the church, even where congregations could have different practices. As 1995 Resolution 3-05 said, “Honest Christian conscience can and does exist on both sides of this issue, but such difference of opinion is not divisive of Christian fellowship.”⁴⁰

In the case of lay readers (as in the case of women’s suffrage), we have an example of the tension between uniformity and variety in practice. Neither the CTCR nor the Synod claimed that this was a matter of doctrine, that is, the clear teaching of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. The CTCR believed uniformity in the practice of lectors was desirable — much like the first Constitution of the Synod — but did not believe a variety in that practice damaged the doctrinal unity we share. The Synod in convention, however, approached it differently, not claiming that uniformity in this matter was desirable, yet urging the “responsible” exercise of variety.

When the Synod makes decisions on matters of this nature, it should be said that such decisions are never permanent or inviolable. We submit all church decisions to the rule of Holy Scripture — and the Lutheran Confessions as accurate expositions of that Word of God — and that in turn means we must be willing to change those decisions if and when we determine they are not in accord with God’s Word. There are clearly delineated processes in our bylaws for the reconsideration of doctrinal statements and resolutions which a member of the Synod believes to contradict the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions. Even more so, in cases where we claim that a matter is free, or one that Scripture does not directly address, we must also be willing as a church body to reconsider our position. The Synod is free to consider a new resolution proposing a new position. This is especially true for certain practices neither commanded nor prohibited, such as lay lectors or women’s suffrage. There may be good reason for changing those practices, whether that involves resolving a preventable conflict within our church body or providing a united front against certain cultural movements, or simply the fact that we desire a common form of this or that practice. The point is that we must reason together. We must work together as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. We must bear in mind the consciences of others within our fellowship, we must follow our duly agreed upon Synod Constitution and Bylaws, and we must seek to find solutions to our problems that neither

³⁹ This point was expressly made by C.F.W. Walther in his first presidential address in 1848. See Carl S. Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1984), 174–175.

⁴⁰ 1995 *Proceedings*, 120.

What Now?

This study document has not sought to provide precise answers to either ceremonies or other practices in the Missouri Synod require uniformity and which ones allow for variety. Nor does it seek to identify what is properly adiaphora and what is not. The Commission can categorically say that, where Scripture or the Lutheran Confessions directly address matters of doctrine or practice, those matters require unity and are not up for debate, compromise or change.⁴¹ There are many practices that do fit within the category of practices expressly commanded or forbidden by Scripture. That list includes admission to the Lord’s Supper, the avoidance of unionism and syncretism, the call and ordination of pastors, the responsibility of the pastoral office for preaching the Word and administering the Sacraments, the prohibition of women’s ordination, or the restriction of certain distinctive functions of the pastoral office to men.

Yet many of the practices at issue in the Missouri Synod historically, or those detailed in the preceding case studies, are not clearly addressed by Scripture or the Lutheran Confessions. Likewise, many of the worship practices often cited in the LCMS debates over proper practice fit into this category — things like instrumentation in worship, specific rites or ceremonies within the order of worship, conduct of the liturgy, vestments, certain forms of lay assistance in worship, among others, are not directly addressed by the Scriptures, nor are they part of the doctrinal content of the *Book of Concord* that the Synod has always considered obligatory.⁴² However, the fact that something is an adiaphoron does not mean the Synod is prevented from collectively adopting or urging a common practice. This has been the case for many issues in our history, such as the decision to require the use of doctrinally pure worship materials, the rejection of women’s suffrage before 1969, or later restrictions on women serving as elders or assisting in the distribution of the Lord’s Supper.⁴³ We may adopt — and have done so frequently — a common practice not required by Scripture, in accordance with our duly prescribed procedures for adopting Synod resolutions, provided we do not maintain that Scripture clearly commands or prohibits certain practices when it does not. In that event, such a decision may invoke Formula of Concord X, which binds us to oppose practices being required as necessary that are truly adiaphora.

How then should we proceed when we *disagree* about whether something is truly an adiaphoron or not? How should we address a contested practice that needs change or reconsideration? One can get the impression that appealing to the Constitution, Bylaws and resolutions of the Synod on matters of either doctrine or practice

⁴¹ In this sense, we reject the relativistic approach to doctrine and practice that characterizes many in the ecumenical movement or among other Lutheran church bodies globally. For an example, see the Lutheran World Federation, *Now There Are Varieties: A Study Document on Lutheran Identity in the Global Lutheran Communion* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2023).

⁴² It is of more than passing interest that the 1956 Synod convention — the same convention that reaffirmed the practice of women’s suffrage — passed a resolution (1956 Res. 3-10) appealing to then-Article III’s concerning liturgical uniformity. It specifically resolved that “pastors, teachers, and theological students who have a special interest in liturgics continue to be warned to exercise an appropriate measure of caution in these matters, so that the consciences of our people and clergy be not disturbed, and that our Synod be on guard lest ‘Romanizing tendencies’ develop in our midst.” It further asked that the Presidium and district presidents examine liturgical practices in light of Article III 5 and “deal vigorously with offenders arising in the area of liturgical practices” (1956 *Proceedings*, 550–551). The appeal to uniformity in practice can again be used for or against various forms of liturgical worship.

⁴³ On the last, see 2016 Resolution 5-14, “To Reaffirm Biblical Teaching on Man and Woman in the Church,” 2016 *Proceedings*, 163. For another worship-related example, see 2016 Resolution 4-04A, “To Appeal to the LCMS Congregations, Workers, and Institutions within Christian Freedom and for Love’s Sake to Retain a Common Order of Service for the Lord’s Supper,” 2016 *Proceedings*, 147.

WHAT NOW?

(adiaphora or not) is an attempt to stint conversation or prevent change. That is not — or ought not be — the case. Rather, those processes established by the Synod are intended to provide for orderly discussion of contested matters, undertaken in a way that respects the consciences of *all* members of the Synod — whether agreeing with the existing position or dissenting from it (see especially 2023 *Handbook*, Bylaw 1.8). The purpose is not bureaucratic officiousness or partisan politicking, but the facilitation of theological conversation like that of Acts 15, where members of the Synod discuss and debate matters of importance, yet bear “with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (**EPH. 4:2B-3**).⁶⁴

Despite its many changes in phrasing and scope over the years, the article of the Synod Constitution precipitating this study has retained a primary goal of encouraging uniformity in church practice. We see this in every iteration of the Constitution. At the same time, it has also come to grant that a “variety of responsible customs and practices” may be permissible, provided they do not injure the doctrine we share in common as the basis for our fellowship nor sow seeds of division within that fellowship. When and where we find practices that raise doubts about the faith we confess or cause offense, we can and should attempt to discuss those matters and seek to persuade one another of the better practice.⁶⁵ Where the Synod has no position (as defined by a doctrinal statement or resolution), we are free to debate those matters publicly, whether in seminary publications, theological periodicals, district conventions, pastoral conferences, circuit meetings, even — with great care given to the medium — in online forums. Where the Synod has a position, more discretion is necessary. The process for dissent encourages potential dissenters not to air their disagreement publicly, but first to address the issue within the fellowship of their peers. That usually involves private discussion among fellow clergy, and preferably conversation with those who are “competent to judge” (ordinarily the called theological professors of the Synod, at a seminary or otherwise, who can evaluate their arguments critically), before expressing that dissent to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations and potentially submitting an overture to the Synod in convention. Again, this process does not seek to inhibit, but *facilitate* productive, orderly conversation about doctrine and practice that the members of the Synod hold as the basis for their unity.

The ultimate goal of such conversation and dissent, as with our agreement concerning doctrine and practice in the first place, is “to conserve and promote the unity of the true faith” — the very first objective of the Synod. Note that this does not state that my opinion is the true faith. That true faith is found in Scripture, and in the Lutheran Confessions as accurate expositions of that pure Word of God. What makes our fellowship a true fellowship is not a synodical constitution, bylaw or resolution, but agreement regarding this “doctrine and all its articles” (Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration X 31) that our shared submission to Scripture and the Confessions entails. If we are going to truly engage and hope to persuade one another of the biblical faithfulness of a practice, then it will require us to enter such conversation on the basis of virtues clearly taught by those Scriptures we confess. A pastor must “not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined ... hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught” (**TITUS 1:7B-9A**). Any leader in the church must “be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain ... hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (**1 TIM. 3:8-9**). The entire priesthood of believers must embody what St. Paul says to the church at Ephesus:

⁶⁴ It is not merely coincidental that the Constitution appeals to both Acts 15 (as reason for establishing the Synod) and to Ephesians 4 (as basis for the first objective of the Synod, namely, “to conserve and promote the unity of the true faith”).

⁶⁵ For instance, C.F.W. Walther, again in his first presidential address, celebrated rather than lamented the fact that the church’s authority does not exist primarily in constitutional force, but in scriptural agreement and the power of persuasion: “We have merely the power to advise one another ... the power of the Word, and of convincing.” *Moving Frontiers*, 170.

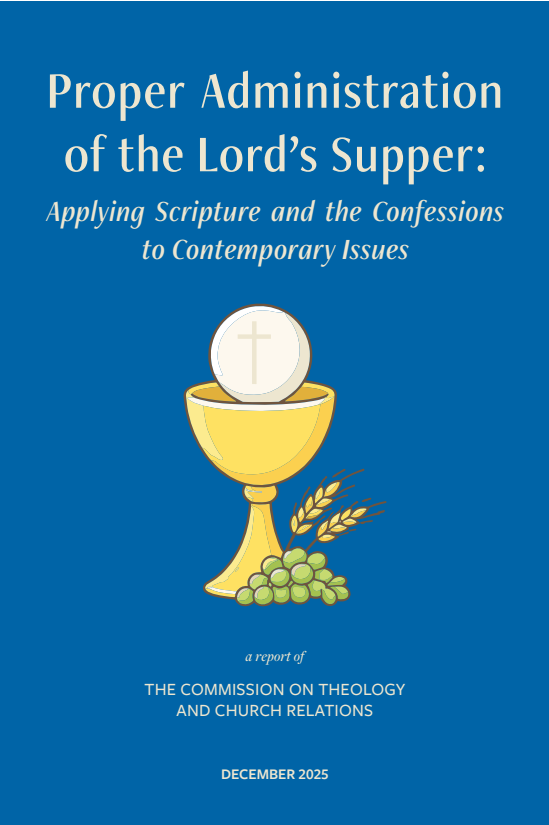
WHAT NOW?

Having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (**EPH. 4:25-32**)

Above all, we must trust one another, not assuming the worst, and seek to edify one another in word and deed. Theological discussion is not a battle to be waged and won, but a humble, mutual submission to God’s Word for the sake of our own faith, that of our neighbor’s faith, that of the whole church, indeed, that of a lost world.

The cases examined in this document do not definitively establish the relationship between uniformity and variety in our practices. They show, rather, how the church has always wrestled with this distinction. At times, that has resulted in greater uniformity. This was obviously the case with the date of Easter or the rejection of certain practices under persecution in the 16th century. At other times, greater diversity was permitted, such as freedom from Jewish practices among Gentile believers in Acts 15 or the decision not to enshrine certain prohibitions or requirements for worship in the original LCMS Constitution. What these case studies reveal is that, with appropriate time and patience, conversation and study, greater understanding may be reached regarding where uniformity is more desirable and where greater diversity may be appreciated. That is part of what it means to be the Synod, to commit to a life together in doctrine and practice, and to work together to better understand and share that common doctrine and, where appropriate, common practice.

R62.9



PROPER ADMINISTRATION
OF THE LORD’S SUPPER: APPLYING
SCRIPTURE AND THE CONFESSIONS
TO CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

A Report of the Commission on Theology
and Church Relations

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

December 2025

Abbreviations	
AC	Augsburg Confession
AE	Luther’s Works
Ap	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
CW	Convention Workbook
FC SD	Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration
FC Ep	Formula of Concord, Epitome
LC	The Large Catechism
SA	Smalcald Articles
SC	The Small Catechism

Contents	
Preface	4
Theological Considerations	7
Substitution of Grape Juice for Ordinary Wine	11
The Use of Pre-Packaged Elements in the Lord’s Supper	14
Substitution of Non-Wheat Bread for Wheat Bread	22
Conclusion	36
Appendix A	37
Appendix B	40
Appendix C	45



Copyright © 2026 The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

1333 S. Kirkwood Rd., St. Louis, MO 63122-7295

1-888-843-5267 • lcms.org

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The quotations from the Lutheran Confessions in this publication are from *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, second edition © 2006 Concordia Publishing House. All rights reserved.

The quotations from *Luther’s Works* in this publication are from the American Edition, vol. 40 © 1958 Fortress Press. Used by permission of the publisher.

Manufactured in the United States of America

PREFACE

At its 2023 convention The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) adopted Resolution 5-15, “To Uphold Proper Elements and Reverential Administration of the Lord's Supper,” addressing concerns about the practice of the Lord's Supper.¹ The resolution includes reminders that the Supper is “a communal meal . . . through which His body and blood are distributed in, with, and under bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.” The resolution goes on to reaffirm the confessional teaching “that the proper use of the Sacrament includes unified consecration, distribution, and reception” and the consequent fact that the Supper “should be kept according to His [Christ's] institution.” It adds: “It is incumbent on all faithful ministers of the Gospel to remove all obstacles that create doubt regarding what Christ offers in this Sacrament or detracts from it.” Lastly, the final two “Whereas” statements speak about the use of “prefilled communion cup and wafer sets” and “the use of non-wheat hosts and/or grape juice” in LCMS congregations.

Three resolves follow:

Resolved, That our pastors and congregations give careful consideration to the reverential treatment of the elements in the administration of the Lord's Supper; and be it further

Resolved, That this convention reaffirms 2001 Resolution 3-16, “To Encourage Use of Only Wine in Administration of Lord's Supper”; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Commission on Theology and Church Relations [CTCR] be instructed to take up these concerns.

The following consideration is offered in compliance with the third and final

¹ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2003 *Convention Proceedings*, 157.

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Gospel “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). As people hear and believe the Gospel's promises they are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13). We are saved by grace through faith in Christ. Holding to Christ in faith, we also hold to His promises. His promises are spoken that we may believe them and so receive what they promise: forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Faith is thus confident hope. It is assurance that what God promises is ours, even when we do not see it (Heb. 11:1).

Among the precious expressions of the Gospel is the Sacrament of the Altar, where Christ explicitly promises that the bread of the Sacrament is His body and the cup of wine is His blood—and that this body was given for us and this blood was shed for the forgiveness of our sins. This is not “interpretation” but a simple acknowledgment of God's Word:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: “Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me.”

In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them saying, “Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”²

² See “The Words of Our Lord,” or Words of Institution, as they appear in the *Divine Service of Lutheran Service Book* (Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 162, 179, 197, 209, 217.

direction of 2023 Res. 5-15 and seeks to address the three specific “concerns” about the practice of the Lord's Supper identified therein: first, the substitution of grape juice for wine; second, the use of prefilled communion cup and wafer sets; and third, the substitution of non-wheat for wheat hosts.

Each one of the three practices mentioned in 2023 Res. 5-15 has its rationale in pastoral concern for the well-being of communicants. Specifically, each addresses a matter of bodily health and well-being. Pre-packaged elements were introduced in some LCMS congregations during the COVID-19 pandemic as an attempt to protect communicants from transmission of the coronavirus. Churches that make grape juice available rather than wine do so to aid members who suffer from alcoholism or others who are on medications that should not be taken together with alcohol. And churches that offer gluten-free bread in the Supper do so to prevent adverse physical reactions to the gluten in wheat. It is important to acknowledge and commend the compassion and pastoral concern that these practices represent.

At the same time, appreciation of the compassion, motivations, and actions at work does not mean that we should ignore the theological appropriateness of these practices. Therefore, the CTCR seeks to address herein each of these practices from a confessional Lutheran theological and pastoral perspective. Our goal is that our practice would fully align with our confession of the Lord's Supper as instituted by our Lord Jesus.

This wonderful promise of the sacramental union and forgiveness in the Lord's Supper also has a sobering corollary: “We hold that the bread and wine in the Supper are Christ's true body and blood. These are given and received not only by the godly but also by wicked Christians” (SA III VI 1).³

Given these words, the Small Catechism simply and boldly restates them, confessing that the Sacrament of the Altar “is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself” (SC VI 2). The Formula adds the assurance that the words of Jesus are “simple, plain, clear, firm, and beyond doubt” (FC SD VII 48). Thus Lutherans make a confident confession, grounded in Christ's trustworthy promises. There is no doubt or quibbling or any attempt to rationalize how such a gift could be given. Faith does not demand an explanation; it receives and rejoices as it trusts in Christ's promises. Rather, Lutheran Christians firmly confess that the “true” body and blood—that is, the real, actual body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ—are what Christ gives Christians to eat and to drink. Any talk of Jesus' words as symbolic or mere figures of speech is ruled out. Thus the Formula of Concord echoes the Apology (X 54) to say, “We believe that in the Lord's Supper Christ's body and blood are *truly and substantially present* and are truly administered with those things that are seen (bread and wine) to those who receive the Sacrament” (FC SD VII 11; emphasis added).

All this is true, of course, not only of the Last Supper, but every Lord's Supper that follows Christ's intent. Paul's repetition of Christ's words in 1 Corinthians proves that they are rightly understood to apply not only to the bread and wine Christ distributed on the night of His betrayal, but are also true for the communion administration of the church in every age (see 1 Corinthians 10 and 11, especially 1 Cor. 10:16 and 1 Cor. 11:23–24; see also FC SD VII 54–55).

³ Therefore Lutherans do not administer the Sacrament without restriction to any and everyone. “Everyone who desires to be a Christian and go to this Sacrament should know them [the words of Christ]. For it is not our intention to let people come to the Sacrament and administer it to them if they do not know what they seek or why they come” (LC V 2). That the “unworthy” receive Christ's body and blood is taught in 1 Cor. 11:27–32.

The “word, institution, and ordination” of Christ creates the sacramental union (FC SD VII 73–75).⁴ And His “Do this” means the validity of the Sacrament also includes more than a mere recitation of Christ’s word over bread and wine. “This embraces the entire action or administration in this Sacrament. In an assembly of Christians bread and wine are taken, consecrated, distributed, received, eaten, drunk, and the Lord’s death is shown forth at the same time. St. Paul also places before our eyes this entire action of the breaking of bread or of distribution and reception (1 Corinthians 10:16)” (FC SD VII 84). This is summarized in the ancient rule that “nothing has the nature of a Sacrament apart from the use [*usus*] instituted by Christ or apart from the action [*actio*] divinely instituted” (FC SD VII 85). “The use or action here does not mean chiefly faith. Nor does it mean the oral participation alone. It means the entire external, visible action of the Lord’s Supper instituted by Christ: the consecration, or words of institution, the distribution and reception, or oral partaking of the consecrated bread and wine, of Christ’s body and blood” (FC SD VII 86).

Given the emphatic certainty of the Gospel in the words of Jesus when He instituted His Holy Supper, we should be concerned if any church practice fails to follow His institution or if it introduces doubt or uncertainty about the Supper. Instead, the church rightly seeks to follow our Lord’s own institution in Holy Communion. Just as our Lord took bread and wine, declaring it His body and blood and promising that “in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words” (SC VI 6), so we also echo His very words over bread and wine, distributing them in confident faith because He has declared that He wants to distribute His very body and blood in this way.

The clear words of Christ answer essential questions: “For Christ gives this command at the table and at supper. There is certainly no doubt that He speaks of real, natural bread and of natural wine. Also, He speaks of oral eating and drinking” (FC SD VII 48). Everything important is there in the Words of Institution. Because they are simple and clear and make unambiguous promises, our practice should avoid anything that takes the plain, powerful words of Jesus and produces questions or uncertainty, or leads to unhelpful, confusing, or illegitimate practices.

4 The Latin text reads, “*verbo, institutioni atque ordinationi*,” and the German, “*Wort, Einsetzung und Ordnung*.” See *Concordia Triglotta*, 999.

SUBSTITUTION OF GRAPE JUICE FOR ORDINARY WINE

This is not the place to trace the history of how and why grape juice came to be substituted for wine in the practice of Holy Communion.⁵ We should simply note that the practice came out of Methodist revivalism’s condemnation of all alcoholic use and was spurred by Thomas Welch’s (a Methodist minister) development of a way to prevent the fermentation of grape juice through pasteurization.⁶

Over time the substitution of grape juice for wine was adopted by many Protestant churches and even by some LCMS congregations. Within the LCMS, however, this practice has not involved a total substitution of grape juice for wine. In such cases wine is used by most members and grape juice is available for alcoholics and others who avoid alcohol for medical reasons.

Although some LCMS congregations may in some situations substitute grape juice for wine in the Lord’s Supper, the LCMS has taken a long-standing, consistent position against the practice. For this reason, although 2023 Res. 5-15 asked the CTCR to take up the three concerns we are addressing herein, the use of grape juice in place of wine can be considered most briefly. The resolution itself reaffirms a 2001 resolution that strongly encourages our congregations to use only wine and not grape juice (see Appendix A for the full text of 2001 Res. 3-16).

The Synod’s position on this matter predates 2001 and is based firmly on Scripture. It is also consistent with the traditions of the church before the Reformation, of

5 A relatively brief history of the temperance movement in the US is available on the National Institutes of Health’s National Library of Medicine. See Paul Aaron and David Musto, “Temperance and Prohibition in America: A Historical Overview,” <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK216414/>.

6 See Joe Iovino, “Methodist History: Communion and Welch’s Grape Juice,” United Methodist Church, June 28, 2016, <https://www.umc.org/en/content/communion-and-welchs-grape-juice#:~:text=To%20combat%20the%20epidemic%20of%20is%20such%20common%20practice>.

That we seek to avoid ambiguity about the Sacrament, however, does not mean that every specific thing described in the Last Supper or in Paul’s advice to Corinth must be followed in some kind of rigid mimicry. When Jesus said, “Do this,” He focused on eating the bread that He promises is His very body and drinking the cup that He assures us is His very blood. Our Lord’s emphasis is not on such things as the Passover setting or the physical action of breaking a loaf or other such matters. He tells us simply to eat and drink the bread and cup that are His body and blood—and thereby assures us that our sins are forgiven.

Luther and the Confessions, and of confessional Lutheran teachers who followed. Throughout this history the term “fruit of the vine” has been understood as a technical term and not a general description. The LCMS and its theologians have with great consistency affirmed that only bread and wine are to be used in the Lord’s Supper. This position can be traced from C. F. W. Walther to Franz Pieper to the faculties of our seminaries to the CTCR.⁷

In 1998, the Synod convention affirmed this understanding in Res. 3-16B, “To Affirm Use of Bread and Wine in the Sacrament of the Altar.” In keeping with its title, the resolution included reminders that the Scriptures are unanimous in stating that our Lord used bread and a cup of wine in the Last Supper and that the same were present in the Sacrament at Corinth. Pastors were urged to “remain faithful in their practice of Christ’s institution” so as “not to introduce an element of uncertainty into the Sacrament.”⁸

As noted in 2023 Res. 5-15, the Synod again addressed this topic in 2001, in Res. 3-16, “To Encourage Use of Only Wine in Administration of the Lord’s Supper.” The convention then addressed congregations that were using grape juice: “That the congregations be encouraged to use only wine for the Sacrament.”⁹ Once more, in 2023 Res. 5-15, the Synod again reaffirmed its 2001 Res. 3-16 stance, “To Encourage Use of Only Wine in Administration of Lord’s Supper.”¹⁰

We must add that this consistent position also indicates concern for the communicant who for various reasons cannot tolerate alcohol. The discussions of both seminaries and the CTCR all note the availability of low or non-alcoholic wines that may be used without objection.

7 See Walther’s *Pastoral Theology* (Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 199; Pieper’s *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 3 (Concordia Publishing House, 1953), fns 94, 354; also “Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 45, nos. 1-2 (1981): 77-80; “Is ‘Non-Alcoholic Wine’ Really Wine?” *Concordia Journal* 17, no. 1 (1991): 4-6; Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Theology and Practice of the Lord’s Supper* (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1983), under 2. The Elements, b. The Wine, 16-17.

8 See The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1998 *Convention Proceedings*.

9 See The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2001 *Convention Proceedings*.

10 2023 *Convention Proceedings*, 157.

There is no reason to question the Synod's time-honored position on this matter. The elements referred to in Scripture are without question bread and wine. The Synod therefore rightly opposes the substitution of pasteurized grape juice for wine in the Sacrament. Rather, the Commission echoes Concordia Theological Seminary's "Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology":

We strongly urge, therefore, lest confusion be multiplied, offense be given, consciences and peace within the church be disturbed, that Lutheran pastors and people continue a consistent practice in support of the Scripturally designated elements in Holy Communion, especially as regards the use of wine, "the fruit of the vine," which Christ instituted when He gave to His church this new testament in His blood.¹¹

In conclusion, we commend once more the Synod's long-standing teaching that only bread and wine should be used in the Lord's Supper, since "the use of an element other than wine is an alien practice in the churches of the Augsburg Confession and brings about doubt whether the Sacrament is offered or not" (2001 Res. 3-16).

11 "Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology," 80. Earlier in its opinion, the Systematic department offers this strong caution: "Those who simply 'prefer' to receive grape juice instead of wine should be led to see that their 'preference' is in violation of Scripture's own clear teaching and that they are thereby making the Sacrament an uncertain matter, if in fact not invalid. Moreover, it is to be feared that such tampering with the Sacrament may in the final analysis involve a deeper error, the relegating of the Lord's Supper to a mere memorial meal instead of the blessed means of grace that Christ has constituted it to be for our spiritual well-being, for the forgiveness of sins" (80). See Appendix B for the full text of this opinion.

13

loaf was employed—sometimes leavened and sometimes not. Both unleavened and leavened bread have been used, usually made from wheat flour, although there is evidence that in some places other grains were acceptable to make the flour for the bread. Usually the unleavened bread for the Sacrament is made with only flour and water, but in some places oil is added, and in others wine or salt may also be in the dough.¹⁴ The creation of the individual host dates to the seventh or eighth century, and by the ninth century the practice of individually made unleavened hosts was nearly uniform in the West (almost always baked in monasteries with prayer and fasting). However, a few, even in the West, preferred a single loaf of leavened bread for the Eucharist.¹⁵

With the Reformation came more change. The Reformed eventually insisted on the use of ordinary loaves in the Supper, because of the symbolism inherent therein, while Lutherans generally retained the Roman practice of individual hosts.¹⁶

The wine of the Supper through history also exhibits significant variety. Only grape wine appears to have been used throughout the church, although some heretical groups used only water rather than wine. While water alone was condemned, wine was typically diluted with water in the ancient world, in Jewish practice, and so also in the church. Augustine mentions the practice, and Cyprian of Carthage comments on this theologically, although the practice was more likely the result of practicality and custom than theology.¹⁷ The grape varieties used for wine varied.

The practice of communing in one kind, or withholding the cup, is of course one of the most significant variations that occurred in the practice of the Lord's Supper. The practice of the New Testament church, as we know from Corinth, or of the Western Church in general into the twelfth century was clearly Communion in both kinds, although there were exceptions in isolated circumstances, for example,

14 See Henri Leclercq, "Host," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7 (Robert Appleton Company, 1910), <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07489d.htm> (accessed August 19, 2024).

15 Lucia Graziano, "Communion Wafers Instead of Loaves: A History," *Aleteia*, February 7, 2023, <https://aleteia.org/2023/02/07/communion-wafers-instead-of-loaves-a-history> (accessed August 19, 2024).

16 "Host," *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

17 Augustine, "On Christian Doctrine," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff (Hendrickson reprint, 1995), 590; Cyprian, "Epistle 62: Caecilius, on the Sacrament of the Cup of the Lord," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Hendrickson reprint, 1995), 358-64.

15

THE USE OF PRE-PACKAGED ELEMENTS IN THE LORD'S SUPPER

Historical Background

Of the three practices that are named in 2023 Res. 5-15, the most recent—at least in the LCMS—is the introduction of pre-packaged bread and wine (or grape juice). COVID-19 led to skyrocketing use of the packets in many Protestant and Evangelical churches,¹² and also to some use in the LCMS. The recent rise of pre-packaged elements resulted from the mystery of how COVID-19 was spreading. The use of packets was linked to other changes in church life, from widespread temporary suspension of worship in many churches, to parking lot services, to physical separation of individuals and families in sanctuaries, and so forth. For one vendor of the pre-packaged elements, sales rose by 1,000 percent in the year after COVID-19 hit the US.¹³

Over the centuries, various ways of providing the communion elements have been employed in the church catholic. With regard to the bread, practice has varied through church history. The earliest evidence indicates that ordinary table bread was used. The Roman Catholic tradition now is to use only unleavened wheat bread; churches of the East generally use leavened bread. For many years a larger

12 Lutheranism can arguably be placed under the Protestant and the Evangelical umbrella as a church body that stems from the sixteenth-century Reformation. However, within this document our general practice will be to distinguish confessional Lutheranism from other Protestants and Evangelicalism.

13 Parija Kavilanz, "Easter Is Here, and So Are Disposable, Pre-filled Communion Cups," *CNN Business*, April 7, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/07/business/pre-filled-communion-cups/index.html>.

14

when the Sacrament was taken to the sick and in the practice mentioned by certain church fathers of laity taking home the host for communing privately and in the communion of young children.¹⁸ In the East the Sacrament "is always given in both forms—bread and wine."¹⁹ Thus, the Roman practice of communing in only one kind is a novelty in the catholic tradition that, unfortunately, became the standard in the medieval Roman Catholic Church. Protests against the practice of withholding the cup preceded the Reformation, but with the Reformers the chalice was returned to the laity in virtually every strand of the Reformation.

As noted above, however, some Protestants began the variation of using something other than wine in the cup. Then, beginning in the twentieth century and due to advances in knowledge about disease transmission, the common chalice gradually gave way to the use of individual metal cups or glasses and then individual plastic cups. The cups were almost always filled in advance of the service. The rationale for the practice is the assumption that communicants are thereby protected from colds, flu, or other diseases. (It should be noted, however, that this assumption cannot be firmly substantiated and that there is no verifiable evidence of any transmission of infections via the common cup.)²⁰ Over time the use of individual portions of wine became common also in the LCMS, and the Synod formally approved the use of individual glasses in 1944.²¹

18 See Patrick Toner, "Communion under Both Kinds," II. History of Disciplinary Variations, 2, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 4 (Robert Appleton Company, 1908), <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04175a.htm> (accessed February 22, 2026).

19 "Holy Eucharist," *Orthodox Church in America*, <https://www.oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-sacraments/holy-eucharist> (accessed August 22, 2024).

20 In 1998 the US Center for Disease Control "reported that there had never been an outbreak of infection related to the communion cup and that a theoretical risk of transmitting infectious diseases by using a common communion cup exists, but that the risk is so small that it is undetectable." See "COVID-19 and Holy Communion" *Public Health* 187 (2020): 134-35, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2020.08.012>. A later study published in light of COVID-19 came to this same conclusion that "the common communion cup may serve as a potential vehicle for transmission. However, the risk is considerably lower compared to other conditions of social gathering. Furthermore, the transmission of any infectious disease has never been documented" (emphasis added); see Dimitrios Anyfantakis, "Holy Communion and Infection Transmission: A Literature Review," *Circus Journal of Medical Science*, June 21, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.8741>.

21 The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1944 *Convention Proceedings*, 254-55.

16

Prior use of individual pre-packaged elements for the Lord's Supper is even more recent, dating only to the closing years of the twentieth century.²² The initial "market" was among Evangelical churches and other Protestants whose practice of the Lord's Supper involved having filled individual glasses (usually with grape juice) in a cup holder attached to the pew in front of the worshipers. Convenience was the initial rationale for the pre-packaged elements since the laborious process of filling each individual glass could be avoided.²³

During the pandemic, many congregations, including some in the LCMS, adopted the use of pre-packaged elements as a way to have the Lord's Supper without any perceived danger of virus transmission from either bread or cup. Plus, the packets simplified distribution for churches that met in parking lots and enabled it also for churches that held online or "virtual worship" by having members use pre-packaged elements that had been delivered to their homes.²⁴

Polarization of opinions was an unfortunate result of the various responses to COVID-19. Some condemned those who refused government restrictions and counsel. Others condemned those who followed the guidelines. The use of communion packets was yet another source of disagreement. The debates and, too often, rancor affected churches and circuits. Hence, the LCMS convention request to consider the practice of using pre-packaged elements in 2023 Res. 5-15. But we note that the same convention also urged "charity and latitude" among Synod pastors regarding the various approaches taken in response to the pandemic.

²² According to the *Chicago Tribune*, prepackaged elements were first marketed in 1996. See "Communion in a Cup Has Its Converts, Naysayers," April 19, 1996, updated August 18, 2021, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/1996/04/19/communion-in-a-cup-has-its-converts-naysayers/>.

²³ Although popular, the communion package also had detractors even within Evangelicalism. "Communion in a Cup" notes that critics argued that the practice undermined the symbolism of the Lord's Supper.

²⁴ The LCMS has, of course, strongly opposed virtual or online Communion. See 2023 *Convention Proceedings*, Res. 5-08A, 152-53. The third "Resolved" reads: "That the Synod in convention clearly and unequivocally reject and condemn the practice of virtual (online) Communion." See Appendix C for the full text of the resolution. See also the various CTCR opinions on this issue, available online at <http://resources.lcms.org/reading-study/ctcr-library-means-of-grace-sacraments-lutheran-doctrine-and-practice/>.

the Altar. This does not mean that any and every practice is acceptable regarding pre-packaged elements, especially since the Synod has addressed the manner of distributing the cup in the Lord's Supper. We offer the following comments giving our considered opinion about their use:

Consecration: As is always the case in the Lord's Supper, the words of Christ must be spoken over the elements.

To be sure, the words can be spoken over pre-packaged elements.

However, the packets prevent a more explicit declaration. In a typical setting, the pastor can clearly indicate the bread and the cup (or cups) separately during the Words of Institution. He indicates the bread by touching or lifting it as he repeats our Lord's words: "Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me." Then, he repeats Christ's words as he indicates the cup: "Drink of it, all of you, this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

In our judgment, the consecration of packets lends itself to a confusion that is not evident in typical consecration.

Also, the use of disposable plastic cups raises concerns about the proper and reverent treatment of the consecrated wine that remains after Communion.²⁶

Elements: The LCMS affirms the biblical and confessional understanding that only bread and wine should be used in the Lord's Supper.

²⁶ In *Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper*, page 17, the CTCR states: "The consecrated elements which remain after all have communed should be treated with reverence. This reverence has been expressed by Lutherans in various ways. Some have followed the ancient practice of burning the bread and pouring the wine upon the earth. Others have established a basin and drain—*piscina*—specifically for the disposal of the wine. The elders or altar guild may also return the consecrated bread and wine to specific containers for future sacramental use, or the elders and pastor can consume the remaining elements. All of these practices should be understood properly. The church is not, thereby, conferring upon the elements some abiding status apart from their use in the Lord's Supper itself." See also the reference to FC SD VII 14-15 on page 17.

Response

We noted above that the accounts of the Last Supper in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as well as Paul's comments about the Sacrament in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11, certainly indicate something of how the Lord's Supper was administered first by Jesus and then in the New Testament church. In both the Passover meal when Jesus first instituted His Supper and in Paul's description of the Sacrament as he had received it, we hear of bread (*artos*) that is taken, blessed with thanksgiving,²⁵ broken, and then distributed for eating with the assurance that it is Christ's body. In like manner, a cup of wine is taken up to be blessed and declared to be His blood, and participants are invited to drink.

With regard to right practice, then, the Synod holds firmly to the confessional understanding that the validity of the Lord's Supper involves certain necessities: (1) right consecration—the use of the words of Jesus (Words of Institution) spoken over (2) the appropriate earthly elements of bread and wine, followed by (3) the distribution to the congregation for them to eat and drink (see, e.g., FC SD VII 79-82; FC SD VII 121; FC Ep VII 8-9; FC SD VII 75).

Given the various ways that bread and cup have been given and received by Christians, as described above, one must proceed with caution before passing judgment on practice. For example, there has been widespread acceptance in most of Christianity of the use of bread that is provided in individual portions rather than from a single loaf. Similarly, even churches that do not utilize individual glasses for the Sacrament often employ several chalices when communing a very large assembly. Synod congregations have used both a single loaf and, more commonly, individual hosts, leavened and unleavened bread—all without condemnation or question. And many if not most congregations offer individual cups with explicit Synod approval.

The LCMS has no resolutions or statements on the use of pre-packaged elements, and there is no incontrovertible scriptural basis for asserting that the use of individual packets of bread and wine would inherently invalidate the Sacrament of

²⁵ Matthew and Mark speak of Jesus "blessing" the bread (Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22), while Luke and Paul describe Him giving "thanks" (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24).

Communion packets are available for purchase from a number of sources. Some provide only a portion of unleavened bread with grape juice. A few offer both packets with grape juice and with wine and some also offer gluten-free bread in their packets.

Only packets that are filled with bread and wine are acceptable under any circumstances in LCMS congregations.

Distribution: The manner of distribution varies. As is the case in general, some congregations have communicants come to the altar, kneel, and then receive Communion. Others have individuals walk forward and receive the Sacrament while standing, and then return to their seats (continuous Communion). In exceptional cases members are communed in their seat. Regarding prefilled packets, variety also existed. Three approaches were observed in LCMS congregations during the pandemic. In some churches, packets were handed to each individual communicant by the pastor or an elder assisting him. In others, individuals helped themselves, taking the packet from a tray or basket as they approached the altar to commune. A third form of distribution was having individuals take a communion packet together with a service folder (bulletin) as they entered the church and then, during the service of the Sacrament, communing in their seat.

In general, the manner of reception is an adiaphoron.

However, we strongly discourage the practice of having individuals take communion elements for themselves into the service and then communing in their seats. This practice is problematic in two ways. First, it largely prevents any pastoral care regarding who is prepared for the Sacrament. Second, it raises confusion and doubt about the point of reference in the consecration when the pastor speaks of "this bread" and "drink this cup." Should he say "That is My body" or "That cup is the new testament in My blood"?

Further, since "self-communion" in the pew is common in many Reformed churches and congregations, this may lead to confusion regarding crucial differences between Lutheran and Reformed theology and practice.

Given these concerns, while the Commission does not consider the use of pre-packaged elements to be inherently illegitimate, we find it troubling. The use

of pre-packaged elements invites confusion and can encourage bad practices. As noted above, such usage seems to invite some churches to adopt specific practices that undermine or prevent the practice of closed Communion and may also create questions about what has or has not been consecrated. Consequently, such a practice may under some circumstances create doubts that may cause communicants to be unsure that they are receiving Christ's body and blood and therefore to refrain from reception. For these reasons, we believe the Synod should discourage their future use.

This judgment does not in any way seek to condemn those pastors and congregations that, according to their best judgment during the confusion of the COVID-19 pandemic, made use of the packets. Nevertheless, we believe that the potential for confusion and bad practice outweighs any potential benefit. The great treasure that is Christ's Holy Supper should not be discounted in place of uncertain attempts to avoid disease. Moreover, if we emphasize worries about the potential for disease transmission, public worship itself would be viewed as a possible threat to physical well-being because of the constant presence of influenza, continuing outbreaks of COVID-19, and other contagions. Our deepest concern as Christians is not threats to the body, but threats to our soul. Jesus rightly admonishes us about the danger of living in fear of this world's threats and ignoring God (Matt. 10:28). A risk to the spiritual well-being of those who would be uncertain of the Sacrament should rank above the unlikelihood that Communion will endanger us physically.

21

to those who request them. Hence the question of their propriety has been raised in 2023 Res. 5-15.

Regarding the bread of the Lord's Supper, this is what we have been given in Scripture:

Matthew 26:26 – “Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.””

Mark 14:22 – “And as they were eating, He took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is My body.””

Luke 22:19 – “And He took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.””

1 Corinthians 11:23–24 – “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, “This is My body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.””

In each of the passages, the text shows that Jesus took “bread” with a blessing or thanksgiving, and distributed it to the disciples with the words “This is My body.”

The concern the CTCR has here been asked to address is whether it is consistent with our Lord's “Do this” for congregations to use “non-wheat hosts” in the Lord's Supper. That is, since the Lord took “bread” as one of the elements of the Lord's Supper, is bread made from something other than wheat a valid earthly element? The Confessions simply describe Christ's instruction: “For Christ gives this command at the table and at supper. There is certainly no doubt that He speaks of real, natural bread and of natural wine. Also, He speaks of oral eating and drinking” (FC SD VII 48). Therefore, consistent with our response in the matter of substituting grape juice for wine, we should state at the outset that using something other than “natural bread” would not be in keeping with our Lord's words.

The Greek word translated as “bread” in the four passages cited is *artos*. For biblical studies, Greek lexicons (dictionaries) provide definitions by summarizing the

23

SUBSTITUTION OF NON-WHEAT BREAD FOR WHEAT BREAD

Biblical and Historical Background

The question of the propriety of using bread made from grains other than wheat is largely a result of requests by individuals who suffer from celiac disease or another form of gluten intolerance. Although celiac disease was diagnosed as early as the second century AD, it was given little study or medical treatment until the 1800s.²⁷ Both celiac disease (CD) and non-celiac gluten intolerance (NCGS) have garnered increasing attention in recent years. The *World Journal of Gastroenterology* (WJG) says that “currently, 1% of the United States population holds a diagnosis for celiac disease (CD), however, a more recently recognized and possibly related condition, ‘non-celiac gluten sensitivity’ (NCGS) has been suggested to affect up to 6% of the United States public.”²⁸ In addition to those with such diagnoses, a significantly higher number of Americans—about 20% of the population—have chosen to adopt a gluten-free diet without either a CD or NCGS diagnosis.²⁹ This has led to concerns about the Sacrament, since wheat hosts or bread have been used almost exclusively for generations. By the late twentieth century non-gluten hosts were offered to churches as an alternative to wheat hosts for use in cases of CD or other gluten intolerance. Significant numbers of LCMS churches offer non-gluten hosts

²⁷ See “History of Celiac Disease,” Beyond Celiac, <https://www.beyondceliac.org/celiac-disease/celiac-history/> (accessed September 17, 2024). The death rate for untreated celiac children is about 30 percent. Because of high rates of child mortality, the fact that celiac victims tended to be children may have prevented scientific attention until more recent times.

²⁸ Samuel O. Igbiniedon et al., “Non-Celiac Gluten Sensitivity: All Wheat Attack Is Not Celiac,” *WJG* 23, no. 40 (2017): 7201–10, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29142467/>.

²⁹ Igbiniedon, et al.

22

usage of a word in the ancient world during both the period of Classical Greek literature and later, more common (Koine) biblical and early church literature. The definitions for *artos* vary somewhat in the dictionaries but can be summarized: In Classical Greek when *artos* appears without a modifier it seems to have referred to wheat bread almost exclusively; however, the definition broadened to become the general term for all bread in the Koine period.³⁰

The Bible knows different grains and breads. Wheat and wheat bread are most frequently mentioned (over fifty times), but barley and bread made from barley are also mentioned frequently (more than thirty times). As for other types of grain, the only certain reference of bread made from them is the passage in Ezekiel 4:9, where the Lord commands the prophet to make bread from a mixed flour containing wheat, barley, beans, lentil, millet, and emmer. The term “bread” (*lehem* in Hebrew, *artos* in Greek) is far more common than specific terms such as “wheat bread” or “barley bread.” It is used over two hundred times in the Old Testament and nearly one hundred times in the New Testament. “Bread” can mean a loaf, a cake, or a wafer—although when the wafer is unleavened bread in the Old Testament the term *matzah* rather than *lehem* is typical.

Bread is further used in ways that go beyond the literal. Since bread was the staple in the diet of the biblical world, the Bible also can use “bread” as shorthand for food or nourishment (e.g., Prov. 6:8; Lam. 1:11; Ezek. 18:16; Matt. 6:11; Luke 14:15; 15:17; 2 Thess. 3:12). Reference to bread being broken is connected with the blessing of the meal by the head of the household and the subsequent distribution of food. This is also, of course, the sense in the four Lord's Supper narratives. The combination of breaking and bread in Luke and Acts seems to indicate partaking of a meal in some cases (Luke 24:35; Acts 2:46; 20:11), but it may refer to the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7). Certainly “the bread that we break” in 1 Corinthians 10:16 refers to the Supper.

There is further usage of the term “bread” beyond any reference to normal grain bread. Note the connection with manna, “bread from heaven” (Ex. 16:4, 8; Psalm

³⁰ Several dictionaries can be consulted: Henry George Liddell et al., eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th rev. ed. (Oxford University Press, 1996); James Diggle et al., eds., *The Cambridge Greek Lexicon*, vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 2021); Johannes Behm, “*artos*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromley (Eerdmans, 1964); Walter Bauer et al., eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 2000).

24

105:40; Neh. 9:15; John 6:31). And, of course, Christ refers to Himself as the true bread or bread of life (John 6:31–59).

The Bible knows more than one kind of bread, although wheat bread is mentioned more than other grains or bread. Jesus uses wheat in parables such as the Parable of the Weeds (Matt. 13:24–30) and of the Dishonest Manager (Luke 16:1–30). Bread made from the “finest wheat” seems to have been the preferred bread for the Old Testament. For example, “fine wheat flour” is used for the unleavened bread offered during the consecration of priests (Ex. 29:2; see also Deut. 32:14). Barley is also frequently mentioned in the Bible, but it evidently was a humbler grain or, at any rate, less costly than wheat (e.g., Rev. 6:6). Of note are the twenty barley loaves that Elisha used miraculously to feed one hundred men (2 Kings 4:42–44) and the five barley loaves from which our Lord fed five thousand men and their families (John 6:9–13).

The passages from Matthew, Mark, and Luke all describe the Last Supper in the upper room with Jesus and His disciples as the Passover. Thus the bread that Jesus used at that meal would almost certainly have been unleavened bread since Passover directly preceded the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:4–6). Given their proximity, Luke refers to Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread as one event (Luke 22:1). Houses were cleansed of leaven in preparation for Passover and the following Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ex. 12:15–20; Deut. 16:16).³¹ The leavening to be cleansed would have included any leavened grain bread, such as barley as well as wheat.³²

Given the direct connection between Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, it is of note that the word for bread in the first three Gospels is *artos*, the general term for bread, and not the specific Greek term for unleavened bread (*azymos*). Then, in Paul’s teaching about the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11, there is no mention of a Passover setting or of unleavened bread. In those chapters Paul, too, speaks only of bread generally (*artos*, not *azymos*) without further qualifica-

31 See Francis X. E. Albert, “Azymes,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (Robert Appleton Company, 1907), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02171a.htm>.

32 There is specific mention of barley in Rabbinic Judaism (Tosefta, *Pisḥa*, 38f). Later Talmudic Judaism holds that *matzah* (unleavened bread) is to be made from one of the grains mentioned in the Torah (wheat, barley, spelt, rye, oats). See “Passover: Matzah,” Jewish Virtual Library, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/matzah>. Karaite Jews used only barley, believing it to be most suited to serve as the “bread of affliction” (Deut. 16:3) since it was the bread commonly eaten by the poor.

Thomas’s conclusion that unleavened wheat should be used in the Sacrament was endorsed by the Council of Florence in 1439 for use in the West, stating that “the body of Christ is truly confectioned in both unleavened and leavened wheat bread, and priests should confect the body of Christ in either, that is, each priest according to the custom of his western or eastern church.”³³ For Rome, this teaching remains unchanged. Trent reaffirmed it as did John Paul’s Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* in 2004. Paragraph 49 is explicit:

The bread used in the celebration of the Most Holy Eucharistic Sacrifice must be unleavened, purely of wheat, and recently made so that there is no danger of decomposition. It follows therefore that bread made from another substance, even if it is grain, or if it is mixed with another substance different from wheat to such an extent that it would not commonly be considered wheat bread, does not constitute valid matter for confecting the Sacrifice and the Eucharistic Sacrament. It is a grave abuse to introduce other substances, such as fruit or sugar or honey, into the bread for confecting the Eucharist. Hosts should obviously be made by those who are not only distinguished by their integrity, but also skilled in making them and furnished with suitable tools.³⁸

The same ruling was reiterated in 2017 by Cardinal Robert Sarah in a letter on behalf of Pope Francis. “Hosts that are completely gluten-free are invalid matter for the celebration of the Eucharist. Low-gluten hosts (partially gluten-free) are valid matter, provided they contain a sufficient amount of gluten to obtain the confection of bread without the addition of foreign materials and without the use of

37 “Council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence, 1431–49 AD,” Session 6, July 6, 1439, Papal Encyclicals Online, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum17.htm> (accessed February 19, 2026).

38 The Holy See, “Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacrament,” III 1, paragraph 48, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20040423_redemptionis-sacramentum_en.html.

tion (1 Cor. 10:14–22; 11:20–34).³³ Although grain was certainly used for the bread of the Last Supper and in Corinth, no text explicitly describes the kind of grain used in either case.

The early church practice of the Lord’s Supper was distinguished from the Jewish Passover, as was the case in Corinth. In the earliest Christian centuries, there is no evidence of controversy over the kind of bread—whether leavened or unleavened—that should be used in the Supper. It appears that ordinary leavened bread was used most widely throughout the early church. Over time, however, a division regarding leavening developed between the Eastern and Western branches of Christianity. Eventually unleavened bread was used almost exclusively among the Roman—or Western—Church and leavened bread was used in the East.³⁴ This became one of the factors leading to the Great Schism.³⁵

In the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas concluded that only unleavened wheat bread should be used in the Sacrament. Although he argues that only wheat bread should be used, he concedes that there are other practices in some places where cereal grains that resemble wheat were used in the Sacrament. He allows that some mixture of other grains with wheat may be acceptable for use in the Sacrament, as long as wheat predominates. He also mentions that some have thought wheat starch could be used in place of wheat flour. As for leavening, Thomas is more circumspect. Wheat is “necessary,” while unleavened bread is only “suitable” because it is in accord with the Roman rite, while leavened bread is “suitable in the East according to their rite. Nevertheless, overall, unleavened bread is “more reasonable.”³⁶

33 Paul’s only mention of Passover in 1 Corinthians is in chapter 5, where the subject is the incestuous sexual relationship of a man in Corinth. In arguing for the necessity that the man be disciplined by the church, Paul says: “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (vv. 6–8).

34 Augustin Joseph Schulte, “Altar Breads,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Robert Appleton Company, 1907), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01349d.htm>.

35 For a brief discussion, see “East-West Schism,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/event/East-West-Schism-1054> (accessed September 19, 2024).

36 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 58, trans. William Barden (Blackfriars, 1965), 35–39 (Part 3, ques. 74, arts. 3, 4).

procedures that would alter the nature of bread.”³⁹ Here the judgment is not what may be more “suitable” or “reasonable.” An “invalid” sacrament is no sacrament. The use of low-gluten hosts made by authorized providers is suggested as the only acceptable alternative to gluten-free hosts.⁴⁰

With the Reformation came a significant reconsideration of the nature of the Sacrament and also its elements. While the doctrine of the sacrifice of the mass was the central point of contention, Luther also addressed other matters, including the bread used in the Lord’s Supper. In Luther’s *Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments* he discusses sacramental bread in the context of his rejection of the view that has the validity of the Lord’s Supper hanging on duplication of doing everything that Christ does. “But we are of the opinion that it is not necessary to do or refrain from doing all that Christ has done or refrained from doing.”⁴¹ It is what Christ teaches—the Word alone—that matters.

Attempts to mimic Christ’s actions exactly would lead to “utter foolishness,” says Luther, even to avoiding the Sacrament completely due to uncertainty about exactly what Christ did or did not do (or say) at the Last Supper. Sarcastically he writes: “Since we do not know and the text does not state whether red or white wine was used, whether wheat rolls or barley bread were used, we must by reason of doubt at this point refrain from observing the Last Supper, until we become certain about it, so that we do not make any external detail differ a hairsbreadth from what Christ’s example sets forth.”⁴² To the contrary, Luther concludes: “No one is to command or prohibit anything which he has neither commanded nor forbidden.”⁴³ The kind of bread and the color of wine are adiaphora.

39 “Letter to Bishops on the Bread and Wine for the Eucharist,” Vatican Radio, July 8, 2017, https://www.archivioradiovaticana.va/storico/2017/07/08/letter_to_bishops_on_the_bread_and_wine_for_the_eucharist/en-1323886.

40 Four providers of hosts are named by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Committee on Divine Worship, “Celiac Disease, Alcohol Intolerance, and the Church’s Pastoral Response,” updated April 20, 2016, <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/order-of-mass/liturgy-of-the-eucharist/celiac-disease-and-alcohol-intolerance>.

41 Martin Luther, *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, AE 40:131.

42 AE 40:132–33.

43 AE 40:133.

This general perspective with regard to the altar bread has been passed down in Lutheran theology. Martin Chemnitz notes former debates about the bread—“Whether it should be of wheat, whether leavened or unleavened”—but adds that “the church judged correctly that these things are free and not of necessity for the sacrament.”⁴⁴ In naming only wheat—“whether it should be of wheat”—before saying that “these things are free and not of necessity,” Chemnitz apparently holds simply that the kind of grain may not be restricted only to wheat at risk of binding something that has been kept free.

Generations later, C. F. W. Walther also addresses the matter of sacramental bread in his *Pastoral Theology*. In his discussion of “Valid administration of the Lord’s Supper” (emphasis original), Walther states:

Whether the *bread* is made with yeast or not; whether it is rye, wheat, corn, barley, or oat bread; and whether it has this or that shape is an adiaphoron, so long as it is a baked good [made] with grain flour and water.⁴⁵

Interestingly, Walther puts rye before wheat in his list of grains. One can only speculate that this may be the case because of the strong preference for rye in German breads and baked goods.⁴⁶

Walther’s perspective, that the kind of grain used to make the bread of the Supper is an indifferent thing, has continued to be endorsed by later LCMS theologians. Franz Pieper quotes directly from Walther’s theological opinion in his *Christian Dogmatics*.⁴⁷ John H. C. Fritz paraphrases Walther’s statement, listing the same grains in the same order.⁴⁸

44 Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Part II, *Chemnitz’s Works*, trans. Fred Kramer (Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 540.

45 Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, *American-Lutheran Pastoral Theology*, *Walther’s Works*, ed. David W. Loy, trans. Christian C. Tiews (Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 168.

46 “The History of German Bread: A Crusty Chronicle,” German Culture, <https://germanculture.com.ua/baking-recipes/history-of-german-bread/> (accessed June 20, 2023).

47 Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 3 (Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 354.

48 John H. C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology: A Handbook of Scriptural Principles Written Especially for Pastors of the Lutheran Church* (Concordia Publishing House, 1945).

In the Koine Greek, *artos* is the generic name given to bread of whatever kind—white, whole wheat, rye, barley, etc. It would seem, however, that the context of the institution of the Lord’s Supper indicates the use of unleavened wheat bread. It is not essential that the bread used in the celebration of the sacrament be unleavened, but it is a custom of long-standing in the Lutheran Church.⁵¹

To summarize, *artos* may refer to any kind of grain bread.

Response

With regard to the substitution of non-wheat for wheat bread in the Sacrament, the Commission believes it is helpful to uphold some important distinctions. First, we would distinguish between practices that are required for a valid Communion and those that are condemned because they prevent a right and salutary sacramental service. Paul condemned the twisted practice of Corinth with its self-absorbed feasting and drunkenness, saying, “It is not the Lord’s supper that you eat” (1 Cor. 11:20). To correct this he delivered again what the Lord requires: that bread and wine be blessed and received according to the declaratory words of Christ: “This is My body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.” And, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me” (vv. 24–25). The Lord’s Supper is exactly what Christ promises—His true body and blood for the forgiveness of sins—so long as “bread and wine are taken, consecrated, distributed, received, eaten, drunk, and the Lord’s death is shown forth” (FC SD VII 84).

But what of the *kind* of bread that is employed? Does non-wheat bread invalidate the Sacrament? No. To make such a judgment is to go beyond what the Word of God makes necessary and to forbid what God does not forbid. Even if it could be proven that only unleavened wheat bread was used in the Sacrament by Jesus and

51 Norbert H. Mueller, George Kraus, eds., *Pastoral Theology* (Concordia Publishing House, 1990), 96. They go on to contrast “the generic bread” with “a specific ‘fruit of the vine’: wine,” 96–97.

In 1983 the CTCR continued in the same vein, but with one variation. In considering “The Elements” to be used in the Lord’s Supper, the CTCR states:

The Greek word for bread in the New Testament texts, *artos*, is generic. It applies to bread in general. While Greek has a more restricted term, *azumos* [*azymos*], for unleavened bread, it is not found in any of the New Testament accounts of the Lord’s Supper.

The fact that unleavened bread was used in the Passover and that the three evangelists set the time for the Lord’s Supper “on the first day of [the Feast of] Unleavened Bread” would strongly suggest the use of unleavened bread in our Lord’s original action (Matt. 26:17; cf. Mark 14:12 and Luke 22:7). Therefore we have reason to conclude that unleavened bread should also be used today. Since the Scriptures are silent on the source of the bread, it may be baked from the flour of wheat, rye, barley, or other grains. While the form of distribution should reflect reverence for the elements, there is no specific guidance on the size or shape of the wafer or portion.⁴⁹

Note that the CTCR here also views the type of flour to be an indifferent thing, but concludes that “unleavened bread *should* also be used today” (emphasis added).⁵⁰

The most recent statement from within LCMS circles on the bread to be used in Holy Communion comes from *Pastoral Theology* (1990), edited by Norbert Mueller and George Kraus. They also continue the position set forth in Walther, but provide a somewhat more substantial discussion of the type of bread that may be used in the Sacrament of the Altar. In so doing, they distinguish between what is “essential” for the Lord’s Supper and what is “custom”:

49 CTCR, *The Theology and Practice of the Lord’s Supper*, 15–16.

50 CTCR, *The Theology and Practice of the Lord’s Supper*, 16.

the apostles, that would not be grounds to declare all other practice, such as the use of leavened bread or bread from other grains, to invalidate the Lord’s Supper. Wheat bread has not been commanded. Unleavened bread has not been commanded. Breads from barley, rye, or other grains have not been forbidden. “No one is to command or prohibit anything which he [our Lord] has neither commanded nor forbidden.”⁵² The position of Luther and other fathers is correct. To hold otherwise introduces dissension and division into the church and risks a return to the kind of ritualistic understanding of the Sacrament as continues in the Roman Church today.

Validity is not the only question, however. We also hold that it is helpful to distinguish between what is customary and what is innovative. And while our culture tends to value innovation over custom, that is not the case throughout the church’s history or, for that matter, in the Lutheran Church. In the midst of necessary changes, the Lutheran Reformation steadfastly held to countless traditions. Tradition is not ironclad, of course. For example, the church at some point went from the use of a loaf that required breaking to individual broken morsels to individually made hosts—at least in the Western Church. Yet these changes all came to be affirmed both explicitly and implicitly and were then handed on to further generations.

Emerging from within this kind of tradition, Lutherans were insistent that they would not forsake the doctrine of the church catholic and so were favorably disposed toward church traditions. So Lutherans retained the liturgy as it was handed down, making changes only where a practice contradicted the Word of God (AC XXIV 1–9; XXVI 40; see also Ap XXIV). Custom was valued highly for the sake of good order, but also critically so that none should suppose it merits forgiveness (Ap XV 1–7). In keeping with this the Commission strongly encourages churches to continue the custom of using unleavened wheat hosts in the Lord’s Supper, although our pastors and churches should be reminded that this custom is for the sake of good order and does not mean that other practices—such as the use of leavened bread or bread made from other grains—make the Sacrament invalid. Since the use of unleavened wheat hosts has been the nearly uniform practice

52 AE 40:133.

of LCMS congregations throughout recent history, to change this would result in needless confusion.

There remains the pastoral question of how the spiritual needs of Christians with celiac disease or gluten intolerance are to be addressed: What is the most appropriate pastoral care for individuals with a diagnosed medical consideration like CD that makes the reception of the bread in the Lord’s Supper cause physical harm?⁵³

There is something of a parallel here with the question of the potential danger to an alcoholic in receiving the wine of the Lord’s Supper. We recall the counsel offered by the CTCR earlier in this document, together with the Synod’s 1998 Res. 3-16B, which both acknowledge the need for pastoral discretion. Acceptable suggestions for pastoral care in the case of alcoholism included diluting the wine and intinction, but the Commission also acknowledged that in some cases there may be “no fully satisfactory answer” to the question of how best to respond to alcoholism.

While both alcoholism and CD are conditions plaguing individual Christians, they must be distinguished. Alcoholism is understood as “a disease characterized by compulsive decision-making, impulsive behavior and relapse” and thus a mental health disorder.⁵⁴ CD is a physical disorder, that is, an autoimmune disease in which gluten triggers an attack on the small intestines, potentially leading to many other serious physical conditions.

The danger of gluten is real for individuals with CD, although it was unknown prior to World War II, when wheat shortages resulted in vastly improved health outcomes for celiac patients. Over time the practice of following a gluten-free diet expanded beyond celiacs and also for those with non-celiac gluten sensitivity (NCGS), about 1 percent of all people, to include many people without CD or

53 It is important to distinguish the challenge of CD from missiological questions—such as whether in Asian countries a rice host would be preferred over a wheat host.

54 “Is Alcoholism a Mental Illness?” Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, October 9, 2019, <https://www.hazeldenbettyford.org/articles/why-is-alcoholism-classified-as-a-mental-illness#:~:text=Since%201956%2C%20the%20American%20Medical,making%2C%20impulsive%20behavior%20and%20relapse.>

ternative recommended by the Roman Catholic Church, it is important to state forthrightly that we disagree with the Roman view that the use of bread made by another grain invalidates the Sacrament.) However, we emphasize that caution is necessary if the third option is employed. Gluten-free “bread” for Communion is offered now by many vendors, but in many cases it is made without grain flour. Other starches are used instead (e.g., potatoes, garbanzos, tapioca, palm fruit oil, cellulose, sunflower). The CTCR urges congregations that decide to use non-gluten bread to ensure that the alternative hosts are made from actual grain crops.

NCGS.⁵⁵ The only known treatment is dietary—“a lifelong adherence to a strict gluten-free diet.”⁵⁶ Most gastroenterologists recommend that a CD patient consume less than 50 milligrams of gluten each day for adults and less for children to remain symptom free. However, as little as 10 milligrams of gluten causes intestinal abnormalities in some patients.⁵⁷

The average communion wafer contains about 22 milligrams of gluten. As such, it may be consumed without triggering symptoms by most who suffer from CD or NCGS. The operative word is “may,” however, and many individuals do suffer problems from even such a small amount. What options can be considered for such individuals in light of no specific direction from Scripture?

Decisions regarding these alternatives should remain a matter of pastoral discretion in consultation with those who suffer. However, several options may be suggested for consideration by pastors and members with CD/NCGS. We list them in order of preference after due consideration by the Commission.

Perhaps the single best option is to use low-gluten wheat hosts. The North American Society for the Study of Celiac Disease found these hosts to be “safe for consumption by celiac disease patients.”⁵⁸

A second option is to receive only a fragment of the normal host, which thereby reduces the amount of gluten consumed. This may present practical problems in distribution and reception, however.

A third option is to use non-wheat, gluten-free hosts made from rice flour or another grain. (Even though we are here recommending low-gluten hosts, an al-

55 Jacqueline Howard, “Gluten-Free Diets: Where Do We Stand?,” CNN Health, updated March 10, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/03/01/health/gluten-free-diet-history-explainer/index.html>.

56 “What Is Celiac Disease?” Celiac Disease Foundation, <https://celiac.org/about-celiac-disease/what-is-celiac-disease/> (accessed September 23, 2024).

57 Inna Spector Cohen et al., “Gluten in Celiac Disease—More or Less?” NIH National Library of Medicine, January 28, 2019, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6363368/#:~:text=studied%20the%20long%20term%20effect,communion%20wafer%20prevented%20histological%20recovery.>

58 “NASSCD Confirms Use of Low-Gluten Host for Catholic Mass,” Celiac Disease Foundation, September 1, 2017, <https://celiac.org/2017/09/01/nasscd-statement-use-low-gluten-host-catholic-mass/#:~:text=Accordingly%2C%20considering%20the%20total%20weight,safe%20in%20various%20clinical%20studies.> This option has another potential benefit, namely, that such low-gluten wheat hosts could be used for the entire congregation and not only for people with CD/NCGS.

CONCLUSION

2023 Res. 5-15 instructed the Commission “to take up these concerns.” To summarize the results of our study herein we

Strongly reaffirm the long-standing LCMS understanding that only wine, of whatever alcohol content, should be used in the consecration of the Lord’s Supper;

Recommend against the use of prefilled wine and wafer sets in the Lord’s Supper because of potential confusion and the potential encouragement of bad Communion practices; and

Suggest that the medical needs of celiac patients and others with gluten intolerance may best be met through the use of low-gluten wheat hosts, or if that is not possible, the use of hosts made from another grain crop.

APPENDIX A

RESOLUTION 3-16⁵⁹

Overture 3-52 (CW, p. 172)

WHEREAS, A number of congregations in the Synod have introduced grape juice for use in the Sacrament of the Altar; and

WHEREAS, The clear statements of our Confessions instruct us that “As the Words of Institution of Christ expressly state: while at the table during the Supper, he distributed natural bread and wine to his disciples” (FC SD VII 64); and

WHEREAS, The use of an element other than wine is an alien practice in the churches of the Augsburg Confession and brings about doubt whether the Sacrament is offered or not; and

WHEREAS, “Since Christ used and sanctified no other element for this Sacrament; since no place in Scripture which treats of the Lord’s Supper mentions even a single other element; since it befits the true disciples of Christ to abide by His ordinance and institution, John 8:33; since the promise of Christ concerning the sacramental reception of His body and blood is expressly dependent upon the bread and wine; and finally, since bread and wine are the essential elements of the holy Lord’s Supper, it follows that under no circumstances can or should one substitute elements, which might be comparable, in place of bread and wine” (Johann Gerhard, *A Comprehensive Explanation of Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper* [trans. Elmer M. Hohle; Repristination Press, 2000], 228–29); and

59 2001 Convention Proceedings, 141–42.

you that I will certainly not drink from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes”; and WHEREAS, God’s Word says in Mark 14:24–25, “And He said to them, this is My blood of the covenant which is being poured out on behalf of many. Truly I say to you that I will certainly not any longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God”; and WHEREAS, God’s Word says in Matthew 26:27–29, “And taking a cup and giving thanks He gave to them saying, drink of it all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant being poured out for the many for forgiveness of sins. And I say to you that I will certainly not drink of the fruit of the vine until that day whenever I drink with you anew in the kingdom of My Father”; and WHEREAS, the word wine (oínos) is used in the New Testament 33 times, but never in relation to the Lord’s Supper; and WHEREAS, God’s Word only uses “the fruit of the vine” in regards to the content of the cup; therefore be it Resolved, That the congregations be encouraged to use only the fruit of the vine as one of the elements for the Sacrament. The substitute motion was defeated and the original motion was adopted as amended in session 10 [yes: 814; no: 184]. The final resolve is added as required by Res. 1-02, adopted by the convention at an earlier session.)

WHEREAS, Both theological faculties of the LCMS have offered opinions (*Gutachten*) (cf. *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 45:1/2 [Jan./Apr., 1981], 77–80; *Theological Observer* 17:1 [Jan. 1991], 4–6) supporting the use of wine, or reduced-alcohol wine, offering the clear teaching of the Evangelical Lutheran Church with regard to this matter from the Scriptures, the Confessions, and the teaching of the church; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has spoken in 1998 Res. 3-16B “To Affirm Use of Bread and Wine in the Sacrament of the Altar”; therefore be it

Resolved, That the congregations be encouraged to use only wine for the Sacrament; and be it further

Resolved, That the theological faculties of our seminaries be commissioned to offer guidelines to pastors and congregations in meeting the needs of those who feel they cannot drink wine; and be it finally

Resolved, That all action taken in this resolution shall be used to help carry out “The Great Commission” and shall not in any way detract or distract from the primary mission of God’s kingdom here on earth. We will remember 1-02!

Action: Adopted as amended (11)

(This resolution was first discussed during session 10. The fifth whereas as presented by the committee, WHEREAS, *Both theological faculties of the LCMS have offered opinions (Gutachten) to the contrary* (cf. “Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology: The Fruit of the Vine in the Sacrament of the Altar,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 45:1/2 [Jan./April, 1981], 77–80; Department of Systematic Theology, Concordia Seminary, “Is ‘Non-Alcoholic Wine’ Really Wine?” (*Theological Observer*, Concordia Journal 17:1 [Jan. 1991], 4–6), offering the clear teaching of the Evangelical Lutheran Church with regard to this matter from the Scriptures, the Confessions, and the teachers of the church; and, was amended by replacing it with the paragraph included in the adopted resolution. A substitute resolution, *To Encourage Use of Fruit of Vine in Lord’s Supper*, was considered by the delegates when this resolution was brought back by the committee in session 11: WHEREAS, *Any guidelines for celebrating the Lord’s Supper must originate in God’s Word*; and WHEREAS, *The Constitution of the Synod, Article II, refers to “The Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice”*; and WHEREAS, *God’s Word says in Luke 22:17–18, “And taking the cup and giving thanks He said, “Take this and distribute it among yourselves. For I say to*

APPENDIX B

Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology⁶⁰

The Fruit of the Vine in the Sacrament of the Altar

The classic definition of the Lord’s Supper was given by Luther: “It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself.” Luther cites Matthew (26:26–29), Mark (14:22–25), Luke (22:15–20), and the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 10:16; 11:23–29) as Scriptural proof for the institution, nature, and meaning of the Sacrament of the Altar.

In recent years some have raised the question whether grape juice might be substituted for wine in the Sacrament in view of the fact that the texts do not expressly state “wine,” but “fruit of the vine” or “cup.” The reasoning is that grape juice should be an allowable substitute for wine in sacramental use, since grape juice can rightly be termed “fruit of the vine.”

The Scriptural texts leave no doubt that Christ was celebrating the Passover meal with His disciples. Among the foodstuffs on the table would have been unleavened bread and wine. As regards the latter, it was without question the fermented product of the grape vine, in view of the fact that this was the spring of the year, probably April. Moreover, wine was the customary drink of the Jews at solemn festival meals, the *peri haggephen* (liturgical Hebrew for “fruit of the vine”). There can be no doubt then, as Lenski points out, that “*this* fruit of the vine”—with emphasis on the *this*—which the Passover cup contained “shuts out any and all other products of the vine save actual wine and thwarts all modern efforts that speak

60 *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 45, nos. 1–2 (1981): 77–80.

of unfermented grape juice, raisin tea, or diluted grape syrup” (*Commentary on Matthew*, [p. 1007]). The point is that “fruit of the vine” is a technical term which in the stated contexts can have no other meaning than *wine*. The church has never, from that day forward, felt at liberty to alter the solemn testament given by Christ in conjunction with the bread and the wine of the Sacrament (cf. Matt. 28:20; Gal. 3:15). Whenever such altering or substitution was introduced, it was promptly repudiated, lest any doubt be cast upon the validity of the sacrament as Christ instituted it.

In an article dealing with the “Archaeology of the Sacraments” (CTM, X [1939], p. 328), P. E. Kretzmann avers: “There never was any doubt in the minds of the teachers of the Church as to the meaning of the expression [fruit of the vine]. For this reason they resented the use of any substitute for wine.” The consensus is virtually unbroken. The chief quibble seems to have been whether water was to be added to the wine. This Jewish custom was followed later in the Roman Church, on the grounds that this action symbolized the uniting of the people with Christ in the priest’s celebration of the Mass and on the fact that blood and water flowed from the side of the crucified Christ.

The Lutheran Confessions stand as a phalanx behind Luther’s simple and beautifully clear definition in the Small Catechism, “under . . . the wine.” There is not a single concession, nor any implication, that anything else was ever to be substituted or understood for “wine.” The Small and Large Catechisms enjoy the support on this point of the Augsburg Confession (Article X), the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (Article X), the Smalcald Articles (III, vi), and the brilliant exposition and defense of the Lord’s Supper in the Formula of Concord and its Epitome (Article VII). There is total concurrence that in the Lord’s Supper Christ “offers His disciples natural bread and natural wine” (FC VII 64). Countless other references in the Confessions attest the same fact.

Luther’s many writings on the Sacrament of the Altar also bespeak the same consistency of usage. There was no substitute for wine in the Sacrament. For Luther, of course, Christ’s precious gift of His true body and blood in the Sacrament was the pre-eminent thing, but never apart from the stated bread and wine. He advised those who had doubts or misgivings about receiving both kinds in the Sacrament to forego reception for the time being. That they could do without sinning (St. L.

41

in his *Enchiridion*, in his famous *Examen Concilii Tridentini*, and in his beautiful *De Coena Sacra*. As with Luther there is no question in Chemnitz’s mind as to the prescribed elements, bread and wine; Holy Scripture clearly teaches them.

Nor ought the question be raised for dispute in our day. Those who do so, that is, argue that “fruit of the vine” should also allow for the use of grape juice, processed or unprocessed, are clearly making this suggestion for other reasons than on Scriptural grounds. The idea of insinuating or substituting grape juice (or something else) for wine is of sectarian background, stemming specifically from religious bodies which pledge total abstinence from all liquids that have alcoholic content.

There is no ground for the notion that the use of wine in the Lord’s Supper contributes to alcoholism or even threatens the so-called alcoholic. The sin of drunkenness, like adultery, homosexuality, etc., is clearly exposed in Scripture as serious (1 Cor. 6:10); but the source of the evil in each such case of sin is man’s own depraved, evil heart. Even though some may argue on scientific grounds that certain individuals are naturally and constitutionally more inclined to alcoholism, for example, than others, this still would not remove the onus of sin. By virtue of his sinful nature man is prone to all manner of sin, but Scripture nowhere allows us to teach that man is, as it were, biologically programmed by God to be so and so. This would virtually remove from man the responsibility for his sin and place it on God, something totally repugnant to Scriptural teaching. We may be sure that Christ, who knew perfectly what was in man (John 2:25), would not have instituted anything, including the Lord’s Supper and the use of wine, if it in *any* way would contribute to man’s delinquency. The Apostle Paul’s pastoral practice also underscores this fact (1 Cor. 11). The wine in the Lord’s Supper threatens no sinner who comes in repentance and faith, but consoles and lifts him up with the precious gift of the blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins and gives him strength for godly living. This is the only teaching Scripture supports.

Those who simply “prefer” to receive grape juice instead of wine should be led to see that their “preference” is in violation of Scripture’s own clear teaching and that they are thereby making the Sacrament an uncertain matter, if in fact not invalid. Moreover, it is to be feared that such tampering with the Sacrament may in the final analysis involve a deeper error, the relegating of the Lord’s Supper to a mere memorial meal instead of the blessed means of grace that Christ has constituted it

43

22, 1862; 21a, 608). He noted, too, that the Sacramentarians, for all their wild notions concerning the meaning of the Sacrament, were at least agreed on one point, viz., that the bread was bread, and the wine, wine (St. L. 20, 1773). While he considered it an adiaphoron whether water was mixed with the wine, Luther’s personal emphasis was on natural wine, without additional diluting or mixing with water (St. L. 19, 258). Luther noted that the Scriptures did not specify whether the wine should be red or white (though it was to be of or from the grape vine), nor whether the bread was to be of wheat or barley flour or another grain (St. L. 20, 188). These matters were adiaphora, as were also the quantity and shape of the host or bread, manner of distribution, and other externals or usages connected therewith.

Sometime during the winter of 1542–43 Luther was asked whether a sick person, wishing to have the Sacrament but unable because of nausea to use wine, could be given something else in place of the wine. According to Kaspar Heydenreich, who recorded the conversation, Luther replied (WA 74, TR 5, 5509; emphasis added):

The question has often been put to me; but I have always responded as follows: *Nothing else but wine should be used*. If wine cannot be taken, then let the matter rest that way, in order that nothing new is done or introduced. *Must* a person who is dying receive the sacrament yet? In times past it was said that he who received the one kind might consider himself to have partaken of both kinds. Why do we not rather say: If you receive nothing, consider yourself to have received both?

Clearly Luther rejected *any* idea of substitution for the *materia terrestris*. Hence the barbed *reductio ad absurdum* above, suggesting that then a person take or receive nothing and just simply believe that he has received something.

Luther’s stance, as also that of the Confessions, is upheld by all Lutheran theologians. (Cf. Baier-Walther, *Compendium*, p. 498; N. Hunnius, *Epitome*, p. 208; F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* 3, p. 354; T. Engelder, *Popular Symbolics*, p. 93; J. T. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 525; Ad. Hoenecke, *Dogmatik* 4, p. 115; E. Hove, *Christian Doctrine*, pp. 340f; et al.) Martin Chemnitz, the Lutheran Church’s greatest theologian in the generation after Luther, wrote definitively of the Sacrament of the Altar

42

to be for our spiritual well-being, for the forgiveness of sins.

Any substitution for the Scripturally stated elements is especially offensive because it yields to the intrusion of Reformed theology and practice into the Lutheran Church. It is to be expected that those who hold the Lord’s Supper to be a symbolical eating and drinking will have little difficulty substituting other elements for the bread and wine. This has been true in some Reformed circles. Needless to say, the *strength*, or alcoholic *content* of the wine, is not the issue, as long as natural grape wine is used. This, therefore, rules out some bizarre concoctions, or mixtures, which are sometimes sold as wine, such as grape juice mixed with alcoholic spirits distilled from grain.

We strongly urge, therefore, lest confusion be multiplied, offense be given, consciences and peace within the church be disturbed, that Lutheran pastors and people continue a consistent practice in support of the Scripturally designated elements in Holy Communion, especially as regards the use of wine, “the fruit of the vine,” which Christ instituted when He gave to His church this new testament in His blood.

44

APPENDIX C

To Affirm In-Person Communion
RESOLUTION 5-08A⁶¹

Overtures 5-11–20 (CW, 293–300)

WHEREAS, In the wake of the pandemic, congregations throughout the Synod sought to provide spiritual care to their congregations when public health measures prohibited gathering for corporate worship services; and

WHEREAS, The Lord Jesus, with words and actions spoken and carried out by Him in the direct and physical presence of His disciples, instituted Holy Communion as a communal meal through which His body and blood are distributed under the bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation (Matt. 26:26–28); and

WHEREAS, In speaking of the Lord's Supper, Holy Scripture does not endorse a spiritual or virtual fellowship, but rather a physical, communal gathering as the apostle Paul describes when he writes to the church in Corinth, "So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for your judgment" (1 Cor. 11:33–34a); and

WHEREAS, The Epistle to the Hebrews states, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb. 10:24–25); and

61 2023 Convention Proceedings, 152–53.

WHEREAS, The Sacrament of the Altar has been established by our Lord according to His Words of Institution, commanding literally "This keep on doing" (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24–25), which indicates that this use of the Sacrament should be kept according to His institution, and that "nothing is a sacrament without the appointed use" as set forth by those same Words of Institution (FC SD VII 73) and these texts (and all related) require serious study by the church; and

WHEREAS, No theological justification for the novel practice of online or virtual Communion has existed within the Synod or in the Lutheran tradition nor has been advanced in the circles advocating for it on the basis of the principally relevant texts (*sedes doctrinae*) of Holy Scripture or of the Lutheran Confessions; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has historically recognized the need for collegial debate, collaborative decision-making, and consensus-building, enshrining "[t]he example of the apostolic church (Acts 15:1–31)" in the Preamble of its Constitution and by adopting a process whereby those principles may be observed with respect to the adoption of doctrinal statements in Bylaw 1.6.2 (b); and

WHEREAS, The practice of online Communion has created confusion and concern whether such observance of Holy Communion is pleasing to God and in accordance with His Word; and

WHEREAS, The uniformity in practice from the foundation of the Synod has long been considered desirable (1847 Constitution Articles I 3, II 4, IV 5, V 14) and remains an endeavor toward which congregations are encouraged to strive (Const. Art. II 7); therefore be it

Resolved, That we commend the desires of faithful pastors to care for their flocks in a time of pandemic, granting charity and latitude to our brothers in the office due to the emergency nature of the situation confronting us all; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod's district presidents and those who assist them be counseled and urged to instruct our pastors and congregations on the basis of Holy Scripture's exhortation to gather in person to celebrate the Lord's Supper and on the basis of the examples of the Augsburg Confession Articles VII and XXIV, to refrain from the practice of online Communion, ensuring that those pastors and

WHEREAS, The Augsburg Confession describes the administration of the Lord's Supper in the context of a physically gathered assembly (Augsburg Confession [AC] VII 1; XXIV 36–39); and

WHEREAS, The Commission on Theology and Church Relations and the systematic theology departments of both seminaries issued opinions that unequivocally and unanimously argued against the practice of online or virtual Communion and affirmed the administration of Holy Communion in person by the pastor; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions (Formula of Concord [FC] Solid Declaration [SD] VII) indicate that the proper use of the Sacrament includes a unified consecration, distribution, and reception, none of which are to be severed from the other:

However, this blessing, or the recitation of the words of Christ's institution alone, does not make a Sacrament if the entire action of the Lord's Supper, as it was instituted by Christ, is not kept. (For example, it is not kept when the consecrated bread is not distributed, received, and partaken of, but is enclosed, sacrificed, or carried about.) Christ's command "This do" must be observed unseparated and inviolate. (This embraces the entire action or administration in this Sacrament. In an assembly of Christians, bread and wine are taken, consecrated, distributed, received, eaten, drunk, and the Lord's death is shown forth at the same time.) St. Paul also places before our eyes this entire action of the breaking of bread or of distribution and reception (1 Cor. 10:16).

yet the practice of online or virtual Communion would interject a spatial, temporal, and technological gap between the consecration and the distribution and reception; and

WHEREAS, The pastoral office is responsible for oversight of the administration of the Sacrament in accordance with the keys conferred upon the pastor by virtue of his call (AC XIV; *Walther's Theses on the Ministry V and VII*); and

congregations who continue to practice online Communion after due fraternal admonition be subject to appropriate ecclesiastical supervision; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention clearly and unequivocally reject and condemn the practice of virtual (online) Communion; and be it finally

Resolved, That those who are hindered for a time from bodily participation in Holy Communion be encouraged to content themselves with the power of the Word, remembrance of their Baptism, and the exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Action: Adopted (8)

It was moved but failed to strike the final resolve. Upon closure of debate, as suggested by the chair, the resolution was adopted [Yes: 842; No: 140]. Pacific Southwest District President Michael Gibson addressed the convention, requesting patience for district presidents as they continue to work with perhaps a dozen churches remaining in the practice of online communion.

At its 2023 convention, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod adopted Resolution 5-15, “To Uphold Proper Elements and Reverential Administration of the Lord’s Supper,” addressing concerns about the practice of the Lord’s Supper. This report by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations seeks to address the three specific “concerns” about the practice of the Lord’s Supper identified therein: first, the substitution of grape juice for wine; second, the use of prefilled communion cup and wafer sets; and third, the substitution of non-wheat for wheat hosts.

In this report, the CTCR addresses each of these practices from a confessional Lutheran theological and pastoral perspective so that our practice would fully align with our confession of the Lord’s Supper as instituted by our Lord Jesus. It searches the Scriptures and traces the practices of the church through the ages, taking heed of Martin Luther’s words: “No one is to command or prohibit anything which [Christ] has neither commanded nor forbidden” (AE 40:333).



R62.10

Deacons, Evangelists and the Office of the Holy Ministry
in the New TestamentThe Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
Commission on Theology and Church Relations
December 2025

The Augsburg Confession clearly sets forth the Lutheran understanding of the Office of the Holy Ministry that is revealed in the Scriptures: “To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments” (AC V 1).¹ The primary and divinely given responsibilities of this office are “to preach the gospel, to forgive or retain sin, and to administer and distribute the sacraments” (AC XXVIII 5–6). A challenging factor in any discussion of the Office of the Holy Ministry as presented in the Scriptures, however, is the variety of terms used within the New Testament for this one office. This variety should not be interpreted as either the lack of a clear institution of this office or the absence of a widespread recognition of this office among first-century Christians.² This variety in terminology should rather be understood as reflecting the historical fact that with Jesus and the establishment of His church, some terminology for the office was used that had links to past revelation during the history of Israel (e.g., shepherd, prophet, teacher, elder) and other terminology began to be used that was new and descriptive of the office (e.g., apostle and overseer, although even these have roots in the Old Testament usage).

This study³ will proceed in three parts. First, the various terms used for the Office of the Holy Ministry in the New Testament (including “deacon,” about which there is not full consensus among

¹ Although various terms are used for this office (e.g., pastoral office or Office of the Public Ministry), this document will consistently use the term “Office of the Holy Ministry.” For broader examinations of the Office of the Holy Ministry in the Scriptures as taught and practiced in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, see the following publications: C.F.W. Walther, *The Church and the Office of the Ministry*, ed. Matthew C. Harrison (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012); Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1981) [hereafter CTR, *The Ministry*]; Joel P. Okamoto, “The Office of the Holy Ministry,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (April 2006): 97–111; David P. Scaer, “The Office of the Holy Ministry According to the Gospels and the Augsburg Confession,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (April 2006): 113–121; and John C. Wohlrabe Jr., *Ministry in Missouri until 1962* (self-published, 1992). For an examination of this office in the writings of Luther and Melancthon, see Hellmut Lieberg, *Office and Ordination in Luther and Melancthon*, trans. Matthew Carver (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2020).

² The institution of the Office of the Holy Ministry by our Lord Jesus is explicitly recorded at the end of the Gospels in passages such as John 20:20–22 and Matthew 28:16–20. These are the primary passages from which the *Book of Concord* draws its confession of the Office of the Holy Ministry (see, e.g., AC XXVIII 6–7; Tr 9, 23, 31). “We have a sure doctrine that the Office of the Holy Ministry derives from the common call of the Apostles” (Tr 10 [German]). The reference here to the “common call” comes from John 20:20–22.

³ This study is a response to 2023 Ov. 5–48, “To Distinguish Terms for Pastoral Office from Those for Auxiliary or Helping Offices” (see appendix). This overture was referred to the CTR in 2023 Omnibus Resolution A, and the CTR chose to add it to its agenda as a formal assignment. The final two resolves of this overture read:

rebuke of them because of their unfaithful shepherding. Yahweh then promises that He Himself, the true and ultimate shepherd of Israel, will come to gather His scattered flock and shepherd them (Ezek. 34:11–16).

This understanding of Yahweh as “the chief Shepherd” who has undershepherds that spiritually care for His people continues in the New Testament with the language of Jesus as “the good shepherd [*ho poimēn ho kalos*]” (John 10:11, 14) or “the chief Shepherd [*ho archipoimēn*]” (1 Peter 5:4).⁴ Not only is Jesus identified as Yahweh “the Shepherd” in light of this broad Old Testament background, but Jesus also speaks of His apostles as spiritual “shepherds” or pastors. During His earthly ministry, He characterizes the Jews in Galilee and Judea as “sheep without a shepherd [*poimēna*]” (Matt. 9:36; Mark 6:34; cf. Num. 27:17). Jesus then encourages His listeners to “pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers [*ergatas*] into his harvest” (Matt. 9:38; Luke 10:2). That the term “workers” here in Matthew refers to “apostolic ministers” is clear from Matthew’s continuing narrative in which Jesus extended His ministry through calling, authorizing and sending the “twelve disciples” who are now also designated as “twelve apostles [*apostoloi*]” (Matt. 10:1–2; see also Luke 6:13–16).

There is, therefore, a clear connection and overlap between the “shepherd” and “apostle” titles as well as their functions. In Jesus’ action of restoring Peter, He exhorts him as an apostolic *shepherd* to “feed my lambs [*boske ta arnia mou*]” (John 21:15), “*shepherd* my sheep [*poimaine ta probata mou*]” (John 21:16), “feed my sheep [*boske ta probata mou*]” (John 21:17), and also “follow me [*akolouthei moi*]” (John 21:19). Jesus speaks this way because He is the chief shepherd who is sending forth His apostolic undershepherd. This last imperative command, “follow me [*akolouthei moi*]” is the same command used for Peter’s call toward the apostolic ministry (Matt. 4:19; Mark 1:17) as well as Matthew’s call toward that same ministry (Matt. 9:9). The use of the title “chief Shepherd [*ho archipoimēn*]” in 1 Peter 5:4 implies that the “elders [*presbyteroi*]” mentioned in that immediate context are also shepherds/pastors, as will be discussed below.

Paul also affirms the understanding that “shepherd/pastor” is one of the titles used for the Office of the Holy Ministry when he writes in his letter to the Ephesians that Christ Himself gave “shepherds/pastors” to His church: “And he gave . . . the shepherds [*kai autos edōken . . . tous de poimenas*]” (Eph. 4:11). When Paul speaks to the elders/overseers from the church of Ephesus in Miletus, he uses shepherding imagery in his exhortation to them: “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock [*kai panti tō poimnīō*], in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [*ἐπισκότους/episkopous*], to shepherd [*poimainein*] the church of God. . . . Fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock [*mē pheidomenoi tou poimniou*]” (Acts 20:28–29). The Latin term *pastor*, used for a shepherd who

⁵ Concerning Jesus as the good shepherd in the Gospel of John, including the translation “the Noble Shepherd,” see Charles A. Gieschen, “The Death of Jesus in the Gospel of John: Atonement for Sin?” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 72, no. 3 (July 2008): 243–261, esp. 256–258.

⁶ When a word in a Bible passage appears in italics, it indicates that the wording of the passage has been adjusted to reflect the Greek more closely.

Lutheran theologians, past or present) will be discussed briefly, with a focus on how each term has significant overlap with one or more of the other terms. Because the Scriptures are the source of all Christian doctrine, the theology of the Office of the Holy Ministry in the New Testament must always serve as the basis for understandings and titles of the office in the church today. Second, various terms for auxiliary offices currently recognized by the LCMS (according to its official Bylaws), some of which are found in the New Testament as titles for the Office of the Holy Ministry, will be discussed.⁴ Because the terms “deacon” and “evangelist” have been and continue to be used in various ways and contexts within the LCMS but do not designate offices officially approved or recognized by the Synod in convention, more attention will be given to them. Third, on the basis of these exegetical considerations and current Synod polity and practice, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) will offer four concluding proposals to address and seek to limit the confusion unintentionally created by the use of certain biblical terms for important, mission-focused work being carried out by laypeople.

I. New Testament Nomenclature for the Ministry

A. Shepherd/Pastor

The title “shepherd” has a long-standing historical use for one who cares for God’s people. The Hebrew Old Testament uses the term *ro’eh* (“shepherd”) as a title for Yahweh who cares for His flock, Israel, both spiritually and physically (e.g., Gen. 48:15 and Psalm 80:1). One thinks especially of David’s use of “shepherd” as a title for Yahweh in Psalm 23. David as king was also seen as a shepherd of Israel, due in part to shepherding sheep in his youth (1 Sam. 16:11, 19; 17:15, 20, 34–35). As king of Israel, David was to reflect the shepherding of Yahweh Himself, who was the ultimate king and shepherd of Israel. His role as shepherd was not only administrative for the people of Israel (i.e., political), but also spiritual by cultivating his people’s faithfulness to Yahweh. Thus, David serves as a type — a prophetic pattern — of the future messianic shepherd (e.g., Ezek. 34:23). The speech of Yahweh in Ezekiel 34 also uses “shepherd” to refer to spiritual leaders in Judea, especially the temple priests, but offers a blistering

Resolved, That the CTCR be directed to produce a report that defines and distinguishes the New Testament terms used for the Office of the Public Ministry and its auxiliary offices, including special discussion of the offices of *deacon* and *evangelist*, in preparation for the 2026 convention; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Council of Presidents take this report under consideration as it seeks to formalize the functions and requirements of these auxiliary and helping offices in their respective districts in keeping with 2016 Res. 13-02A.

⁴ An auxiliary office has been defined within the LCMS as “an office that is auxiliary to the office of the public ministry and specifically to the uniquely ministerial functions of that office”; see CTCR, *The Ministry*, 34; cf. pp. 12, 25–31.

leads the animals in his care to pasture, is the basis for the English noun “pastor.” Although “pastor” was not a widespread title used for those in the Office of the Holy Ministry until the 17th century, it has become the most prominent title currently used in many Lutheran churches today.⁷

B. Apostle

Although Jesus is specifically identified as “the apostle” (*ho apostolos*) only in Hebrews 3:1, the Gospel of John contains a very clear and dominant presentation of Jesus as the Apostle sent by the Father who in turn sends out apostles. The title “Apostle” is not explicitly applied to Jesus in John, but the understanding of Jesus as the “the Apostle” pervades this Gospel as part of its testimony to Jesus as “the one sent” by the Father. The noun is used once in the Gospel of John in the context of the foot washing during the Farewell Discourse where Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is *an apostle* [*apostolos*] greater than the one who sent him [*tou pempantos*]” (John 13:16). Although Jesus is addressing His disciples as ones whom He will send out, His self-identification as “the Apostle” sent by the Father is clearly indicated here. That Jesus understands Himself to be the Apostle can also be seen from an earlier saying of Jesus in this Gospel: “*He who sees me sees the one who sent me* [*ton pempanta me*]” (John 12:45).⁸

The Gospel of John uses numerous verbal forms of *apostellō* and *pempō* (both meaning “I send”) interchangeably to describe the Son as one who is sent by the Father. These occurrences demonstrate the prominence of this apostle theme in the Christology of John:

- God sent [*apesteilen*] the Son into the world. (John 3:17)
- He whom God sent [*apesteilen*] speaks the words of God. (John 3:34)
- This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent [*apesteilas*]. (John 17:3)
- Just as the Father has sent [*apestalken*] me, so also I am sending [*pempō*] you. (John 20:21)⁹

This repeated emphasis on apostolic *Christology* (i.e., the Son is sent by the Father) is the foundation for the climactic shift in John 20:21 to apostolic *ministry* (i.e., the apostles are sent by the Son). “Apostle” was a name specifically given to the 12 disciples who were eyewitnesses of Jesus’ ministry and

⁷ Thomas M. Winger, *Ephesians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 456 n135.

⁸ Karl Rengstorff’s extensive study of *apostolos* points out that the background for its use in the New Testament is found in Rabbinic Judaism in the function of a *shaliah*, namely an ambassador whose actions and speech carry all the authority of the one sending him. See Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, “*apostolos*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:414–415; cf. Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, *The Apostolate and Ministry: The New Testament Doctrine of the Office of the Ministry*, trans. Paul D. Pahl (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969), 25–28.

⁹ These are only four of the 18 sending references in John. Note also John 5:36; 5:37; 6:29; 6:57; 7:28; 7:29; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:8; 17:21; 17:23; and 17:25.

resurrection (see Acts 1:21–22). Although it is used for other apostles in the New Testament (such as Paul and others), the distinctiveness of the Twelve is maintained.¹⁰

An important text that serves as testimony to Jesus moving beyond the 12 apostles to a larger number of workers is Luke’s account of Jesus appointing the 72 and sending them out two by two (Luke 10:1–20).¹¹ Although the 12 apostles were a unique group of disciples, the sending out of the 72 suggests that Jesus would establish an Office of the Holy Ministry that would continue to grow in the future beyond the 12 to other male disciples.

Lutherans have used the term “the apostolic ministry” regularly (and properly) as another title for the Office of the Holy Ministry because that title stresses that it is a continuation of the one office established in Jesus and instituted for the extension of His ministry in the church.¹² Sometimes the important distinction between the time-bound office of apostle and the Office of the Holy Ministry as it continues to exist in the church has been emphasized in ways that deny or fail to acknowledge a valid continuity between the apostolic office and the Office of the Holy Ministry. It is clear from the New Testament, however, that there is continuity between the office of apostle and those who follow in the apostolic office through the divinely instituted activities of preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments. As the CTCR states in its 1981 report on the ministry: “The office of the public ministry is grounded in the ministry of Christ and is an extension of the apostolate established by Him.” “As a continuation of the ministry of Christ and as an extension of the apostolic ministry, the office of the public ministry is not optional for the church.”¹³

C. Prophet, Evangelist and Teacher

Ephesians 4:11 provides important testimony to the various titles used for the Office of the Holy Ministry during the early decades of the Christian church: “*Kai autos edōken tous men apostolous, tous de prophētās, tous de euangelistas, tous de poimēnas kai didaskalous.*” On the basis of Paul’s testimony that Christ gave the church “the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds/*pastors* and teachers,” the offices of apostle and shepherd/pastor are sometimes understood as distinct and separate from the offices of prophet, evangelist and teacher in the first-century church. This understanding is reflected in the older New International Version that renders the verse, “It was he who gave some to be

apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers” (NIV 1984). It is more accurate, however, to conclude that Paul is specifying here the individuals whom Christ has given to the church: “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers” (ESV).¹⁴ The syntax of “shepherds/*pastors* and teachers [*tous de poimēnas kai didaskalous*]” also indicates that these two are not distinct offices. Apostles, prophets and teachers are also mentioned by Paul in a sort of descending rank within the Office of the Holy Ministry when addressing the problem of ecstatic speaking in tongues at Corinth: “And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers” (1 Cor. 12:28). The phrase “God has appointed” affirms that these all belong to the Office of the Holy Ministry, mandated and instituted by Jesus.

Although Thomas Winger understands Paul to be implying some distinction of offices with these five titles in Ephesians, he concludes with this important observation: “At the same time, the usage of the five terms in Eph 4:11 elsewhere in the NT demonstrates a certain overlap of categories; within the one divinely instituted office of the ministry, certain men held only one, but others held many, of these offices.”¹⁵ This “overlap of categories” between apostle and shepherd/pastor, which has already been discussed above, is also present here. Jesus is often addressed as “Teacher” or “Rabbi” by His disciples (e.g., Mark 9:5, 38; 10:17, 35, 51). Two of the primary tasks that characterize Jesus’ earthly ministry are teaching and preaching as noted with the participles *didaskōn* (“teaching”) and *kēryssōn* (“proclaiming/preaching”) in the Gospels (e.g., Matt. 4:23; 9:35). Thus, the apostles are also teachers who teach everything that Jesus taught (Matt. 28:19). Jesus is also identified explicitly as “a prophet,” showing that His ministry has continuity with this established office in the history of Israel since Moses (e.g., Deut. 18:15; John 6:14). In light of the longtime office of prophet among the Israelites for the man chosen by YHWH to proclaim the words that the prophet received from YHWH, it is not surprising that Paul uses the term “prophet” in the first-century church as a title for those who follow Jesus in the prophetic task of proclaiming the Word of God (Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28).

Paul appears to be using these five titles in Ephesians 4:11 in an inclusive manner, therefore, for those who were carrying out, in various unique ways, the one Office of the Holy Ministry in the first-century church. At the heart of each title is the sacred task of preaching and teaching the Word of God, especially the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to the Apostle Paul, the Office of the Holy Ministry is manifested in the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds/pastors and teachers whom Christ has given to His church. We also use a variety of titles today for men holding the one Office of the Holy Ministry based upon their specific call and pastoral vocation: senior pastors, associate pastors, visitation pastors, missionaries, church planters, college and seminary professors, district presidents, and the like.

¹⁴ On the translation issue, see Winger, *Ephesians*, 449–458. There are also challenges with modern translations of Ephesians 4:12; see Henry H. Hamann, “The Translation of Ephesians 4:12 — A Necessary Revision,” *Concordia Journal* 14 (1988): 42–49, and Winger, *Ephesians*, 459.

¹⁵ Winger, *Ephesians*, 458.

taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. (Titus 1:5–9)

The qualifications listed in these two texts have much in common. Even the titles are so closely related that Paul begins in Titus 1:5 with the title “elder” (*presbyteros*) and then switches to the title “overseer” (*episkopos*) in Titus 1:7. Although we do not know whether overseers may have had more and/or different responsibilities than elders, nevertheless both should be understood as titles for those who hold the Office of the Holy Ministry. Therefore, an elder is also an overseer, who is further described here as “God’s steward [*theou oikonomos*],” a descriptive term used elsewhere by Paul for those in the Office of the Holy Ministry (“stewards [*oikonomos*] of the mysteries of God” in 1 Cor. 4:1). The title *episkopos* (“overseer”) is sometimes translated as “bishop” and used by some denominations for pastors who have oversight authority within that denomination. The understanding of *episkopos* as an office distinct from and higher than the Office of the Holy Ministry, however, is not present in the New Testament.

E. Elder

Because “elder” (*presbyteros*) is a term used in many Christian congregations today for an elected office held by laity who work closely with the pastor in the spiritual care of a congregation, its presence in the New Testament as a title for the Office of the Holy Ministry can be a source of some confusion. The close interrelationship and interchangeability between the titles “elder,” “apostle,” “shepherd” and “overseer” is most clearly presented in 1 Peter 5:1–5. There the *Apostle* Peter clearly understands himself to be an *elder* when he writes: “I exhort the elders [*presbyterous*] among you, as a *fellow elder* [*sympresbyteros*]” (1 Peter 5:1, emphasis added). He then exhorts these elders to “shepherd [*poimane*] the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight [*episkopountes*], ... being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:2–3). The use of the participle *episkopountes* (“exercising oversight”) in this text demonstrates the close relationship and overlap between an overseer and an elder in the understanding of the Apostle Peter and the first-century Christians to whom he is writing. Both “overseers” and “elders” served in the Office of the Holy Ministry and were responsible for shepherding Christ’s flock.

Furthermore, as noted above, Paul’s list of qualifications for “elders” in Titus 1:5–9 clearly identifies an “elder” as one who was also an “overseer” (Titus 1:7). Paul also emphasizes that elders carry out the primary task of the Office of the Holy Ministry: the teaching and proclaiming of God’s Word. “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9).

F. Deacon

One of the challenges related to the title “deacon” is that the semantic range of that term can include everything from those who are simply “servants” in various household capacities, to rulers (Rom. 13:4), to the Lord Jesus Himself (Rom. 15:8), and to those potentially occupying a specific ecclesial office of

¹⁰ An exception would be sectarian Christian groups that continue to use the title “apostle” for specific leaders to express their unique authority (cf. the ranking of “apostles” as “first” in 1 Cor. 12:28).

¹¹ Due to textual variants, there is some debate about whether Jesus sent out 72 or 70 disciples; for discussion of this textual problem, see Arthur A. Just Jr., *Luke 9:51–24:53* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 435–445. Because “seventy-two” is the harder reading due to the probability of some harmonization of this account with Moses choosing “seventy elders” (Num. 11:16–17, 25; Ex. 24:1, 9–14), the reading of “seventy-two” will be followed here.

¹² This emphasis on “apostolic ministry” should not be understood as espousing the need for “apostolic succession” as argued in some churches. As the CTCR notes, “the pastoral ministry is apostolic in terms of what it teaches but not in terms of an unbroken succession of ordaining bishops” (*The Ministry*, 26).

¹³ CTCR, *The Ministry*, 26, 27.

Acts 21:8 describes Philip as an “evangelist.” Acts 8 tells how Philip proclaimed Christ in Samaria, bringing people (like the Ethiopian eunuch) to faith and baptizing them. “It seems clear from these passages that Philip had a gift for bringing the Gospel to men who had not yet heard it. He does not appear to have become a parish pastor, but went from place to place proclaiming Christ.”¹⁶ In 2 Timothy 4:5, Paul tells Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” “In some sense, [Timothy] could be called a ‘diocesan bishop,’ so far as his office is concerned. This is indicated by the instruction about what should be done in the churches (1 Tim. 1:3ff.; 2), and the instructions about what kind of persons should become bishops (chapter 3).”¹⁷

D. Overseer

The fact that the title “overseer” (*episkopos*) is closely related to the title “shepherd” and “elder” is visible especially in Acts 20:28, where Paul summons “the elders of the church [*tous presbyterous tēs ekklesiās*]” (Acts 20:17) from Ephesus in order to exhort them about shepherding as the key function of being an overseer: “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [*episkopous*], to shepherd [*poimainein*] the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.” The close relationship and overlap between the offices of “overseer” and “elder” in the congregations established by Paul and his associates is evident in the similar qualifications given by Paul in his pastoral epistles for “overseers” (1 Tim. 3:1–7) and for “elders” (Titus 1:5–9).

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer [*episkopēs*], he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer [*ton episkopon*] must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. (1 Tim. 3:1–7)

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders [*presbyterous*] in every town as I directed you — if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer [*ton episkopon*], as God’s steward [*theou oikonomon*], must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as

¹⁶ CTCR, *The Ministry in Its Relation to the Christian Church* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1973), 11. The use and citation of this 1973 document does not imply endorsement of its conclusions or recommendations, such as the ordination of called male teachers.

¹⁷ CTCR, *Ministry in Its Relation*, 12.

“deacon.” Moreover, there has not been complete consensus — in the LCMS or otherwise — about how the term is used in the New Testament or its relationship to the Office of the Holy Ministry.

Most New Testament references to “deacon” seem to refer to general “service” in the church. Two passages, however, clearly refer to deacon as an office in the church. In Philippians 1:1, Paul greets “all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons.” No further information is provided in this letter about the nature of these offices, their specific responsibilities or the relationship between them. In 1 Timothy 3, Paul lists the qualifications for overseers (vv. 1–7) and deacons (vv. 8–13), again without providing specific information about the nature of these offices, their duties or the relationship between them. Because these offices are linked together in some way in both of these passages, some Lutheran exegetes and theologians have concluded that both offices belong to the Office of the Holy Ministry, with only slight differences in qualifications and perhaps (therefore) somewhat different duties and responsibilities. On the other hand, precisely because of the differences in the list of qualifications (“able to teach,” “above reproach” and “not . . . a recent convert” are omitted from the deacon list), other Lutheran exegetes and theologians have come to the opposite conclusion: The office of deacon did not belong to the Office of the Holy Ministry, but was created by the Early Church to assist those in the Office of the Holy Ministry.

Complicating matters further is Luke’s account of the seven men chosen to assist the apostles in Acts 6:1–6. Some interpreters have identified these seven as “deacons,”¹⁸ primarily because the infinitive form of the verb *diakoneō* (“I serve/minister”) is used in Acts 6:2. Luke, however, never identifies these seven using the noun *diakonos* (“deacon/servant/minister”). He only uses the noun to describe the apostles’ “ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). The 12 apostles state, “It is not right that we should give up preaching of the word of God to serve/minister [*diakonein*] tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry/service of the word [*τῇ διακονίᾳ τοῦ λόγου*]” (Acts 6:2–4).

Even though one of their tasks was “serving/ministering” tables (possibly in the sense of administrative oversight¹⁹), it is noteworthy that the description of these seven as being “full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3) implies that they are being set aside for more than serving tables. (This is reminiscent of how Joshua was described when Moses had laid hands upon him as his successor in the leadership of Israel; see Deut. 34:9.) More importantly, Luke testifies at length to Stephen’s character (“full of grace and power” in Acts 6:8 and “full of the Holy Spirit” in Acts 7:55), his preaching (exhibiting “wisdom and the Spirit” in Acts 6:10 and in his extensive proclamation in Acts 7:2–53), his deeds (“doing great wonders and signs among the people” in Acts 6:8), and even his appearance (“his

¹⁸ CTCR, *The Ministry*, 17, implies that a new office distinct from the Office of the Holy Ministry was begun by the church in Jerusalem. While the seven in Acts 6 were not apostles, they clearly did more than wait on tables, as will be discussed below.

¹⁹ *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, Third Edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 230 (definition 5).

G. Other Related Nomenclature

There are a few terms used in the New Testament and in the church that are related to the Office of the Holy Ministry but are not exclusively used as titles for this office. These terms include slave, servant/minister, steward, father, reverend and priest. Each will be discussed very briefly here.

The Apostle Paul refers to himself as a “slave” (*doulos*) or a “servant/minister” (*diakonos*) in his epistles (e.g., Gal. 1:10; Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:23), but he does not use either term as a specific title for his office as apostle. These terms function as descriptors of his life in the office of apostle. They simply describe his life and ministry as one of service to Christ and others. Every apostle and pastor is to be a slave and servant/minister of Jesus. By using the term “servant/minister” (*diakonos*) to describe himself in 1 Corinthians 1:23, Paul is not implying that he is in both the office of apostle and the office of deacon. Because the term “minister” is often used in the LCMS for those who serve in the Office of the Holy Ministry and is also sometimes used as a title for those in the auxiliary office of deacon, it must be carefully defined when used.²⁴

As noted above, “steward” (*oikonomos*) is sometimes used by Paul as a description of what holders of the Office of the Holy Ministry do as well as what they are (“stewards of the mysteries of God,” 1 Cor. 4:1; cf. Titus 1:7). Although there are New Testament texts about the importance of respecting those with spiritual authority over others (e.g., 1 Thess. 5:12), the title “reverend” is not used in the New Testament. While Paul refers to himself as a spiritual “father” (*patēr*) on occasion (e.g., 1 Cor. 4:15b), “father” is not used as a title for the Office of the Holy Ministry in the New Testament. Each baptized Christian is said to have the status of a “priest” (*hierēus*) in various texts (e.g., 1 Peter 2:9; Rev. 1:6), and Jesus is our “high priest” (e.g., Heb. 4:14). “Priest” is not used in the New Testament, however, as a title for those who serve in the Office of the Holy Ministry, even though those who serve in this office clearly have some priestly roles (e.g., service at the altar by offering prayers and administering the Lord’s Supper).

II. Nomenclature for Auxiliary Offices in the LCMS Today

and female — were to be “servants” in their respective congregation. Phoebe appears to serve “the church at Cenchreae” as one holding a position that assisted the man who held the Office of the Holy Ministry. We will discuss briefly the LCMS office of deaconess in the next section of the report.

²⁴ Within the LCMS, the terms “ordained minister” and “commissioned minister” are used to distinguish between those in the Office of the Holy Ministry and those in auxiliary offices; see Constitution Article V B in the 2023 LCMS *Handbook*. An example of the confusion that use of the term “minister” without clear definition can cause is seen in Oscar E. Feucht, *Everyone a Minister: A Guide to Churchmanship for Laity and Clergy* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1974). The natural question arises: If only some are called to be ordained ministers, and some others are called to be commissioned ministers, then how can *everyone* be a minister? Because of the technical use of “minister” for specific offices in the church, “servant” is a better translation to use as a label for every Christian (i.e., everyone is a servant).

face was like the face of an angel/messenger” in Acts 6:15). Luke also testifies to Philip’s ministry of proclamation/teaching, his demonstration of divine signs (exorcisms and healings), and his baptizing of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:5–8, 26–40). While it seems clear that there is some distinction between the 12 apostles and these seven (the latter were not necessarily eyewitnesses of Jesus’ earthly ministry and resurrection), some theologians see this as evidence to suggest that these seven did, indeed, hold the Office of the Holy Ministry. Others disagree.

Luther, for his part, held that “the diaconate is the ministry, not of reading the Gospel or the Epistle, as is the present practice, but of distributing the church’s aid to the poor, so that the priests may be relieved of the burden of temporal matters and may give themselves more freely to prayer and the Word. For this was the purpose of the institution of the diaconate, as we read in Acts.”²⁰ Others, such as Chemnitz, suggested a variation of Luther’s view: Deacons such as Stephen and Philip were originally appointed to the more mundane task described in Acts 6 but, after proving themselves, were later entrusted with “more important duties of the ministry [i.e., preaching and teaching] conferred with greater benefit.”²¹ Theodore Graebner is representative of a view that is common in the LCMS tradition and relates to our forthcoming discussion of what the LCMS has historically referred to as “auxiliary offices” created by the church in Christian freedom:

The seven elders performed such services as the twelve apostles were unable to do for want of time. In order to emphasize the fact, we repeat that this office of eldership was not divinely appointed, nor instituted by God’s command, as is the office of the ministry. It simply was inaugurated to supply help for the office of the ministry; it is an auxiliary office thereof, instituted by the Church.²²

Many more examples could be given, but to summarize and reiterate: No consensus exists among Lutheran exegetes and theologians, past or present, about the nature of the office of “deacon” in the New Testament — specifically, whether this office was a “helping office” created by the church or whether it was an office that belonged to the one divinely instituted Office of the Holy Ministry. In view of these differing exegetical and historical perspectives, it is important that when the term “deacon” is used today in the LCMS we strive to be as clear and consistent as possible in our usage of this term, especially if and when it is used in “official” ways to designate a particular office of service in the church (see Parts II and III of this report).²³

²⁰ “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church” (1520), AE 36:116.

²¹ Walther, *The Church and the Office of the Ministry*, 293.

²² Theodore Graebner, “Elders and Deacons in the Lutheran Church,” trans. W. Cook, *The Lutheran Witness* 15 [1916], 222.

²³ The single text that might possibly be understood as a biblical basis for a woman holding the office of “deacon” (or “deaconess”) is Paul’s statement about Phoebe in Romans 16:1, “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant/deaconess (*diakōnōn*) of the church at Cenchreae.” Although most translators render *diakōnōn* here as “servant,” some English translations render it as “deacons” (e.g., RSV, JB and NJB). Some scholars think it is premature to speak of an established office of diaconate being referenced here, yet 1 Timothy 3:8–13 is evidence of the existence of such an office for males during the mission carried out by Paul. While all early Christians — male

*Note: The LCMS has for nearly its entire existence used the concept of “auxiliary offices” to describe the vocation of those church workers (among others) who do not hold the Office of the Holy Ministry. That concept emerged from the eighth of C.F.W. Walther’s synodically adopted 1851 theses on the ministry, which argued that all such helping offices in the church stem from the pastoral ministry, as the highest office in the church. Since that time, these other offices — primarily teachers, but also all those now presently grouped under the classification of “commissioned ministers” — have been considered as functioning in a way that supports the pastoral office in its ministry of Word and Sacrament. This has understandably raised concerns from different corners of the Synod. For some, the very fact of referring to those in helping offices as “ministers” seems to detract from or confuse them with the one Office of the Holy Ministry. For others, especially those serving in auxiliary offices, being placed in this category gives the impression that their work is somehow less important than or spiritually inferior to the pastor’s. The Commission acknowledges that the concept itself is limited and not altogether helpful (as will be discussed later), and it concedes that the historical tensions the concept has produced on both sides of the debate are valid and reflect legitimate concerns. The description of auxiliary offices in what follows is not meant necessarily as an endorsement of the term or concept of “auxiliary office,” but rather it is an attempt to use the category the Synod has used throughout its history — one that has shaped and continues to shape our church polity — and apply it to the present question regarding deacons and evangelists.*²⁵

The LCMS uses the language of “ordained ministers” for those who hold the Office of the Holy Ministry and “commissioned ministers” for those who hold an officially recognized auxiliary office in the Synod.²⁶ Although it is possible to have an ordained minister called to and serving in one of the auxiliary offices (e.g., an ordained pastor serving as a cantor or a Lutheran school principal), these offices are ordinarily filled by Synod-trained laity who are commissioned ministers. Some LCMS congregations and districts use the nomenclature of deacon and evangelist, even though these are not officially recognized auxiliary offices in the Synod at the present time. Therefore, usage of this nomenclature will also be discussed below.

²⁵ “The pastoral ministry [*Predigtamt*] is the highest office in the church, and from it stem all other offices in the church,” C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, trans. J.T. Mueller (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1987), 289. Note also Walther’s explanation of this concept of an auxiliary office: “Every other public office in the church is part of the ministry of the Word or an auxiliary office that supports the ministry, whether it be the elders who do not labor in the Word and doctrine (1 Tim. 5:17) or the rulers (Rom. 12:8) or the deacons (the office of service in a narrow sense) or whatever other offices the church may entrust to particular persons for special administration. Therefore, the offices of Christian day school teachers, almoners, sextons, preceptors at public worship, and others are all to be regarded as ecclesiastical and sacred, for they take over a part of the one ministry of the Word and support the pastoral office.” 289–290.

²⁶ LCMS Bylaw 2.6.1.1 (2023 *Handbook*) lists these current commissioned offices: “The roster of commissioned ministers shall admit eligible teachers, directors of Christian education, directors of Christian outreach, directors of family life ministry, directors of parish music, deaconesses, parish assistants, and directors of church ministries.”

First, more should be said about the concept of auxiliary offices and how they have been understood within the LCMS. For instance, in its 1981 report on the ministry, the CTCR described auxiliary offices this way:

These are offices established by the church. Those who are called to serve in them are authorized to perform certain of the function(s) of the office of the public ministry. These offices are “ministry” and they are “public,” yet they are not *the* office of the public ministry. Rather, they are auxiliary to that unique pastoral office, and those who hold these offices perform their assigned functions under the supervision of the holders of the pastoral office. Such offices are established by the church as the need arises, and their specific functions are determined by the church. The most common auxiliary office today is the office of the teaching ministry. (*Ministry*, 12)²⁷

The church has freedom to create, use and oversee these “helping offices” or “auxiliary offices” however and whenever it sees fit. Yet there remains a consistent proviso that, whatever these auxiliary offices are and however they function, they are not the Office of the Public Ministry established by Christ and so the church must avoid any confusion of the auxiliary offices with the pastoral office.

An important question that arises with auxiliary offices is whether or in what way such offices can be seen or characterized as “divine” in nature, especially in view of the fact that in the LCMS “divine calls” are issued to individuals serving in these offices. In light of the discussion above, two opposite positions are to be avoided. One position is to argue that such offices are divine offices in the same sense that the Office of the Holy Ministry is a divine office (i.e., they are instituted by God and testified to in the Scriptures). The Scriptures testify that the Office of the Holy Ministry is divinely given and mandated by Christ Himself. Scripture does not testify that Christ gave or mandated any other office. The other extreme is to assert that these auxiliary offices have no divine character whatsoever, so that individuals should not be called to such offices by the church.

One way to view these auxiliary offices that have been established by the church is to recognize that they exist to assist and support the divinely instituted Office of the Holy Ministry, and to carry out certain (but not all) of its divinely instituted responsibilities under the oversight of an ordained pastor. Auxiliary offices created by the church can therefore be seen as “divine” by virtue of their close relationship to the Office of the Holy Ministry. Those who hold auxiliary offices (established in good order by the church) are called and commissioned by the church to carry out certain specific divinely given responsibilities under the oversight of those who hold the divinely instituted Office of the Holy Ministry.

²⁷ In its 1985 document, *Women in the Church*, the CTCR described the “distinctive functions” of the pastoral office — which are to be performed only by those who hold the Office of the Holy Ministry — as follows: “1) preaching in the services of the congregation; 2) leading the formal public services of worship; 3) the public administration of the sacraments; 4) the public administration of the office of the keys.” CTCR, *Women in the Church: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1985), 42.

Christian freedom in matters (such as polity and nomenclature) that are not commanded or forbidden by God’s Word is a vital theological principle. But God-pleasing order and uniformity (even in matters of adiaphora) is also vital in order to avoid confusion and potential division in the church over matters that ought not disrupt our walking together in confession and mission. The CTCR urges, therefore, that fraternal, honest, deliberate discussion take place in the Synod regarding this matter to avoid further confusion that could undermine and threaten our walking together (see below for more specific commentary on the offices of “deacon” and “evangelist” as examples of this real and/or potential confusion in the Synod today).

A. Teacher and Director of Christian Education

A very prevalent auxiliary office in the LCMS for many years has been the office of Lutheran school teacher, because the primary responsibility of a teacher in a Lutheran school is to teach the Word of God.³⁰ This is an office, therefore, that is closely related to, and assists, the Office of the Holy Ministry. As noted above, the task of “teaching” is frequently mentioned in the New Testament in relationship to the Office of the Holy Ministry, and the title “teacher” (*didaskolos*) appears in tandem with “shepherd/pastor” (*poimēn*) in Ephesians 4:11, demonstrating that the terms “teacher” and “pastor” are used synonymously in the New Testament. The activities of preaching/proclaiming and teaching are often linked together in the New Testament and were a central characteristic of the ministry of Jesus and His apostles (e.g., Matt. 4:23; 9:35). The evidence presented earlier from the New Testament — especially Ephesians 4 — demonstrates that “teacher” is to be viewed as a first-century office in the church that was not distinct from the Office of the Holy Ministry.

Just as the Early Church established the office of deacon, the office of teacher as it exists in the church today was established later as a distinct office due to the need and desire of the church for teachers who were not pastors (e.g., in a Christian school) but who would work closely with pastors in teaching the Word of God and other subjects. Like other auxiliary offices, it is closely related to the Office of the Holy Ministry and serves under its authority and supervision. Some Lutheran school teachers have the additional responsibility of serving as a Lutheran school principal. Closely related to the office of teacher, director of Christian education is an office that supports and guides the Christian education program of a congregation. Both of these auxiliary offices can be held by males or females who have the proper theological and skill preparation to be called as commissioned ministers.

B. Deaconess

A second important question concerning auxiliary offices is *how* they are established by the church — in this case, by the LCMS. In the LCMS, congregations and districts have a certain degree of freedom to use nomenclature for humanly instituted offices even when this nomenclature is not used in official ways by the Synod itself. As noted above, some congregations use the term “deacon” for the congregational office more commonly known as “elder” or specifically for laymen who assist in public worship.²⁸ While this may be somewhat confusing (especially for those who transfer their membership from one congregation to another), this is an area of congregational polity that is not mandated by the Synod and falls into the realm of Christian freedom (as long as a congregation’s constitution complies with other matters of theology and polity that are mandated by the Synod and the congregation’s district).

Generally speaking, the same is true for districts of the Synod. In the case of districts, however, the potential for confusion is much greater because of issues such as:

- The frequency and “normalization” of such nomenclature within a district;
- Perceptions and misunderstandings about the relationship between districts and the Synod (e.g., “the district has an office of ‘deacon,’” so this office must also be recognized by the Synod”); and
- Inevitable questions about definition, job description, oversight, etc. (It might be noted, for example, that only rostered workers of the *Synod* are accountable to the disciplinary guidelines set forth in the Synod’s Bylaws.)

It is important to emphasize, therefore, that it is not the prerogative of individual congregations and districts — apart from the LCMS in convention — to establish auxiliary offices into which they call, commission and install individuals. In order for such offices to be recognized by the Synod as a whole, they would need to be thoroughly studied and discussed, carefully defined, have proper preparation and training in place for those who would be called to such an office, and ultimately be approved by the LCMS in convention.²⁹ This is part of our “walking together” in doctrine and practice as a Synod.

²⁸ Somewhat customary is the use of “liturgical deacons” to assist in the administration of the Lord’s Supper. In the Early Church, and in other theological traditions today, a deacon was one of the three orders or ranks of clergy within an episcopal structure (bishop, priest, deacon), often requiring ordination into the diaconate. The primary responsibility of such deacons was assisting liturgically with the Lord’s Supper. In the medieval church, as for Roman Catholicism after the Council of Trent, “deacon” was one of the several ranks of clergy, ordinarily the middle of the three “major” orders or grades (priest, deacon, subdeacon), who administered Holy Communion. Lutherans inherited the office of deacon at the time of the Reformation and treated the terminology as an adiaphoron, but considered those occupying that office to have the same requirements of examination, calling and ordination as any other occupant of the pastoral office — what the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope refers to as “choosing, calling, ordaining” (Tr 67). The practice in the LCMS of using liturgical deacons to assist with the administration of the Lord’s Supper (sometimes ordained men, other times laymen) is simply understood as congregational assistance of the pastor and not as an office of deacon, let alone an “ordained diaconate.”

²⁹ The result would be inclusion of such “commissioned minister” offices in the LCMS Bylaws; see footnote 24 above.

Although (as noted in footnote 28) the New Testament testimony to the office of deaconess is limited to Romans 16:1, it is an office with a long history in the Christian church and in the LCMS.³¹ The preparation of deaconesses for service in the LCMS originally took place through college and university programs, but it was expanded to the seminaries with the approval of Resolution 5-06B at the 2001 LCMS convention.³² The office of deaconess is clearly defined as an auxiliary office that assists the Office of the Holy Ministry in a variety of ways, especially in the showing of Christ’s mercy. It is an office limited to females who have the proper preparation to be called and commissioned as deaconesses.

C. Other Auxiliary Offices in the LCMS

In addition to teacher, director of Christian education and deaconess, the LCMS Bylaws officially recognize five other auxiliary offices: director of parish music, director of Christian outreach (see the further discussion below), director of family life ministry, parish assistant and director of church ministries.³³ There are specific training programs to prepare individuals to be called and commissioned to serve in these auxiliary offices of the LCMS.

D. Deacon

The office of deacon, in various forms, has been present throughout history in a number of Christian denominations. Although deacon is not an officially recognized auxiliary office in the LCMS,³⁴ some LCMS congregations (as noted above) use this term as a synonym for the lay office of “elder.” As also noted above, some LCMS districts use the term “deacon” to denote a lay office that is distinct both from the Office of the Holy Ministry and from auxiliary offices that are recognized by the LCMS. On the district level, those who hold this office normally have some training (typically provided by the district itself) and may be authorized by the district president to provide assistance to a congregation under the supervision of an ordained pastor. Specific responsibilities of a deacon may vary from congregation to congregation (and from district to district), but these typically do not (and from the Synod’s perspective, definitely should not) involve public preaching and the administration of the Sacraments.³⁵ Confusion arises when deacons (whether authorized to do so or not) carry out these responsibilities, even if this takes place under the “supervision” of an ordained pastor.³⁶

³¹ See Cheryl D. Naumann, *In the Footsteps of Phoebe: A Complete History of the Deaconess Movement in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008). Naumann offers a detailed history, including the establishment of LCMS deaconess preparation programs at Concordia College, River Forest, in 1980; at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in 2002; and at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, in 2003.

³² See Naumann, *In the Footsteps of Phoebe*, 507–508.

³³ See footnote 24 above.

³⁴ See footnote 24 above.

³⁵ 2016 Resolution 13-02A. For discussion, see below.

³⁶ In its 2023 opinion, “President of Synod Request for Opinion on Lay Reading of Sermons and Conduct of Worship in the Absence of a Pastor,” the CTCR advised that it was theologically permissible for laymen to conduct

³⁰ See the discussion of “teaching ministry” in CTCR, *The Ministry*, 17–19.

Recent history in the LCMS has served to complicate things further when it comes to the office of deacon. In an attempt to address the problem of providing Word and Sacrament ministry to congregations when no ordained pastor was available, the Synod's 1989 convention (via Res. 3-05B) established an office distinct from the Office of the Holy Ministry called "licensed lay deacon." According to the protocols specified in the resolution, such deacons were required to complete a certain amount of seminary course work and training; were to be approved, licensed and regularly monitored by the district president; and were then authorized "in exceptional circumstances or in emergencies" to carry out certain duties normally restricted to those who hold the pastoral office (e.g., lead public worship, preach and — under certain circumstances — administer the Lord's Supper). In view of the rather contentious debate that took place regarding this resolution at the 1989 convention itself and in subsequent years, it seems self-evident that there was a lack of careful Synodwide and consensus-building study and discussion before this resolution was presented and (narrowly) adopted.

The vigorous debate about this office that ensued in the years after the establishment of licensed lay deacons resulted in two major changes in the LCMS. First, the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program was established at both seminaries by the adoption of Resolution 5-01B at the 2007 LCMS convention. The SMP program provides pastoral training by the LCMS seminaries to men in their contexts so that they can be called and ordained as Specific Ministry Pastors (a roster status established by the Synod in 2007 in contrast to General Ministry Pastors). The second major change that came about was the adoption of Resolution 13-02A at the 2016 LCMS convention, which brought an end to the licensing of lay deacons for Word and Sacrament ministry. It should be noted that the 2016 resolution did not reject the use of the term "deacon":

Resolved, That nothing in this resolution shall be construed as impeding the training, recognition, credentialing or service of deacons who do not publicly preach or administer the Sacraments, namely, those who serve in ministries of mercy, education, or visitation, and so forth, or in an outreach role, assisting in evangelism and church planting (but not in public preaching and administration of the Sacraments); and be it further
Resolved, That district presidents may continue to recruit, train, and credential new deacons for general varieties of service in the church that do not include public preaching and administration of the Sacraments. (2016 *Proceedings*, 237–238)

services in the absence of a pastor, provided that it is a legitimate emergency or temporary need and that the layman not administer the Sacrament or pronounce absolution (in accordance with AC XIV). However, the Commission acknowledges that the lay officiating of a formal worship service in the congregation is a genuine gray area. To that end, it suggested that non-Communion orders of service (which allow for such lay leadership) should be used. The principle underlying these concerns is avoidance of confusion with the pastoral office, and that principle likewise applies to auxiliary offices or others such as deacons or evangelists.

desirable to appoint persons in addition to parish pastors, who are often fully occupied with parish work, to the task of evangelizing. ... If a congregation calls an evangelist, he will as a matter of course work under the supervision of and in closest harmony with the pastor, who is the shepherd of the whole flock entrusted to his charge, including the evangelist.³⁸

Although the Synod in convention never acted upon this or other specific recommendations of the 1973 report, it did eventually (as noted above) create the office of director of Christian outreach, which seems to align closely with what is described in the 1973 report. In the final section of the current report, the CTCR will offer its own conclusions and recommendations regarding the office of evangelist.

III. Summary Conclusions and Recommendations

There are three primary conclusions to be drawn from this study. First, the New Testament uses several different titles for those serving in the one, divinely instituted Office of the Holy Ministry. These include shepherd/pastor, apostle, prophet, evangelist, teacher, overseer and elder (and possibly others, including deacon). This variety of terminology should not be interpreted as somehow contradicting the clear evidence in the New Testament for this one, divinely instituted office, nor should it be seen as evidence that this office was not widely recognized by first-century Christians. The early decades of Christianity were simply a time when titles were more varied and less standardized.

Second, there is nothing in the New Testament that prevents or proscribes the church from establishing helping or auxiliary offices to assist the Office of the Holy Ministry. While opinions differ about whether the New Testament itself attests to the creation of such offices by the church (as we have discussed, some regard "deacon" and "deacons" as auxiliary offices created by the Early Church), there is no disagreement in the LCMS about whether the church today has the freedom to create and fill such offices in response to particular needs, challenges and opportunities in its efforts to proclaim the Gospel and further Christ's mission on earth. If the Synod were to determine that auxiliary offices of deacon or evangelist were needed, then it has the freedom to establish them, along with establishing appropriate forms for calling, commissioning and installing deacons and/or evangelists into those offices.

Third, this study points out the confusion that can result from using biblical titles without understanding their original referent. For example, in the New Testament an elder was a man who served in the Office of the Holy Ministry. In the LCMS today, an elder is typically a layman who holds an elected and term-restricted congregational office made up of men who assist the pastor(s) with matters related to worship and pastoral care. In the New Testament, an evangelist was also a man who served in the Office of the Holy Ministry, presumably focused on the task of outreach and evangelism. In the

What has not yet happened in the LCMS is careful study, discussion and definition of the office of deacon in light of recent history in the LCMS, both in view of the now-defunct licensed lay deacon program and continued deacon training programs in certain LCMS districts. The LCMS has specified (in 2016 Res. 13-02A and elsewhere) what deacons are *not* to do (public preaching and administration of the Sacraments), but more needs to be done to define the duties of and training for this office if it is ever to become an officially recognized auxiliary office in the LCMS into which men are called, commissioned and installed.

E. Evangelist

Like deacon, "evangelist" is also not an auxiliary office recognized by the LCMS (at least not using this specific title). The Synod, however, has established an auxiliary office called director of Christian outreach (DCO). Any Synod discussion contemplating the establishment of an auxiliary office of evangelist would do well to consider this already-established auxiliary office. Another factor to keep in mind is that there is some current usage of the term "evangelist" as an additional title for the Office of the Holy Ministry within the LCMS, which (as discussed earlier) is actually more in keeping with the New Testament usage of this term.

Complicating matters further, in recent years some districts have begun to use the term "evangelist" for a lay office in which male or female individuals go through some limited training to share the Gospel in order to establish "faith communities."³⁷ Such evangelists typically serve under the guidance of an LCMS pastor, but little or no study and discussion of this recent use of the term or title "evangelist" has taken place within the LCMS as a whole and no resolution recognizing "evangelist" as an official Synod office has been approved by the Synod in convention. While (as noted above) there is considerable freedom for individual congregations and even districts to have titles for various elected, appointed or paid staff positions, it would be very helpful if an office connected to some form of evangelistic ministry of the Word would be studied and discussed carefully across the Synod before being used by some districts and congregations in what may be perceived by some as an officially recognized title and office.

At the Synod's request, the CTCR's 1973 report on the ministry studied and discussed the "office of evangelist" and came to the conclusion that:

The work of an evangelist ... does not necessarily call for a separate office. It is a function of the total Ministry and may be carried out even by bishops, and certainly by parish pastors. However, the work of evangelizing the unchurched is so great and pressing a task that the church may well find it

³⁷ One recommendation of the 2013 Resolution 4-06A Task Force was "that congregations and districts be encouraged to identify individuals for special training in and attention to evangelism." See 2013 Resolution 4-06A Task Force Report to the Synod, 25. Available at resources.lcms.org/reading-study/ctcr-library-lcms-task-force-updates.

LCMS today, the title "evangelist" is being used by some for a lay office that is often not clearly or consistently defined. The challenges with the office of deacon in the LCMS in recent decades have demonstrated the importance of defining terms, titles and responsibilities carefully and consistently; of seeking to avoid confusion (and practices that may be at odds with the Synod's position); and of striving for as much uniformity as possible to avoid confusion, misunderstanding and tension in our walking together as a Synod.

The use of biblical terms such as "deacon" or "evangelist" in and of itself is not a problem. They are biblical terms that can and may be employed profitably by the church. It is rather *how* they are being used that can and does cause confusion. For instance, all Christians are in some sense "evangelists," in that they are entrusted with sharing the Gospel. Likewise, all Christians are "deacons" in the sense that they are called to lives of service toward God and neighbor. Yet we must not confuse a Christian's general Christian vocation as an evangelist or deacon with his or her occupying the *office* of deacon or evangelist. The latter uses of these terms connote ecclesiastically recognized offices into which one is called, commissioned and installed, and the LCMS has not as yet designated them auxiliary offices.

As emphasized earlier, a proper way to understand helping or auxiliary offices established by the church to which qualified individuals can be called is to recognize that those holding such offices are authorized to assist the pastor in carrying out certain responsibilities of his office. In light of the foregoing, the Commission makes several recommendations that may lessen confusion over the use of various nomenclature in the Synod, including the terms "deacon" and "evangelist."

- **Deacons:** The term "deacon" is ambiguous exegetically, and it is clear that even within the Synod historically there has been no single understanding or application of it.³⁹ This at times has led to confusing and contradictory applications of it, though usage of the biblical term in itself is not objectionable. As noted above, 2016 Resolution 13-02A also allows for the formation of deacons to "serve in ministries of mercy, education, or visitation, and so forth, or in an outreach role," provided their responsibilities do not include "public preaching and administration of the Sacraments." In light of the potential for confusion and misunderstanding of the various ways "deacon" has or might be used in the Synod, the Commission makes the following recommendation: *The term "deacon" should only be used for laymen who assist the pastor in certain, specific ways (liturgically, administratively, educationally, etc.), yet do not publicly preach or administer the Sacraments.*

³⁸ CTCR, *The Ministry in Its Relation*, 12. Again, the use and citation of this report does not imply an endorsement of its conclusions or recommendations, including the possibility of ordaining "evangelists."

³⁹ Note, for instance, the debates concerning the possibility of an "ordained diaconate" as a resolution to the controversy over the licensed lay deacons created by the 1989 convention. See, the opinion of the Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary, "A Response to 'An Overture to Establish an Ordained Diaconate,'" *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (July 1999): 205–220.

- **Evangelists:** The term “evangelist” has a closer relationship to the Office of the Holy Ministry in the New Testament and therefore may evoke greater confusion. However, the 2013 Resolution 4-06A Task Force explicitly encouraged the “identification and training of laity for the role of evangelist,” that is, “special training in and attention to evangelism” (2013 Resolution 4-06A Task Force Report to the Synod, 25). Since this evangelistic role obviously has a different scope than the New Testament usage of the term, the Synod should seek to clarify that role and distinguish it clearly from the pastoral office. The Commission recommends the following: *First, calling men or women to be trained for and to serve in the auxiliary office of director of Christian outreach should be more widely encouraged and emphasized. In this regard, the Synod might expand the formal title for this office (e.g., “Director of Christian Outreach—Evangelist”). Second, the term “evangelist” as a lay or congregational office should be restricted to those laypersons (male or female) identified and trained for outreach to visitors and nonmembers in their communities. Neither those called to the auxiliary office of DCO nor congregational outreach workers (whether or not they are referred to as evangelists) should exercise the characteristically “distinctive functions” of the pastoral office (preaching in the services of the congregation, leading formal public services of worship, the public administration of the Sacraments, and the public administration of the Office of the Keys).*
- **Training:** The Synod has repeatedly emphasized that programs intended to theologically train laity for the work of service in the church or outreach within their communities may be of great benefit for our churches. Those programs already exist in various ways, though more uniform definitions of “deacon” or “evangelist” (especially should the Synod designate them as auxiliary offices) may also entail uniform training programs. The seminaries, ministry-related faculties of our universities, and other offices and/or institutions of the Synod (such as the Office of National Mission) are well-equipped to collaborate in developing, administering and teaching such programs. The Commission recommends: *If and when the Synod were to recognize deacons and/or evangelists as rostered auxiliary offices, the above-named entities should be engaged to develop biblically, theologically and confessionally faithful resources to aid in the training and credentialing of those auxiliary offices.*
- **Auxiliary Offices:** There is as yet no official Synod definition of the term “auxiliary office,” nor are there parameters for what particular ministries are included in the concept of auxiliary offices or what specific duties may be assigned to those who hold these offices in differing contexts and circumstances. In his synodically adopted theses on the ministry, C.F.W. Walther noted that “other offices” stem from the ministry, as the highest office in the church. In its 1981 report on the ministry, the CTCR referred to them as “facilitating offices” (since they facilitate the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments and the Keys) and conceded that “auxiliary,” while a traditional term, is itself ambiguous: “Perhaps a better term than ‘auxiliary’ might be found” (*The Ministry*, 28). More attention might be paid to defining and

clarifying this term and its usage in the church, as well as associated practical realities, such as the call into auxiliary offices. The Commission recommends the following: *The Synod in convention should consider asking the CTCR to produce a study of auxiliary offices, including their historical usage, theological basis and practical application in the life of the church, as well as potential terminological changes to the category or to ministries included in it.*

Appendix

2023 Convention Workbook
Ov. 5-48

To Distinguish Terms for Pastoral Office from Those for Auxiliary or Helping Offices

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions simply and clearly confess that God has established the Office of the Public Ministry for the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, through which the Holy Spirit works to create faith when and where He wills (Matt. 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–16; Luke 24:44–49; John 20:21–23; Augsburg Confession [AC] V; AC XIV); and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions also simply and clearly confess that God, through the Church calls qualified men into this unique and distinct Office of the Public Ministry, so that His Word will be preached and the Sacraments will be administered to the end that the Holy Spirit will call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify the whole Christian Church on earth and keep it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith (1 Cor. 4:1; 1 Peter 2:7; Matt. 18:18–20; AC V; AC XIV; Small Catechism [SC] II, Third Article); and

WHEREAS, The members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, by God’s grace, have by their unequivocal and unconditional subscription to the Lutheran Confessions publicly confessed this understanding of the Church and the ministry throughout the Synod’s history; and

WHEREAS, C.F.W. Walther, in Thesis I of “Church and Ministry” confessed, “The holy ministry or pastoral office is an office distinct [The German word translated as “distinct” is *unterschiedene*, which can be translated distinguished, different from, distinctive, and unique] from the priesthood of all believers” (C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry [Kirche und Amt]* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987], 161); and

WHEREAS, The New Testament also includes many functions and titles for the Office of the Public Ministry, including apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, among others (Eph. 4:10; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Tim. 3:1–7; 1 Peter 5:1–4), and sets aside other functions and titles for those who assist the Office of the Public Ministry in carrying out its tasks, including deacons (Acts 6:1–5; 1 Tim. 3:8–13); and

WHEREAS, The 2016 convention urged Synod to uphold the biblical and confessional qualifications for the pastoral office (2016 Resolution 6-02A) and to remove any confusion of the pastoral office with other forms of helping or auxiliary offices in the church, such as deacons (2016 Res. 13-02A); and

WHEREAS, 2016 Res. 13-02A brought an end to the licensing of laymen for Word and Sacrament ministry, yet also commended the work of educated lay evangelists to assist in bringing the Gospel to an increasingly secular, unbelieving world; and

WHEREAS, Ongoing training programs in several districts for lay assistants, making use of various titles such as evangelist, pastoral assistants, pastoral ministry assistants, and deacons, include instruction and training for functions unique to and reserved for men called into the Office of the

Public Ministry. For example, a course offered by the Mission Training Center of the Pacific Southwest District entitled “Homiletics” includes the description: “In this course the deacon applicant will concentrate on the basic preparation and delivery of a sermon”; and

WHEREAS, Although well intentioned, these lay training programs have created confusion because of the use of terms historically associated with the Office of the Public Ministry; and

WHEREAS, In attempting to comply with timelines and expectations set by 2016 Res. 13-02A for ending the licensure of lay deacons for Word and Sacrament ministry, confusion has arisen over the use of the terms of *deacon* and *evangelist* in relation to those who occupy the Office of the Public Ministry; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod commend the publications of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) which define the theology, nomenclature, and responsibilities of the office of the ministry, especially *The Ministry in Its Relation to the Christian Church* (1973), *The Ministry: Offices, Procedure, and Nomenclature* (1981) [Such as: “Thus, we may speak of various ‘ministries’ in and of the church, but we must be careful to distinguish them properly. An office is not defined solely by what one who holds it does (function) but by the duties, responsibility, and accountability assigned to it. The pastoral office is unique in that all the functions of the church’s ministry belong to it.” *The Ministry: Office, Procedure, and Nomenclature* (1981)]; and be it further

Resolved, That the CTCR be directed to produce a report that defines and distinguishes the New Testament terms used for the Office of the Public Ministry and its auxiliary offices, including special discussions of the offices of *deacon* and *evangelist*, in preparation for the 2026 convention; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Council of Presidents take this report under consideration as it seeks to formalize the functions and requirements of these auxiliary and helping offices in their respective districts in keeping with 2016 Res. 13-02A.

Board of Directors
Iowa East District

R62.11

President of Synod Request for Opinion on Lay Reading of Sermons and Conduct of Worship in the Absence of a Pastor**The Request of the Synod President**

During the extended triennium, the President of Synod repeatedly noted the looming shortage of clergy and the need to provide direction for (male) laymen assisting vacant congregations or congregations without ordained clergy available to preach or conduct worship. In November 2022, following extended conversations with CTCR executive staff and the chairman of the CTCR, the President posed the following questions:

- 1) *Given the biblical and confessional doctrine of the Office of the Holy Ministry, under what conditions might a layman read sermons or lead worship at a congregation when there is no pastor available to serve? What precedents are there within orthodox Lutheranism (and the LCMS, in particular) for such a practice? What qualifications should an individual have to assist in this way and what supervision should be provided?*
- 2) *What practical guidelines could the CTCR offer to ensure this is done “decently and in good order” (1 Cor. 14:40) and in keeping with Scripture and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church?*

It is the President’s hope that, if possible, the CTCR provide answers to these questions in advance of the 2023 Synod Convention.

The President’s questions require a careful and informed response. In light of this request, the Commission recommended a two-part opinion. It would include a brief statement on the qualifications and supervision appropriate for a layman to read a sermon and conduct worship in the public services of a congregation without a pastor present, especially taking into account the stipulations already addressed in 1989 Res. 3-05B and the recommendations of the 2013 Resolution 4-06A Task Force. It would also (or furthermore) provide guidelines that offer direction for laymen serving in this capacity and congregations being assisted by such laymen. Since the Commission is customarily not the entity tasked with providing liturgical guidance, it sought to restrict itself to a theological consideration of the President’s request and practical guidelines in accordance with those theological considerations.

The Response of the CTCR

The 2013 Synod convention requested that the President of Synod establish a task force to address questions regarding the service of licensed lay deacons under the terms established in 1989 Resolution 3-05B, whereby qualified laymen were authorized to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments in certain extraordinary cases with proper supervision. In advance of the 2016 convention, 2013 Task Force 4-06A published its report, which laid out important exegetical, theological, and historical foundations for the office of the ministry and argued that these were inconsistent with the widespread licensure of lay deacons to carry out Word and

Sacrament Ministry. It particularly recommended the elimination of two practices—the use of Licensed Lay Deacons in congregations that were already being served or reasonably could be served by ordained pastors, and the use of Licensed Lay Deacons to serve vacancies in neighboring congregations. The task force further suggested that Synod should “provide a clear path forward to certify, call, and ordain men presently serving as lay deacons.” It recommended that “no new lay deacons be licensed to preach or administer the sacraments after January 1, 2018” and that all previously licensed lay deacons apply to a Synodical path leading to ordination (seminary or colloquy).¹

At the 2016 convention, the Synod adopted resolution 6-02, by a vote of 875-177, upholding the biblical and confessional qualifications for the office of the public ministry, including the ordinary prerequisite that all those carrying out the functions of that office be examined, called, and ordained. Synod also adopted resolution 13-02A, by a vote of 809-277, affirming the “theological framework” of the task force and accepting its proposals for regularizing the ministry of lay deacons through ordination. Again, following the task force, it stipulated the cessation of licensure of deacons for Word and Sacrament ministry by January 1, 2018. It also included a provision that would allow qualified deacons to colloquize directly into Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) status. It further resolved that the training of lay deacons should continue for service that does not include public preaching or administration of the sacraments and finally directed the First Vice-President of Synod and a committee appointed by the Council of Presidents to direct the implementation of the resolution’s requirements, subject to approval by the Colloquy Committee for Pastoral Ministry.

As the Word and Sacrament ministry of Licensed Lay Deacons has been phased out in accordance with these 2016 resolutions, concerns have been raised by the President of Synod and Council of Presidents about procuring service for congregations which are temporarily or permanently unable to obtain a pastor, potentially growing more acute in light of present and future clergy shortages. It is for this reason that the President of Synod posed the current questions regarding the propriety of laymen publicly reading sermons and conducting worship services in the absence of ordained clergy. The Commission addresses them as follows.²

Q. 1) *Given the biblical and confessional doctrine of the Office of the Holy Ministry, may a layman read sermons or lead worship at a congregation when there is no pastor available to serve?*

¹ 2016 LCMS Convention Workbook, 245.

² This opinion presupposes the basic Scriptural and confessional foundations and role of the pastoral office in the church which the LCMS has repeatedly affirmed. For examples, see especially the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature* (St. Louis: Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1981); C.F.W. Walther, *Theses on the Church and the Office of the Ministry* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012), 3-6; “To Uphold the Scriptural and Confessional Principles for the Office of the Holy Ministry,” 2016 Res. 6-02, 2016 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 166-168; and “To Affirm Synod’s Official Position on Church and Ministry,” 2001 Res. 7-17A, 2001 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 172-173.

To this question, the Commission answers a qualified “Yes.” The Commission does not believe either practice mentioned in the above question necessarily contradicts the biblical and confessional doctrine of the ministry, provided that certain safeguards remain in place to prevent confusion with the pastoral office. The Commission has repeatedly identified four distinctive functions of the public ministry that should be carried out by those who have been rightly called to the office of the public ministry: preaching in the services of the congregation, leading formal public services of worship, public administration of the sacraments, and the public administration of the keys.³ Apart from certain exceptional circumstances, the laity ought not exercise these distinctive functions of the public ministry, lest they risk such confusion with the pastoral office.

In the case of the lay reading of sermons, one would be exercising a distinctive function of the public ministry only in a qualified sense, because the sermon would simply be read and not composed by the layman himself. Rather, an ordained pastor, who is regarded as “apt to teach” (2 Tim 2:24), would prepare the sermon. In the case of conducting worship services, there is certainly potential for confusion, but the Commission believes that this can be avoided through the use of services especially designed for lay officiation, or through the use of the daily prayer offices and existing devotional orders (see *Lutheran Service Book* 282-89, 294-98). Likewise, it may be wise for lay officiants to distinguish themselves from ordained clergy in vesture, for instance, by not wearing a stole, or possibly even an alb, to prevent confusion.

Moreover, there is adequate precedent for these measures. Confessional Lutheran churches throughout their history have sought to address pastoral shortages and other emergency situations in ways that are faithful to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. That has at times included laymen reading sermons written for them by ordained clergy and conducting public services with certain limitations. This was particularly the practice for Lutheran congregations in America. For instance, the Berkenmeyer Constitution of 1735 (for congregations of New York and New Jersey) established the office of *Vorleser*, or “reader,” who would serve in the absence of a pastor by leading the congregation in song, or liturgy, and the reading of a sermon provided him by a pastor or from other authorized books.⁴ Likewise, during its early expansion, many Synod congregations found themselves without called pastors for extended periods of time. In these instances, laymen were allowed to publicly read sermons and conduct services in what was called a “read service” (*Lesegottesdienst*), though this was only seen as a temporary or emergency provision and never proposed as a permanent solution.⁵

In its report to the 2016 convention, the 2013 Resolution 4-06A Task Force specifically made this same proposal in the fifth of its concluding recommendations to Synod:

Emergencies and other unforeseen circumstances will occur that will make it impossible for a pastor to serve his congregation on a given Sunday. The time-honored approach to such occasions has been to designate a man (typically an elder or perhaps another called auxiliary minister) to conduct Matins or another service from the hymnal so that the

congregation has opportunity to hear the Word of God, to pray together, and to sing praise (1 Tim. 4:4-5). A proactive approach to such occasional needs is important. On most occasions a sermon can be prepared by the pastor to be read in the service.⁶

The task force recommendation, however, cautioned that such measures should not be taken haphazardly, without guidelines, or in any way that may cause offense. It added:

In all such cases where it is simply impossible for a pastor to preach or conduct worship, care should be taken so that an exceptional circumstance does not create confusion or become a precedent for errant practices. Though “emergency knows no law,” it should not be an excuse for disorder. Thus, even in such difficult circumstances, every attempt should be made to address the problem in an orderly way that is consonant with Scripture and does not cause offense or misunderstanding. For example, while an emergency pastoral absence may necessitate having a layman lead a service of the Word and read a sermon prepared by the pastor, our congregations should heed the Synod’s counsel for women not to exercise liturgical leadership. Moreover, it would be good to distinguish between an emergency and ongoing challenges. A pastor’s illness and unavoidable absence on a given Sunday presents an emergency need. But, when there will be no pastor for the foreseeable future, a thoughtfully considered, theologically orthodox answer, rather than “emergency” remedies, is needed.⁷

It is in the spirit of this rationale and these kinds of concerns that the Commission offers a qualified “Yes.” We can explicitly affirm that, in temporary or emergency situations, a layman may read public sermons or conduct public worship in the absence of an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament. However, certain guidelines, as noted above and expanded upon below, should be practiced to prevent confusion with the pastoral office and its distinctive functions. Furthermore, care should be taken so that such temporary or emergency exceptions are in fact truly temporary or truly emergencies, and thus not seen or encouraged as normative. They are by definition *exceptions* and every effort should be made to obtain ordained clergy to preach and conduct public services of the church in accordance with the distinctive functions of the public ministry implicit in that office.

Q. 2) *What practical guidelines could the CTCR offer to ensure this is done “decently and in good order” (1 Cor. 14:40) and in keeping with Scripture and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church?*

As noted above, the Commission ordinarily does not address itself to strictly liturgical concerns, such as guidelines for the conduct of lay-led services. However, it can speak to what we believe are optimal theological and practical standards to guide congregations of Synod in this practice. To that end, we suggest that, in these situations, congregations select lay readers and officiants who fit the following criteria. First, the candidate *must* be a male. Second, the candidate should hold a position within the congregation that maintains some accountability for the pastoral office or support of it, such as an elder, officer of the congregation, or, alternately, an auxiliary minister

³ CTCR, *The Ministry*, 35.

⁴ Karl Kretzmann, ed., “The Constitution of the First Lutheran Synod in America,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 9 (1936): 88-89.

⁵ Karl H. Wyneken, “The Development of the Itinerant Ministries in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1847-1865,” Unpublished Thesis (Concordia Seminary, 1963), 27-36.

⁶ 2016 LCMS Convention Workbook, 246-47.

⁷ 2016 LCMS Convention Workbook, 247.

(e.g., Commissioned Minister) within that congregation or from a neighboring congregation. Third, the candidate should be trained and, in the event of longer durations, supervised by an ordained pastor, ordinarily a vacancy pastor, circuit visitor, or district president.

It is incumbent upon both congregation and supervisory clergy to ensure that this practice be reserved for true emergencies, such as the illness of a pastor or the inability to secure pulpit supply on short notice, or other temporary situations, such as during a vacancy. Care should be taken, however, not to use laymen in these instances simply to avoid the difficulty or cost associated with procuring a pastor. In the event of a prolonged vacancy, the presence of a lay officiant is no replacement for the appointment of a vacancy pastor, who may be available to conduct services and preach occasionally and, even if that is impossible, provide pastoral care and oversight to the congregation in the absence of its own shepherd. In the event of congregations with no realistic prospect of financially supporting full-time clergy, other more feasible options should be sought instead of lay officiants, such as alternate routes like SMP, EITF, Center for Hispanic Studies, or possibly the service of retired pastors, so that the congregation may have a regularly called and ordained pastor to carry out all the distinctive functions of the pastoral office for the spiritual benefit of its members. We also note the time-honored practice of establishing a dual or multi-point parish with one or more similar congregations.

Other practical guidelines may be suggested pertaining to the specific functions entailed by lay services. With respect to laymen reading sermons, they should only read sermons written by ordained synodical clergy, and it should be made clear—by way of a bulletin or public announcement—that this is the case. With respect to conducting worship services, the layman should not administer the Sacrament of the Altar, nor should he exercise the keys by pronouncing absolution. For these reasons, it is best to make use of non-communication orders of service, such as Matins, the Order of Morning Prayer, or the Service of Prayer and Preaching, which may be used by either ordained or lay officiants. (We note that *LSB* indicates the leader position in all these services with an “L” and not with a “P” as is the case in Divine Service – Settings One through Five). The truncation of one of the five settings of the Divine Service in *LSB* to exclude Confession and Absolution and the Service of the Sacrament is possible, though not desirable due to the potential for incidental confusion.

In order to facilitate a biblically and confessionally responsible use of this practice, the Commission urges other agencies of Synod to assist in providing resources to support it. First, the seminaries of Synod and the publishing arm of Synod would do well to consider establishing a digitally available database of full-text sermons corresponding to the appointed pericopes of the church year (both one-year and three-year). This would enable lay officiants to download and read biblically, confessionally faithful sermons from ordained clergy rather than having to rely upon a supervisory pastor to provide them one, especially in time-sensitive emergencies. It would also allow for a greater diversity of sermons from which to choose. Second, the responsible agencies of Synod, such as the Office of National Mission or Concordia Publishing House, could produce liturgical resources for use by lay officiants. These would ideally include other non-communication services designed for lay leadership that are based upon the current, more familiar settings of the Divine Service, as well as rubrics and training resources dedicated to

5

to accommodate the presence of an ordained pastor from another congregation. Scripture does not necessitate that worship happen at a particular day or time each week. We are free to gather on any day and at any time for the church’s public services of Word and Sacrament. The Commission believes that such alternatives, while admittedly not optimal for clergy or congregants, are far preferable to strictly lay-led services because they provide the congregations with ordained clergy to meet their pastoral needs in a way that is consistent with Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. This position is consistent with the assumed presupposition that undergirds the entire argument and conclusions of this response, namely that doctrinal fidelity to our Confession rather than the force of pragmatic concerns must norm our practice.

Finally, the growing number of congregations that are not able to obtain regular pastoral care merits further attention and careful consideration. To this end, the Commission recommends more formal discussions in the next triennium to address the larger issue of Lutheran theological foundations for mission and ministry, especially as those foundations are being challenged in a post-Christian culture, where religious participation is on the decline and where demographics are also rapidly changing. Such discussions might involve representatives of the CTCR, the Council of Presidents, the Pastoral Formation Committee, and the seminaries, among others. Conversation and collaboration between these parties could lead to the development of practical and educational solutions to this looming problem that are consistent with, and indeed derive from, those theological foundations.

Adopted April 13, 2023

7

assist laymen with the conduct of services, use of vestments, and other matters where confusion with the pastoral office should be avoided.

While the Commission does not believe the public reading of sermons or conduct of public services by laymen to be contradictory with the biblical and confessional standards for the pastoral office, nor to cause confusion with the pastoral office (given the basic caveats and guidelines noted above), it ultimately holds that this practice is neither desirable nor a long-term solution to the problem of current and future pastoral shortages. Among the many necessary qualifications of the pastoral office, the aptitude to teach stands out as particularly important within a confessional Lutheran tradition that has long valued preaching and the right division of God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Congregations should eagerly desire a theologically trained, rightly called and ordained pastor to preach and teach the Word in a way that addresses that Word to their context. This requires both knowledge of the people pastorally and knowledge of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions theologically. The opinion offered here and its guidelines apply to legitimate emergency or temporary situations, so that the Word may be preached and the people of God edified in conformity with the biblical and confessional standards for the pastoral office. Yet it must not be viewed as an adequate regular or permanent substitute for the examined, called, and ordained pastor serving in the office of the public ministry.

By way of postscript, the Commission regrets that it is unable to provide a satisfying answer to the more serious challenges many of our districts face, namely, the growing number of regions with a high volume of small or financially strained congregations, which are simply unable to afford a full-time pastor. Some are in rural areas that lack geographic proximity either to more populous areas with active clergy that might be able to help fill needs, or to potential sister congregations, with whom they might enter multipoint parish service. Others are in areas with few retired (or even active) clergy to assist vacant congregations. These chronically underserved regions will for the foreseeable future continue to struggle filling pulpits and providing pastoral care. While the Commission understands the plight such congregations face, we are reluctant to propose this model of lay readers and officiants as a legitimate, long-term option, for the reasons cited throughout this opinion (the need for theologically trained clergy who are apt to teach and preach, the proper administration of the Sacrament of the Altar, regular pastoral care, etc.). The pastoral office is not an *adiaphoron*. The office of the public ministry has been instituted in Holy Scripture for the purpose of preaching the Word and administering the sacraments. In accordance with Augsburg Confession XIV, Lutheran congregations are to call ordained clergy to carry out these distinctive functions of the pastoral office in their midst. When they can no longer obtain the services of such clergy, the congregation must honestly and soberly reconsider its options for ongoing mission and ministry, however difficult and painful that may be.

We do believe there are plausible solutions to such dilemmas that do not necessitate the permanent use of lay-led services, as imperfect and unsatisfying as those solutions may be. Options are available, even if they require creativity and adaptability on the part of pastor and congregation alike. For instance, we would propose the use of lay readers/officiants *in conjunction with* semi-regular conduct of services by an ordained pastor or circuit visitor. This might entail, for example, three lay-led services a month without the sacrament and a fourth clergy-led service with the sacrament. A congregation might also adopt a different service time

6

R62.12

President of Synod Request for Opinion on Lawsuits between Christians or Members and Institutions of Synod

The Request of the Synod President

In correspondence dated November 12, 2024, the President of Synod requested that the CTCR respond to the following questions:

1) Given what the CTCR has said in its 1991 document concerning Christian lawsuits [*1 Corinthians 6:1-11: An Exegetical Study*], is it biblically valid, and under what circumstances, for a Christian to file a lawsuit against another Christian? Or for a member or institution of Synod to file a lawsuit against another member or institution of Synod?

2) What guidance might the Lutheran Confessions give concerning this issue, particularly the role of good order in the church (Augsburg Confession 15) and the church's participation in the left-hand, civil realm (Augsburg Confession 16)?

In 1991, the CTCR published *1 Corinthians 6:1-11: An Exegetical Study* in response to a 1990 request from the Praesidium to study "the whole matter of Christian brothers proceeding against one another in civil courts particularly in the light of 1 Corinthians 6 and other related passages." The President of Synod has asked that the CTCR consider how that more narrowly focused exegetical study might apply in actual practice to lawsuits between individual Christians, members of Synod, and institutions of Synod (or any combination thereof), as well as what the Lutheran Confessions might add to those considerations. The opinion of the Commission follows.

The Response of the CTCR

The CTCR's 1991 document, *1 Corinthians 6:1-11: An Exegetical Study*, focused primarily on the meaning of the passage in question, starting with the context of the Corinthian church, the context of 1 Corinthians 6 itself, and the exegetical and practical considerations of the passage. The summary position of that brief report was that lawsuits among Christians should be urged against and avoided whenever possible on the basis of the New Testament's strong admonition. The concern of the passage is that Christians seeking legal recourse against another Christian through the secular legal system (rather than within the fellowship of the church) run the risk of overlooking the spiritual dimensions of the conflict, thereby damaging the fellowship within the body of Christ.

Disputes between Christians are always a concern for fellow Christians, who will do everything possible to resolve them and to restore broken or damaged relationships caused by them. Because of their unique position as members of the body of Christ, especially if members of the same church body, they have a responsibility to deal with these matters. In fact, when the church allows its members to run to the secular courts with problems between Christian brothers and sisters and imposes no check on such action, it is derelict in its duty. Every dispute which occurs among Christians, even the

smallest dispute, includes aspects that are spiritual in nature. The secular law and the secular court, which are established on the basis of the wisdom of the world, are not in a position to judge the fundamental spiritual issues which are always involved. (13)

The study cautions against Christians taking legal action against other Christians because of the potential for spiritual harm done in the process, largely due to sinful motivating factors (e.g., greed, anger, revenge, self-seeking defense of "rights") that may be at work and to the scandal it may cause both within the church and in the sight of the unbelieving world (see the guidelines at 16-17). Significantly, however, the report does not assert that Scripture absolutely or categorically prohibits the use of the legal system by Christians, even when suing other Christians. The Commission believes the reasons for the report's conclusions and argumentation merit further attention and commentary in light of the present question.

First, the lawsuits identified by 1 Corinthians 6 are between individual believers in a local congregation. According to the CTCR study, Paul is "speaking of the action of one Christian *against* (pros) a fellow Christian" (15). In the passage, the singular "brother" (*adelphos*) is used to describe the parties to a dispute. "When *one* (singular) of you has a grievance against another (singular)" (1 Cor. 6:1). "*Brother* (singular) goes to law against *brother* (singular)" (1 Cor. 6:6). The CTCR adds: "The original context in which St. Paul addressed the Christians at Corinth involved disputes among members of the congregation and may well have been motivated, at least in part, by the scorn and ridicule cast by the non-Christians upon the body of believers who were apparently unable or unwilling to resolve their disputes among themselves" (15). These are individual Christians within a congregation who are at odds with one another and who are taking their grievances outside the fellowship of the church to be addressed by the courts, rather than seeking to resolve those disagreements within the church. The concern Paul expresses here is for the divisiveness such lawsuits may occasion within the congregation, as well as the damage it may cause to its witness in the community. What 1 Corinthians 6 does not seem to have in view are groups of Christians participating in lawsuits against other groups of Christians, let alone inside a broader denomination or church body, or between denominations or church bodies. However, this does not exempt corporate entities from the principles articulated in this passage that sternly caution Christians against entering into suit against other Christians.

Second, Christians should seek to resolve potential legal conflicts with other Christians within the church. Since the passage has in mind individual Christians seeking legal recourse against other individual Christians, there should always be an attempt by representatives of the church to mediate the dispute. One would hope that reasonable Christians might be found to mediate between Christians, as St. Paul clearly has in mind in v. 5b ("Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle disputes between brothers?"). Again, the CTCR study states:

Because of the spiritual insights which they have and are expected to exercise, Christians are uniquely qualified to assess problems among themselves and to resolve them. This does not mean that each Christian possesses unique natural abilities for dispute resolution or that others, including non-Christians, may not be in a position to provide assistance in such matters. However, Christians have the mind of Christ. This is their uniqueness, and the church should be able to identify persons best qualified to serve to assist in resolving

conflicts between fellow Christians. For this reason, it is "shameful" to take ecclesiastical matters to civil courts. (16)

For instance, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has adopted bylaws that expressly govern dispute resolution within the Synod (2023 LCMS *Handbook* Bylaw 1.10). This process aims at reconciliation between parties and involves personal conversation, panels of reconcilers to consider a dispute case, appeals of those decisions, and review panels, among other bylaw-mandated processes. In most cases, especially those not of an allegedly criminal nature, every effort should be made to resolve disputes at the congregational or church body level. Members of the Synod agree to follow the processes spelled out in the synodical bylaws that endeavor to bring about reconciliation within our shared biblical, confessional, and ecclesiastical parameters.

Third, 1 Corinthians 6 does not categorically preclude Christians from filing lawsuits in civil courts against other Christians, especially in cases of clear impropriety, illegality, or criminal behavior. Not only may this be justified, but actually preferred to simply ignoring a potential wrong or an injustice. As the Commission put it in the 1 Corinthians study,

The legal system by which order is maintained is a gift of God not to be despised. It may be used properly for certain purposes. The statements in 1 Corinthians 6 are not to be understood as absolute prohibitions against the use of courts by Christians. When the legal system is used and when action is motivated by reasons other than those such as identified below, the use may not only be appropriate but may be of benefit to both Christian and non-Christian. In addition and more specifically, Christians may indeed have a responsibility, if not a duty, to pursue, on behalf of any fellow human being in need of help, legal action against others (whether or not they are Christian) (e.g., in Christians' capacity as guardians, trustees, parents or other fiduciaries on behalf of their ward, beneficiary, child or charge). (16)

That is, whether a civil case or a criminal case, it may be necessary for Christians to file lawsuits, even where the suit is brought against a fellow Christian. The 1991 study poses a number of potential scenarios: a Christian banker against a Christian property owner who defaults on a loan, a church worker unjustly denied service in the church, a falling out between joint Christian business owners, among others. However, there is also a sense in which simply participating in the legal system may mean one is at odds with another Christian. Can Christians not file lawsuits of any sort on the off chance that the suit may implicate another Christian? Can Christians fight traffic tickets if the ticketing officer is a Christian? Can they protest unjust civic action or city codes in court if the city manager or mayor or councilman are also Christians? Can Christians defend themselves in a court against criminal allegations if the district attorney is a Christian? That is to say nothing of court cases involving more nefarious and objective wrongs, such as sexual assault or domestic abuse. The simple fact is that 1 Corinthians does not have in mind the prohibition of any and all use of secular courts by Christians. There are innumerable occasions when the Christian may (and, in fact, *should*) responsibly and virtuously use secular courts, even against fellow Christians.

Fourth, Christians should not pursue legal action out of sinful motivation, which may come with great consequences for their own spiritual lives, the fellowship of the church, and their witness to the world. Though the use of the courts by Christians may be licit, whoever participates in the legal process—individually or corporately—should bear in mind the motivation for pursuing legal action. Just because Scripture does not prohibit an action expressly does not mean it *should* be done. In many even permissible cases, it may be in the best spiritual interests of the Christian not to sue. The 1991 study puts it this way: "The motive for taking legal action is more critical than the action itself. Action taken by one Christian *against* another, which has at its root motivations of greed, anger, revenge, the desire strictly to defend one's own rights, or similar causes which are incompatible with the Christian faith, is always wrong" (16). Moreover, "Christians recognize that taking fellow Christians to court in a spirit of greed, revenge, etc., is a cause of offense and undermines the effect of the Christian witness to the world" (17). That is, there can be a positive use of the court and there can be a negative use of the court. A positive use, as noted above, may entail filing suit regarding something unjust, whether the party culpable for that injustice is a Christian or a non-Christian. A negative use, however, involves participating in any legal action that is cause or opportunity for sin, even against a non-Christian. It is not only the fellowship of the body that Scripture seeks to protect with moral injunctions like that of 1 Corinthians 6. It also warns against that which might inhibit the fruit of the Spirit or the exercise of Christian virtue. Christians should reflect upon their own personal motivations and the spiritual implications of appealing to the courts. It may be better to endure fiscal injury than to sully the witness of the church and to deny the selflessness compelled by our Lord when he calls us to carry our cross (Matthew 16:24). Though an action may be permissible does not necessarily mean it is right. As St. Paul reminds us elsewhere in First Corinthians, "All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up" (1 Cor. 10:23). This applies as readily to corporate entities as it does to individual Christians.

Fifth, Christians may in certain cases neglect their left-hand responsibilities by *not* utilizing secular laws and legal courts to which they are subject as citizens of the left-hand, temporal realm. We ordinarily define the left-hand realm as that which relates to the protection or defense of life and property, which are governed by civil authorities such as the courts. Any number of aspects of the church's life exist in this left-hand realm and are subject to civil laws and regulations. In its 1995 report on church and state, the CTCR described this consideration in detail:

But the church is also a social organization—in the Missouri Synod, congregations, districts, and Synod. While it is tempting to assume that these groupings are synonymous with that church defined by Word and sacrament, they actually have one new characteristic: they are also institutions of the temporal kingdom. They usually incorporate, adopt constitutions and by-laws, and conduct business according to *Robert's Rules of Order*. While the church of the Word is not subject to civil law, since even in totalitarian societies that Word can still be preached or read "underground" and cherished in faith even in the isolation of a prison cell, the church as an institution of society is subject to civil law. The church as institution can be created and abolished, *it can sue and be sued* [italics added], and it can address other legal entities, including government, regarding its institutional interests or concerns. (*Render unto Caesar*, 66).

The left-hand, institutional dimension of the church will inevitably take different shapes in different societies. The institutional church will almost certainly have different rights and responsibilities under different governments and correspondingly act in different ways based upon those rights and responsibilities. But the church will always have a left-hand component, precisely because it lives in the world and is subject to governing authorities (cf. Romans 13; 1 Peter 2-3).

This does not mean Christian churches and/or institutions simply abdicate all left-hand matters to the civil government. They actively participate in that left-hand realm, whether that means advocating for specific legal or political issues, involving itself as far as possible in the legal and political process, seeking certification for its higher education institutions, parochial schools and teachers, among many other such activities. That may mean filing suit over matters such as religious freedom. It may involve supporting other Christian institutions or entities in their own legal battles against injustice. It may also involve entering into suit against those who may be fellow Christians. As a matter of fact, the Commission believes, it frankly may be irresponsible and unethical for the church *not* to do so in certain egregious cases. Imagine a scenario where a Missouri Synod congregation knew of sexual abuse allegations against a pastor or member, yet instead of reporting those to the authorities, sought to oversee the case itself. Likewise, imagine a case of mental illness or domestic abuse that a congregation sought to adjudicate itself rather than referring the parties to appropriate healthcare or psychiatric professionals. The damage cases like this might bring upon the church legally, politically, and monetarily would be extensive, let alone to the reputation and witness of that church in the community. That is to say nothing of the real victims in such cases—victims who may have been protected physically and emotionally by duly instituted laws and law enforcement to which the church may have appealed for aid.

Sixth, and finally, the Lutheran Confessions commend authorities and institutions of the civil realm, such as courts of law, as divine institutions which may be used profitably by the church. Augsburg Confession 16 says:

Concerning public order and secular government it is taught that all political authority, orderly government, laws, and good order in the world are created and instituted by God and that Christians may without sin exercise political authority; be princes and judges; pass sentences and administer justice according to imperial and other existing laws; punish evildoers with the sword; wage just wars; serve as soldiers; buy and sell; take required oaths; possess property; be married.¹

The confessions repeat the fundamental legitimacy of civil institutions again in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession: “It is permissible for Christians to use civil ordinances, just as they use the air, light, food, and drink. For as this universe and the fixed movements of the stars are truly orders of God and are preserved by God, so legitimate governments are truly orders of God and are preserved and defended by God against the devil” (Ap 8.49).² Likewise, in its

¹ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 48.
² Kolb-Wengert, 183.

condemnation of the errors of the Anabaptists, the Formula of Concord defends the Christian appeal to civil government for the enforcement of secular laws. It identifies as intolerable the opinion “that a Christian may not make use of the functions of government against the wicked in appropriate situations, nor may the subjects of the government call upon it to use the power it possesses and has been given by God for protection and defense” (FC Epitome 12.14).³

Elsewhere the Apology forbids “private redress,” or taking matters into one’s own hand in order to exact revenge. Yet it accords a positive place to “public redress”: “Public redress, which is made through the office of the judge, is not forbidden but is commanded and is a work of God according to Paul in Romans 13. Now the different kinds of public redress include judicial decisions, punishment, wars, and military service.” (Ap 16.7)⁴ The sixteenth-century reformers were presented with any number of legal, political, and military challenges to their view of the gospel and their reform of churches—Luther’s excommunication and the imperial edict against Luther’s writings and teachings in 1521, the emperor’s rejection of the Augsburg Confession in 1530, the Schmalkaldic War of the 1540s—mostly in conflict with fellow baptized Christians. Likewise, St. Paul himself appealed to his status as a Roman citizen (Acts 16: 37-39; Acts 22:25-29) as a means to protect himself against unlawful prosecution. The reformers, with Paul, believed Christians could make use of these legitimate civil institutions, including the judges and laws of the first-century Roman Empire or the sixteenth-century Holy Roman Empire, to protest unjust measures, to defend life and property, and to provide free course for the proclamation of the gospel.

Summary

In light of what has been said regarding the focus and purpose of 1 Corinthians 6, as well as its relationship to the legal context in which we live, it is the opinion of the Commission that 1 Corinthians 6 does not categorically prohibit the Christian use of the legal system or the Christian filing of lawsuits against fellow believers. 1 Corinthians 6 strongly opposes lawsuits between individual believers or groups of believers that could otherwise be resolved through mediation of the congregation or larger church. This counsel should be followed, not the least through the church’s own processes for resolving disputes. However, Christians may avail themselves of secular courts in cases against other Christians, ideally after all other congregational and ecclesiastical options have been exhausted. This is all the more pertinent and applicable for institutions and agencies of the church, which are left-hand expressions of the church and are subject to left-hand laws and regulations (fiscal, political, legal, etc). Ultimately, the Commission does not categorically endorse or encourage Christian participation in lawsuits against other Christians, nor does it wish to ignore the clear warnings of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 6. However, we do acknowledge that, like many instruments of the civil, left-hand realm that are capitulations to sin—war, divorce, the criminal justice system, civil government itself—the use of the courts by Christians and against Christians is a sad reality, yet a reality nonetheless that must be used at times, with all due self-examination and restraint.

Adopted by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations
 February 28, 2025

³ Kolb-Wengert, 521.
⁴ Kolb-Wengert, 232.

R62.13

CTCR Opinion on Admission to Seminary for Divorced Men

The Rev. Dr. Brian Saunders, Chairman of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), received correspondence dated November 11, 2024 from Mr. Mark O. Stern on behalf of the Boards of Regents of Concordia Seminary and Concordia Theological Seminary. The correspondence concerned The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) 2023 Convention Omnibus Resolution A, Overture 6-34 (Ov. 6-34), titled “To Prevent Admission, Reinstatement, or Colloquization of a Divorced Man into the Office of the Public Ministry Who Has Married Another Woman.” Omnibus A referred Ov. 6-34 to the two seminary boards as well as to the Council of Presidents and to the Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry.

Overture 6-34 asserts that a man who is to serve in the office of the ministry must be “above reproach” (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6) and explains the phrase to mean the man is “to be the husband of no more than one wife.” The overture concludes that, “Divorce and remarriage disqualifies a man from the Office of the Public Ministry (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6).”¹

The overture does not specifically refer to seminary admission policies. However, the seminary boards consider it to be pertinent because the seminaries are largely responsible for admission to seminary programs and for recommendation of their students to the Council of Presidents as qualified for admission to the office of public ministry in the LCMS. On behalf of the two Boards of Regents, Mr. Stern requested “such guidance as the CTCR may wish to provide on this topic.”²

I. Divorce and Pastors—the questions

Two questions must be considered in order to provide guidance regarding the assertions of Overture 6-34. First, does divorce disqualify a man to serve in the office of public ministry? Second, does the remarriage of a divorced man make him unsuitable for the office of public ministry?³ These two questions address matters that are foundational for Ov. 6-34.

II. Divorce and Pastors—a brief theological overview

a. Scripture on divorce

Scripture and the Confessions provide explicit teaching about marriage and divorce. However, neither Scripture nor the Confessions *explicitly* address the divorce or remarriage of a pastor, although Scripture does *implicitly* address the matter.

¹ See the third and fourth *Whereas* statements of Overture 6-34 in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2023 *Convention Workbook: Reports and Overtures* (1333 S Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, Missouri), page 340.

² See the letter from Mr. Stern in the Appendix.

³ We are considering in this statement of guidance only the matter of divorce and clergy—pastors—and not the men and women who serve in Synod’s auxiliary offices of public ministry. This should not be interpreted to mean that those who serve in auxiliary offices are exempt from the matters considered here.

The Augustana (AC) and its Apology (Ap) defend the marriage of priests.⁵ Citing Scripture (1 Cor. 7:2, 9b; Matt. 19:11; Gen. 1:28), the AC rejects compulsory clerical celibacy as an abuse that fostered widespread sexual scandal and immorality. The Confutation’s defense of celibacy led to a vigorous rejoinder. The confessors held firm to their view that Rome’s insistence on celibacy “conflicts with divine and natural law.”⁶ Rome’s insistence on the rigor of clerical celibacy is rejected since God himself “instituted marriage to help human frailty and to prevent sexual immorality. The old canons also state that sometimes severity and rigor must be alleviated and relaxed for the sake of human weakness and to prevent and avoid greater scandal.”⁷

Luther’s Smalcald Articles (SA) holds to the same view of priestly marriage as stated at Augsburg. He bluntly declares that “we are unwilling to consent to their miserable celibacy, nor will we tolerate it.”⁸ Similarly, in the Treatise (Tr) Melancthon mentions marriage, but only as an example of the unjust actions of bishops, specifically objecting to “the tradition that prohibits remarriage of an innocent party after divorce.”⁹

The catechisms provide a more general confessional understanding of marriage. Luther’s Small Catechism (SC), while not explicitly using the term “marriage,” summarizes godly marriage as a life of sexual purity and decency wherein “husband and wife love and honor each other.”¹⁰ In the SC’s Table of Duties Luther quotes 1 Peter 3:7 and Col. 3:19 for husbands and Eph. 5:22 and 1 Peter 3:5-6 for wives.¹¹ In Luther’s “A Marriage Booklet for Simple Pastors” (often appended to the SC in his day and to at least one printing of the 1580 Book of Concord), his introduction urges that the “godly estate of marriage” be honored and esteemed highly. He also speaks of the great need for prayer in light of “how much unhappiness the devil causes in the married estate through adultery, unfaithfulness, discord, and all kinds of misery.”¹²

The Large Catechism (LC) reveals both a similarly high view of marriage together with sober attention to its practical necessity for sinful people in its extended discussion of the commandment against adultery. One’s nearest neighbor is his or her spouse, who is “one flesh and blood with them.”¹³ Marriage is “the first of all institutions” wherein male and female differ

There is no ambiguity in the Bible about the goodness and value of marriage. As God creates humans to be male or female (Gen. 1:26-27) he also creates marriage (2:15-25). The marriage of man and woman is instituted by God for the well-being of both individual spouses and for humanity as a whole. Because it is not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18), the married couple is given a profound unity of unique “mutual companionship, help, and support.”¹⁴ And, by means of marital fruitfulness, God intends the multiplication of the entire human family (Gen. 1:18). After sin enters the world, a further blessing of marriage is understood: as it channels sexual desire for good it also restrains sinful lust (1 Cor. 7:2-5). Having thus united the husband and wife, God intends them to remain married as long as both are alive (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:6).

Given such a foundation, divorce is flatly contrary to the good and gracious will of God. Malachi bluntly reminds us that the Lord says, “I hate divorce” (Mal. 2:16). In Matthew 19:1-9 Jesus forbids the believer from divorcing his or her spouse, except for the case of one whose spouse is guilty of sexual immorality (*ἐνι πορνεία*) or the case of one who suffers the *de facto* divorce of desertion by one’s spouse (1 Cor 7:15; cp. Matt 5:31-32; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18.)

Divorce is an awful reality in a sinful world. God anticipates this and, as much as possible, ameliorates the effects of divorce. The law given through Moses stipulates divorce procedures that somewhat minimize its devastation (see Lev. 22:13; Deut. 22:13-21; 23:28-29; 24:1-4). But when regulation of divorce is thought to be approval of it, Jesus explains that such stipulations are never more than evidence of recalcitrant sinful hearts (Matt. 19:8; cp. Matt. 2:14b-16).

Scripture’s teachings on marriage and divorce hold for every Christian, but are of particular significance for those entrusted with the high office of public ministry. The pastor’s life and conduct are always factors in how the church is viewed by the world. His public manner and behavior must therefore be blameless (*ανεγκλήτος*; cf. 1 Tim. 3:10; Titus 1:6a) and irreproachable (*ανεπιλημπτον* 1 Tim. 3:2a). Public sin inevitably invites blame and reproach. For such reasons the divorce of a pastor presents a twofold challenge. First, on the personal level, a genuine acknowledgment of any failures on his part together with a confession of sin and a sincere desire to amend his life is required. Second, as to the office that he holds, the real and potential damage to the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ must be recognized and diminished as much as possible (see 1 Tim. 5:19-20).

b. The Confessions

The Confessions speak of marriage largely in the context of objection to enforced celibacy for priests. Divorce in general is addressed only in passing and the divorce of clergy is not discussed.

⁴ “Holy Matrimony,” *Lutheran Service Book* (CPH: St. Louis, 2006), 275.

for the sake of marital fidelity and fruitfulness.¹⁴ It has practical necessity as a provision against sexual sin, which is rightly addressed within marital love. “Wherever marital chastity is to be maintained, above all it is essential that husband and wife live together in love and harmony, cherishing each other wholeheartedly and with perfect fidelity.”¹⁵

c. Synodical consideration of the question

i. Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR)

The CTCR has twice addressed the matter of clergy divorce and remarriage. In a consideration of the grave seriousness of all divorce, *Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective* (1981) adds:

*The divorce of Christian pastors must be taken with utmost seriousness. It is difficult to see how the church can maintain the integrity of its witness—especially in an age where divorce is prevalent—if it permits pastors who have divorced their wives for less than Biblical reasons to continue in the office of the public ministry. Generally a pastor who has been divorced, except in cases of unchastity or desertion on the part of his wife, ought not to remain in office nor be reinstated in the office of pastor. However, it is possible that under very exceptional circumstances a former pastor may by the grace of God come to the point of being in a position to be reconsidered as a person qualified to be entrusted once more with the powers of the pastoral office.*¹⁶

In *Divorce and Remarriage: An Exegetical Study* (1987), the CTCR included an excursus on clergy divorce.¹⁷ The Commission shows that the pastor is called to “a pattern of life that is exemplary of the Gospel at work, and worthy of emulation.” Moral failure by a pastor presents an obstacle and offense that may turn others from the truth of the Gospel (citing 2 Cor. 6:3).¹⁸ This does not deny that pastors remain sinful men ever in need of forgiveness, but it requires recognition that the *public* behavior of a pastor is of great importance because of the risk to “the credibility of his office and his message.”¹⁹ For this reason, “[f]idelity to one’s spouse in marriage is of particular importance in the life and conduct of the Christian pastor.”²⁰

The Commission then explains the phrase, “the husband of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6). “St. Paul is here establishing the general principle that any transgression of God’s will for marriage as a monogamous union is ruled out, whether it should take the form of concubinage or polygamy or marital unfaithfulness, including the “virtual polygamy of illicit divorce.”²¹ *Divorce and Remarriage* also reaffirms the previous quotation from 1981, but emphasizes that only “under

⁵ AC XXIII, Concerning the Marriage of Priests, pages 62-65, and Ap XXIII, 247—57, in Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000). Abbreviated as KW in further references.

⁶ Ap XXIII par 5, KW 62.

⁷ AC XXIII par 15-16, KW 66. The same rejection of compulsory celibacy is central in the argument against monastic vows of chastity and in favor of releasing individuals from such vows when they wish to marry. See AC XXVII, KW 80-91 and Ap XXVII, KW 277-89.

⁸ SA III [11:] Concerning the Marriage of Priests, KW 324.

⁹ Tr par 78, KW 342.

¹⁰ Luther’s Small Catechism (© 1986 CPH) in *Luther’s Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 14.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹² KW 369.

¹³ LC I par 200, KW 413.

¹⁴ LC I par 207, KW 414.

¹⁵ LC I par 221, KW 415-16.

¹⁶ CTCR, *Human Sexuality* (LCMS 1981), 27-28, emphasis in the original. Available online at www.lcms.org/ctcr.

¹⁷ CTCR, *Divorce and Remarriage: An Exegetical Study* (LCMS 1987), 42-45. Available online at www.lcms.org/ctcr.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

very exceptional circumstances” should it be possible for a pastor whose divorce was “for less than biblical reasons” to be reconsidered for reinstatement. Indeed, the report cautions that even in the case of a pastor who divorced because of his wife’s unchastity or desertion, the potential for offense remains and the proclamation of the Gospel may be hampered.²²

With respect to Ov. 6-34, then, we note that the CTRC strongly condemns clergy divorce and holds that a divorced pastor “ought not to remain in office nor be reinstated in the office of pastor,” “except in cases of unchastity or desertion on the part of his wife” (that is, “illicit divorce”). The Commission has not addressed the matter of a pastor’s remarriage after divorce.

ii. Council of Presidents (COP)

The Synod’s *Council of Presidents Manual* guides the work of its members, whose office is to be ecclesiastical supervisors of the Synod’s congregations and church workers.²³ Of course, the COP is ultimately responsible to follow the teachings of Scripture and the Confessions, as well as the Constitution and Bylaws of the LCMS. The guidelines for addressing clergy separation and divorce begin with a Preamble emphasizing the Bible’s teachings on marriage, divorce, and the office of public ministry. The Preamble also notes the intention to provide a consistent approach to the challenge of clergy marital crisis and divorce that avoids two “extreme” views: either a policy holding that divorce always disqualifies a man for ministry, or a policy that approves continuing ministry regardless of the reasons for a divorce.²⁴

The specific guidelines obligate pastors to seek help when a crisis threatens their marriage and, if the potential for separation or divorce persists, require that the district president’s guidance be sought and that Christian counseling be engaged. If such aid fails to restore the marriage, the district president and visitor must be informed prior to any formal separation or divorce proceedings. And, if further counsel fails to help, the district president and pastor shall agree on how the congregation (or other calling entity) is to be informed.²⁵

If the pastor is guilty of sexual sin or desertion, he is to resign or be suspended from his call and the Synod’s roster. If the cause of divorce is uncertain, the district president may require a leave of absence. After further investigation, the district president determines the result of the divorce, which may include various results for the pastor, from remaining in his current assignment and call to removal from office and the Synod roster.²⁶

In the case of removal the Manual notes the possibility of reinstatement, consistent with Bylaw 2.18 of the LCMS. It adds this: “The simple fact of remarriage to a new partner by itself shall not

be construed as persuasive evidence for reinstatement.” This is the only mention of remarriage in the guidelines.²⁷

III. Summary of current LCMS policy regarding divorce and pastors

a. When does divorce disqualify a man for the pastoral office?

Divorce disqualifies a man from the office of public ministry because it creates an obstacle and offense to the proclamation of the Gospel. The only *possible* exceptions are cases that involve fornication or desertion on the part of the wife. Even in such a case continuing service in ministry is not a given.

b. Under what circumstances may a divorced man serve as a pastor?

The ecclesiastical supervisor of a divorced man determines whether he may continue to serve as a rostered member of the Synod. A positive determination requires first that the pastor’s divorce was based on scriptural reasons—that is, his wife’s infidelity. Additional factors, however, are also necessary to determine whether the pastor can serve in a manner that is above reproach. It is possible in rare circumstances that a man whose divorce was not for scriptural reasons may be reinstated to the office.

c. Under what circumstances may a divorced and remarried man serve as a pastor?

The matter of remarriage is a second factor raised in Ov. 6-34. The view therein is that a pastor who was divorced because of his wife’s infidelity or desertion can potentially remain in office, but not if he remarries. The overture holds that 1 Tim. 3:2 and Titus 1:6 mean “no more than one wife.” The CTRC does not share this understanding. Rather, in the CTRC’s view, the remarriage of a divorced or widowed pastor does *not* automatically disqualify a man from ministry. The district president is charged with determining the specific circumstances under which the remarried pastor can serve.

d. Applicability of current policies to the matter of admission to study for the office of public ministry.

The CTRC holds that current COP policies are largely applicable to seminary admission, but not entirely so. Together with the applicant’s district president, the seminaries also play an important role, similar to that which is outlined in the COP Manual. Divorce for an applicant or current student who seeks to serve in public ministry is a serious matter, but whether it disqualifies him from admission or continuing his studies cannot be easily determined. Both applicants and students are sinners in need of forgiveness and guidance. They are growing and maturing in

²² Ibid., 44.

²³ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Council of Presidents Manual: Guidelines, Procedures, and Forms* (Revised April 2024). The manual includes “Guidelines for Dealing with Marital Crisis Involving Separation and Divorce of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Clergy” on pages 04-48 to 04-51.

²⁴ COP Manual, 04-48.

²⁵ Ibid., 04-49 – 04-50.

²⁶ Ibid., 04-50.

many ways, including in a life of faith and sanctification. We do not believe a divorce should automatically disqualify an applicant from admission, but it may. Both the applicant’s district president and the seminary must carefully consider whether the applicant may be formed as a suitable candidate for the office of public ministry whose teaching will conform with Scripture and whose life will adorn the Gospel.

Adopted by the CTRC (unanimously)
May 3, 2025

²⁷ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Handbook: Constitution, Bylaws, Articles of Incorporation* 2023, 99.



November 11, 2024

By Electronic Mail – bsaunders@lcmsside.org

The Rev. Dr. Brian S. Saunders
Chairman, Commission on Theology and Church Relations
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
c/o Iowa East District
1100 Blairs Ferry Road
Marion, IA 52302-3092

Re: 2023 Synod Convention Overture 6-34:
To Prevent Admission, Reinstatement, or Colloquization of a Divorced Man
into the Office of the Public Ministry Who Has Married Another Woman

Dear President Saunders:

You will recall that Overture 6-34 was referred by 2023 Convention Omnibus Resolution A to the Seminaries, to the Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry, and to Council of Presidents. The referral was three-fold, presumably in light of the three topics included in the overture title (Admission – for the Seminaries; Reinstatement – for the Council of Presidents; and Colloquization – for the Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry).

The Boards of Regents of Concordia Seminary and Concordia Theological Seminary recently held our annual joint meeting, at which we discussed what might assist us in giving thoughtful consideration to this overture. To that end, the consensus of each Board was that it would be beneficial to our deliberations to obtain input from, *inter alia*, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations. Thus, I am writing at the request of the Boards to seek such guidance as the CTRC may wish to provide on this topic.

I am aware of *Guidelines For Dealing With Marital Crisis Involving Separation and Divorce of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Clergy* (A Policy statement adopted by the Council of Presidents, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, April 29, 1987), as well as *Divorce and Remarriage An Exegetical Study*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (November 1987). These documents seem primarily to address the circumstances of men already serving in the Office of the Holy Ministry, rather than men who aspire to the office and are seeking admission to a Seminary (the situation that our two institutions would be addressing).

We would welcome a reply from the CTCR addressing whether it believes the criteria enumerated in the foregoing documents (or others) are applicable to Seminary admissions, and any other theological resources you wish to provide, either formally or informally. Thank you for your consideration and response.

In Christ,



Mark O. Stern

Secretary, Concordia Seminary Board of Regents

cc: The Rev. Dr. Thomas Egger
The Rev. Dr. Jon Bruss
The Rev. Dr. Scott Murray
The Rev. W. Max Mons
The Rev. William Cwirla

1. National Witness

REPORTS

**R1, R1.2–R1.2.1, R1.2.4–R1.3, R5.2–R6, R8,
R16–R19, R21–R58, R60, R62.6–R62.7**

OVERTURES

Ov. 1-01

To Celebrate Chinese, Black, Hispanic, Hmong Mission Anniversaries in the United States and Encourage New Mission and Ministry

WHEREAS, Our Lord Jesus Christ gave His Great Commission: “Make disciples of all nations,” (Matt. 28:19) and He gave the Holy Spirit so that His disciples would be “witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8); and

WHEREAS, The Church Triumphant in Revelation 7 is shown to be a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, redeemed and gathered in praise before God on His throne, and these passages have inspired Synod mission efforts in the United States (U.S.) and around the world; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s (LCMS) history includes stories of faithfulness as well as times of failure that point us to Christ in thankful and repentant prayer; and

WHEREAS, God’s Word calls us to “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb. 10:23–25); and

WHEREAS, In this triennium, milestone anniversaries of mission in the U.S. include 90 years of Chinese ministry and 100 years of Hispanic ministry in 2026; 150 years of Black ministry in 2027; and 50 years of Hmong ministry in 2028; and these milestones serve as reminders of Christ’s faithfulness and opportunities to stir up one another toward love and good works; and

WHEREAS, More than half (52.7 percent, according to the 2020 Census) of all children in the U.S. under the age of 18 today are of a non-European heritage, and will be part of the ongoing and new ministry of the whole Synod, including of the 500+ ministries in existence today as a result of these mission efforts; and

WHEREAS, The mission efforts have also resulted in the formation of an All Nations Council, made up of representatives of many of these Synod ministries in the U.S., including Black Ministries of the Southeastern District, Black Ministries of the Southern District, Chinese Lutherans in Mission Building, the Eritrean Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society in North America, the Evangelical Mekane Yesus Lutheran Fellowship in North America, the Hispanic Missionary League & National Hispanic Convention, the Hmong Mission Society, LCMS Office of National Mission (ONM), Messiah for Muslims, the Multi Asian Gathering, LCMS Native American ministries of the Northern Cheyenne and Navajo Nation, the Oromo Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society, and the Sudanese Lutheran Mission Society, that has convened five times in locations throughout the U.S., meeting with and learning from local ministers and districts, building capacity for

collaboration, praying together and discerning opportunities for engagement together in mission, with and to people of all ethnicities and languages in the U.S.; therefore be it

Resolved, That congregations commemorate these milestone anniversaries by holding events, creating displays, sponsoring mission projects, and communicating in newsletters and other media the encouraging news that the Synod is a church of every nation, of all peoples, tribes, and languages (Rev. 7:9), and make known the history of outreach and mission as well as current mission efforts of congregations and districts in the U.S.; and be it further

Resolved, That congregations provide information to members about the Synod’s resources that make known the Law-Gospel faithfulness of Christ for all peoples, that make known the Synod’s condemnation of racism, and that provide guidance for outreach and witness to people who are not yet part of the church; and be it further

Resolved, That the LCMS Communications department regularly spotlight in Synod publications, on the web, in social media, and in e-newsletters practical ways that congregations and districts are witnessing across ethnic and language boundaries, especially in their own communities; and be it further

Resolved, That the ONM work with Concordia Publishing House (CPH) to prepare materials to facilitate congregational and family ministry among people of many languages and cultures in the U.S., which would include all CPH worship material of its Spanish, Chinese, French, and other language hymnals being made available in Lutheran Service Builder; and be it further

Resolved, That the ONM work with CPH to add theologically sound materials in English that originated in Black/African American, Chinese, Hispanic, and Hmong traditions to the materials available in Lutheran Service Builder; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention lift our hearts in gratitude and praise to God, standing to sing the Doxology in celebration of His mission in the U.S. among people of all ethnicities and languages, giving thanks for the many individuals who have served in these ministries.

Board for National Mission

Ov. 1-02

To Support 150th Anniversary of Synod Black Ministry and Promote Renewed Emphasis

WHEREAS, Black Lutherans have played a significant role in the history and mission of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Lutheran Black Ministry within the geographic area now served by the Southeastern District of the Synod has had vital and lasting impact on the work of the Church, including, but in no way limited to, such influential figures as:

- Rev. Thomas Frye, who was born on George Washington’s estate, and who, after having been brought to North Carolina, studied the Lutheran Confessions, was licensed to preach by the Tennessee Synod in 1868, and became perhaps the first African American Lutheran minister in the Carolinas;
- Rev. Daniel Wiseman (1858–1942), who was one of the most distinguished theological graduates of Howard University at the time and the first Lutheran African American pastor in Washington, D.C., serving the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, and

becoming known as the “mayor of the city’s neglected element” because of his work among the poor and dispossessed;

- Rev. Nils Bakke, a white pastor who founded numerous black Lutheran congregations and Immanuel Lutheran College in North Carolina before partnering with Rosa Young in the growth of black Lutheran churches and schools in Alabama;
- Rev. R.O.L. Lynn, who was a pastor at Grace Lutheran Church in Greensboro, N.C., taught at Immanuel Lutheran College, and went on to be the first African American to lead a Lutheran college, serving as the president of Alabama Lutheran Academy; as well as
- Immanuel Lutheran College in Greensboro, N.C. (1903–1961), which had the core mission to educate African Americans, training men for the ministry and both men and women for teaching positions; and the 54 black congregations, which, through realignment of districts within the Synod, came to be part of what is now the Southeastern District; and
- Other faithful servants like the Rev. William Schiebel;

and

WHEREAS, The official 150th anniversary celebration of Black Ministry in the Synod, scheduled to be held in Charlotte, N.C., July 7–10, 2027, provides an opportunity to reflect on this legacy, celebrate its impact, and look toward the future; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give praise and thanks to God for the history of Black Ministry throughout the Synod over the last 150 years; and be it further

Resolved, That the President of the Synod be directed to provide support for such celebration and a renewed emphasis on Lutheran Black Ministry.

Southeastern District

Ov. 1-03

To Give Thanks to God for 150 Years of Black Ministry

WHEREAS, Christ our Lord commissioned His church to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19–20); and

WHEREAS, Revelation 5:9, 13:7, and 14:6 speak of salvation freely offered and the proclamation of the Gospel “to every nation and tribe and language and people”; and

WHEREAS, Many other passages of Holy Scripture testify to God’s love for all people and our obligation to likewise love our neighbors regardless of ethnic, geographic, or social background; and

WHEREAS, 2027 marks the 150th anniversary of Black Ministry within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) with its establishment at Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, Ind. at the 1877 convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America; and

WHEREAS, The history of Black Ministry within the LCMS as the Rev. Dr. Richard C. Dickinson aptly put it is one of both “roses and thorns” (*Roses and Thorns* [Concordia Publishing House, 1977]); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Northern Illinois District celebrate the missionaries, teachers, churches, and schools involved in this work; and be it further

Resolved, That the district lament failure to meet the scriptural standards of love for one another; and be it further

Resolved, That we commend the 2023 Northern Illinois District study on *Crossing Thresholds: to Others* mandated by the 2022 district convention (NID Res. 3-03A; nidlcms.org/ethnic-bible-study-intro) and 2019 Res. 11-04A, “To Affirm the Common Humanity of All People and Ethnicities”; and be it further

Resolved, That the district reaffirms the scriptural condemnation of racism in all its forms; and be it further

Resolved, That the district encourage the study of the history of Black Ministry in the LCMS through books such as *Roses and Thorns: The Centennial Edition of Black Lutheran Missions and Ministry in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (Richard C. Dickinson [Concordia Publishing House, 1977]) and *Light in the Dark Belt: The Story of Rosa Young as Told by Herself* (Concordia Publishing House, 1950), films such as *The First Rosa*, and other sources; and be it further

Resolved, That able LCMS scholars be encouraged to provide an updated history of Black Ministry within the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That pastors, commissioned ministers, and lay people involved in this work be encouraged to record their reflections and personal accounts for the sake of preserving our knowledge of this important work; and be it finally

Resolved, That the 2026 Synod convention adopt this resolution generally as is and that resources be provided to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Black Ministry in the LCMS in 2027.

Northern Illinois District

Ov. 1-04

To Encourage Outreach and Ministry on College and University Campuses

WHEREAS, The English District is known for its support for and encouragement of ministry among college students, with more than 18 different campuses served by its congregations and by supporting nine ministries with funding from the district in the past triennium; and

WHEREAS, There are 164 LCMS U chapters and 420 congregations across the Synod engaged in some form of college student ministry; and

WHEREAS, Ninety-five percent of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) congregations report being within a 45-minute drive of a college or university campus; and

WHEREAS, There is a recognized need to train leaders for the future of the church, both as lay leaders and professional church workers; and

WHEREAS, Baptized and confirmed members of LCMS congregations attending college or university at a distance from their home congregation need a place to receive Word and Sacrament ministry and to grow in faith and service; and

WHEREAS, Even though the colleges and universities within the Concordia University System (CUS) are blessings to the church at large and to the students who attend them, many LCMS students

choose to attend a public or private school outside of CUS to pursue their academic and professional goals; and

WHEREAS, According to a recent Barna survey, 52 percent of U.S. adults age 18–22 do not identify as Christian and/or do not know who Jesus is (barna.com/research/teens-and-jesus/, accessed Feb. 18, 2025); and

WHEREAS, College and university campuses are vast international mission fields, with over 1.1 million students from around the world attending during the 2023–24 academic year, many of whom came from nations where Christians are in the minority or outlawed entirely (opendoorsdata.org); therefore be it

Resolved, That the English District in convention give thanks to God for the faithful work being carried out by the campus ministries within the district; and be it further

Resolved, That every congregation in the district be encouraged to connect their college-bound members with the appropriate LCMS campus ministry or local congregation; and be it further

Resolved, That the district in convention commend the LCMS Youth Ministry for their efforts to support the work of LCMS U chapters and campus ministry workers; and be it further

Resolved, That the district in convention give thanks to God for the work of LCMS recognized service organizations supporting work on campuses, specifically the Lutheran Campus Mission Association and International Student Ministry, Inc.; and be it finally

Resolved, That the district in convention memorialize the 2026 Synod convention to reinstate a full-time director of Campus Ministry within the Office of National Mission to coordinate, support, and encourage outreach and discipleship on college and university campuses.

English District

Ov. 1-05

To Encourage and Support Campus Ministry in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Preamble

Southern Illinois District President the Rev. Heath Curtis has shared (while serving as LCMS Stewardship Coordinator), “In a sea of unbelief, LCMS campus ministry gives our kids an island of community, support, and living faith. [I]n my work...I tell people: the best bang for your mission buck today is campus ministry. Hands down!” (“Ministry Readiness Study Report,” cidlcms.org/resources/misioneducationtoolkit/CIDExecutiveSummary.pdf, accessed Jan. 1, 2026). Campus ministry presents a tremendous mission opportunity for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). Every year, hundreds of thousands of young adults—many of them not knowing the teachings of Scripture at all, let alone the Gospel—enter college. While attending, those who are Christian have their faith tested, questioned, or neglected. Many are formed by a culture that is hedonistic, materialistic, legalistic, and in some ways demonic. Nevertheless, research shows that young people today are deeply interested in spirituality, purpose, and truth. Many are open to a serious Christianity rooted in conviction and authenticity.

For over a century, the Synod has provided faithful pastoral care, spiritual nurture, and Gospel proclamation to students through its campus ministries. These bring the Word and Sacraments of Christ

to students in critical years of faith formation, extend Christ’s mission to the nations on campus, and serve as training grounds for future faithful church members and leaders.

WHEREAS, Young men and women continue attending colleges and universities throughout the nation in significant numbers, and these campuses are to be regarded as mission fields for the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; and

WHEREAS, Longitudinal research indicates that behavioral aspects of religiosity (such as worship attendance and devotional practices) tend to decline in the first semesters of university attendance, even though the personal importance of faith often remains stable (Carolyn Barry and Larry Nelson, “The Role of Religion in the Transition to Adulthood for Young Emerging Adults,” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 34, no. 3 [2005], 245–255); and

WHEREAS, A national survey of U.S. college freshmen found that the percentage reporting “no religious preference” increased from about 10 percent in 1986 to about 31 percent in recent years, while those identifying with a Christian denomination declined from approximately 81 percent to 60 percent (Helen Gibson, “College Freshmen Increasingly Drop Religion,” July 13, 2017, research.lifeway.com/2017/07/13/college-freshmen-increasingly-drop-religion/), and a 2025 Pew Research report indicates that only 46 percent of adults aged 18–24 (the prime college age) identify as Christian (Gregory Smith et al., “Decline of Christianity in the U.S. Has Slowed, May Have Leveled Off,” Feb. 26, 2025, pewresearch.org/religion/2025/02/26/decline-of-christianity-in-the-us-has-slowed-may-have-leveled-off/); and

WHEREAS, Despite this trend toward disaffiliation, surveys also reveal a growing openness among young adults to spiritual questions, faith discussions, and “serious Christianity,” with over 70 percent of Generation Z responding they are “at least somewhat motivated to keep learning about Jesus throughout their lives” (Barna Group, *The Open Generation*, barna.com/research/barna-trends-2025-pt-1/); and

WHEREAS, Even among students who identify as nonreligious, a majority report interest in conversations about purpose, morality, and transcendence—fertile ground for the seed of God’s Word on college campuses (Springtide Research Institute, *The State of Religion and Young People 2023* [Minneapolis, 2023]); and

WHEREAS, Pew Research Center has reported that Christians with higher education are as likely as—or even more likely than—those with less education to demonstrate high levels of religious commitment, such as regular worship, prayer, and the importance of faith (Pew Research Center, “In America, Does More Education Equal Less Religion?,” April 26, 2017, pewresearch.org/religion/2017/04/26/in-america-does-more-education-equal-less-religion/); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has a long and faithful tradition of campus ministry through congregations, Lutheran Student Fellowship, and LCMS U chapters, which connect college students and scholars with Word and Sacrament ministry; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has long recognized the importance of deliberately supporting, expanding, and funding campus ministries that are directly connected to full-time Word and Sacrament ministry; therefore be it

Resolved, That we give thanks to the one true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—for past and current Synod campus ministries and

for the pastors, workers, lay leaders, and congregations engaged in this vital mission; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod encourage its districts, circuits, and congregations to actively and creatively seek ways to establish, develop, and fund new campus ministries, especially in areas with significant college or university student populations; and be it further

Resolved, That all campus ministries be encouraged to maintain a direct connection to full-time Word and Sacrament ministry, either through a nearby LCMS congregation or by forming a preaching station or mission congregation in their own right; and be it further

Resolved, That districts, circuits, and congregations be encouraged to maintain, support, and revitalize as necessary, but certainly not abandon, existing strategically valuable campus ministries and campus ministry locations; and be it further

Resolved, That all districts, circuits, congregations, and campus ministries embrace dual ministry goals of:

- Evangelizing the unchurched and seeking students interested in serious Christianity;
- Sustaining and nurturing LCMS and other Christian students through the Means of Grace;

and be it further

Resolved, That the LCMS Office of National Mission (ONM) establish a Campus Ministry Coordinator (or similar title, or equivalent duties as assigned), who will serve the Synod by assisting and advising districts, circuits, congregations, and campus ministries in strengthening existing campus ministry work and establishing new campus ministry preaching stations and congregations throughout the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That ONM continue conducting a LCMS Campus Ministry Worker conference, to help encourage collegiality, support, and cooperation among the various campus ministries of the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That ONM sponsor or conduct regional and national LCMS U conferences, for students, college-aged young adults, and campus ministry workers to attend and be built up in the faith, strengthened in the knowledge and fear of the Lord, encouraged in the Gospel and in the fellowship they share in Christ, and to interact with teachers and presenters who will help them thoughtfully to engage both classic and contemporary issues faced by college students; and be it further

Resolved, That ONM investigate various funding models for domestic mission work on the nation's college campuses, and issue a report to the Council of Presidents and the Board for National Mission no later than July 2028; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod not waver in upholding campus ministry as a significant mission priority from the national to the congregational level, constantly listening to the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest" (John 4:35); and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod and its districts, circuits, and congregations integrate campus ministry into their strategic mission and stewardship planning, recognizing that campus ministry is an investment in the church's present and future.

Board for National Mission

Ov. 1-06

To Increase Church Planting at the Parish Level

WHEREAS, The Synod Office of National Mission (ONM) currently is supporting church planting ministry across the Synod through resources, training, and grants; and

WHEREAS, The districts and congregations of the Synod maintain numerous mercy missions and ministries to care for those in their communities; and

WHEREAS, The process of planting new congregations is a priority of the work of the ONM; and

WHEREAS, Our Lord Jesus Christ wants all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4) and has commanded His Church to make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching (Matt. 28:19); and

WHEREAS, Acts 2:42 shows that the Church of baptized believers gathered around the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments, which are foundational to the life and mission of the Church both in function and in goal; and

WHEREAS, The early Christians, having been gathered around Word and Sacrament, were sent into the world and established new churches as they went; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has historically planted most of its congregations effectively through daughter congregations, beginning with preaching stations that grew into new congregations; and

WHEREAS, The establishment of preaching stations through existing congregations and their pastors represents a faithful and cost-effective means of planting new churches by leveraging existing congregational structures; and

WHEREAS, This historic pattern of Word and Sacrament expansion allows the local congregation (uniquely suited as the front-line mission outpost) to be the driving force in church planting; and

WHEREAS, the Synod's human care efforts and community outreach provide natural connection points for the proclamation of the Gospel, which can lead to the formation of preaching stations and, eventually, new congregations; and

WHEREAS, Special attention should be given to regions where people do not have access to the seven marks of the Church, as outlined in Luther's Church and Ministry (*Luther's Works* AE 41:148–65); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod encourage districts, circuits, and congregations to plant churches through preaching stations supported by existing congregations and their pastors; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod encourage congregations to consider ways in which their human care efforts may be paired with Word and Sacrament ministry, so that new worshiping communities may form around the Means of Grace; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod commend this model of church planting as a faithful, practical, and historically grounded approach to fulfilling Christ's command to make disciples of all nations.

Board for National Mission

Ov. 1-07**To Study, and To Make Recommendations to Stop and Reverse, Long Decline in Synod Membership**

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, founded in 1847, has historically been one of the largest Lutheran bodies in the United States; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has always placed a strong emphasis on confessional fidelity, education, and mission work; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has experienced periods of remarkable growth, especially after World War II, leading to a peak in membership in the latter half of 20th century; and

WHEREAS, In 1980, the Synod reported 2,719,319 baptized members; 6,048 congregations; 1,453 elementary schools; 59 high schools; 11 colleges in the United States; and three seminaries (one in Canada); and

WHEREAS, In 2024, the Synod reported 1,635,076 baptized members; 5,794 congregations; 660 elementary schools; and 114 high schools; 5 colleges; and two seminaries; and

WHEREAS, This decline reflects the aging of our membership, lower birth rates, fewer young families joining our congregations, rural depopulation, and the increasing secularization of our culture; and

WHEREAS, The faithfulness of the Synod to Holy Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, and the Great Commission, along with our traditional forms of worship, are still our greatest strengths and the means through which the Holy Spirit grows Christ's Church; therefore be it

Resolved, That a synodwide conversation be encouraged to take place over the next triennium involving all our congregations, circuit forums, districts, schools, colleges, seminaries, and all other agencies of our church regarding this long trending decline, how to slow it, and ultimately reverse it; and be it further

Resolved, That this synodwide conversation include wherever possible essayists, trained speakers and facilitators with knowledge of the subject, panel discussions, informative videos, and printed material; and be it further

Resolved, That appropriate agencies of the Synod, such as our seminaries and/or the Board for National Mission along with Concordia Publishing House, prepare conversation and study materials to facilitate this synodwide conversation, as well as develop formats by which results and recommendations of these conversations can be submitted to the appropriate agencies for compilation, editing, summarization, recommendations, proposals, and synodwide publication before the 2029 Synod convention; and be it finally

Resolved, That every baptized member of our congregations be encouraged to continue steadfastly in prayer for the success of the Gospel and the prospering of the Synod, that the decline would be stopped, and that a great harvest of souls would be brought in and continue to be added to the church to the end that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10–11).

Christ the King
Los Lunas, NM

Ov. 1-08**To Expand Work of Revitalization and Encourage Use of *re:Vitality* Resources**

WHEREAS, The Synod has prioritized revitalization of its congregations; and

WHEREAS, Many existing Synod congregations have plateaued or are declining in membership or worship attendance; and

WHEREAS, Less than five percent of existing Synod congregations have officially utilized a *re:Vitality* workshop; and

WHEREAS, *Re:Vitality* workshops provide practical training and theological rationale for planning strategically, intentional outreach to the community, and ministry to inactive members; and

WHEREAS, A forthcoming *re:Vitality* workshop provides practical training and theological rationale for intentionally incorporating members for increased involvement; and

WHEREAS, *Re:Vitality* is designed to meet a large-scale need for revitalization at little to no cost to congregations; and

WHEREAS, *Re:Vitality* workshops are faithful to the Scriptures and to the Lutheran Confessions; and

WHEREAS, Congregation revitalization is centered in the new life that is found in God's Word being proclaimed in purity and His Sacraments being rightly administered; and

WHEREAS, The 2013 and 2016 Synod conventions approved the increased focus on revitalization and the expansion of *re:Vitality* from the Office of National Mission (ONM) (2013 Res. 3-08A; 2016 Res. 1-03); therefore be it

Resolved, That Synod congregations be regularly encouraged to engage in biblically based, confessionally faithful best practices concerning planning for the future, outreach to the community, caring for inactive members and intentionally incorporating current members into the life of the church (Matt. 28:19–20; 1 Cor. 3:6; 1 Cor. 14:40); and be it further

Resolved, That districts utilize the ONM's "Exploring God's Mission Here" Bible Study with congregations to help them discern their needs for revitalization efforts; and be it further

Resolved, That congregations be encouraged to make use of *re:Vitality* resources as these are made available; and be it finally

Resolved, That current revitalization efforts in our districts and local congregations be commended.

Board for National Mission

Ov. 1-09**To Encourage Congregations and Agencies to Work Together to Share Resources**

WHEREAS, The Atlantic District was founded in 1906 to address the emerging needs to Gospel mission and ministry; and

WHEREAS, Congregations and agencies in the district were founded with the goal of faithfully and vigorously embracing Gospel mission and ministry; and

WHEREAS, Lutheran high schools in New York City (Martin Luther and Our Savior) and some congregations in Albany (Unity) recently have come together to share resources for the benefit of Gospel mission and ministry, just as other congregations in the district have done in the past; and

WHEREAS, There are more congregations and agencies in the district that would benefit similarly from sharing resources; therefore be it

Resolved, That the district in convention give thanks for collaborative efforts that have been facilitated with congregations, schools, and agencies in the district; and be it further

Resolved, That district leadership establish tangible plans to encourage congregations and agencies to work together and share resources; and be it finally

Resolved, That the congregations and agencies of the district commit themselves to working with district leadership in this effort.

Atlantic District

Ov. 1-10

To Support Lutheran Congregations and Schools in Urban Contexts

Rationale

Throughout its history, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has had congregations and schools in urban contexts. Many of these congregations and schools have ceased operations or have greatly curtailed ministries due to shifts in demographics, even as more people live in urban contexts in the United States. Assisting with parish operation and governance, developing sustainable funding models, encouraging networking for mutual conversation and consolation, and encouraging workers to serve in urban contexts would be ways to invest in urban contexts so that people may continue to hear the good news about Jesus and so that existing congregations and schools may be supported and new congregations and schools may be planted.

Therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks for congregations and schools in urban contexts; and be it further

Resolved, That districts encourage networking among those serving in congregations and schools in urban contexts within circuits and districts so that support and resources may be offered for workers and agencies; and be it further

Resolved, That the Office of National Mission (ONM) work with districts to foster networking for congregations, schools, and workers in urban contexts throughout the Synod for the sake of sharing resources and best practices; and be it further

Resolved, That, as part of the networking, grant opportunities be shared regularly with districts for use in circuits, congregations, and schools in urban contexts to assist with funding ministries; and be it further

Resolved, That the ONM work with districts to provide congregations and schools in urban contexts with administrative assistance for governance that could include payroll services, sharing a bookkeeper, insurance recommendations, strategic planning, and the like; and be it further

Resolved, That demographic resources from the ONM, LCMS Rosters, Statistics, and Research Services, the Lutheran Church Extension Fund, Lutheran Hour Ministries, Concordia Plan Services, and other data-collecting entities be shared with congregations, schools, and workers in urban contexts so that plans for outreach to people in urban contexts may be developed locally; and be it further

Resolved, That the ONM work with districts to plant new congregations and schools in urban contexts; and be it finally

Resolved, That progress on these fronts be reported by districts and other entities of the Synod to the 2029 Synod convention.

Board for National Mission

Ov. 1-11

To Inspire Training for Witness

WHEREAS, Jesus Christ commands His people to make disciples by Baptism and teaching (Matt. 28:19–20); and

WHEREAS, Christians as God’s people are to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9) and to maintain constant preparation “to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15); and

WHEREAS, Martin Luther observed, “We live on earth for no other purpose than to be helpful to others. Otherwise it would be best for God to take away our breath and let us die as soon as we are baptized and have begun to believe. But He lets us live here in order that we may lead other people to believe, doing for them what He has done for us” (*What Luther Says* [CPH, 1959] §3021; WA 12:267), and “The godly rejoice when the Gospel is widely spread, many come to faith, and Christ’s kingdom is increased in this way” (*What Luther Says* [CPH, 1959] §3013; WA 40:II:18); and

WHEREAS, We teach “that the kingdom of God would come among us, and so we pray that ... God’s Word would be proclaimed throughout the world—also by us—that His Spirit might bring others under His gracious reign” (*Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* [CPH, 2017], 249); and

WHEREAS, Christians know and interact with many non-Christians and unchurched people through their vocations and daily lives (e.g., family, coworkers, classmates); and

WHEREAS, Most people who attend church for the first time or for the first time in a long time do so at the invitation of a member who has a relationship with them; and

WHEREAS, In this sinful world, Christians are often hesitant or fearful to speak of Christ with others; and

WHEREAS, Such hesitancy and fearfulness can be addressed through teaching and learning not only the biblical message of the Gospel but also particular ways to become conversant concerning it; and

WHEREAS, There are resources for learning how to share the faith, such as Synod’s *Every One His Witness*, Ongoing Ambassadors for Christ, Jesus Door-2-Door, Lutheran Hour Ministries’ Spiritual Conversations workshops, and so forth, that help prepare Christians for witness to people from various specific backgrounds; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Oklahoma District continue to preach Christ crucified for sinners so that all might believe and be saved; and be it further

Resolved, That the district encourage its pastors and other church workers to inculcate a desire in people to witness, consistent with the Lutheran Confessions, particularly to unchurched people; and be it further

Resolved, That the district in convention encourage all the baptized members of her congregations to recognize they are Christ’s witnesses wherever they are; and be it further

Resolved, That the district in convention direct its circuit visitors to include program time during a minimum of one circuit meeting each year to discuss outreach; and be it further

Resolved, That the district direct the evangelism executive to resource a self-assessment tool that will be sent to the evangelism chair (or equivalent) in each congregation in order to facilitate congregations taking serious and realistic stock of how often and how well they employ recurring parish education opportunities (including, but not limited to, Bible and catechism classes, youth ministry, retreats, etc.) to teach church members key witnessing skills (e.g., listening discerningly to unchurched people, beginning a spiritual conversation, making a simple statement of the Gospel, defending the resurrection), including the provision of opportunity to practice such skills; and be it finally

Resolved, That the district in convention memorialize the Synod to do the same as the above at the 2026 Synod convention.

Oklahoma District

Ov. 1-12

To Confront Increased Idolatry of Our Culture with Clear Confession of Love of Christ and Lutheran Resources in Christian Apologetics

WHEREAS, The Ten Commandments as revealed to us in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 begin with the commandment “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:3 and Deut. 5:7); and

WHEREAS, The propensity of the sinful nature is to engage in both self-sufficiency and relativism as described of Israel in Judges 21:25, “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes”; and

WHEREAS, Sinful blindness and corruption is beyond the understanding of human reason as put forth in Jeremiah 17:9, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”; and

WHEREAS, The heart without Christ accepts idols (false gods) by making the person who accepts them like them as taught in Psalm 115:8, “Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them”; and

WHEREAS, The Church is commanded by our Lord Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19) through holy Baptism and teaching; and

WHEREAS, The Word of God includes apologetics (true and rational defense) in the scope of biblical teaching as Saint Paul described in 2 Corinthians 10:4–6: “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete”; and

WHEREAS, Saint Paul, who was a prolific teacher of the faith and the saving Gospel acknowledged, “I am put here for the defense of the gospel” (Phil. 1:16); and

WHEREAS, God commands us in 1 Peter 3:15: “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect”; and

WHEREAS, God admonishes the Church “to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3); and

WHEREAS, The Small Catechism (SC) instructs us that it is only the Holy Spirit who calls us by the Gospel and “calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith” (SC II, Third Article); and we acknowledge the primacy of the Holy Spirit’s work and His use of the proclamation of the Gospel in conversion, and we also acknowledge the secondary, but helpful, application of clear biblical teaching in respect to apologetics in the face of cultural idolatry; and

WHEREAS, Christian apologetics properly employed by the Church serves the saving Gospel, especially when it is used to demonstrate the futility of worldviews contrary to the Gospel and the importance of rejecting false faiths on the one hand, and when it supports the historical and empirical (real time and space) status, objective truth, and urgency of the Gospel itself on the other; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions demonstrate the powerful employment of the ministerial use of reason for refuting falsehood and presenting the Word of God; and

WHEREAS, The Constitution of the Synod Article III states, “The Synod, under Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, shall ... provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism [Rom. 16:17] and heresy” (Const. Art. III 1); and “Aid congregations by providing a variety of resources and opportunities for... defending their confessional unity in the truth faith” (Const. Art. III 6); and

WHEREAS, It is evident that the current cultural tsunami of idols includes not only false religions (such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, animism, and paganism, to name a few) and atheistic philosophies, but also blatant expressions of satanism, demonic witchcraft, and hedonism; furthermore, there are a host of idols which have permeated the culture including the use of technology, the magnification of artificial intelligence, the worldly priority of career and success, the promotion of addictive states and sloth, the wholesale affirmation of separating what is created (e.g. the human body) from the Creator, and the idol of power, especially when it attempts to nationalize the faith while confusing and melding the two kingdoms; and

WHEREAS, Because of the permeation of these various forms of idolatry in the culture, it is important not only to zero in on single issues, but to have a broader understanding and systematic approach to cultural idolatry, especially as these have seeped into the fabric of the three estates: family, congregation, and society; and

WHEREAS, God has graciously provided us with protection from and empowerment “against the schemes of the devil” (Eph. 6:11) and “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has been greatly blessed with broad resources by the grace of God even in these latter days; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention establish a task force to survey the details of the forms of idolatry currently extant/common in the American landscape, identify resources and expertise already available within our fellowship, and propose next steps to address this issue; and be it further

Resolved, That we urge all pastors, commissioned ministers, and congregations of the Synod to pray for the Church as she is confronted by the cultural idols of our day in such a way that we are able to specify what these idols are, and more importantly how the

Word of Christ supplies all we need to be alerted to, protected from, and equipped for facing our cultural idols; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod task the individual Synod arms, educational institutions, auxiliaries, and recognized service organizations to develop resources in Christian apologetics, as appropriate to their purviews, for alerting the Church to and protecting the Church from the cultural idols confronting Christians in this century in a thorough and systematic manner; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod embrace vigorous Gospel proclamation—timeless worship, evangelism, loving apologetics, and exhortation—to carry the Good News of Christ throughout our culture.

Board for National Mission

Ov. 1-13

To Faithfully Respond to the Resurgence of Young Men and Women in the Church

WHEREAS, The Barna Group reported in the fall of this past year “a significant, surprising resurgence in Christian faith and church attendance led by young men (“New Barna Data: Young Adults Lead a Resurgence in Church Attendance,” *Barna*, Sept. 2, 2025, barne.com/research/young-adults-lead-resurgence-in-church-attendance/); and

WHEREAS, Other cultural sources including *City Journal*, *The New York Times*, *New York Post*, *The Catholic Herald*, *USA Today*, and *Northeastern Global News* have also, during 2024–25, reported a religious resurgence among young adults; and

WHEREAS, While minority reports contradict the above (e.g., Pew Research Center and *The Hill*), many church workers and congregations have reported (anecdotally) the observation of a resurgence of young adults coming to church; and

WHEREAS, Many of these reports point to cultural circumstances possibly accounting for the resurgence including a stronger sense of mortality after the pandemic; the desire for meaningful community in the face of increased cultural isolationism; valuing clear moral frameworks; seeking structure, authenticity, and purpose amidst societal uncertainty; and

WHEREAS, The Church trusts in the Lord’s promise “that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28); and

WHEREAS, The prophet Joel proclaimed God’s Word about the last days, “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters shall prophecy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days, I will pour out my Spirit.” (Joel 2:28–29); and

WHEREAS, St. Peter preached that the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy began at Pentecost (Acts 2:17–18); and

WHEREAS, The Church has the responsibility to understand and live out the variety of gifts given to the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:4–31); and

WHEREAS, God commanded St. Timothy through St. Paul that the young disciple “Let no one despise [him] for [his] youth” (1 Tim. 4:12); and

WHEREAS, Even in the face of numerical decline among our congregations as well as the general numerical decline among American Christian churches, not only are we to always be faithful

to the Great Commission of our Lord while having fervent love for one another, but we ought also be cognizant of, and not surprised by, the Lord working revival within the Church Militant (the Reformation being a case in point); and

WHEREAS, Even in the face of many challenges, the Lord assures His Church that “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17) and that “[God] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks and praise to God for our young men and women in the church and cherish them as among those who are carrying on the saving faith on earth; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod appoint a task force to understand the greatest opportunities and challenges facing our young men and women for being regularly and frequently well fed and nourished through the Word and Sacraments of Christ, for discovering how the church can best serve the practical needs of our young men and women in the three estates and in holy vocations, and for how our young men and women can be best equipped to be strong disciples of Christ, either as active laity or as called workers; and be it further

Resolved, That the findings of the task force not only be disseminated throughout the Synod (e.g., to all ordained and commissioned ministers, congregations, and districts), but that real recommendations be put forth on how we might provide encouragement, support, and resources for caring for and serving the young men and women in our church through the individual arms of the Synod especially the Office of National Mission, educational institutions, auxiliaries, and recognized service organizations; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention affirm President Harrison’s urgency for us to reach out “to young men, women, and families who are increasingly drawn to our congregations because of our authentic biblical teaching and practice. They want it, let’s give it to them.” (Matthew C. Harrison, “‘Abounding in the Word’: Looking Forward,” *The Lutheran Witness*, Dec. 29, 2025, witness.lcms.org/2025/abounding-in-the-word-looking-forward).

Board for National Mission

Ov. 1-14

To Encourage Armed Security at All Synod Schools

WHEREAS, Our Lord has entrusted children to families and the church, charging them to “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4); and

Whereas, The Synod has established and maintained hundreds of early childhood centers, elementary schools, high schools, and universities as a vital mission to educate and catechize children in the one true faith; and

Whereas, The Fifth Commandment obligates us to protect life and care for our neighbor, especially the most vulnerable; and

Whereas, Violent attacks upon schools, especially church-affiliated schools, have tragically increased across our nation in recent years; and

Whereas, Armed protection is a proven deterrent and effective means of stopping threats to children and staff in educational settings; and

Whereas, Many Synod schools currently lack trained, armed security personnel and thereby remain vulnerable to attack; and

Whereas, It is the responsibility of the Synod, in Christian love, to safeguard the lives of those entrusted to our care in our educational institutions; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention direct the Board of Directors and those working in LCMS School Ministry, in consultation with Concordia Plan Services and legal experts, to establish a synodwide standard encouraging all Synod educational institutions to provide trained, armed security personnel during school hours and at major school events; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod encourage and assist congregations, schools, and districts with securing the funding and the training necessary to implement such armed security, recognizing the diversity of school sizes and settings; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod commend congregations and schools that have already taken measures to ensure armed protection of students and staff; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for those who serve as law enforcement officers, security personnel, and guardians of the innocent, and implore the Lord's continued protection over our schools, children, and teachers.

Circuit 6 (Merrill)
North Wisconsin District

Ov. 1-15

To Appeal to Lutheran Schools to Use Only Biblically Sound Curricula and Books

WHEREAS, When the disciples asked Jesus Christ, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (Matt. 18:1), He called a little child to Him and said,

Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes! (Matt. 18:6–7 NKJV)

and Luke records the same warning from Jesus in Luke 17:1–2; and

WHEREAS, Luther's Small Catechism (SC) is a tool for teaching the Bible to children to make us "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus," (SC Preface 6) and to train us in holy living:

From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:15–17 NKJV)

Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it. (Prov. 22:6 NKJV)

and

WHEREAS, The 1973 Synod convention adopted Resolution 2-04, "To Declare Homophile Behavior Sinful" (*Proceedings*, 110), recognizing homophile behavior as intrinsically sinful, and the Synod adopted 2004 Res. 3-05A, "To Affirm Marriage as Union of One Man and One Woman," acknowledging that "Homosexual behavior is prohibited in the Old and New Testaments ... as

contrary to the Creator's design" (*Proc.*, 130), and the Synod adopted 2019 Res. 11-03A, "To Encourage Synod to Develop Resources to Aid Congregations and Schools regarding Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Issues," affirming that "All sexual corruption and confusion result from humanity's fall into sin and often lead to rebellious and sinful acts against God's will (James 1:14–15)" and "Gender is now considered by many in our culture as a social construct rather than a physical reality created by God" (*Proc.*, 215–16); and

WHEREAS, Article II of Synod's Constitution confesses, "The Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice" and "All the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God, to wit: the three Ecumenical Creeds (the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed), the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Large Catechism of Luther, the Small Catechism of Luther, and the Formula of Concord"; and

WHEREAS, Events in 2025 have demonstrated that some administrators, school boards, advisors, teachers, pastors, and district presidents overseeing parochial schools of the Synod may be confused about relations between men and women, equality among God's people, non-Christian religions, and harmful philosophies; therefore be it

Resolved, That all daycares, parochial schools, and high schools of the Synod use only the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions, particularly Luther's Small Catechism and Luther's Large Catechism, when teaching about relations between males and females and God's design for males and females; that progressive social movements that have arisen during the past few years should not be taught or advocated in Synod schools; that there should not be any books in schools of the Synod promoting any of these deviant movements; and that particularly harmful philosophies include but are not limited to the following:

- "Wokeism"—A worldview that America's institutions and traditional moral and social values marginalize and oppress minorities who oppose or live contrary to them (Adam S. Francisco, "Awake or Woke," *The Lutheran Witness*, May 11, 2023; witness.lcms.org/2023/awake-or-woke).
- Critical Race Theory (CRT)—An academic and philosophical discipline that desires to fundamentally alter the control of power between majority and minority groups (Lucas V. Woodford, "Responding to Social Justice & Critical Race Theory," *Seelsorger*, Vol. 6 (2021): 12, 17, 24–26; doxology.us/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/dox_2021_woodford_crt_final2.pdf). CRT holds to the view that white people must admit their social privilege, their fragility in discussing issues of race, and that the United States of America itself was created by white supremacists who were intent on upholding white supremacy. CRT must be rejected because it subverts biblical views of justice by considering whole systems (including the nation, churches, and schools) to be racist (i.e., sinful) and in need of dismantling (See also Woodford at 15–16; Micah 6:8; Gal 2:20; 3:26–28).
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)—While in the common biblical sense, the church includes diverse peoples and talents (1 Cor. 12:12–14; Rev. 7:9), modern emphases

on “diversity, equity, and inclusion” emphasize the unrealistic *equality of outcome* over against *equality of opportunity*, and such emphases have been documented even in a Synod university (2023 Convention Report R64, “Ecclesiastical Visitation of Concordia University Texas,” Office of the President, *Workbook*, 177).

- Anything that promotes homosexuality or other sexual deviancies (LGBTQIA+). This includes questioning a person’s gender, teaching that there are more than two genders, or that a person’s gender can be changed.

Further, Synod schools should not sponsor or participate in any events that advocate, teach or condone any of the above, nor should there be displays of any type that promote any of the above; and be it further

Resolved, That no Synod school teach non-Christian doctrine or precepts or participate in events sponsored by any non-Christian entity that promotes non-Christian doctrine or practices, nor should Synod-sponsored church or school libraries utilize books to advocate non-Christian philosophies, doctrine, or entities; and be it finally

Resolved, That due to the vulnerability of our children, if any of the above harmful philosophies and/or non-Christian religions are taught at any Synod daycare, parochial school, or high school, the appropriate Synod authorities should immediately stop the offensive teaching and/or remove the offensive library or textbooks; if appropriate, the authorities can then use the Synod dispute process, since beginning with the dispute process would drag things on *ad infinitum* while our children are being harmed.

Holy Cross
Kansas City, MO

Ov. 1-16

To Proactively Put in Place National Standards for Our Schools to Protect Students

WHEREAS, Synod congregations and recognized service organizations provide 1,745 schools, which are boldly and successfully reaching children and their families with the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ; and

WHEREAS, Our gracious Lord has blessed us with God-fearing teachers who are simultaneously both saints and sinners; and

WHEREAS, There have been cases of moral failure that have harmed students and damaged the public reputation of schools and the churches who operate them; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has a moral obligation to proactively protect children that we are entrusted with, wielding the first use of the Law through national standards related to the safety of children, which would have the effect of curbing potential inappropriate conduct; and

WHEREAS, The National Lutheran Schools Accreditation (NLSA), which serves as the accrediting body for the Synod, has declined to implement some needed national standards for our schools that could proactively protect children; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention direct the NLSA to implement a national standard that prohibits teachers from communicating with students via Snapchat or any other electronic application that automatically deletes messages so that they cannot

be retrieved by parents or authorities unless they are intentionally saved; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention direct the NLSA to implement a national standard that prohibits teachers from dating former students until the student has reached the age of 18 or older; and be it finally

Resolved, That the NLSA be encouraged to implement other appropriate proactive national standards for our schools, which are intended to curb inappropriate conduct and safeguard the well-being of students and our ministry to them.

Circuit 25 (Kenosha), South Wisconsin District; Circuit 26 (Racine), South Wisconsin District; Circuits 3, 4, and 6 (Metro Northwest/Central/North Shore), South Wisconsin District

Ov. 1-17

To Commend and Give Thanks for Lutheran Schools

WHEREAS, The Synod has maintained a strong and enduring commitment to Lutheran education as a vital expression of its mission to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ; and

WHEREAS, The Synod facilitates one of the largest Christian school systems in the United States, with nearly 1,700 schools—including early childhood centers, elementary schools, and high schools—in addition to Concordia universities that prepare future church and community leaders; and

WHEREAS, Lutheran schools are centers of academic excellence, spiritual formation, formation in Christian character and life shaped by faith, providing children and youth with a Christ-centered education that equips them for lives of faithful service to God and neighbor; and

WHEREAS, These schools serve as powerful outreach arms of local congregations and mission efforts, welcoming students and families from both church and unchurched backgrounds; and

WHEREAS, Teachers, administrators, pastors, and support staff in Lutheran schools labor with faithfulness, skill, and dedication, often under challenging circumstances, to bring the light of Christ into the lives of students; and

WHEREAS, The Holy Spirit in the Scriptures exhorts the Church to honor those who labor among us (1 Thess. 5:12–13), to commend what is good (Phil. 4:8), and to give thanks to God in all things (1 Thess. 5:18); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to God for the ministry of Lutheran schools and for the countless lives shaped by their Gospel-centered mission; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod commend the faithful work of Lutheran school educators, administrators, and congregational leaders who support these ministries with their time, gifts, and prayers; and be it further

Resolved, That districts and congregations be encouraged to invest in, support, and expand Lutheran schools as vibrant expressions of the Synod’s commitment to Christian formation and community engagement; and be it finally

Resolved, That this resolution be shared throughout the Synod and beyond as a public expression of thanksgiving and support for Lutheran schools and those who serve within them, to the glory of God, as they spread the Gospel and build up Christ’s Church.

Board for National Mission

Ov. 1-18

Board for National Mission

To Give Thanks for Lutheran Educators and Administrators

WHEREAS, The Synod has long cherished the role of Lutheran education in forming faith, developing intellect, and preparing young people for lives of Christian service in church and society; and

WHEREAS, Lutheran educators and administrators, serving in just over 1,700 schools—including early childhood centers, elementary schools, high schools, and universities affiliated with the Synod—are daily engaged in the sacred vocation of teaching the faith and modeling the love of Christ; and

WHEREAS, These faithful servants consistently go above and beyond in nurturing students academically, emotionally, and spiritually, even amidst challenges such as cultural shifts, economic strain, and the global pandemic; and

WHEREAS, Many of these men and women serve with limited resources, offering their time and talent for the sake of the Gospel and the next generation of disciples; and

WHEREAS, The Holy Spirit, through the Word, calls us to “encourage one another and build one another up” (1 Thess. 5:11) and to give “honor to whom honor is owed” (Rom. 13:7); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to God for Lutheran teachers, administrators, and school staff who serve in the mission of Christian education across the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That congregations, districts, and educational institutions be encouraged to recognize and celebrate the ministry of Lutheran educators, especially during National Lutheran Schools Week, Teacher Appreciation Week, and other appropriate occasions; and be it further

Resolved, That districts, congregations, and educational institutions make good use of the synodwide effort, “Set Apart to Serve” for encouragement and recruitment of prospective Lutheran school teachers; and be it further

Resolved, That congregations and districts encourage potential Lutheran school administrators to take part in the School Leadership Development program (LuthEd, luthed.org/school-leadership-development-sled/) offered by LCMS School Ministry, making available to all teachers additional continuing education opportunities, including the use of the Concordia University Education Network for teachers to use in the colloquy process; and be it further

Resolved, That districts annually review and set appropriate compensation guidelines as well as adequate health insurance and retirement plans through Concordia Plan Services for their Lutheran school teachers and administrators, strongly encouraging all of their respective congregations or associations with the Synod’s early childhood centers, elementary schools, and high schools to utilize these guidelines and offer these benefits, since as partners in the Gospel, “The laborer deserves his wages” (1 Tim. 5:18); and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod commend the work of LCMS School Ministry and other support organizations which strengthen and encourage Lutheran schools and educators, sharing this resolution widely as a tangible expression of heartfelt gratitude for those who teach and lead in the name of Christ.

Ov. 1-19

To Increase and Support Establishing New and Strengthening Current Schools

WHEREAS, The Synod’s Lutheran schools afford opportunities for mission work as they teach the Word of God and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to Christians and non-Christians alike; and

WHEREAS, Lutheran schools also exist for the purpose of assisting and supporting Christian parents in their God-given vocation of rearing their children in the Christian faith and life; and

WHEREAS, Christian parents desire that their children grow up believing in their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and that they learn to live as faithful, responsible, God-fearing citizens in the world in which God has placed them; and

WHEREAS, Lutheran schools have played a vital role in the church’s mercy work in the society and culture in upholding and revitalizing the God-given estates of the home, church, and state; and

WHEREAS, The Large Catechism (LC) states, “... if we wish to have excellent and able persons both for civil and Church leadership, we must spare no diligence, time, or cost in teaching and educating our children, so that they may serve God and the world” (LC I 172); and

WHEREAS, Lutheran schools have historically and rightly emphasized doctrine and practice that is faithful to the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions and curricula informed and shaped by the educational reforms of the Lutheran Reformation; and

WHEREAS, The most vital Lutheran schools have historically been closely connected to Lutheran congregations with well-trained Lutheran teachers and administrators; and

WHEREAS, Lutheran schools have been among the most important ways in which the Synod’s congregations have ministered to society and been strengthened for growth to *Tell the Next Generation* the Gospel of Christ; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks and praise to God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—for all our current elementary and secondary schools and for the many opportunities for strengthening current schools and for planting new schools; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention direct the Office of National Mission (ONM) to form a task force on facilitating the growth and expansion of Lutheran schools; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force work collaboratively with districts in identifying new areas for establishing Lutheran schools within their districts by providing resource support (e.g., feasibility studies, financially sustainable models for funding, etc.) to the districts for congregations to establish schools alone or in cooperation with other congregations and circuits; and be it finally

Resolved, That the task force work to identify and provide resources to establish and “strengthen the Lutheran ethos” in our schools (2016 Res. 8-01A, 2016 *Proceedings*, 181–82); and be it finally

Resolved, That we thank and praise God for the exceptional service being conducted in the area of LCMS School Ministry within the ONM as we launch this new effort.

Board for National Mission

Ov. 1-20

To Include Homeschool Enrollment in Statistical Reports of the Synod

WHEREAS, The Synod tracks Lutheran schools and their enrollees in its statistical records; and

WHEREAS, The homeschools of our congregation members are Lutheran schools; and

WHEREAS, A full accounting of all Lutheran schools and all students so enrolled is essential for congregations, districts, and the Synod to support such educational endeavors; therefore be it

Resolved, That each congregation include as a separate category in the statistical reports of the Synod the number of households engaged in homeschooling and the number of children, preschool through twelfth grade so enrolled; and be it further

Resolved, That congregations, districts, and the Synod account for all Lutheran schools in their promotion and support of Lutheran education.

Circuit 14 (Austin)
Minnesota South District

Ov. 1-21

To Encourage Faithful Youth Ministry and to Initiate Synodwide Study of Generation Alpha

WHEREAS, Our Lord Jesus Christ has commanded His Church to make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching the baptized (Matt. 28:19–20), and to raise up successive generations in the faith; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, through the Office of National Mission (ONM) (Youth Ministry in particular), has conducted research to help congregations better understand and retain Millennials, notably publishing *Relationships Count: Engaging & Retaining Millennials*, a three-phase research project that used surveys and focus groups to gain a deeper understanding of retention rates of young people in the Synod; and

WHEREAS, The *Relationships Count* project and its associated resources have emphasized the importance of sustained, faithful relationships (pastoral, congregational, peer, and family) in forming and keeping young adults integrated in the Church; and congregations that prioritize sustained Gospel-centered relationships are better positioned to shepherd youth into adult discipleship; and

WHEREAS, The *Relationships Count* project attempted some forecasting of the spiritual care needs of Generation Z youth in the final chapter of the published book, making use of and interpreting data collected in other demographic and sociological studies; and

WHEREAS, Such broader, nationally representative research shows important context about the religious lives of American adolescents: as of a 2020 Pew Research Center study, about 63 percent of U.S. teenagers (ages 13–17) identify as Christian, compared with a higher share (72%) among their parents; a small set (4%) of U.S. teenagers (ages 13–17) are affiliated with non-Christian faiths; and fully a third (32%) of U.S. teenagers are religiously unaffiliated; additionally, Pew found that roughly four in ten U.S. teens report attending religious services at least once or twice a month, with about one-third reporting weekly attendance, and that the attendance of both teenagers and their parents is mostly identical, percentage-wise; this data highlights both the continuing

presence of faith among many teenagers and the pastoral challenge of forming regular worship and faith practices among them and their families (Religious affiliation among American adolescents, pewresearch.org/religion/2020/09/10/religious-affiliation-among-american-adolescents, accessed March 20, 2026); and

WHEREAS, Long-standing youth and religion research (including the National Study of Youth and Religion and related projects) has repeatedly shown that family practice, congregational relationships, and accessible catechesis matter greatly in whether adolescents articulate and continue in a robust Christian faith into adulthood; and

WHEREAS, A new generational cohort, commonly labeled Generation Alpha (roughly children born beginning around 2010), is coming of age in distinct cultural and technological circumstances that differ from Millennials and Gen Z; and understanding Generation Alpha's particular formation patterns, media ecosystems, family structures, and religious orientations will help the Synod equip pastors, teachers, and other church workers to help them and their families to grow in the Christian faith and piety; and

WHEREAS, The Synod benefits when the ONM, auxiliaries such as Lutheran Hour Ministries, and recognized service organizations (RSO) (such as Higher Things) collaborate to produce research and resources that are both academically sound and pastorally useful; therefore be it

Resolved, That the 2026 Synod convention give thanks to God for the work of LCMS Youth Ministry, Concordia Publishing House, Higher Things, and countless pastors, teachers, other church workers, youth leaders, and parents, who have labored faithfully to serve children, adolescents, and young adults across the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod give continued thanks for the *Relationships Count* research and resources, and for the practical guidance it has supplied to congregations seeking to form young people in the faith; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod directs the ONM, through LCMS Youth Ministry in cooperation with applicable partners and RSOs, to undertake or commission a focused, methodologically rigorous study of Generation Alpha and their families within the Synod's congregations and schools; and that the purpose of such a study be to identify (1) patterns of religious identity and practice among Generation Alpha, (2) formative influences (family, school, digital media, peers), and (3) concrete, theologically faithful pastoral and educational strategies congregations can employ to baptize, catechize, and nurture this generation in the Christian faith; and be it further

Resolved, That the ONM then produce at least a publicly available summary of findings, along with a set of practical implementation resources (for congregations, districts, and schools) that prioritize baptismal catechesis, regular worship participation, Lutheran doctrine and practice, parental support, and sustained relational ministry, so congregations of all sizes may readily apply the findings in local ministry contexts; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for the faithful service of pastors, teachers, other church workers, youth workers, congregational leaders, and volunteers throughout the Synod, and commend to the Church's continued prayer and support those who labor to bring the Gospel to our young people and to form them in the life of the Church.

Board for National Mission

Ov. 1-22**To Affirm Atlantic District Commitment to Education and Formation**

WHEREAS, The 2022 Atlantic District convention passed Resolution 2022-01-03, “To Explore Future Lutheran Higher Education Opportunities in the East Coast Region” (2022 Atlantic District *Proc.*, 11, ad-lcms.org/now/district-events/convention/convention-61); and

WHEREAS, The 2022 district convention passed a resolution (2022-01-09, “Encouraging the Use of the Ancient Catechumenate Model”) to affirm the ancient catechumenate; and

WHEREAS, In 2024, an education committee was formed by the district board of directors to consider current and future opportunities for Lutheran education and formation; and

WHEREAS, The district has committed resources specifically to the mission and ministries of Martin Luther School in Queens and Our Saviour Lutheran School in The Bronx, among other schools; and

WHEREAS, The district has a tradition of forming solid theological minds grounded in the evangelical, catholic, and reforming tradition of the Augsburg Confession in its congregations and schools; therefore be it

Resolved, That the district in convention affirm the ongoing work of its education committee; and be it further

Resolved, That the district in convention encourage her congregations to recommit themselves to the tradition of raising up and forming solid theological minds grounded in the evangelical, catholic, and reforming tradition of the Augsburg Confession; and be it finally

Resolved, That the district in convention memorialize this resolution to the 2026 Synod convention.

Atlantic District

Ov. 1-23**To Affirm and Encourage Parents as Primary Teachers of the Faith**

WHEREAS, In the Scriptures, we read: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4); and

WHEREAS, Luther writes in the Small Catechism, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Eph. 6:4)” (SC Table of Duties, For Parents); and

WHEREAS, Luther, in his Large Catechism explanation to the Fourth Commandment states, “But [parents] should consider that they are obligated to obey God. First of all, they should seriously and faithfully fulfill their office, not only to support and provide for the bodily necessities of their children, ... but, most of all, they should train them to honor and praise God [Proverbs 22:6]” (LC I 168–69); and

WHEREAS, Luther further declares, “let everyone know that it is his duty, on peril of losing the divine favor, to bring up his children in the fear and knowledge of God above all things [Proverbs 1:7]” (LC I 174); and

WHEREAS, Parents are, therefore, entrusted with the ultimate responsibility of teaching the faith and catechizing their children; and

WHEREAS, Contrary to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, parents may neglect their role as the primary teacher of the faith in the lives of their children or be given the impression that faith formation in their children is a primary work of the pastor, teacher, or other called minister of the congregation, rather than the father and mother; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention clearly and unequivocally reassert and affirm the scriptural truth that God has given to parents to be the primary teachers of the faith in their children; and be it further

Resolved, That parents within the church be regularly encouraged to undertake and fulfill the duty God has given them to bring up their children in the fear and knowledge of God; and be it further

Resolved, That the pastors, teachers, and other commissioned ministers of the church be encouraged to affirm parents in their God-given duty and to support, equip, and encourage them, through prayer and other means, to fulfill the duty God has given them; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod use its resources and influence to encourage parents in their God-given role as the primary teachers of the faith for their children.

St. John
Seward, NE

Ov. 1-24**To State Religious Objection to Government Interference with Parents’ Duty**

WHEREAS, The Small Catechism confesses that God has created and given to each person “my body” (SC II, Second Article); and

WHEREAS, The body of the baptized is the temple of the Holy Spirit and belongs not to government or its institutions (such as schools [public or private]), but to God (1 Cor. 6:19); and

WHEREAS, The Fourth Commandment, as explained in the Large Catechism, places all authority over a child on the parents of that child, so that we confess, “For all authority flows and is born from the authority of parents. Where a father is unable alone to educate his ... child, he uses a schoolmaster to teach the child. ... So all whom we call ‘masters’ are in a place of parents and must get their power and authority to govern from them” (LC I [Fourth Commandment] 141–142); and

WHEREAS, The Scriptures and the Catechism do not limit parental authority to a particular age, but state that God has given authority to parents over all children who live under their roof; and

WHEREAS, The doctrine of the two kingdoms affirms prescriptively that while the government bears the sword for civil order (Rom. 13:4), it allows the kingdom of the left no jurisdiction relative to the responsibilities God has given to parents in the spiritual and moral upbringing of their children; and

WHEREAS, Government in our society—at federal, state, and local levels—has attempted or may attempt to step between children and their parents (impeding the parents’ duty to raise their children in the faith and life of the Christian confession) in various ways, including but not limited to:

- laws that mandate vaccines for children even without parents' approval;
- laws that allow, recommend, or give children sex change operations or medical procedures for "transitioning" minors without parents' approval;
- laws that permit minors to get an abortion without parents' approval;
- laws that label parents who refuse their minor children vaccines, sex change operations and procedures, or abortions as engaging in child abuse;
- laws that remove children from the custody of parents who refuse their minor children vaccines, sex change operations and procedures, or abortions;
- school policies that teach children various anti-scriptural social agendas without parents' approval;
- school policies that mandate vaccines for children even without parents' approval;
- school policies that encourage children to "transition," use gender-confusing language, or introduce sexual or gender identities that do not conform with the child's birth sex without parents' approval;

therefore be it

Resolved, That the English District boldly, unequivocally, and plainly state its objection on the grounds of religious belief and constitutionally protected religious liberty, to any federal, state, or local law or mandate, and any school policy that imposes the government's will over the parents' duty to raise their children or that aids the minor child's will to be kept secret from the parents; and be it further

Resolved, That the English District state plainly its willingness and readiness to support, come to the aid of, and speak in defense of any parents within sister congregations of the district who face such interference, whether by providing pastoral care, connecting them with legal or educational resources, or advocating publicly and lawfully on their behalf; and be it further

Resolved, That the district urge Synod in convention and each district to boldly, unequivocally, and plainly state their unconditional agreement with this religious objection to government interference in Christian parents' duty to raise their children in the faith and life of the Christian confession; and be it further

Resolved, That the district urge the Synod and each district to boldly, unequivocally, and plainly denounce any teachings of any church bodies that seek to advocate for or tolerate the government interfering with parents' duties in raising their children in the Christian faith and life; such teachings are unbiblical, unchristian, false, opposed to God, and worthy of condemnation; and be it further

Resolved, That the district urge member congregations and all their families to benefit their children with the use of Lutheran schools or Lutheran homeschools/hybrid cooperatives, or to become involved in their local public school government, that the parents may safeguard their God-given responsibility, and that the children may be protected from such government overreach and godless agendas and may be raised in the proper fear of the Lord; and be it finally

Resolved, That the English District encourage member congregations and pastors to equip parents through ongoing

catechesis and public teaching regarding their God-given vocation, their rights under the law, and the spiritual care of their households.

English District

Ov. 1-25

To State Religious Objection to Government Interference with Parents' Duty

WHEREAS, The Small Catechism confesses that God has created and given to each person "my body" (SC II, Second Article); and

WHEREAS, The body of the baptized is the temple of the Holy Spirit and belongs to God and God alone (1 Cor. 6:19); and

WHEREAS, The Fourth Commandment, as explained in the Large Catechism, places all authority over a child on the parents of that child, so that we confess, "For all authority flows and is born from the authority of parents. Where a father is unable alone to educate his ... child, he uses a schoolmaster to teach the child. ... So all whom we call 'masters' are in a place of parents and must get their power and authority to govern from them" (LC I [Fourth Commandment] 141–142); and

WHEREAS, The Scriptures and the Catechism do not limit parental authority to a particular age, but state that God has given authority to parents over all children who live under their roof; and

WHEREAS, Government in our society—at federal, state, and local levels—may in various ways attempt to step between children and their parents in defiance of scriptural exceptions allowing the government to do so (impeding the parents' duty to raise their children in faith and life of the Christian confession); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Northern Illinois District boldly, unequivocally, and plainly state its objection on the grounds of religious belief to any federal, state, local law, mandate and any school policy—excepting those granted to such by Scripture, such as abuse or neglect according to scriptural definitions—that infringes with the parents' duty to raise their children or that aids the minor child in circumventing parental authority; and be it further

Resolved, That the district state plainly its willingness to recommend resources for any parents within sister congregations of the district who face the challenge of government laws or school policies negating parents' duties to raise their children in the fear of the Lord; and be it further

Resolved, That the district commend parents for their work in raising their children in the training and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4) so that they might be found faithful though surrounded by teachings and influences contrary to the Gospel; and be it further

Resolved, That the district urge member congregations and all their families to benefit their children with the use of Lutheran schools, Lutheran homeschools, and other opportunities for Christian education, that the parents may safeguard their God-given responsibility, and that the children may be protected from such government overreach and godless agendas and may be raised in the proper fear of the Lord; and be it finally

Resolved, That the district urge the 2026 Synod convention to unequivocally and plainly state its objection on the grounds of religious belief to any federal, state, local law, mandate, and any school policy—excepting those granted to such by Scripture, such as abuse or neglect according to scriptural definitions—that infringes with the parents' duty to raise their children or that aids

the minor child in circumventing parental authority and to provide guidelines for parents as it relates to this topic.

Northern Illinois District

Ov. 1-26

To Strengthen Christ-Centered Homes through Family Discipleship Work

WHEREAS, All Christians—whether young or old, single or married, widowed or barren—are placed within a family and entrusted with vocations (Psalm 68:5–6); and

WHEREAS, Moses writes “And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (Deut. 6:6–7); and

WHEREAS, The Pew Research Religious Landscape Study has shown a strong correlation between: (1) growing up in religious homes and remaining in the faith; and (2) frequency of church attendance growing up and frequency of church attendance as an adult (“Religious Landscape Study,” *Pew Research Center*, Oct. 26, 2016; pewresearch.org/religion/2016/10/26/links-between-childhood-religious-upbringing-and-current-religious-identity/, accessed Feb 27, 2026); and

WHEREAS, Faith formation has been misunderstood as primarily the responsibility of the church, while Scripture reveals that parents are the primary influence on faith formation; and

WHEREAS, Family discipleship encourages all households to develop and maintain faith habits of faithfully attending worship, having home devotions, and discussing and living out their faith in their home; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention encourage congregations to pray for families, including single people and married couples without children; and be it further

Resolved, That congregations are commended to support and to partner with all households in family discipleship; and be it further

Resolved, That the Office of National Mission (ONM) be directed to provide resources for parents and other adults who are influencing faith, support for church workers equipping the family, and resources for households to grow in their personal faith; and be it finally

Resolved, That congregations and members thereof be encouraged to support family discipleship resource development by the ONM with their gifts and prayers.

Board for National Mission

Ov. 1-27

To Propose LCMS Men’s Ministry

WHEREAS, Christ warns us that in the last days “Because of the multiplication of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold” (Matt. 24:12, Berean Study Bible [BSB]) and “when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Luke 18:8); and Saint Paul admonishes us “Watch you, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13 BSB); and

WHEREAS, Christian men face increasing hostility from a culture that speaks of “toxic masculinity” and mocks their faith in God; and

WHEREAS, Just as athletes and soldiers have a better chance of success when working together, Scripture teaches: “As iron sharpens iron, so one [man] sharpens another” (Prov. 27:17 BSB); and

WHEREAS, The Synod would reap inestimable benefits from a Christ-centered, Bible-based men’s ministry; therefore be it

Resolved, That we encourage all congregations to become part of the Synod’s men’s ministry to provide opportunities for all Christian men to:

- encourage their Synod brothers in spiritual growth by regular Bible study, prayer, and gatherings on the congregation, circuit, district and Synod level;
- build strong families as faithful sons, brothers, husbands, fathers, and grandfathers;
- confess the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3);
- provide for and protect the church and her pastors;
- visit orphans and widows in their affliction (James 1:27).

Mid-South District

Ov. 1-28

To Study and Recommend Strategies to Advance Congregation-based Older Adult Ministries

WHEREAS, Congregations of the Synod are blessed by growing memberships of active older saints; and

WHEREAS, Older adults, at a different stage of life, may be seeking renewed purpose and value; and

WHEREAS, Older adults, as God’s children, make a significant impact upon the lives of others in the name of Jesus Christ; and

WHEREAS, Older adults are to be looked upon as a special blessing God gives to the Church to be actively used in the mission of the Church; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to God for the gifts and service of older adults in its congregations; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention direct the appropriate synodwide board or office to study and identify resources and strategies to empower congregation-based older adult ministry at the local level and to report its findings and recommendations to the congregations and districts of the Synod; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention encourage the use of this study to strengthen and expand faithful, congregation-based older adult ministries throughout the Synod.

Southeastern District

Ov. 1-29

To Celebrate 500th Anniversary of Luther’s Small Catechism and To Encourage Heads of Households to Teach It in Home

WHEREAS, The year 2029 marks the 500th anniversary of the publication of both Martin Luther’s Small and Large Catechisms; and

WHEREAS, In the year 2029 the Synod will gather for its 70th Regular Convention and, prior to the convention, will choose a convention theme; and

WHEREAS, The Small Catechism (SC) is fundamental for teaching the basic doctrines found in the Scriptures to persons desiring to understand God's truth concerning the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, Confession, and the Sacrament of the Altar, including instructions for individuals (SC Table of Duties) and various prayers; and

WHEREAS, The Small Catechism is a magnificent teaching tool for the head of household to use for the devotional life of the family and teaching foundational biblical truths by using the questions and answers within each chief part, the Table of Duties, basic questions and answers for the family, and daily prayers; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention encourage congregations and various entities within the Synod to recognize and celebrate the treasure for the sake of the church that is Martin Luther's Small Catechism; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod include in its regular convention theme for 2029 the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Small Catechism; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod in convention encourage pastors, congregations, and schools to continue to use the Small Catechism to teach the Christian faith to their members and those considering membership, and encourage members to use the Small Catechism at home for family devotions; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod promote the 500th anniversary of the Small Catechism by publicizing this important event in the history of the Lutheran church and to produce materials that will encourage and equip heads of households to teach the Small Catechism within the home.

Missouri District

Ov. 1-30

To Proclaim 2029 500th Anniversary Year of the Catechism

WHEREAS, 2029 marks the 500th anniversary of the Small and Large Catechisms of Martin Luther; and

WHEREAS, The renewal of catechesis ushered in by Luther's catechisms is arguably the greatest contribution to catechesis since the time of the apostles; and

WHEREAS, The catechisms capture "the pattern of sound words ... in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:13), which is essential for evangelism, mission work, teaching the faith, and the health and growth of the Church; and

WHEREAS, The doctrine and life of the congregations and schools of the Synod are to conform to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions of which the catechisms play a central role; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention proclaim 2029 the 500th Anniversary Year of the Catechism; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention encourage every entity of the Synod to prepare resources, activities, conferences, symposia, continuing education opportunities, educational materials, worship resources, and catechetical materials to equip our congregations, schools, pastors and church workers to "Tell the Next Generation" of the treasure we have in the catechisms for evangelism, discipleship, teaching the faith, the life of prayer, Christian

vocation, mercy work, and confessing Christ to the world; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention direct the Office of National Mission to work with each district of the Synod to coordinate a program of study and celebration for our congregations and schools to commemorate the 500th Anniversary Year of the Catechism; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention encourage each university of the Concordia University System and each seminary of the Synod to engage in an intentional program of study and celebration to commemorate the 500th Anniversary Year of the Catechism; and be it further

Resolved, That preaching, teaching, and worship celebrations of the 500th Anniversary of the Catechism be encouraged throughout the Synod in the year 2029; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to our gracious Lord for the gift of Luther's Small and Large Catechisms, and rise to the singing of hymn, "Lord, Help Us Ever to Retain" (LSB 865):

Lord, help us ever to retain
The Catechism's doctrine plain
As Luther taught the Word of truth
In simple style to tender youth.
Help us Your holy Law to learn,
To mourn our sin and from it turn
In faith to You and to Your Son
And Holy Spirit, Three in One.
Hear us, dear Father, when we pray
For needed help from day to day
That as Your children we may live,
Whom You baptized and so received.
Lord, when we fall or go astray,
Absolve and lift us up, we pray;
And through the Sacrament increase
Our faith till we depart in peace.

Board for National Mission

Ov. 1-31

To Give Thanks for and Offer Renewed Commitment to Work of Atlantic District

WHEREAS, In order to minister the Gospel of Jesus Christ and carry out faithful mission work in the northeastern region of the United States (U.S.) on behalf of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the Atlantic District was founded in 1906; and

WHEREAS, The district's mission and ministry has placed it at the cultural, geographical, and societal margins of the United States; and

WHEREAS, The Lord Jesus' own life and ministry placed Him at the cultural, geographical, and societal margins of the Roman Empire; and

WHEREAS, The district's cultural and geographical location, its history of affirming the Office of the Holy Ministry, and its history of boldly and creatively affirming the evangelical, catholic, and reforming emphases of the Lutheran Confessions position it to offer great gifts to the Synod and the entire church in the crucial work of witnessing to Christ at the margins; therefore be it

Resolved, That the district in convention give thanks to God for nearly 120 years of faithful Gospel service and mission work; and be it further

Resolved, That, modeled after the Lord Jesus Christ, the district in convention encourage its member congregations, workers, schools, and agencies to renew their commitment to missionary work on behalf of the Synod for the cultural, geographical, and societal margins of the U.S.; and be it finally

Resolved, That the district in convention memorialize this resolution to the 2026 Synod convention for the 120th anniversary of the Atlantic District.

Atlantic District

Ov. 1-32

To Engage Work of Concordia Center for the Family

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod upholds the scriptural mandate for families and the Church to nurture faith in the home: “These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road” (Deut. 6:6–7 NIV); and

WHEREAS, Concordia Center for the Family (CCF), under the leadership of Executive Director Rev. Dr. Todd A. Biermann, is a recognized service organization (RSO) of the Synod, dedicated to uniting homes and congregations in making lifelong disciples of Jesus through targeted training and resources for family discipleship; and

WHEREAS, CCF offers practical training opportunities including Family Discipleship Facilitator training, presentations on multiple aspects of family discipleship, and partnerships like the Family Discipleship Initiative with Concordia Seminary, which equip pastors, church workers, and lay leaders to guide families in daily faith formation; and

WHEREAS, in accordance with the Synod’s priority to “strengthen and support the Lutheran Family in living out God’s design” (2016 Resolutions 4-02A, 16-02A), greater engagement with CCF programs would strengthen collaborative ministry between homes, congregations, and RSOs to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20), including by building synergy across districts; and

WHEREAS, CCF has been encouraged by Synod leaders, by leaders of our Concordia seminaries and other Concordia University System schools, by many of the Synod’s district presidents and by scores of local church workers to expand its training opportunities to become more accessible throughout the entire Synod; therefore be it

Resolved, That the 2026 Synod convention encourage all Synod pastors, commissioned workers, lay leaders, and congregations to actively engage with the training and resources provided by CCF, including the participation in Family Discipleship Facilitator training and the utilization of home-centered discipleship materials; and be it further

Resolved, That all members of the Synod be encouraged to pray for the expanding work of CCF and unite in the common biblically-based cause of family discipleship, toward the end that our Synod and all its members would be strengthened by the gifts of Christ,

affirmed in walking together with Christ toward eternity in heaven, and empowered to more brightly shine as lights in the darkness; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod district presidents be requested to promote CCF’s offerings in their districts through newsletters, conventions, and church worker gatherings, aiming to increase awareness and utilization of CCF programs and resources; and be it finally

Resolved, That the 2026 Synod convention affirm the vital role of CCF in supporting the Synod’s family ministries and commit to ongoing prayer and support for expanded engagement with its work.

Christ, Milford, MI; Shepherd of the Hills, Crossville, TN;
Trinity, Springfield, MO

Ov. 1-33

To Commend Family Discipleship Work of Concordia Center for the Family

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is committed to the proclamation of the Gospel and the nurturing of faith in Christ-centered homes and congregations, as affirmed in Constitution Article III 5, which states that the Synod’s objectives include “aid[ing] congregations to develop processes of thorough Christian education and nurture”; and

WHEREAS, Concordia Center for the Family (CCF) is a recognized service organization (RSO) of the Synod, focused on inspiring and equipping Christian leaders to facilitate thriving home-centered, church-supported family discipleship that nurtures faith in families; and

WHEREAS, CCF has faithfully served the Synod by uniting homes and congregations in making lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ, providing resources such as Family Discipleship Facilitator Training, the Faith & Life Survey, daily devotion guides using Luther’s Small Catechism, and Bible studies on God’s design for daily faith formation; and

WHEREAS, CCF seeks to impact the whole earth as families practicing Christian family discipleship will be bold witnesses for Christ to everyone they encounter every day, leading many more to receive the blessings of life in Christ; therefore be it

Resolved, That the 2026 Synod convention recommend CCF for family discipleship training for its pastors, teachers, other workers, and lay leaders; and be it further

Resolved, That the convention commend CCF for its faithful service as an RSO and express gratitude to God for the blessings it has brought to Synod families, congregations, and workers through home-centered discipleship resources and training; and be it further

Resolved, That the convention give thanks for CCF’s role in strengthening the Synod’s mission by supporting parents and caregivers in sharing faith and values with their children, in line with the Synod’s commitment to Christian parenting; and be it further

Resolved, That the President of the Synod be requested to convey this commendation and thanks in writing to the leadership of CCF; and be it further

Resolved, That the convention pray for God’s continued blessing on the work of CCF, that it may bear abundant fruit in the Synod for generations to come; and be it finally

Resolved, That the convention thank CCF and its leaders, including the Rev. Dr. Todd A. Biermann, executive director, for their work to unite homes and congregations in forming disciples of Jesus who will daily walk in faith unto eternal life in heaven.

Christ, Milford, MI; Shepherd of the Hills, Crossville, TN;
Trinity, Springfield, MO

2. International Witness

REPORTS

**R1–R1.2, R1.2.2, R1.2.4–R1.2.5, R5.2, R7–R8,
R12, R56–R57, R62.5**

OVERTURES

Ov. 2-01

To Encourage Prayer, Partnership, and Participation in International Mission

WHEREAS, Scripture exhorts believers to “pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:38) and to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3); and

WHEREAS, Congregations of the Michigan District partner with Lutheran church ministries around the world, such as with Lutheran Church of Uganda through Women of the Pearl, Mission Opportunities Short Term Ministries, Lutheran Association of Missionaries and Pilots, and the Office of International Mission in Puerto Rico through the FORO model (international.lcms.org/events-foros); therefore be it

Resolved, That the district’s Gospel partnership with other Lutheran churches in the world be commended to all Synod congregations as a worthy focus for prayer and thanksgiving in corporate worship; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod encourage its congregations to commit to praying regularly for the Lord to raise up pastors and to prosper the ministry of the Lutheran churches in the world, and to consider supporting their works through their time, talents, and treasures as the Spirit moves them; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod adopt the already commended practice of participation in forums, such as the Latin American FORO, committing to regular support, including a financial commitment; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod consider how the FORO model could be employed to create partnerships between congregations in the Synod and the mission field, and inspire congregation members to be in mission at home and abroad; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod encourage its congregations to prayerfully explore the FORO model as a framework for deepening their connection to the global mission of the Church through financial support and personal involvement.

Michigan District

Ov. 2-02

To Encourage Every Congregation to Adopt a Missionary

WHEREAS, Our Lord has instructed His Church to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has heeded this instruction in part by sending missionaries to many countries in its history; and

WHEREAS, In recent years, the Synod has supported this effort through the Network Supported Missionary (NSM) model, where congregations adopt and support the missionaries of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, This program has been a great success not only in the support of our missionaries, but also in raising the awareness of mission work in our congregations and in joining them and their members in this effort; and

WHEREAS, The purpose of the NSM model is not only financial support, but also the prayers of God’s people for our missionaries; and

WHEREAS, Some congregations do not participate in this effort due to financial limitations, missing out on the joy of supporting a missionary through their prayers and in learning about the work that is going on around the world; and

WHEREAS, Our Lord has given many great and precious promises regarding prayer, and that He is “able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20); and

WHEREAS, Gifts are of great value, significance, and joy to our Lord Jesus; therefore be it

Resolved, That the SELC District in convention encourage all its congregations to adopt a missionary to support with their prayers and, if possible, with their mission giving; and be it further

Resolved, That the district in convention memorialize the Synod in convention in the same, until each and every congregation in our Synod be connected to and praying for one of our missionaries and financially supporting them as they are able.

SELC District

Ov. 2-03

To Direct Board for International Mission to Study Ecclesiastical Supervision, Pastoral Care, and Synod Membership in International Mission Contexts

WHEREAS, The 2023 Synod convention adopted Resolutions 2-03 and 2-06A (2023 *Proceedings*, 124–126), which address matters related to ecclesiastical supervision, pastoral care of missionaries, and Synod membership for international congregations; and

WHEREAS, These matters relate to the responsibility of the Board for International Mission (BIM) under Bylaw 3.8.3; and

WHEREAS, The BIM has already invested significant time studying the possibility and advisability of such arrangements and has determined that reasonable pathways exist; and

WHEREAS, Responsible stewardship requires careful study and appropriate consultation prior to proposing potential actions to the Synod; therefore be it

Resolved, That the BIM continue to study and identify priority considerations related to ecclesiastical supervision, pastoral care, and structural organization in international mission contexts; and be it further

Resolved, That such study include, but not be limited to, examination of the Synod’s historical international districts, prior inclusion efforts, mission-based or associate relationship models, existing international mission structures, and core ecclesiastical needs (including supervision, pastoral care, and call processes), while considering policy based solutions within the existing constitutional and bylaw frameworks of the Synod; and be it finally

Resolved, That the BIM conduct this work with appropriate consultation and submit a written summary of its findings and any recommendations to the 2029 Synod convention.

Board for International Mission

Ov. 2-04

To Promote Divine Call Opportunities for Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology Pastors

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod pastors who are trained through the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT), but who do not have a Masters of Divinity (M.Div.), often do not qualify for job positions as foreign missionaries (including to their country of origin) that are created by the Board for International Mission (BIM); and

WHEREAS, It is the responsibility of the Office of International Mission (OIM) to recruit and recommend candidates to the BIM for divine calls (Bylaw 3.8.3); and

WHEREAS, Scripture teaches us that it is our Lord's desire to increase the number of workers sharing the Gospel: "And [Jesus] said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest'" (Luke 10:2); and

WHEREAS, Scripture also teaches us that the sending of God's laborers is indeed a global outreach: "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8); and

WHEREAS, We as a Synod confess that to do so effectively requires that pastors are sent in a proper manner: "Our churches teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call" (AC XIV); and

WHEREAS, EIIT trained pastors possess the unique cultural knowledge and language skills to serve with great impact amongst their native peoples; therefore be it

Resolved, That the BIM be encouraged to develop inclusive job descriptions (where appropriate) for missionaries that would allow EIIT trained pastors not yet possessing an M.Div. to qualify for more opportunities to engage in Word and Sacrament ministry with overseas populations; and be it further

Resolved, That the OIM be encouraged to recruit broadly from among all categories of ordained pastors in good standing and recommend them to the BIM for divine calls.

Our Savior
Laurel, MD

Ov. 2-05

To Amend Bylaws to Protect Divine Calls of Missionaries

WHEREAS, One of the objectives of Synod is to "extend [the] Gospel witness into all the world" (Const. Art. III 2); our Lord states: "behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." (John 4:35 KJV); and

WHEREAS, The sending and support of missionaries is therefore a vital objective of our Synod; and

WHEREAS, It is also an objective of the Synod to "Provide protection for congregations, pastors, teachers, and other church

workers in the performance of their official duties and the maintenance of their rights" (Const. Art. III 9); and

WHEREAS, Called pastors at local congregations are protected by the doctrine of the Divine Call, explained by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) to mean that a pastor can be removed rightfully from his call only for teaching false doctrine, offensive conduct (which may include, among other things, neglect of, or inability to perform, official duties), or scandalous life (LCMS CTCR, *Theology and Practice of "the Divine Call"* [adopted February 2003], 25); and

WHEREAS, The CTCR has also recognized in its report that due process must be followed in removing a man from a call; additionally, pastors serving in certain capacities—for example, as seminary professors—are granted express protection in the Synod Bylaws against arbitrary removal from their calls without just cause (Bylaw 3.10.5.7.5); and

WHEREAS, Missionaries serving the Synod, called by the Board for International Mission (BIM), are not granted express bylaw protection, nor do the current BIM policies provide for due process for missionaries before the BIM can terminate their calls and effectively end their mission service; and

WHEREAS, Consistent with 1 Peter 2, Matthew 18, and other Scripture passages, the mission boards of the Synod should set a good example in their conduct and treatment of their called missionaries, and institute a formal requirement for good cause before terminating the call of any missionary, and ensuring due process, fairness, and an opportunity to be heard before any such decision is implemented, with appropriate right of appeal through the Synod's dispute resolution process; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod grant called missionaries serving the BIM protection in their Divine Calls by revising the Synod Bylaws to require good cause before terminating the call of any missionary, and ensuring due process, fairness, and an opportunity to be heard before any such decision is implemented, with appropriate right of appeal through the Synod's dispute resolution process; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention overturn any part of the CTCR Report, *Theology and Practice of "the Divine Call,"* that holds that the Divine Call of a missionary in service to the Synod is of lesser tenure or protection than the call of a local parish pastor.

St. Paul, Brookfield, IL; Circuit 24 (Sedalia), Missouri District

Ov. 2-06

To Give Thanks for LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces

WHEREAS, From the Civil War through both World Wars, Korea, Vietnam, and more recent areas of conflict, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastors, serving honorably and with distinction as military chaplains, bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to those protecting our great nation; and

WHEREAS, Some chaplains serve on forward bases in harm's way; others, onboard ships maintaining vigilant watch over the seven seas; yet others walk the flight line on isolated air bases, engaging airmen as they load fighter aircraft for combat operations on matters of faith and family; and

WHEREAS, These “pastors in uniform” provide Word and Sacrament ministry while enduring hardship, constant peril, and danger; and

WHEREAS, These chaplains meet the needs of military personnel and their families stationed around the world and provide a vital link to home; and

WHEREAS, LCMS chaplains have been recognized for their excellence in theology and pastoral care by their peers and frequently called to significant leadership posts within the U.S. Department of Defense at the Pentagon; and

WHEREAS, LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces (MAF) supports almost 200 chaplains representing the church on active duty; in the Reserves, National Guard, Civil Air Patrol, and Coast Guard Auxiliary; as Directors of Religious Education; and in the Department of Veterans Affairs; and

WHEREAS, MAF assists and trains congregations through Operation Barnabas, working to equip and encourage local pastors and congregations of the Synod in compassionate care and witness by training them for outreach to all military-connected people (active, reserve, retired, veterans, and their loved ones); and

WHEREAS, The Synod cares deeply for those who currently serve, for those who have donned the cloth of our nation in uniform, and for those who served our nation and live in our communities; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod encourage its congregations to intentionally recognize and care for current and former military members, veterans, and family members in their midst by joining the network of care provided through Operation Barnabas; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for MAF, Operation Barnabas, and MAF leadership, including its director, the Rev. Craig Muehler, and assistant director, the Rev. Dr. Steven Hokana.

Board for International Mission

Ov. 2-07

To Thank God on the 60th Anniversary of the Inception of LCMS International Schools in Asia and Pray for God’s Guidance in Advancing Their Ministry and Mission

WHEREAS, Our Lord Jesus said to the disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19–20); and

WHEREAS, Church of All Nations, Lutheran, Hong Kong (CAN)—whose founding pastor, Rev. Lenard Galster, and congregation worked in 1962–63 with Synod educator, Dr. Mel Kieschnick, to propose that the Synod establish Hong Kong International School (HKIS)—is in 2026 giving thanks to God for HKIS’ 60 years of educational mission for international and local families in Hong Kong and Asia; and

WHEREAS, Members of CAN and HKIS were seminal and instrumental in encouraging the Synod to establish Concordia International School Shanghai (CISS) in 1998 and Concordia International School Hanoi (CISH) in 2011, and active members of CAN’s congregational fellowship and pastoral care continue to serve within the CISS and CISH communities; and

WHEREAS, The Synod resolved at the 2016 Synod convention “To Commend and Support Synod’s International Schools and Their Role in the Church’s Mission” (2016 Res. 2-03); and

WHEREAS, The Synod’s Chief Mission Officer, the Office of International Mission (OIM) Asia region, and the Board for International Mission (BIM) reported to the 2019 Synod convention (Reports R1.2, 1.2.2, R8, pp. 17–18, 32, 92) that a major objective of the pending triennium (subsequently extended to 2023; 2023 Reports R1.2, 1.2.2, R8, pp. 9, 22, 50) was to strengthen the working relationship between the international schools, the OIM, and the BIM, and to encourage these schools to be steadfast and thorough in embodying Lutheran identity and mission; and

WHEREAS, The Synod’s international schools have in the past triennium: continued to present the Synod with ministry and mission opportunities; grown as world-class, highly respected educational institutions; and endeavored in good faith to strengthen their work with the Synod; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod thank God for the three international schools and attendant opportunities to proclaim the Gospel; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod members and congregants be encouraged to pray regularly for these schools, their communities, and the students and families served; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to inspire all involved in these international schools with the love of God, humility, wisdom, and grace, and particularly guide the Synod Board of Directors, the BIM, and the respective boards and heads of school to advance the mission and ministry of proclaiming the Gospel of our Savior Jesus through the education of children in international schools.

Church of All Nations
Hong Kong

3. Mercy

REPORTS

R1, R1.2–R1.2.2, R1.2.4, R5.2–R7, R60, R62.1

OVERTURES

Ov. 3-01

To Promote Awareness of Christian Adoption and Fostering Needs

WHEREAS, Adoption figures prominently in Holy Scripture (Gal. 4:5) and the baptismal theology of salvation by grace in the Evangelical Lutheran Church; and

WHEREAS, Christians have a historical legacy of enacting this Gospel by undertaking and coordinating care for “orphans and widows in their affliction” (James 1:27); and

WHEREAS, In the United States, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, her congregations, and affiliated parachurch organizations have especially exemplified these concerns and embodied this mercy; and

WHEREAS, Some 115,000 children nationwide are awaiting families and homes through adoption this year; and

WHEREAS, In many jurisdictions, state involvement in adoption imposes restrictions that result in a significant proportion of these children receiving placements in situations contrary to the Heavenly Father’s design and intention for sexuality and marriage and without regard for their eternal welfare; and

WHEREAS, The Synod in convention has not explicitly spoken about the connection of adoption to our doctrine and our vocation to serve these neighbors in need; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Indiana District, in grateful response to our own baptismal adoption as children of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, affirm our Christian privilege and responsibility to advocate and undertake protecting and providing for children awaiting adoption and fostering, particularly that they might enter His kingdom by baptism and belief in His saving name; and be it further

Resolved, That we encourage our district’s leaders and congregations to promote awareness of Christian adoption and fostering needs, agencies, and opportunities; and be it further

Resolved, That we recognize and commend Synod recognized service organizations (RSOs) engaged in these services with our prayers, our advocacy, and our contributions to further their labors among us and on our behalf; and be it further

Resolved, That the Indiana District in convention memorialize the Synod in convention to encourage our Synod leaders and congregations to promote awareness of Christian adoption and its Christ-pleasing benefits and promote awareness of Christian adoption and fostering needs, agencies, and opportunities; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Indiana District in convention memorialize the Synod in convention to recognize and commend the Synod RSOs engaged in these services with our prayers, our advocacy, and our contributions to further their labors among us and on our behalf.

Indiana District

Ov. 3-02

To Commend and Encourage Life Ministry Efforts of Congregations, Schools, Districts, and Recognized Service Organizations

WHEREAS, God has created every human life (Job 10:9–11; Psalm 139:13–16; Jer. 1:5), and people are taught by Holy Scripture to love those in need in every stage of life, from conception to death, with not only our words but also our actions (1 John 3:16–18; James 1:22–27); and

WHEREAS, Increasing numbers of Lutherans are planning and participating in pro-life marches and other advocacy events across the United States; and

WHEREAS, LCMS Life Ministry has awarded Million Dollar Life Match grants to Synod congregations and districts to support and expand beginning-of-life care projects, sanctity of life education and pro-life advocacy work that upholds the value of all human life; and

WHEREAS, LCMS Life Ministry has created new resources that proclaim the Gospel and equip the saints for pro-life efforts that serve the neighbor and witness to Christ (many such resources to be found in the LCMS Life Ministry Library online at resources.lcms.org/reading-study/life-library/); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to God for the ongoing and increasing witness to the sanctity and dignity of every human life by Synod congregations, schools, districts, Recognized Service Organizations (RSO), and by LCMS Life Ministry; and be it further

Resolved, That LCMS Life Ministry, the Office of National Mission, the Office of the President, and district staff members be encouraged to participate in not only Synod efforts, but also ecumenical and civic pro-life organizations and events, when and where appropriate; and be it further

Resolved, That LCMS Life Ministry continue to create resources, offer educational events such as conferences and webinars, and advise congregations, schools, districts, and RSOs in their pro-life work; and be it finally

Resolved, That congregations, schools, and districts of the Synod, as well as RSOs, continue to promote and encourage both church workers and congregation members to be involved in pro-life efforts, such as advocating state and federal lawmakers to protect and defend human life from conception until natural death, educating congregation members and school families about the God-given sanctity and dignity of human life, and finding myriad ways to care for the body and soul needs of fathers, mothers, babies, and whole families.

Board for National Mission

Ov. 3-03

To Thank God for Work of LCMS Disaster Response and Training

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture teaches us to “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2), and the Lord calls His Church to works of mercy that flow from His mercy given to us in Christ Jesus; and

WHEREAS, Since its current organizational structure in 2005, LCMS Disaster Response has faithfully equipped the church for

acts of mercy in times of crisis, trained and coordinated Lutheran Early Response Team (LERT) volunteers, trained leaders, and supported congregations and districts in times of disaster; and

WHEREAS, LCMS Disaster Response currently works through 104 key leaders across 35 districts and six recognized service organizations (RSO), supporting a network of more than 9,200 trained LERT volunteers and more than 80 pieces of specialized disaster equipment, enabling faithful and compassionate response; and

WHEREAS, In the past triennium, LCMS Disaster Response and its volunteers have responded to disasters, (including hurricanes Helene and Milton in 2024, tornadoes, floods, wildfires, and other emergencies) and has provided enhancements with new training options for LERT volunteers and trainers, showing Christ's mercy in tangible acts of service and bringing the comfort of the Gospel with pastoral care to thousands of survivors; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks and praise to God for His mercy and provision through the ongoing work of LCMS Disaster Response, especially for the witness and service offered through LERT volunteers, districts, and RSOs; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod encourage continued support and prayer for those affected by natural disasters and for those who serve faithfully in times of crisis; and be it further

Resolved, That each district appoint a district disaster response coordinator to work directly with LCMS Disaster Response and offer LERT training modules in the district; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod commend LCMS Disaster Response, its staff, leaders, and volunteers, to the Lord's continued care, asking Him to strengthen their work in mercy and to bless their proclamation of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod joyfully confess that every act of mercy flows from Christ Himself, "who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction" (2 Cor. 1:4), to the glory of God and the comfort of His people.

Board for National Mission

Ov. 3-04

To Give Thanks For and Support Human Care Efforts

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31) and to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2); and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has a rich history of caring for those in need, including immigrants, people affected by natural disasters, and the most vulnerable in society; and

WHEREAS, Recently the Synod has faithfully supported human care efforts, including relief for those affected by disasters such as Hurricane Helene and support for legal immigrants through various recognized service organizations; and

WHEREAS, These efforts reflect the mercy and compassion of Christ, bringing hope and healing to those in need; and

WHEREAS, The congregations and members of the Synod have generously contributed time, resources, and prayers to sustain these vital ministries; and

WHEREAS, The work of human care ministries strengthens the witness of the church, demonstrating Christ's love in action; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to God for the faithful work of those engaged in these human care ministries; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod encourage its congregations, members, and partners to continue their generous support of human care efforts, including disaster relief and aid for immigrants and refugees; and be it further

Resolved, That the congregations, members, and partners of the Synod be encouraged to support these efforts with their time, including participation in Lutheran Early Response Team training; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks for these efforts, encourage continued support for human care ministries, and seek additional ways to extend Christ's mercy to those in need, that the church at large may continue to bear witness to the love of Christ through acts of mercy and service.

Southeastern District

Ov. 3-05

To Establish District Commission on Immigration and Immigration Resources

WHEREAS, The issue of United States immigration procedures is under great scrutiny nationally and within the boundaries of the LCMS Atlantic District, and neighboring districts; and

WHEREAS, The district has been at the forefront of welcoming immigrants into its congregations since its founding in 1906, including called church workers specifically for immigrant populations; and

WHEREAS, The district has fostered immigrant pastors in recent years to complete the process of entering the clergy roster of the Synod, with 18 first-generation immigrants currently serving district congregations; and

WHEREAS, The membership of the district congregations currently is composed of a substantial number of first- and second-generation immigrant families, representing significant percentages of the membership in many congregations; and

WHEREAS, The blessing of those immigrant members has produced leaders serving in diaconal and parish ministries as well as at the district level; and

WHEREAS, Some of these members currently fear unjust detainment and deportation; and

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions speak directly to care and hospitality for the stranger; and

WHEREAS, In 2012, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) published the report, *Immigrants Among Us: A Lutheran Framework for Addressing Immigration Issues*, that advises congregations and other members concerning immigrants, and in 2018, the CTCR published a complementary Bible study based on the 2012 report; and

WHEREAS, Lutheran Social Services of New York (LSSNY) and Global Refuge (formerly Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service) are collaborative partners in programs and opportunities for refugees, asylum-seekers, and immigrants; and

WHEREAS, LSSNY and Global Refuge provide not only advice and counsel concerning immigrant issues, but also opportunities to serve the migrant and immigrant communities in just and righteous ways; therefore be it

Resolved, That the 2025 LCMS Atlantic District in convention authorize the formation of an Atlantic District Commission on Immigration and Immigration Resources; and be it further

Resolved, That composition of the commission may include representatives from LSSNY and Global Refuge, as well as district rostered church workers and laity; and be it further

Resolved, That the commission be established within 60 days of the 2025 Convention of the LCMS Atlantic District; and be it further

Resolved, That the tasks of the commission may include:

- study of the 2012 CTCR document *Immigrants Among Us* and the 2018 complementary Bible study;
- examination of migrant issues in the congregations of the district;
- institution of programs, workshops, and individual consultation for the use of district congregations;
- collaboration with LSSNY and Global Refuge on specific means to address those issues;
- the creation of biblical, civil, and lawful guidelines to advise congregations on how best to care for our neighbors;
- to provide—in addition to workshops, programs, and consultation—regular remission of current programs, opportunities, and involvement in immigrant issues to be distributed via various means to congregations, congregational members, and rostered workers of the district;

and be it further

Resolved, That the district budget include resources and opportunities for the commission; and be it finally

Resolved, That this resolution, as passed by the delegates to the Atlantic District convention, be made available to share with other members of the Synod for appropriate adaptation ahead of the 2026 Synod convention.

Atlantic District

Ov. 3-06

To Commend and Encourage LCMS Worker Wellness Efforts

WHEREAS, It is a mission priority of the Synod to promote and nurture the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of pastors and professional church workers; and

WHEREAS, The Council of Presidents (COP), LCMS Worker Wellness, and Concordia Plan Services (CPS) have collaborated to create a strategic plan that has been disseminated to district presidents and established by district boards of directors pursuant to 2023 Resolution 1-06A, “To Direct Districts and Council of Presidents to Provide Strategic Plan for Addressing Wellness of Church Workers”; and

WHEREAS, The strategies involve the efforts of both professional church workers and the congregational lay leaders and ministry leaders; and

WHEREAS, Soldiers of the Cross has provided \$241,705 of financial assistance to 98 rostered church workers this past triennium; and Veterans of the Cross has provided \$717,751 to 30 recipients in the same period; and

WHEREAS, Approximately 20 percent of rostered church workers are not covered by the CPS health plans; and

WHEREAS, The Soldiers of the Cross and Veterans of the Cross crisis financial grants offered to church workers demonstrate that workers who are not covered by CPS health plans are vulnerable to significant adverse financial impact when there are serious health and medical needs of the workers and their family members; and

WHEREAS, CPS health plans are customized for the needs of church workers, the assets of the health plans are designed to bear the health burdens of the members (Gal. 6:2), and the health plans have varied financial options for Synod ministries; therefore be it

Resolved, That the COP, LCMS Worker Wellness, and CPS be commended and thanked for their work to provide leadership and a strategic plan, and for their collaboration on Soldiers of the Cross and Veterans of the Cross grant programs; and be it further

Resolved, That districts, congregations, schools and ministries not enrolled in a CPS health plan be encouraged to annually consider and compare their current health plan with those available through CPS; and be it finally

Resolved, That the lay leaders of Synod congregations, schools, and Recognized Service Organizations be advised and encouraged to make use of resources, programs, and plans created by the districts, CPS, and LCMS Worker Wellness, and endeavor to form the local culture to be supportive of and caring for the holistic well-being of rostered church workers, members, and visitors.

Board for National Mission

Ov. 3-07

To Encourage Use of Telehealth Counseling Services for Care and Retention of Church Workers

WHEREAS, Clergy and other professional church workers of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod experience unique vocational stressors inherent to ecclesial callings, including isolation, heavy workloads, public scrutiny, financial strain, and relational pressures; and

WHEREAS, Research within and outside the Synod demonstrates increasing rates of burnout, depression, anxiety, suicidality, marital distress, loneliness, financial uncertainty, and certain addictive behaviors among pastors and other church workers; and

WHEREAS, Professional counseling, including counseling delivered via telehealth, has demonstrated efficacy in treating burnout, depression, anxiety disorders, trauma-related distress, marital and family conflict, financial stress, and certain addictive behaviors; and

WHEREAS, Church workers of the Synod will benefit from Christ-centered, clinically competent counseling services that are confessionally aligned with the doctrine and practice of the Synod and are well positioned to serve church workers confidentially through telehealth; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention encourage pastors and other church workers to view the use of professional counseling services, including telehealth counseling, as faithful stewardship of

the gifts of body and mind entrusted to them by God; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod commend telehealth counseling services as trusted resources for addressing burnout, depression, anxiety, suicidality, marital and family distress, financial stress, and certain addictive behaviors among church workers; and be it further

Resolved, That districts, congregations, and employing entities be encouraged to become familiar with available counseling and telehealth services that are confessionally aligned with the doctrine and practice of the Synod and to share such information as part of a culture of care and support for church workers; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod affirm that timely access to counseling services may assist church workers in remaining in their calls and continuing faithful service to Christ's Church through the proclamation of the Gospel; and be it finally

Resolved, That such encouragement be offered in a manner that respects Christian freedom, confidentiality, and pastoral discretion, without mandate or compulsion.

St. John
Oskaloosa, IA

Ov. 3-08

To Define *Leadership* and Its Priority for Worker Wellness

WHEREAS, The Synod and many of her districts have set worker wellness as a high priority; and

WHEREAS, Much of our work has focused primarily on resources/information, retreats, reactions to burn out, and counseling; and

WHEREAS, Research informs us that "58% of pastors report emotional exhaustion or burnout, but strong leadership growth is linked to greater resilience and ministry longevity" (Barna Group, 2025, *barna.com*); and

WHEREAS, The work in the Nebraska District with Leadership Learning Communities has shown that cultivating intentional environments and fostering relationships for proactive growth help bring health and can curb burnout; and

WHEREAS, There is not current agreement both on a clear definition of *leadership* and on the importance of leadership development for ordained, commissioned, or lay workers in the church; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Office of National Mission and those involved in worker wellness, in conjunction with Concordia Plan Services and district worker wellness executives, establish a clear definition of *leadership* and its priority for worker wellness; and be it further

Resolved, That districts and the Synod shift wellness efforts towards a more proactive posture to focus on leadership formation for ordained, commissioned, or lay workers in the church to promote greater health and wellness in the church, both individually and congregationally.

Board of Directors
Nebraska District

4. Life Together

REPORTS

**R1, R1.2–R1.2.2, R1.2.5, R5.2–R8,
R10, R12, R20–R58, R60**

OVERTURES

Ov. 4-01

To Commend and Sunset Synod Mission Priorities

WHEREAS, The Synod in convention instructed the Board for National Mission and Board for International Mission to recommend possible revisions to the mission priorities and possible Bylaw revisions that would articulate both the process for developing mission priorities and how those priorities would function in the mission and ministry of the Synod (2023 Res. 4-03, “To Affirm and Continue Mission Priorities for 2023–2026 Triennium”); and

WHEREAS, Bylaws do not specifically require the Synod convention to establish “mission priorities”; and

WHEREAS, The two mission boards have had extensive fraternal conversations with every district pertaining to the Synod’s mission priorities and their effectiveness for the work of each district; and

WHEREAS, The districts expressed general agreement with the doctrine and practice articulated in the current mission priorities, yet found them less than helpful for the specific priorities and work of their districts; and

WHEREAS, Many districts have established their own mission priorities under the Synod’s triennial mission and ministry emphasis; and

WHEREAS, Every priority of the current list of seven mission priorities is already articulated in the objectives of Synod (Const. Art. III); and

WHEREAS, Conversations with the districts by the two mission boards indicated no particular desire to retain the current mission priorities, or establish an elaborate procedure for creating mission priorities in the future; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention commend the district presidents and their districts for the constructive fraternal conversations they have had with the mission boards over the last triennium; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks for how the original mission priorities helped shape the work of national and international mission during the early years after restructuring; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention commend and identify the Synod objectives (Const. Art. III) as the mission priorities of the Synod and a faithful articulation of its work; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention reaffirm the responsibility of the respective mission boards (Bylaws 3.8.2, 3), under the leadership of the President and pursuant to Bylaw 3.3.1.1.1, to assist in identifying the specific goals and priorities for national and international mission work.

Board for National Mission; Board for International Mission

Ov. 4-02

To Establish *Tell the Next Generation* as Synod Mission and Ministry Emphasis

WHEREAS, The Synod in convention (2023 Res. 4-02) instructed the Board for National Mission (BNM) and the Board for International Mission (BIM) to recommend a new mission and ministry emphasis for consideration at the 2026 Synod convention; and

WHEREAS, The two mission boards have consulted with the district presidents, the Office of National Mission, and the Office of International Mission in an extensive series of fraternal discussions toward seeking input for the development of the triennial mission and ministry emphasis; and

WHEREAS, The two mission boards, in collaboration with the President of the Synod, have unanimously agreed to recommend to the Synod in convention a triennial mission and ministry emphasis that captures the desire to spread the Gospel and the full counsel of God’s Word to those who do not know Christ, as well as the generations of church members that will follow us; and

WHEREAS, The theme for the 2026–29 National Offering has been established as “Christ Is Risen! Tell the Next Generation,” reflecting this desire to spread the Gospel and the full counsel of God’s Word to those who do not know Christ and to the generations to come; therefore be it

Resolved, That the BNM and the BIM commend *Tell the Next Generation* to the Synod for adoption as her mission and ministry emphasis for the 2026–29 triennium.

Board for National Mission; Board for International Mission

Ov. 4-03

To Establish *Tell the Next Generation* as Synod Mission and Ministry Emphasis

WHEREAS, The Synod’s Board for International Mission (BIM) and Board for National Mission (BNM) have consulted with Council of Presidents, the Office of National Mission, and the Office of International Mission in an extensive series of fraternal discussions toward seeking input for the development of the triennial mission and ministry emphasis; and

WHEREAS, The BIM and BNM, in collaboration with the President of the Synod, have unanimously agreed to recommend to the Synod in convention a triennial mission and ministry emphasis that captures the desire to spread the Gospel and the full counsel of God’s Word to those who do not know Christ, as well as the generations of church members that will follow us; therefore be it

Resolved, That the triennial mission and ministry emphasis for the 2026–29 triennium shall be *Tell the Next Generation*.

Board for National Mission

Ov. 4-04

To Encourage Acceptance of Triennial Mission and Ministry Emphases

WHEREAS, Bylaw 4.2.1 (b) requires districts to submit triennial mission and ministry emphases for consideration by the national convention; and

WHEREAS, The Florida-Georgia District has identified primary mission emphases through overtures received from the district; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod accept these three as primary mission emphases for the Synod: *Making Disciples Who Make Disciple-Makers*, *Church Multiplication*, and *Lutheran Schools as Vital Means of Outreach*.

Florida-Georgia District

Ov. 4-05

To Prioritize *Abiding in the Word* as Mission and Ministry Focus

WHEREAS, Christian believers in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) believe, teach, and confess that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God (2 Peter 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16–17); and

WHEREAS, “We believe, teach, and confess that the Gospel of the gracious justification of the sinner through faith in Jesus Christ is not only the chief doctrine of Holy Scripture and a basic presupposition for the interpretation of Scripture, but is the heart and center of our Christian faith and theology (material principle). We also believe, teach, and confess that only ‘the Word of God shall establish articles of faith’ (SA II II 15), and that ‘the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged’ (FC Ep, Summary Content, 1) (formal principle). The Gospel, which is the center of our theology, is the Gospel to which the Scriptures bear witness, while the Scriptures from which we derive our theology direct us steadfastly to the Gospel of Jesus Christ” (LCMS, *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles* [adopted 1973], Article IV, p. 3, lcms.org/scriptural-and-confessional-principles); and

WHEREAS, “We believe, teach, and confess that because the Scriptures have God as their author, they possess both the divine power to make men wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (causative authority), as well as the divine authority to serve as the church’s sole standard of doctrine and life (normative authority). We recognize that the authority of Scripture can be accepted only through faith and not merely by rational demonstration. As men of faith, we affirm not only that Holy Scripture is powerful and efficacious, but also that it is ‘the only judge, rule, and norm according to which, as the only touchstone, all doctrines should and must be understood, and judged as good or evil, right or wrong’ (FC Ep, Summary Content, 7)” (*A Statement*, IV, p. 3–4); and

WHEREAS, Jesus says in John 15:1–8, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples”; and

WHEREAS, Jesus says in John 8:31–32, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”; and

WHEREAS, Martin Luther earnestly encouraged diligence in learning Scripture and the catechism:

You are daily under the dominion of the devil, and he does not rest day or night in seeking to take you unawares and to kindle in your heart unbelief and wicked thoughts against ... the ... commandments. Therefore you must constantly keep God’s Word in your heart, on your lips, and in your ears. For where the heart stands idle and the Word is not heard, the devil breaks in and does his damage before we realize it. On the other hand, when we seriously ponder the Word, hear it, and put it to use, such is its power that it never departs without fruit. It always awakens new understanding, pleasure, and devotion, and it constantly creates clean hearts and minds. For this Word is not idle or dead, but effective and living. (LC I 100–101, Kolb/Wengert)

and

WHEREAS, In Baptism, Christian believers are connected to Christ as branches to the vine, which gives us our identity. *Living as the baptized* (1 Peter 2:9–10) is who we are connected to Christ. In this relationship that He has established with us through His Spirit, we will bear fruit in our lives: good fruit. The fruit of faith, which consists in all the good works that Christians do, are the works done according to the Ten Commandments for the glory of God and the good of our neighbor; and

WHEREAS, Christ supplies all we need to bear abundant fruit through receiving the Word and Sacrament in church: the preaching one hears, the teaching one receives in Bible class, and the receiving of Christ’s body and blood for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of faith; and

WHEREAS, The Word of God also comes to His people at home through personal and family Bible study, Bible reading, and devotion; and

WHEREAS, Timothy Mech observes that what is needed for addressing root problems of the Church today has been available to us all along: “The answer to the challenge for the Church in this self-absorbed culture is found where it has always been found, in the Word of God. Interesting, isn’t it? That almost all of the problems we face in the church and everyday life have to do with our being disconnected from the Word of God in one way or another? We need more of the Word of God in our lives, not less” (Ted Kober, *Built on the Rock: The Healthy Congregation* [Concordia Publishing House, 2017], 28); and

WHEREAS, Dr. Ted Kober also notes in his book, *Built on the Rock: The Healthy Congregation*:

“Healthy churches possess two main characteristics that distinguish them from the unhealthy:

1. Their members, especially the leadership, are regularly engaged in God’s Word, and as demonstrated by their familiarity with it and their desire to apply it to conflict.
2. Their members, beginning with the leaders, model reconciliation, through confession and forgiveness” (ibid., 56); and, “The more spiritually mature the members of a church are, especially the leaders, the healthier the church” (ibid., 57); and, “[Kober’s] observation, based on reconciliation experience, has led

[him] to develop a rule-of-thumb measurement—a healthy church has at least 20 percent of its average worship attendance participating in adult Bible study” (ibid., 58); and “The Bible asserts that our spiritual growth and health depends on our connection to Christ through His Word. Those who dwell richly in that Word demonstrate spiritual maturity and health, individually and corporately. The Bible is our final authority on what makes a church healthy” (ibid., 71).

and

WHEREAS, Lack of a strong baptismal identity that is not regularly fed with the Word and Sacrament of Christ, especially in the context of an increasingly secular culture, is a serious obstacle in our calling to proclaim, teach, and share the Gospel, leaving the baptized immature in God’s Word (Eph. 4:13–14) and ill-equipped to “make a defense” (1 Peter 3:15) and engage in mission and ministry activities; and

WHEREAS, That as the members of the Kansas District faithfully and consistently “Abide in the Word,” the idols of vice are continually loosened on their hearts, and the new man is freed more and more to embrace those virtues the Holy Spirit is laboring to grow within God’s people, so that we are fit for service to our neighbor, equipping us for the tasks God has prepared for us; therefore be it

Resolved, That the district and its members prioritize strengthening baptismal identity in the coming triennium, equipping and encouraging the baptized to stand firm in the faith and resist being conformed to the world (Rom. 12:2) and to move forward boldly as the baptized people of God to expand the kingdom by being regularly in the Word of God at church and at home (Deut. 6:4–9; Rom. 10:17; Heb. 10:25); and be it further

Resolved, That the district and its members commit themselves to weekly worship and the study of God’s Word so that faith in Christ is nurtured and strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Parents, then, take what the pastor taught, and teach their children at home, as Luther states in his Small Catechism, “As the head of the family should teach them in a simple way to his household”; and be it further

Resolved, That the district congregations and schools promote and use weekly *The Congregation at Prayer* resources developed by the district parish education committee (kslcms.org/education-youth/parish-education/cap/). *The Congregation at Prayer*, which coordinates with the Church Year calendar, suggests daily readings, learn-by-heart Scripture and catechism verses, a hymn to sing, along with a psalm and prayer to pray; and be it further

Resolved, That the district congregations and schools implement Lutheran-based curriculum in parish, school, and home settings that foster faith and growth in God’s Word across the lifespan from early learning through adult education; and be it further

Resolved, That the district congregations be encouraged to bring their youth groups together (e.g., Kansas District Youth Gathering, etc.) at least once a year to study the Word of God and that circuits provide ways (e.g., Theology on Tap, etc.) for adults to come together to study the Word of God; and be it further

Resolved, That the professional church workers of the district make every effort to attend the required yearly conferences, and be encouraged to attend other gatherings (i.e., circuit winkels, DCE Clusters, pre-Lent, summer continuing education opportunities,

Lutheran teacher conferences, etc.) where they can receive and grow in the Word of God with other church workers; and be it further

Resolved, That the lay people of the district be encouraged to immerse themselves in the Word of God through such things as congregational Bible studies, podcasts (i.e., *The Word of the Lord Endures Forever*, thewordendures.org/), and other continuing education opportunities (i.e., The Lay Bible Institute, csl.edu/resources/continuing-education/lay-bible-institute/) where they can continue to spiritually grow (Eph. 4:13–15); and be it finally

Resolved, That the district memorialize the 2026 Synod convention, recommending adoption of a mission and ministry emphasis consistent with helping Lutheran Christians hold fast to their baptismal identity, based solely in the Word of God, as is the case with the Synod’s current emphasis of *Making Disciples for Life* (2023 Resolution 4-02, “To Affirm and Continue *Making Disciples for Life* as Mission and Ministry Emphasis for 2023–26 Triennium,” *Proceedings*, 135–36).

Kansas District

Ov. 4-06

To Adopt Triennial Mission and Ministry Emphasis on Clear Gospel Proclamation, Unity in Christ, and Multicultural Ministry

WHEREAS, “The district convention shall, through the delegate vote, forward to the national convention a list of two or three triennial mission and ministry emphases for consideration by the national convention.” (Bylaw 4.2.1 [d]); and

WHEREAS, The Apology of the Augsburg Confession (Ap) IV on justification confesses the central teaching of the Gospel, namely, that we are justified by grace through faith in Christ alone; and

WHEREAS, Rom. 1:16 (NIV) proclaims, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile,” and Smalcald Articles (SA) II I states, “The first and chief article is this: *That Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins and was raised again for our justification* (Rom. 4:25)” (Triglotta); and

WHEREAS, The temptation of the flesh and the work of the enemy continually seek to distort, add to, or replace the Gospel with a false alternative, and we confess that members of the Synod are not exempt from this temptation; and

WHEREAS, Eph. 4:15–16 (NIV) reminds us, “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work”; and

WHEREAS, We should celebrate the unity we have in Christ; and

WHEREAS, Jesus commands His people to “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34–35 [NIV]); and

WHEREAS, The Church is beautifully diverse in language, ethnicity, and life experiences; and

WHEREAS, The Pacific Southwest District houses both the Cross-cultural Ministry Center and the Mission Training Center within its geographic confines; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has historically emphasized taking the Gospel to all nations and continues to support Gospel ministry and theological education around the world; and

WHEREAS, We proclaim the clear and compelling Gospel for all people, without distinction; and

WHEREAS, There is a great need for a clear and unified ministry emphasis for the upcoming triennium; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod return boldly and faithfully to its roots of proclaiming the Gospel clearly, confidently, and joyfully in all its purity without confusing it with any works of men; and be it further

Resolved, That members of the Synod actively work to celebrate our unity in Christ within our fellowship, expressed in sacrificial love, in bearing with one another, and in seeking the good of the whole body of Christ; such love being evident in circuit forums, circuit meetings, conferences, and other places where we walk together; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod emphasize, throughout the next triennium, multicultural ministry within the United States; that we celebrate and support local congregations engaged in “all nations” ministry among us; and that we increase support for the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology, Center for Hispanic Studies, Cross-Cultural Ministry Center and Mission Training Center—and for the equipping of evangelists (all of us) for the clear proclamation of the Gospel in our communities; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod focus its work on: (1) the clear proclamation of the Gospel; (2) walking together in love and trust; and (3) supporting ethnic and multicultural ministry within the United States.

Pacific Southwest District

Ov. 4-07

To Offer Triennial Mission and Ministry Emphases

WHEREAS, Bylaw 4.2.1 (d) requires that “the district convention shall, through delegate vote, forward to the national convention a list of two or three triennial mission and ministry emphases for consideration by the national convention”; and

WHEREAS, The Nebraska District’s vision statement declares that we are “God’s forgiven family walking and working together in God’s mission of making mature disciples of Jesus Christ”; and

WHEREAS, The district’s mission statement asserts that we “serve God’s family, encouraging them to be fully engaged in living and sharing the Good News of Jesus”; and

WHEREAS, The district has identified the following strategic priorities: to cultivate faith and a discipleship culture, to connect people for service and outreach, and to care for the family of God; therefore be it

Resolved, That the district in convention memorialize the Synod to consider a mission and ministry emphasis on the relational health of ordained, commissioned, and non-rostered workers; and be it further

Resolved, That the district in convention memorialize the Synod to consider a mission and ministry emphasis on fostering healthier congregations and ministries; and be it finally

Resolved, That the district in convention memorialize the Synod to consider a mission and ministry emphasis on fostering healthier

districts and the Synod through caring for district and Synod leadership, fostering unity, and providing opportunities for discipleship.

Nebraska District

Ov. 4-08

To More Narrowly Focus the Synod’s Mission Priorities

WHEREAS, The *Handbook* states that district conventions shall forward to the national convention a list of two or three triennial mission and ministry emphases (Bylaw 4.2.1 [d]); and

WHEREAS, The Board for National Mission (BNM) and the Board for International Mission (BIM) asked districts to provide feedback on the Synod’s mission priorities (2023 Res. 4-03); and

WHEREAS, The Synod’s current seven mission priorities are to:

- plant, sustain, and revitalize Lutheran congregations;
- support and expand theological education;
- perform human care in close proximity to Word and Sacrament ministries;
- collaborate with the Synod’s members and partners to enhance mission effectiveness;
- promote and nurture the spiritual, emotional, financial, and physical well-being of pastors and professional church workers;
- enhance early childhood education, elementary and secondary education, and youth ministry; and
- strengthen and support the Lutheran family in living out God’s design;

and

WHEREAS, Ohio District leaders have discussed the Synod’s current seven mission priorities with BNM and BIM representatives; and

WHEREAS, District President Kevin Wilson has received feedback on the Synod’s seven mission priorities from both circuit meetings and congregational visitations; and

WHEREAS, The consensus of these meetings is that the Synod’s current mission priorities, while important, are so broad that almost anything done by a district fits the mission priorities; therefore be it

Resolved, That Synod more narrowly focus its mission emphasis; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod include in its mission priorities for the next triennium the following:

- strengthen congregations and schools of the Synod by building on their biblical and confessional foundation;
- equip laity and church workers to more intentionally and joyfully live out their vocations; and
- increase Gospel outreach throughout the Synod, especially through new congregations, schools, and recognized service organizations;

Ohio District

Ov. 4-09**To Adopt Congregational Sustainability as Mission Goal of the Synod**

WHEREAS, The Synod was formed under the common goal of having congregations walk together; and

WHEREAS, Over the years its many congregations have grown individually; and

WHEREAS, The strength of the Synod is based on the strength of its congregations, both individually and collectively; and

WHEREAS, The Synod's congregations are in urban, suburban, and rural settings, and uniquely individualized within these areas; and

WHEREAS, The Synod's very essence is through its congregations; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod emphasize the need for continuing and ongoing presence within these areas and the preservation of, and ongoing vitality of each congregation; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod prioritize strategies to develop and maintain sustainable congregations throughout the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That a new mission goal of "Common Sustainability" be adopted by this convention; and be it finally

Resolved, That to this end, the President of the Synod annually prepare and distribute to each congregation a report on the Synod's efforts to develop and maintain sustainable congregations, the resources used for these purposes, and the financial commitment made by the Synod, including the percentage allotment to this endeavor as it relates to the Synod budget.

Huntington Woods
Huntington Woods, MI

Ov. 4-10**To Affirm and Retain the Seven Mission Priorities**

WHEREAS, The Synod's Board for National Mission (BNM) and the Board for International Mission (BIM) reported to the 2025 district conventions evaluating the Synod's current mission priorities; and

WHEREAS, The seven mission priorities of the Synod continue to direct its mission and ministry; and

WHEREAS, Both the BNM and BIM found no objection to the current mission priorities; therefore be it

Resolved, That the English District in convention give thanks to God for the faithful work being carried out by the Office of National Mission and Office of International Mission; and be it further

Resolved, That every congregation in the district be encouraged to review and embrace the seven mission priorities of the Synod; and be it finally

Resolved, That the district in convention memorialize the 2026 Synod convention to retain and continue conducting herself in accordance with the seven mission priorities.

English District

Ov. 4-11**To Address Synod Mission Emphasis of Making Disciples for Life and To Eliminate Mission Priorities**

WHEREAS, Bylaws 3.3.1.1.1 (a), 3.5.1, 3.5.2, 3.8.2, 3.8.2.2, 3.8.2.5, 3.8.3, 3.8.3.2, and 3.8.3.5 require the Synod to develop and operate under triennial mission and mission emphases; and

WHEREAS, *Making Disciples for Life* (MDFL) is the Synod's current triennial mission emphasis; and

WHEREAS, Although not specifically required by the bylaws, the Synod also has seven mission priorities:

1. to plant, sustain, and revitalize Lutheran churches;
2. to support and expand theological education;
3. to perform human care in close proximity to Word and Sacrament ministries;
4. to collaborate with the Synod's members and partners to enhance mission effectiveness;
5. to promote and nurture the spiritual, emotional, financial, and physical well-being of pastors and professional church workers;
6. to enhance early childhood education, elementary and secondary education, and youth ministry; and
7. to strengthen and support the Lutheran family in living out God's design;

and

WHEREAS, The Synod has asked for input regarding the mission and ministry emphases and priorities (Bylaws 3.1.1; 4.2.1 [b, d]; 5.3.1 [b][5]); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Atlantic District in convention affirm the Synod's mission emphasis, *MDFL*, as both good and effective; and be it further

Resolved, That the district in convention memorialize the 2026 Synod convention to eliminate the seven mission priorities as they are, and to develop a more succinct way of describing the work of the Synod.

Atlantic District

Ov. 4-12**To Amend Bylaws to Refine Process for Creating Triennial Mission and Ministry Emphases**

WHEREAS, The Synod in convention (2023 Res. 4-02) instructed the Board for National Mission and the Board for International Mission to offer a recommendation to the 2026 Synod convention for refining the process for adopting triennial mission and ministry emphases; and

WHEREAS, The Bylaws require the Synod in convention to approve triennial mission and ministry emphases with a process that requires input from every circuit and district of the Synod (Bylaws 3.8.2.2, 3.8.3.2; 4.2.1 [b, d]; 5.2.3 [g], 5.3.1 [a][5]); and

WHEREAS, The mission boards of the Synod conducted extensive fraternal discussions with every district of the Synod over the past triennium about the work of the Synod and the triennial mission and ministry emphasis, including the procedure for developing triennial mission and ministry emphases; and

WHEREAS, These fraternal discussions with the districts concluded that the current procedure for developing triennial mission and ministry emphases has proven to be cumbersome and unworkable; and

WHEREAS, The Synod's mission boards and the Council of Presidents are to assist the President of the Synod in establishing the goals for mission and ministry of the Synod (Bylaws 3.3.1.1.1 [a], 3.8.2, 3.8.3); therefore be it

Resolved, That the two mission boards, in collaboration with the President of the Synod, and in continued fraternal dialog with the districts, be charged with recommending to the Synod in convention triennial mission and ministry emphases for adoption; and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.3.1.3 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Powers and Duties – Ecclesiastical and Administrative

3.3.1.3 The President shall have responsibilities and duties that are both ecclesiastical and administrative.

...

(q) He shall collaborate with the Board for National Mission and the Board for International Mission in assessing and evaluating the effectiveness of the Synod's triennial mission and ministry emphases.

and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.8.2.2 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Board for National Mission

...

3.8.2.2 The Board for National Mission shall, during the course of each triennium between national conventions of the Synod, work with the Board for International Mission to gather pertinent and sufficient information from the Synod's members that will facilitate the boards' assessment and evaluation of the effectiveness of the Synod's triennial mission and ministry emphases, and shall, in collaboration with the President of the Synod, after fraternal dialogue with the districts, develop accordingly a joint overture to the national convention for beneficial amendments thereto. ~~The boards shall also provide a joint report in advance of the Synod's district conventions, offering ideas and guidance for proposing triennial mission and ministry emphases to the national convention.~~

and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.8.3.2 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Board for International Mission

...

3.8.3.2 The Board for International Mission shall, during the course of each triennium between national conventions of the Synod, work with the Board for National Mission to gather pertinent and sufficient information from the Synod's members that will facilitate the boards' assessment and evaluation of the effectiveness of the Synod's triennial mission and ministry emphases, and shall, in collaboration with the President of the Synod, after fraternal dialogue with the districts, develop accordingly a joint overture to the national convention for beneficial amendments thereto. ~~The boards shall also provide a joint report in advance of the Synod's district conventions, offering ideas and guidance for proposing triennial mission and ministry emphases to the national convention.~~

and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 4.2.1 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

4.2 District Conventions

4.2.1 Conventions of the districts shall afford opportunities for worship, nurture, inspiration, fellowship, and the communication of vital information. They are the principal legislative assemblies, which amend the district's Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws, consider and take action on reports and overtures, and handle appropriate appeals.

(a) The conventions of the districts shall be governed by the bylaws adopted by the Synod for its conventions, insofar as these may be applicable.

(b) The district convention is the instrument to receive overtures (Bylaw 3.1.6.2), ~~including overtures and recommendations for synodwide mission and ministry emphases~~ submitted by member congregations and adopted by a circuit forum.

(c) Following in-depth study and discussion, the district convention shall act on the overtures and may, as determined by the convention, submit overtures to the national convention.

~~(d) The district convention shall, through delegate vote, forward to the national convention a list of two or three triennial mission and ministry emphases for consideration by the national convention.~~

...

and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 5.2.3 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

5.2 Circuit Visitors

...

5.2.3 Each circuit visitor shall assist the district president within the circuit.

...

~~(g) He shall assist in the development and attainment of Synod-wide mission and ministry emphases.~~

...

and be it finally

Resolved, That Bylaw section 5.3 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

5.3 Circuit Forums

5.3.1 The circuit forum is the group which aids the process of keeping congregations, particularly the lay leaders, commissioned ministers, and pastors, supportive of one another in their common confession and mutually active in developing programs for the good of member congregations, in considering and recommending new work, and in suggesting improvements for services and programming at the national and district levels and is encouraged to meet at least twice a year.

(a) The circuit visitor shall endeavor to provide resources, opportunities, and assistance so God's people can grow in their faith.

(b) Among the functions which the circuit forum may perform are the following:

(1) To study the Scriptures and the Confessions in order to promote an evangelical spirit in our walking together.

...

(5) To serve as a setting to review and evaluate programs, plans, and long-range directions of the district and the Synod ~~and thus participate in the triennial process of suggesting, developing, and attaining the Synod's priorities and goals.~~

...

~~5.3.4 The circuit forum may also participate in the triennial process of suggesting, developing, and attaining the Synod's priorities and goals.~~

...

Board for National Mission; Board for International Mission

Ov. 4-13

To Task Commission on Theology and Church Relations to Write Report and Accompanying Study addressing Christian Nationalism in American Context

WHEREAS, Scripture does not, since the fall of ancient Israel, endorse or prescribe one form of government over another; and

WHEREAS, In recent years, a form of government known as Christian nationalism has been promoted by both good faith and bad faith actors, such as in the book *The Case for Christian Nationalism* by Stephen M. Wolfe (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2022); and

WHEREAS, There is no set or agreed-upon form of what constitutes Christian nationalism, with some adherents advocating for basic theonomy and others arguing for a version in which only Christians would hold office and have rights; and

WHEREAS, There is much fear and misunderstanding over what is and is not Christian nationalism due to public discourse, and this causes much confusion within our Synod, as addressed by the 2023 Concordia Seminary Theological Symposium, "Living By Hope in a Secular Age: Church and Society"; and

WHEREAS, Martin Luther argues that since the role of government is to enforce laws and not preach the Gospel it cannot by definition be Christian, and states that "It is out of the question that there can be a common Christian government over the entire world, or for that matter, over one country or a great number of people..." (Martin Luther, *What Luther Says* [CPH, 1959] §1795; see also 1780 and 1781); and

WHEREAS, Pastors, other church workers, and laity have many questions on this topic as they seek to live out their faith in God-pleasing ways, especially in their vocations as citizens; and

WHEREAS, In the politically charged times in which we live, members of the Synod find themselves on all sides of this topic, leading to discord and disunity; therefore be it

Resolved, That the district request the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) to thoroughly study Christian nationalism, detailing various forms, working definitions, and how each does or does not follow the faith handed down from the apostles by mixing up the role of the two realms/kingdoms; and be it further

Resolved, That the district request the CTCR to write a report of their study; and be it further

Resolved, That the district request the CTCR to create a study of their report that is easily accessible and understandable not only by clergy and church workers, but by Synod laity and the church body as a whole; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention be memorialized to instruct the CTCR to accomplish the above requests if the CTCR has not already begun to do so.

Oklahoma District

Ov. 4-14

To Direct Commission on Theology and Church Relations to Address Christian Nationalism in American Context

WHEREAS, Scripture does not, since the fall of ancient Israel, endorse or prescribe one form of government over another; and

WHEREAS, There is much fear and misunderstanding of what is and is not Christian nationalism due to public discourse and this causes much confusion within our Synod; and

WHEREAS, Pastors, other church workers, and laity have many questions on this topic and seek to live out their faith in God pleasing ways, especially in their vocations as citizens; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Commission on Theology and Church Relations be directed to thoroughly study and publish a report on Christian nationalism detailing its various forms, working definitions, and its relation to our Lutheran understanding of the two kingdoms.

Northern Illinois District

Ov. 4-15

To Direct Commission on Theology and Church Relations to Examine, and Provide Guidance on Public Teaching and Engagement of, Lutherans for Racial Justice and to Clarify Lutheran Teaching on Justice

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture commands love of neighbor and justice without partiality (Micah 6:8; Luke 10:25-37); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has repeatedly condemned racism and urged Christian action (e.g., 2019 Res. 11-04A); and

WHEREAS, Lutherans for Racial Justice (LRJ) publicly states it is a "grassroots coalition committed to fostering multiethnic church and school cultures as we pursue racial equity, justice, and healing" (lutheransforracialjustice.com/about-us-1); and

WHEREAS, LRJ's public resources curate materials that engage contemporary frameworks (e.g., Black Lives Matter and Critical Race Theory), which may, if treated normatively, conflict with the primacy of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions; and

WHEREAS, Our Lord testifies, "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather" (Matt. 24:28), indicating that falsehood and decay inevitably attract those who feed on them, and Scripture more broadly teaches that teaching bears discernible fruit (Matt. 7:15-20); and

WHEREAS, Concerns have been raised regarding the character of public discourse surrounding LRJ's materials and whether such discourse reflects alignment with confessional Lutheran teaching or instead draws upon ideological frameworks foreign to the Synod's doctrine and practice; and

WHEREAS, LRJ has publicly critiqued Synod leadership on matters of immigration and public theology (e.g., responses to President Harrison's statements), and has amplified narratives and resources that appear to place political advocacy ahead of confessional unity, raising legitimate questions under Romans 13 and the Lutheran doctrine of vocation; and

WHEREAS, LRJ has promoted or circulated materials that encourage resistance to civil authorities (e.g., "Everyone is

welcome here except ICE,” *facebook.com/L4RacialJustice*, accessed Mar. 19, 2026), potentially exposing congregations and schools to legal and financial risks and blurring the distinction between Christian mercy and political activism (FC Ep III); and

WHEREAS, Certain rostered pastors and teachers within the Synod are publicly associated with LRJ as founders, contributors, or promoters, raising pastoral and ecclesial questions regarding confessional fidelity, public witness, and doctrinal unity; and

WHEREAS, LRJ’s partnerships and resource curation draw significantly from heterodox entities such as organizations affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and groups such as Global Refuge (formerly Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service), whose theological frameworks and public advocacy priorities differ from the Synod’s confessional positions; and

WHEREAS, LRJ endorses or promotes authors and materials associated with social-gospel theology, liberation theology, and other interpretive approaches that risk subordinating the Gospel to social or political agendas, thereby creating confusion regarding the proper distinction of Law and Gospel; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) be directed to examine LRJ’s official claims, public resources, partnerships, and advocacy in light of the Holy Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and adopted Synod resolutions; and be it further

Resolved, That the CTCR clarify for the Synod the proper Lutheran understanding of justice, mercy, and public witness, distinguishing clearly between confessional teaching and extra-biblical ideological frameworks; and be it further

Resolved, That the CTCR evaluate whether LRJ’s public teaching and resource curation create confusion or conflict with Synod doctrine, and provide theological and pastoral guidance accordingly; and be it further

Resolved, That should the CTCR find LRJ’s teachings or practices to be inconsistent with the Lutheran Confessions, it recommend appropriate admonition and corrective steps under Synod Bylaws; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm both its condemnation of racism and its commitment to pursue justice and mercy within confessional and lawful bounds, rejecting both ideological extremism and political coercion as incompatible with faithful Christian witness; and be it finally

Resolved, That congregations, schools, and church workers be encouraged to rely on confessional Synod resources when addressing matters of race, justice, and mercy, rather than materials that may obscure the Gospel or compromise the doctrine of the two kingdoms.

Circuit 12 (Western Michigan)
English District

Ov. 4-16

To Task Commission on Theology and Church Relations to Write Report and Accompanying Study addressing Positive Christianity (aka German Christianity) and Its Deviation from Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy

WHEREAS, Positive Christianity is in reaction to Positive Religion (aka German Religion) which was a movement to return

to the pre-Christian pagan religions practiced in Germany before the preaching of the Gospel and was being promoted by some Nazi officials in an effort to remove “all Jewishness” from the German people through the 1920s–1940s; and

WHEREAS, Point 24 of the 25-point National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP) Program presented by Adolf Hitler on February 24, 1920, reads as follows:

We demand freedom for all religious denominations in the State, provided they do not threaten its existence nor offend the moral feelings of the German race.

The Party, as such, stands for Positive Christianity, but does not commit itself to any denomination. It combats the Jewish-materialist spirit within and without us, and is convinced that our nation can achieve permanent health only from within on the basis of the principle: The common interest before self-interest.

and

WHEREAS, Positive Christianity was never officially systematized as Adolf Hitler and his cohort of Nazi leaders planned to do away with any and all Christianity once the war was won in their favor and only used Christianity and religion as a tool to come into and maintain power; and

WHEREAS, While Positive Christianity was never officially systematized, all efforts to do so put forward theologies with the following contours:

- A theology that is antisemitic and that tried to remove any “Jewishness” in Christianity. This included but was not limited to: rejection of the entire Old Testament; rejection of the Masoretic texts and adherence only to the Septuagint; and declaring that Jesus was Aryan by blood, fathered by a Roman centurion, and not the same God of the Old Testament, among other Marcionite heresies.
- A theology that is racial. As clearly shown in the above quote of Point 24, the paramount concern of Positive Christianity is that it “[does] not threaten [the State or the] existence...of the German race.” The multicultural and multiracial make up the Church (Rev. 7:9, etc.) was and is anathema to Positive Christianity.
- A theology that is syncretic with a National Socialist government/state. The state would be the final overseer and arbiter of orthodoxy, not the Scriptures. As such, the state could force confessions onto churches and Christians that were in direct opposition to God’s Word (much like the Prussian Union did in the 1800s).
- A theology that redefines *neighbor* from *anyone* (or *anyone in need*, Luke 10) to include only the able-bodied and able-minded *Volk* of Germany. Points 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 23 of the NSDAP Program clearly delineate who is, and who is not, to be considered a neighbor. This definitional change changes God’s Word of “love your neighbor as yourself” to exclude wide swaths of humanity in a sinful fashion.
- A theology that conflates the “Leader” (*der Führer*) with Christ. Positive Christianity turns people to a worldly leader as savior, often conflating a worldly savior with Jesus Christ. Scripture commands us to not put our trust in worldly princes and teaches that it is Satan himself that sets up worldly saviors as antichrists to draw people away from the One True God;

and

WHEREAS, Those who seek to sow strife and discord are agitating and advocating for Positive Christianity today, only in the modern context (without reference to Hitler or the NSDAP) to deceive faithful Christians and tempt them into heresy and heretical belief; and

WHEREAS, Those who seek to sow strife and discord are deceiving faithful Christians into falling into sin as resources addressing Positive Christianity are not common nor easily understood by laity who are unfamiliar with Positive Christianity; and

WHEREAS, Positive Christianity conflicts with Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, the *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* [adopted 1932], and *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles* [1973]; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod instruct the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) to thoroughly study Positive Christianity, detailing how it deviates from the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of the Christian faith; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod request the CTCR write a report of their study; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod request the CTCR create a study of their report that is easily accessible and understandable, not only by clergy and church workers but by Synod laity and the church body as a whole.

Circuit 8 (Oklahoma City)
Oklahoma District

Ov. 4-17

To Request Commission on Theology and Church Relations Produce New Document on Race

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture declares that God created all humanity in His image (Gen. 1:27) and that all believers are one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28), and condemns all forms of racial hatred as sinful (James 2:9); and

WHEREAS, The 1994 Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) document *Racism and the Church* was commended by the Synod (1995 Res. 2-05A, “To Commend for study the CTCR Document *Racism and the Church*” [1995 *Proceedings*, 112]), yet a minority opinion by the Rev. Dr. James Voelz, the Rev. Dr. Cameron MacKenzie, the Rev. Dr. Ken Schurb, and the Rev. Dr. Norman Nagel raised concerns about the document’s reliance on sociological frameworks not grounded in Lutheran theology (1995 *Workbook*, 62–64); and

WHEREAS, In recent years, new racial ideologies (e.g., Kinism, critical race theory) and secular distortions (e.g., globalism, the improper binding of consciences on matters such as immigration) have proliferated, leading to widespread confusion; and

WHEREAS, On matters such as immigration policy, Scripture does not bind the Christian conscience to a single political solution, and faithful Christians may, in good conscience, come to differing conclusions (Rom. 14:1–4); and

WHEREAS, It is contrary to Christian liberty to bind consciences where God has not spoken; and

WHEREAS, Pastors urgently need theologically sound resources to proclaim Law and Gospel to those afflicted with the sin of racial hatred, to address concerns about cultural and societal distortions,

and to provide faithful care for those harmed by racism; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention direct the CTCR to produce a new document on race, revisiting the 1994 report *Racism and the Church*, to address: (1) the theological concerns raised in the 1994 minority opinion, ensuring that definitions and frameworks align with Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions; (2) modern racial ideologies (e.g., Kinism, critical race theory) and distortions (e.g., globalism, immigration-related conscience binding), evaluating them through a biblical lens while affirming Christian liberty in areas where Scripture is silent; and (3) pastoral strategies for calling sinners to repentance with truth spoken in love (Eph. 4:15) and for ministering to those harmed by racial hatred or confused by racial ideologies and contemporary issues related to race; and be it further

Resolved, That this document provide exegetical analysis of key biblical texts (e.g., Acts 17; Revelation 7; Galatians 3), and clearly distinguish between God’s design for nations, man-made racial constructs, Law and Gospel, and the two kinds of righteousness; and be it further

Resolved, That the CTCR complete this document in time for the 2029 Synod convention and distribute it to all congregations; and be it finally

Resolved, That pastors and congregations make use of this resource to foster repentance, reconciliation, and Christ-centered unity, proclaiming that for those who belong to Christ by faith, “There is neither Jew nor Greek ... for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

English District

Ov. 4-18

To Uphold Scriptural Teaching of Generations/Lineages and Reject Modernistic Teaching of Races

WHEREAS, The apostle Peter speaks of the Church as “a chosen generation” (“But you are a chosen generation [γένος], a royal priesthood, a holy nation” [1 Peter 2:9 NKJV, 1979; cf. KJV, 1611]); and

WHEREAS, Several modern translations speak of the Church not as a “chosen generation” but as “a chosen race” (“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” [1 Peter 2:9 ESV, 2001; NASB, 1995]); and

WHEREAS, The apostle Peter is using the language of the prophet Isaiah, where Isaiah gives the promise of “my chosen people [LXX: τὸ γένος μου τὸ ἐκλεκτόν; MT: עַמִּי בְּחִירִי]” (Isaiah 43:20), such that with this word Isaiah is referring not to racial categories as used in modernism (“modernism” in the sense of post-enlightenment ideology, the mid-1700s and later) to speak of several races divided from one another, but rather speaks of the chosen people of God; and

WHEREAS, The Greek word γένος is used to translate the Hebrew word עַם (e.g., Isaiah 43:20, et al.), which references not *race* (in the modernistic sense) but *people*; to translate the Hebrew word זֶרַע, meaning *seed* or *lineage* (e.g., Jer. 29:32, et al.); and in parallel with the Hebrew word גּוֹי (e.g., Jer. 31:36), which, again, cannot mean *race* in the modernistic sense, but *nation*; and

WHEREAS, The prophets use the language of “the people/my people” (or “lineage” or “generations”) to reference not *races* in the modernistic sense, so that the prophets are proclaiming that the chosen lineage includes all those brought into the promise of the Christ—i.e., the lineage of Abraham (as also the lineage of the promise to Adam and Eve in Gen. 3:15 and of the promise to Noah in Genesis 9), with the people of promise including all those from many other families and tribes whom the Lord gathered into the lineage of Israel (e.g., Ruth the Moabite, Rahab the Canaanite, et al.); and

WHEREAS, The word *race* prior to modernism refers to the human race (singular), and not to *races* (plural)—where races are be set against each other, such that the *Oxford English Dictionary* identifies the first usages of *races* in the modernistic sense (to denote not the human race descended from Adam and Eve, but several races divided from each other within the human race) to the mid-1700s and later; and

WHEREAS, As those of the Church, the chosen generation (γένος, 1 Peter 2:9), we are given to proclaim not the words of modernistic ideology but rather the words of the prophets and apostles that proclaim Jesus Christ crucified for all nations (ἔθνῃ); therefore be it

Resolved, That we reject modernism’s doctrine of several “races” by which the human race is divided into different typological categories, categories wholly unknown to the prophets and apostles; and be it further

Resolved, That we reject any teaching resulting from or based upon this modernistic category of *race*, including any teaching of race-supremacy, antisemitism, race division or segregation, or any other form of racism; and be it further

Resolved, That we recognize and affirm our Lord’s promise to the Church that we are a “chosen lineage” or “chosen generation” (1 Peter 2:9), which is the lineage of all those called into the promise; and be it further

Resolved, That we rejoice that as the Church, the lineage of the promise, we are given to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9), a proclamation to be proclaimed to all nations (Matthew 28); and be it further

Resolved, That we affirm that any who teach or promote (whether in public or in private, including all forms of social media) any form of racism, antisemitism, or race-supremacy or division, are to be denounced by the Church for this divisive teaching and called to repentance with the hope and the prayer that the Lord restores them to the Church, the chosen lineage of the promise; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Rocky Mountain District memorialize the Synod to affirm that any who teach or promote (whether in public or in private, including all forms of social media) any form of racism, antisemitism, or race-supremacy or division, are to be denounced by the Church for this divisive teaching and called to repentance with the hope and the prayer that the Lord restores them to the Church, the chosen lineage of the promise.

Rocky Mountain District

Ov. 4-19

To Uphold Scriptural Teaching of the Church as One Chosen Generation in Spite of Existence of Various Earthly Races

WHEREAS, The word *race* can broadly be used to refer to the entire human race, all of whom are descended from Adam and Eve (“And Adam called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living,” Gen. 3:20 NKJV); and

WHEREAS, The word *race* has also come to refer to various bloodlines or lineages, which the Scriptures acknowledge (“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,” Acts 17:26 NKJV; see also Genesis 10; Deut. 18:9–14; Acts 2:5–12); and

WHEREAS, The apostle Peter uses the language of Isaiah, “my chosen people” (Isaiah 43:20; 65:22), in 1 Peter 2:9, to speak of the Church as a people not in reference to a single earthly race but rather to the chosen people of God, the sons of Abraham by faith; and

WHEREAS, As those of the Church, the chosen generation, we are given to proclaim not the doctrines of the world, but rather the words of the prophets and apostles that proclaim Jesus Christ crucified for all nations; therefore be it

Resolved, That we reject any racism in the Church—that is, excluding another from the Body of Christ or hating a brother in Christ because of his race (1 John 3:15; Matt. 5:21–22), deeming a neighbor as subhuman because of his race (Gen. 1:27; Prov. 14:21)—because these acts break the Fifth Commandment; and be it further

Resolved, That we recognize and affirm our Lord’s promise to the Church that we are a “chosen lineage” or “chosen generation” (1 Peter 2:9 NKJV), which is the lineage of all those called into the promise; and be it further

Resolved, That we rejoice that as the Church, the lineage of the promise, we are given to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9), a proclamation to be proclaimed to all nations (Matt. 28:16–20); and be it further

Resolved, That we affirm that the Church, with the hope and the prayer that the Lord restore him to the Church, the chosen lineage of the promise, denounces and calls to repentance anyone who excludes another from the Body of Christ, hates a brother in Christ because of his race, or deems a neighbor as subhuman because of his race; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Wyoming District in convention memorialize the Synod to affirm that the Church denounces anyone who excludes another from the Body of Christ, hates a brother in Christ because of his race, or deems a neighbor as subhuman because of his race and that they be called to repentance with the hope and the prayer that the Lord restore them to the Church, the chosen lineage of the promise.

Wyoming District

Ov. 4-20

To Condemn False Teachings of “Stone Choir”

WHEREAS, Social media (X/Twitter) personalities Corey J. Mahler (@CoreyJMahler) and Ryan “Woe” Dumperth (@treblewoe) began releasing episodes of the Stone Choir podcast

on Oct. 19, 2022, to tackle issues relevant to the Synod that, in their judgment, the pastors and leadership of the Synod were not addressing, leaving Mahler and Dumperth to function as *the very stones* who must *cry out* because the clergy are silent (Luke 19:40); and

WHEREAS, The issues on which the pastors and leadership of the Synod are accused by the Stone Choir hosts of remaining silent include: the ostensible necessity of the reintroduction of racial segregation, the ostensible sinfulness of interracial marriage, the ostensibly pernicious nature of the Jewish race today, and the ostensibly fictitious nature of the Jewish Holocaust perpetrated by the National Socialists during World War II; and

WHEREAS, None of the Stone Choir's positions on these aforementioned issues are taught in Holy Scripture, and indeed their positions on these issues cause great offense to many Christians of good will; and

WHEREAS, Stone Choir hosts Mahler and Dumperth are active on X, and Stone Choir listeners are likely to be influenced not only by what Mahler and Dumperth teach on the Stone Choir podcast, but also by what they post on X; and

WHEREAS, On X, Mahler and Dumperth, among other offensive behaviors, openly praise Adolf Hitler, call for the genocide or deportation of Jews, Muslims, and Blacks from the United States, and condemn as sin the practice of interracial marriage and adoption, causing great offense to Christian consciences; and

WHEREAS, Through their activity on the Stone Choir podcast and on X, Mahler and Dumperth have sought to associate confessional Lutheranism with devotion to Adolf Hitler, opposition to the Jewish race, and a desire for the segregation of Black people from "White society"; and

WHEREAS, Mahler and Dumperth have publicly denounced pastors of the Synod as either apostate or derelict, and on their podcast and on X have attempted to turn their listeners against their pastors; and

WHEREAS, Mahler is excommunicated and therefore under discipline and Dumperth is no longer a member of a congregation of the Synod and is therefore beyond the reach of church discipline, yet both continue to challenge the doctrine and teaching of the Synod; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention publicly condemn the teachings of the Stone Choir podcast and its hosts, for the offense they cause by their public devotion to Adolf Hitler, their stirring up of antipathy toward our Jewish and Black neighbors, their denunciation as sin of that which God has not called sin, and their open hostility toward the pastors and leadership of the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That the laity of the Synod be warned against the Stone Choir podcast and its hosts, and that the pastors of the Synod be encouraged to admonish members of their congregations whose approval of such racist and anti-Semitic beliefs has become known; and be it further

Resolved, That pastors and teachers of the Synod be encouraged to examine the teachings of the Stone Choir according to the norm of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, demonstrating from these clear and firm testimonies how the Stone Choir is in error, and acknowledging that these teachings violate the Fifth Commandment; and be it further

Resolved, That pastors and teachers of the Synod be encouraged to teach the truth of God's Word that all human creatures of all nations, tribes, languages, and peoples are made in God's image and redeemed by the death and resurrection of Jesus, and that pastors and teachers would use Synod and district resources that promote the same; and be it finally

Resolved, That the 2026 Synod convention condemn the teachings of the Stone Choir podcast and its current hosts, and admonish pastors and teachers who promote them or their beliefs.

Michigan District

Ov. 4-21

To Condemn Anti-Semitism

WHEREAS, Scripture declares that God "made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26), and that God "shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35); and

WHEREAS, Jesus sends his church to declare the Gospel to all nations (εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, Mark 13:10) and to make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching them (Matt. 28:16-20), including ethnic Jews; and

WHEREAS, In light of international political controversies, especially related to the sad conflicts between Palestinians and Jews in Gaza since October 7, 2023, there has been increased attention on the Jewish people and their relationship to the land of Israel; and

WHEREAS, There is much confusion in churches today concerning the role of Israel in prophecy and the end times, especially as it relates to the necessity of the conversion of the Jews and the exclusivity of justification by faith in Christ; and

WHEREAS, There has been a similar rise in anti-Semitism within many political movements and online conversations in recent years, some more explicitly Christian than others; and

WHEREAS, Certain writings of Martin Luther have been cited in support of anti-Semitism, which has misled some into believing Lutheranism itself is anti-Semitic; and

WHEREAS, The Synod in convention has clearly denounced racism of all sorts (2023 Res. 11-02A; 2019 Res. 11-04A; 1992 Res. 3-03; 1981 Res. 8-07), but specifically anti-Semitism, stating that "we condemn any and all discrimination against others on account of race or religion" and "disassociate ourselves from Luther's negative statements about the Jewish people" (1983 Res. 3-09, "To Clarify Position on Anti-Semitism"); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention reaffirm its opposition to racism of any sort, and to anti-Semitism as a particular kind of racism; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod confess that salvation comes solely to those who are justified by faith and confess Jesus as Lord; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod direct responsible entities, such as the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, Concordia Publishing House, the seminaries, among others, to provide resources to better explain the relationship between the Church and modern-day Israel.

Board of Directors, Minnesota South District;
Circuit 2 (St. Paul Metro), Minnesota South District;
Circuit 9 (Decatur), Indiana District

Ov. 4-22**To Reject Racial Quotas and Idolatry of Human Characteristics**

WHEREAS, God's Word calls us to unity in Christ: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment ... Is Christ divided?" (1 Cor. 1:10, 13 KJV); and

WHEREAS, The world and Satan seek not unity, but division by urging some to fall into sinful pride (Prov. 11:2) based upon the human attributes with which God has created us (Matt. 3:9), and by burdening the consciences of others with "sins" they have not committed and for which there can be no absolution; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has condemned (2019 Res. 7-02) such harmful ideologies, which embrace the Marxist concepts of victim and oppressor by appealing to our sinful nature to lord it over one another (Mark 10:42); and

WHEREAS, The Church must reject false teachings that war against God's unchanging truth and His order of creation; that would make us our own gods and deny the fact of His creation of male and female (Gen. 1:27); that would assign merit or guilt based upon worldly demographic or socioeconomic characteristics; or that would define and measure the success or failure of our own churches and institutions based upon the superficial appearance of our brothers and sisters therein; and

WHEREAS, It should disturb us that any educational institution of the Synod would, like the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's 1993 social statement, *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*, adopt explicit numerical racial quotas or "goals" for students or faculty in the carrying out of its mission, as though a sister or brother is more or less welcome based on (God-given) skin color, and that we have met our "goal" and can declare victory based on achieving some minimum or token number of a particular skin color or ethnicity, when the Lord of the harvest calls us to reach all nations; and

WHEREAS, The Church must faithfully proclaim the Word of God, which is living and active (Heb. 4:12), to all nations and trust the Lord of the harvest to provide the increase, rather than go beyond what God says and into the realm of worldly sociological discourses (see 1995 Appendix R3-01A, Cameron A. MacKenzie, Ken Schurb, James W. Voelz, and Norman Nagel, "Racism and the Church: A Dissenting Opinion," *Workbook*, 62-64; 1995 Res. 2-05A, "To Commend for Study the CTCR Document *Racism and the Church*," *Proceedings*, 112); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod reject and condemn disturbing ideologies of race and ethnicity-based goals and quotas (cf. Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison, "President Harrison denounces disturbing ideologies," *Reporter Online*, Feb. 21, 2023, reporter.lcms.org/2023/president-harrison-denounces-disturbing-ideologies), and direct its institutions not to teach, advocate, or adopt any such policies; and be it further

Resolved, That this resolution not be construed to limit outreach to or the production of resources for language groups, which is a non-racial characteristic; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod affirms that God has created all the nations and all of our varied attributes, of which no one should be ashamed, rejoices in His good gifts of creation given to each of us, and calls upon all people to glory only in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:2-11)

and their baptismal identity in Christ as redeemed children of God (Rev. 7:9-17).

St. Paul
Brookfield, IL

Ov. 4-23**To Amend Bylaws to Reinstate Commission on Worship****Rationale**

The Word of God and the Sacraments are the means by which God has promised to deal with us (SA III VIII 10). It is by these means that justifying faith is obtained (AC V). In order to obtain this faith, the ministry of purely teaching the Gospel and rightly administering the Sacraments was established and continues in the Church, serving as the marks of the true Christian Church and its unity (AC V; VII).

The public teaching of God's Word and administration of the Sacraments in Christian congregations is commonly referred to as "worship." Such worship is the essential and necessary public activity for every Christian congregation. In faithful public worship the following common purposes of the members of the Synod (congregations and individual ministers) are enacted: to conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Const. Art. III 1), to strengthen one another in giving bold witness by word and deed to the love and work of God (Const. Art. III 2), to educate and nourish Christians of all ages (Const. Art. III 5) and to recognize, promote, express, conserve, and defend confessional unity in the true faith (Const. Art. III 6). "Worship" necessarily encompasses a variety of faithful church practices and customs. Holy Scripture does not require precise uniformity in these. Neither is the true unity of the Church to be found by outward uniformity (AC VII 2). Nevertheless, the Synod from inception has consistently affirmed that a recognizable uniformity of order and church practice is desirable and worthy of pursuit (Const. Art. III 7).

In fact, the Synod has found this pursuit of recognizable uniformity and faithfulness of such importance that it has conditioned membership in the Synod concerning the prayers and rites, songs and hymns used in worship. The Synod requires (based on the confessional basis of Const. Art. II) that its members "exclusive[ly] use ... doctrinally pure agenda, hymnbooks, and catechisms in church and school" (Const. Art. VI 4).

Furthermore, we have the clear teaching of Holy Scripture regarding being united by God's Word in worship. For example, Scripture teaches that we are to "let the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in [our] hearts to God" (Col. 3:16). The unity we have in God's Word (John 17:20-21; Eph. 4:11-13) finds expression in our worship.

To assist its members in these things, the Synod adopts official hymnbooks and agenda and gives attention to the conduct of rites, preaching, administration of the Sacraments, and music by her members (e.g., 2016 Resolution 4-04A). Recognizing the vital importance of worship, the Synod maintained a Commission on Worship from the 1930s until 1981, although it was first acknowledged in Synod bylaws in 1960. After a brief hiatus, the Commission on Worship was reinstated in 1983 and continued until the Synod's restructuring in 2010. The Commission on Worship

was historically appointed in its entirety by the President of the Synod.

Such a Commission on Worship is clearly desirable: to coordinate, guide, and instruct the Synod by efforts that faithfully carry forward the Lutheran heritage of worship in the present day; to assure broad input and knowledgeable expertise from the Synod's membership in matters of worship and future hymnal projects; to coordinate the aims of the Synod, the President of the Synod, and Concordia Publishing House; to pursue what is excellent in each new generation so that the church's song would neither become novel nor stagnant; and to do so faithfully and cost-effectively.

Therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod reinstate a Commission on Worship as a separate commission; and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.9.1 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

3.9 Commissions

3.9.1 The commissions of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are the following:

1. Commission on Constitutional Matters
2. Commission on Doctrinal Review
3. Commission on Handbook
4. Commission on Theology and Church Relations
5. Commission on Worship

And be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.9.6 be added as follows:

Commission on Worship

3.9.6 The Commission on Worship exists to provide guidance and materials in matters of worship to the members of the Synod to assist them in their responsibility to make exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymnbooks, and catechisms in church and school (Constitution Art. VI 4) and in their objective to strive for uniformity in church practice and appreciate responsible practices and customs in harmony with the Synod's common profession of faith (Constitution Art. III 7)

3.9.6.1 The Commission on Worship shall consist of 7 voting members including ordained and commissioned ministers and laypersons:

1. One ordained minister who is a parish pastor
2. One commissioned minister who is a Director of Parish Music or parish teacher
3. One layperson
4. One additional ordained minister
5. One additional musician who is either a commissioned minister or a layperson
6. Two additional members

The commission may solicit the assistance of other persons who are well qualified to render valuable and necessary service to the church through the commission. Such persons may serve as advisory members.

3.9.6.2 The members of the Commission on Worship shall be selected as follows:

- (a) The parish pastor, the Director of Parish music or parish teacher, and the layperson shall be elected by a convention of the Synod.
- (b) The additional ordained minister, additional musician, and two additional members shall be appointed by the President of the Synod after consultation with the Council of Presidents.

3.9.6.3 The elected members of the Commission on Worship shall be elected to six-year terms and will be eligible to serve a maximum of three elected terms. The appointed members of the Commission on Worship shall serve six-year terms and have no limit as to the number of sequential terms served.

3.9.6.4 The Commission on Worship may create an executive director position and fill it in accordance with the Bylaws of the Synod and the human resources policies of corporate Synod.

(a) The executive director shall serve at the pleasure of the commission.

(1) The initial appointment of the executive director shall be by the President of the Synod after consultation with the Board of Directors of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

(2) In the event of a vacancy, the commission and the President of the Synod shall act expeditiously to fill the vacancy. This commission shall present a list of at least three but no more than five candidates to the President. The President, after consultation with the Board of Directors of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, will then appoint the executive director from the list of candidates provided by the commission.

(3) The commission shall conduct an annual review of its executive director and, before the expiration of five years, conduct a comprehensive review.

(4) At the conclusion of each five-year period, the appointment shall terminate unless the commission takes specific action to continue the person in the office, each subsequent term not to exceed five years.

(b) Any interim executive director appointment by the commission shall follow a process similar to the initial appointment of the executive director.

(1) Such interim appointee must be approved by the President of the Synod in consultation with the commission and may not serve more than 18 months.

(2) Such interim appointee shall be ineligible to serve on a permanent basis, excepting the process of filling a vacancy in 3.9.6.4 (a)(2) being followed, with the interim appointee having been included on the commission's list.

(c) The executive director of the commission shall normally attend all meetings of the commission except when his own position is being considered.

(d) The commission may create and fill other staff positions in accordance with the human resources policies of corporate Synod adopted pursuant to Bylaw 1.5.5. Such staff may attend meetings of the commission upon request of the commission.

3.9.6.5 The commission shall embrace, recognize, and pursue opportunities to provide guidance, resources, and events which deepen understanding, participation, and excellence in the preparation and conduct of Lutheran worship.

(a) It shall consult with the practical theology and the music departments of Synod colleges, universities, and seminaries to assist them to establish and affirm principles and practices in liturgy, church music, and church art which best express the true confessional theology of worship in Word and Sacrament of the Lutheran Church.

(b) It shall support the growth of congregations' and church workers' discernment in selecting worship resources that edify the church.

(c) It shall facilitate the development, adoption, and revision of agenda and hymnbooks to be adopted as official agenda and hymnbooks of the Synod.

(1) All agenda and hymnbooks that are to be accepted as official agenda and hymnbooks of the Synod shall be given such status only by a convention of the Synod.

(2) All such agenda and hymnbooks shall be considered by the convention only after a process of exposure and testing decided upon by the Synod in convention.

(3) It shall represent the Synod in the preparation of agenda and hymnbooks in which the Synod may engage in cooperation with other synods.

(4) Revisions to adopted official agenda and hymnbooks shall be made only by a convention of the Synod after requesting an evaluation and subsequent recommendations by the Commission on Worship.

(d) It shall approve all literature related to corporate Christian worship in liturgy and hymnody made available through the Synod's various boards, mission offices, and commissions. The commission shall be available to review materials from recognized service organizations upon request.

(e) It shall maintain regular coordination and consultation with Concordia Publishing House to provide guidance and alignment of its worship-related offerings.

Board for National Mission

Ov. 4-24

To Begin Preparations for New Hymnal

WHEREAS, The *Lutheran Service Book (LSB)* was first published as a hymnal of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in 2006 and encouraged for use for every congregation; and

WHEREAS, Much new music, including that developed by The Songwriter Initiative (Center for Worship Leadership at Concordia University, Irvine), which is faithful to Lutheran teachings, is available but not in the *LSB*; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Nebraska District in convention memorialize Synod to put a process in place for development of a new hymnal or hymnal supplement; and be it further

Resolved, That the district memorialize Synod in convention to create a process to develop, distribute, and encourage the use of new hymnody.

Nebraska District

Ov. 4-25

To Give Thanks for Lutheran Hymnals and Call for Production of Supplement

WHEREAS, This year the Evangelical Lutheran Church celebrates the 500th anniversary of the first Lutheran hymnal; and

WHEREAS, The year 2027 will mark the 150th anniversary of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's work specifically among people of color; and

WHEREAS, The year 2026 marks the 20th anniversary of *Lutheran Service Book (LSB)*; and

WHEREAS, It is meet, right, and salutary to raise up and encourage hymnwriters, liturgists, and musicians from the entire church to produce doctrinally pure materials that facilitate responsible creativity in worship; and

WHEREAS, In addition to a clergy shortage, there is also a shortage of musicians in our congregations who are capable of leading music for worship, with the result that many congregations do not have live music for the Divine Service; and

WHEREAS, The people of the Atlantic District are ready and willing to help with the ongoing work on hymnals in the Synod, including the production of a supplement to *LSB*, as we sing to the

Lord a new song while confessing the Christian faith with saints all over the world as the district has in it Christians from all over the world; therefore be it

Resolved, That the district in convention give thanks to Almighty God for the 500th anniversary of the first Lutheran hymnal, the Synod's work among people of all cultures, and the 20th anniversary of the *LSB* by singing "Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart" (*LSB* 806); and be it further

Resolved, That the district give thanks for all musicians of the church and all who work to aid the Lord's people in singing the church's song; and be it further

Resolved, That the district make every effort raise up new musicians during this triennium while encouraging and supporting current musicians of the church through advocating the *Set Apart to Serve* initiative, advocating resources through LCMS Worship, resourcing through the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians and the American Guild of Organists along with other entities that encourage the church's song; and be it finally

Resolved, That the district memorialize this resolution to the 2026 Synod convention for the production of a supplement for *LSB* and the involvement of the people of the district in it.

Atlantic District

Ov. 4-26

To Require Use of Synod Approved Agendas and Hymnbooks at LCMS Youth Gathering

WHEREAS, Synod Constitution VI 4 requires, as a condition of membership in the Synod, the "exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymnbooks, and catechisms in church and school"; and

WHEREAS, The Synod makes available for use by our churches and schools hymnbooks whose doctrinal purity has been established to the satisfaction of all concerned; and

WHEREAS, LCMS Youth Gathering, the triennial youth gathering organized by the Synod's Youth Ministry Office, falls by nature under the category of "church" and such groups are therefore constitutionally bound to the use of "doctrinally pure ... hymnbooks"; and

WHEREAS, The Gathering has in recent years featured assemblies at which the worship materials used have been taken from sources outside those published under the authority of the Synod and whose doctrinal purity is therefore in doubt; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention be memorialized to instruct the Gathering henceforth to draw all worship materials strictly from agendas, hymnbooks, and catechisms published under the authority of the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That the North Dakota District withhold promotion and endorsement from the Gathering until such time (as determined by the district's Board of Directors) that worship materials for the Gathering are being drawn strictly from agendas, hymnbooks, and catechisms published under the authority of the Synod.

North Dakota District

Ov. 4-27

**To Require Use of Synod-Approved Agendas
and Hymnbooks at Concordia University System
Chapels, Lutheran Summer Camps,
and Youth Gathering**

WHEREAS, Constitution Article VI 4 requires as a condition of membership in the Synod, “exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymnbooks, and catechisms in church and school”; and

WHEREAS, The Synod makes available for use by our churches and schools hymnbooks whose doctrinal purity has been established to the satisfaction of all concerned; and

WHEREAS, Corporate worship assemblies occurring under the official auspices or promotion of Synod entities by nature fall under the category of “church” and are therefore constitutionally bound to the use of “doctrinally pure . . . hymnbooks”; and

WHEREAS, Chapel services at Concordia University System (CUS) schools, Lutheran summer camps, and the Youth Gathering are included in the category of corporate worship assemblies occurring under the official auspices or promotion of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, CUS chapel services, Lutheran summer camps, and the Youth Gathering do not exclusively use worship materials taken from sources published under the authority and doctrinal approval of the Synod; doctrinal purity of other materials is used is therefore in doubt; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention instruct all persons and groups responsible for planning the corporate worship assemblies listed above henceforth to draw all worship materials strictly from hymnals and other worship resources published under the authority of the Synod.

Circuit 5 (Mitchell)
South Dakota District

Ov. 4-28

To Recommend Review of Worship Practices

WHEREAS, The Synod continues to decline in numbers with congregations closing or declining in attendance in many congregations, resulting in fewer guests and opportunities for outreach/evangelism; and

WHEREAS, Many once growing and viable congregations are now struggling from lack of willing and active members to carry out ministry goals in every area of parish life; and

WHEREAS, There are many opportunities to adapt worship services without compromising sound doctrine while being more visitor friendly and inclusive of those in changing/multicultural neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, The “dyed in the wool” Lutherans who have attended from infant Baptism to later decades may be reluctant to change decades old habits to allow for our worship services to be modified to accommodate new ideas and procedures; and

WHEREAS, The Great Commission commands us to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19) and Paul says, “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Cor. 9:22); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod conduct a study to determine if current worship practices are serving ourselves and not considering the needs of the unchurched; and be it further

Resolved, That congregations make it a priority to determine the worship style that the people in their neighborhoods would like to hear and see in church services, without compromising doctrine, and implement some of those changes to attract and minister to those who join them for church services; and be it further

Resolved, That in the preparation of the weekly sermon, the pastor present three to four easily understood key points for listeners to live by during the week in hopes the energized members, inactive members, and visitors will return to receive Word and Sacrament ministry; and be it finally

Resolved, That congregation members, young and old, support the pastor and ministry in the congregation by inviting their neighbors and friends, the unchurched and delinquent.

Faith
Hot Springs Village, AR

Ov. 4-29

**To Properly Examine New Worship Practices
within the Synod**

WHEREAS, With regard to the Lord’s Supper, when our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ instituted the Sacrament, He said, “Take and eat; this is my body . . . Drink from [the cup] all of you. This is My blood of the covenant . . .” (Matt. 26:26–28 NIV); and

WHEREAS, St. Paul writes, “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26 NIV); and

WHEREAS, The Scriptures therefore declare that we eat and drink the body and blood of the Lord in Holy Communion and do not speak of adoring either the host or the cup; and

WHEREAS, At the time of the Reformation until this day the Roman Catholic Church has practiced the adoration of the host and cup when bells are rung during the Words of Institution; and

WHEREAS, Luther affirmed the adoration of Christ as present in the Sacrament as distinguished from the Roman practice of the adoration of the host in his 1523 paper entitled “The Adoration of the Sacrament” (*Luther’s Works*, 36:269–305); and

WHEREAS, By the 1530s the adoration of the host was no longer practiced in Lutheran churches. It is not in any of the early church orders, including those of Luther; and

WHEREAS, It is stated in *Luther’s Table Talk*, under the heading “Elevation of the Host Abolished in Wittenberg, No. 5589, Spring, 1543”:

Thereupon somebody asked, “Are there other reasons than adoration [of the host] for abolishing elevation?” He answered, “I know no other.” The former suggested, “Doctor, in places where the gospel has not been preached so long one might tolerate this patiently and not abolish elevation, especially where the people are not yet established in their faith.” The doctor replied, “Yes, it’s of little consequence to us. We don’t care if it’s abolished or not, *provided the abuse—that is, the adoration—is not there*. Some churches have seen that we have dropped the elevation [in Wittenberg] and have imitated us. We are pleased with that.” (*Luther’s Works* 54:462, emphasis added);

and

WHEREAS, The Formula of Concord specifically rejects and condemns the adoration in Article VII, which states, “On the other

side, we unanimously reject and condemn all the following errors ... *That the external visible elements of bread and wine in the holy sacrament should be adored*" (FC Ep VII 40 [Tappert]; emphasis added); and

WHEREAS, Chemnitz rejects "the carrying about, the reservation, and the adoration of the bread, all of which are beyond the usage instituted by Christ" (Martin Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, J. A. O. Preus, tr. [CPH, 1979], 50; emphasis added); and

WHEREAS, While it has been a Lutheran custom that the congregation kneels during the entire Words of Institution (Friedrich Lochner, *The Chief Divine Service* [CPH, 2020], 253), it has not been a Lutheran custom until the late 20th century that the presiding minister would elevate the host and cup and then kneel to adore them; and

WHEREAS, Teachers of the Synod have repeatedly rejected this practice throughout our history, such as when Eugene Klug and Otto Stahlke call the adoration of the "external visible elements of bread and wine" (FC Ep VII 19; SD VII 126) "false adoration" (Eugene F. Klug and Otto F. Stahlke, *Getting into the Formula of Concord* [CPH, 1977], 115); and

WHEREAS, This practice has not been in any of the Synod's hymnals; and

WHEREAS, Despite this, the adoration of the host is practiced in several of our congregations, educational institutions, conventions, and convocations of the Synod today; and

WHEREAS, Regarding the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, our Lord Jesus Christ told us to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19); and

WHEREAS, St. Paul writes that there is one baptism (Eph. 4:5); and

WHEREAS, There is no reference in the New Testament to people splashing water in remembrance of their Baptism; and

WHEREAS, Dipping and making the sign of the cross in holy water is a practice of the Roman Catholic Church; and

WHEREAS, In the Small Catechism, Luther writes that the water in Baptism is plain water unless it is combined with the Word of God in an actual Baptism, and that we remember our Baptism through daily contrition and repentance (SC IV, Holy Baptism); and

WHEREAS, The practice of placing a baptismal font or basin at the entrance of the church and encouraging worshippers to dip their fingers and make the sign of the cross was not practiced in the Lutheran church until the late 20th century; and

WHEREAS, Until recently, baptismal fonts were dry unless there was a baptism; and

WHEREAS, There is nothing special about the water in a baptismal font unless it is being used to baptize; and

WHEREAS, This practice has also crept into many congregations, educational institutions, conventions, and convocations of the Synod in the last several years; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) be requested to study the practices of Eucharistic adoration and the dipping of fingers in the baptismal font, examining them in light of Holy Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the historic practice of the church; and be it further

Resolved, That the CTCR report its findings and recommendations to the Synod in convention; and be it finally

Resolved, That congregations, educational institutions, convocations, and conventions of the Synod be encouraged to refrain from these practices pending the report.

Benediction
Milwaukee, WI

Ov. 4-30

To Condemn Delivery of Children's Sermons in Divine Service by Laity

WHEREAS, Children's sermons in the Divine Service are often delivered by laity; and

WHEREAS, Our Confessions state that no one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the Sacraments without a proper [public] call (AC XIV); and

WHEREAS, The delivery of children's sermons in the Divine Service has the character of public teaching and preaching and includes as its audience not only the children to whom the sermon is directly addressed, but also the adults present; therefore be it

Resolved, That the North Dakota District in convention condemn the delivery of children's sermons in the Divine Service by laity; and be it further

Resolved, That the Praesidium of the district rebuke congregations that make use of laity to deliver children's sermons in their Divine Service; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention condemn the delivery of children's sermons in the Divine Service by laity.

North Dakota District

Ov. 4-31

To Honor and Guard Chief Divine Service of Local Congregation

WHEREAS, The Chief Divine Service is the primary time and place in which the faithful gather to receive the Lord's gifts, His holy Word and Sacraments, in a particular locale (Heb. 10:25; SC 1, Third Commandment; Matt. 18:20); and

WHEREAS, In the Chief Divine Service, offered and delivered is the forgiveness of sins, and thereby life and salvation; and where and when the Lord's Supper is celebrated, our Lord's very body and blood are present upon the altar, distributed, and received; therefore, to be absent from this gathering is a grave thing not to be taken lightly, both due to the need for our own faith to be constantly strengthened and due to our neighbors' need for our presence, encouragement, and support; and

WHEREAS, The devil and the world delight to keep the faithful away from the Chief Divine Service, offering any number of alternatives, many of which are not sinful in and of themselves, but are still unbecoming of the Church due to their conflict with the principal gathering of her people and with her Lord's service to her there; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod and its districts, congregations, auxiliaries, and recognized service organizations not offer other activities or events of general interest and intentional appeal, including (but not limited to) conventions, conferences, speakers' presentations, educational programs, camps, meals, fundraisers, and anniversary observances, that conflict with the Chief Divine Services of those congregations that are proximate to the activity or

event, or those of congregations further afield from which it is reasonable to assume activity or event attendees may be traveling; and be it further

Resolved, That circuit visitors, district presidents, and the President of the Synod give special attention to this matter in their advisory and disciplinary roles.

Circuit 14 (Austin)
Minnesota South District

Ov. 4-32

To Amend Bylaw 6.2.2 (a) to Revise Recognized Service Organization Requirement of 100 Percent Synod Board Membership

WHEREAS, The 2016 Synod convention created a task force to review the current structure and recommend the best model for the Synod's relationship to recognized service organizations (RSOs) (2016 Res. 4-03B, "To Convene Task Force to Review Recognized Service Organization Program and Bylaws," *Proceedings*, 146–47); and

WHEREAS, The task force was charged with, among other things, "[ensuring] that all recommendations maintain the important relationships with the agencies that are recognized by the LCMS" (2016 Res. 4-03B, *Proc.*, 146); and

WHEREAS, The 2019 Synod convention adopted the recommendation of the task force in Resolution 4-06A, "To Amend Bylaw Section 6.2 to Revitalize Synod's Recognized Service Organization Program" (2019 *Proc.*, 137–42); and

WHEREAS, This resolution thoroughly revised and redefined the structure and expectations of RSOs; and

WHEREAS, An unintended consequence of adopting such a large and sweeping change in a single resolution was that some long-standing RSOs subsequently found themselves no longer qualified; and

WHEREAS, The language of Bylaw 6.2.2 (a), adopted in 2019 Res. 4-06A, states that any witness service organization (a new category) must now have 100 percent of its board of directors holding membership in a congregation of the Synod or its partner churches; and

WHEREAS, An organization involved in mission or service in areas without Synod representation, or that desires to expand into regions without Synod congregations, would find it invaluable to recruit board members who better understand the mission context; and

WHEREAS, This requirement has forced RSOs to choose between proudly partnering and affiliating with the Synod or pursuing the mission goals for which they exist; therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 6.2.2 (a) be amended as follows, so that a witness service organization may have board membership of at least two-thirds members from congregations of the Synod or its partner churches;

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

6.2.2 Policies shall distinguish the three classes of recognized service organization, with criteria, procedures, and benefits appropriate to each, further distinctions being drawn within the categories as needed:

(a) A *witness service organization*, under the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions, engages in Word or Word-and-Sacrament

ministry (including chaplaincy), religious media/programming, mission society activity, support of specific missions, mission-and-ministry training, church worker professional development, church worker care, or other work directly related to the church's proclamation. A witness service organization is governed solely by Synod (or partner church) congregations or a board comprising ~~solely~~ members, at least two-thirds of whom are members of member congregations of the Synod (or its partner churches).

(b) An *educational service organization* ...

(c) A *mercy service organization* ...

and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention commend the work of the many and various service organizations and their support of the Gospel proclamation; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention express the earnest desire that longtime and faithful RSOs not be needlessly severed from affiliation with the Synod.

Michigan District

Ov. 4-33

To Promote Transparency and Accountability for Recognized Service Organizations and To Allow Certain Educational Institutions to Be Recognized

WHEREAS, The Synod grants recognized service organizations (RSOs) numerous privileges, including the ability to call rostered workers; and

WHEREAS, Not all categories of RSOs are required to have 100 percent Synod boards, even though such boards can issue divine calls to rostered workers, which is an incoherent situation; and

WHEREAS, Although RSOs are required to operate in harmony with Synod doctrine and practice and maintain nonprofit status, there is no standardized public reporting for finances, governance changes, or program outcomes required beyond voluntary submission or Synod request; therefore, RSOs not required to file tax returns with the Internal Revenue Service can operate without routinely publishing even unaudited financials, conflict-of-interest disclosures, or compensation information ("Why LCMS RSOs Need Greater Transparency and Accountability—and How *Ad Crucem* RSO Explorer Might Help," *Ad Crucem News*, Jan. 9, 2026, adcrucem.news); and

WHEREAS, The Synod recognizes RSOs for a five-year term, after which they may reapply. Yet there is no consistent periodic review process that includes doctrinal conformity checks, governance review, or financial accountability benchmarks. Without a transparent evaluation cycle, the system relies heavily on occasional voluntary compliance rather than routine and systematic verification. Moreover, the criteria by which an RSO's doctrinal alignment and programmatic harmony are assessed aren't publicly codified, leaving evaluators and stakeholders guessing about expectations and enforcement; and

WHEREAS, When a charity carries the Synod imprimatur, despite the Synod's disclaimers about endorsement and responsibility, individuals and congregations often assume that the organization represents the Synod's values, theology, and internal controls. Yet in practice, RSOs are independent, but their internal decisions, partnerships, and public engagements can reflect back on the Synod without clear accountability; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Board of Directors revise the current RSO agreement and policies to include:

- (a) a requirement that the RSO annually file a standardized annual financial report including audited or unaudited financials and governance disclosures, including executive compensation and conflict of interest policies, with the Synod and each district in which the RSO is operating;
- (b) stated criteria for the determination of alignment with the Synod by the RSO;
- (c) a requirement that a document demonstrating the RSO's alignment with Synod doctrine and practice be made publicly available and updated at least every five years upon reaccreditation;
- (d) a requirement that all Board members be members in good standing of Synod or partner church congregations;
- (e) clarification that an educational institution (other than a seminary) whose board members are all members in good standing of Synod or partner church congregations is eligible for recognition as an educational service organization; and
- (f) a requirement that an RSO application be approved or denied within 90 days of completed submission, and if denied, that the applicant be given a specific written statement of the reasons for denial.

St. Paul
Brookfield, IL

Ov. 4-34

To Direct Offices of National and International Mission to Deny or Revoke Recognized Service Organization Status for Organizations Supporting, Advocating, or Otherwise Promoting LGBTQIA+ Agenda and Lifestyle, and To Amend Bylaws 6.2.3–4

WHEREAS, Since before the fall into sin, God created human beings male and female (Gen. 1:27); and

WHEREAS, Since before the fall into sin, God gave man and woman to be husband and wife (Gen. 2:24); and

WHEREAS, After the fall into sin, God reiterates that he still gives man and woman to be husband and wife in marriage (Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:7; Eph. 5:31); and

WHEREAS, Sin is anything that goes contrary to God's purpose and design (1 John 5:17); and

WHEREAS, Our country has adopted policies and practices that uphold, promote, and uplift LGBTQIA+ positions on gender, sexuality, and marriage that are contrary to God's design and are therefore sinful according to God's Word (e.g. ruling that marriage is no longer exclusively the lifelong union of one man and one woman); and

WHEREAS, The LGBTQIA+ community is supported, uplifted, and celebrated at many times and places (e.g. Pride month, Pride parades, etc.); and

WHEREAS, The Christian is called to not follow in the deeds of darkness, but rather, is to lead a holy and God-pleasing life (Eph. 5:11; 1 Peter 2:9); and

WHEREAS, Such a God-pleasing life does not seek to remain in sin nor to celebrate it, but repents of it, receives forgiveness for it, and strives to sin no more (Rom. 6:1–2; Psalm 32:5; John 8:11); and

WHEREAS, The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) published a report on marriage and sexuality entitled, *A Chaste and Decent Life: An Update to Human Sexuality 1981*, which concludes that, "attitudes towards gender identity and dysphoria, homosexuality and homosexual marriage, and societal pressures regarding sexuality, among others, have changed markedly in the last four decades," yet still maintaining that "God's intention for human sexuality does not change" (LCMS CTCR, [adopted 2022], 37); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has upheld and reaffirmed such positions regarding marriage and sexuality, as recently as the 2023 Synod convention (Resolution 5-11, "To Reaffirm Synod's Biblical Positions on Marriage and Sexuality"); and

WHEREAS, The granting of recognized service organization (RSO) status by the Synod "signifies that a service organization, while independent of the Synod, fosters the mission and ministry of the church, engages in program activity that extends the mission and ministry of the Synod, is in harmony with the programs of the Synod, and respects and does not act contrary to the doctrine and practice of the Synod" (Bylaw 6.2.1); and

WHEREAS, Many resources from the Synod and its partners (Lutheran Church Extension Fund, Concordia Plan Services, etc.) are made available to the RSOs of the Synod to support their work; and

WHEREAS, The Office of National Mission (ONM) and the Office of International Mission (OIM) are tasked with the granting of RSO status (Bylaw 6.2.4); and

WHEREAS, Lutheran Community Services Northwest (LCSNW) and Lutheran Social Services of Northern California (LSSNorCA) have both been granted RSO status; and

WHEREAS, LCSNW, as recently as June of 2024, participated in an annual Spokane Pride Parade "as they do every year" in an effort to make their communities "more healthy, just, hopeful and [sic] *Prideful* for all," ("Pride is more than a month at LCSNW; it's a mindset to serve LGBTQ clients," lcsnw.org/2024/06/pride-is-more-than-a-month/, accessed Oct. 1, 2024); and

WHEREAS, LSSNorCA stands with the LGBTQIA+ community and proudly supports them, as stated in a 2023 letter from the CEO of the LSSNorCA ("Statement on LGBTQIA+ Pride," lssnorcal.org/file_download/b8699925-8345-437f-8cda-dad7d95d3d77, accessed Oct. 1, 2024); therefore be it

Resolved, That the RSO status of LCSNW and LSSNorCA be terminated immediately; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod members support and encourage their respective district presidents as they go about their task given them in Bylaw 6.2.1 (c) of overseeing the RSOs under their ecclesiastical supervision; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct the ONM and OIM to decline any applications for RSO status received from any organization supporting, uplifting, celebrating, or otherwise promoting LGBTQIA+ groups, agendas, thoughts, ideas, ideals, etc., including organizations seeking RSO status that are partnered with an organization supporting, advocating, or otherwise promoting the same; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct the ONM and OIM to not grant or renew RSO status to any organization supporting, uplifting, celebrating, or otherwise promoting LGBTQIA+ groups, agendas, thoughts, ideas, ideals, etc., including organizations seeking RSO status that are partnered with an organization supporting, uplifting, celebrating, or otherwise promoting LGBTQIA+ groups, agendas, thoughts, ideas, ideals, etc.; and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 6.2.3 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

6.2.3 Program administration shall be carried out by the Offices of National and International Mission according to these bylaws, and according to policies and criteria developed by the Synod Board of Directors, mission boards, and mission offices.

(a) The Board of Directors of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod shall adopt common policies and criteria for granting of recognized service organization status by Synod’s mission offices, such policies relating to expectations for the corporate structure and governance of the organizations, statements regarding their legal and corporate independence from the Synod, and the necessary relation of their work to the mission and ministry of the Synod as generally expressed in its Constitution and Bylaws. These policies shall include an agreement with the recognized service organization stating that they adopt and will uphold the biblical definition of manhood, womanhood, and marriage, as adopted by the Synod and that they will not endorse, support the work of, nor enter into partnerships with other organizations who either undermine or do not uphold the same. The Board of Directors shall approve the standard form of agreement to be entered into by the Synod and each recognized service organization.

...

and be it finally

Resolved, That Bylaw 6.2.4 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

6.2.4 Subject to policies adopted by the Synod’s Board of Directors and the respective mission board, recognized service organization status may be granted and revoked by the Office of National Mission or the Office of International Mission to a service organization (other than an auxiliary) that extends the mission and ministry of the Synod but is not part of the Synod as defined by its Constitution and Bylaws.

(a) Applications for recognized service organization status shall be made to the Office of the Secretary of the Synod, which will facilitate the application as follows:

...

(4) To be declined are all applications for RSO status from organizations currently supporting, uplifting, celebrating, or otherwise promoting groups, agendas, thoughts, ideas, ideals, etc., contrary to God’s design for man and woman as well as applications from organizations seeking RSO status that are partnered with the same.

(b) Within the area of its responsibility and in accordance with policies and criteria developed by the Synod Board of Directors, the respective mission board and office, each mission office shall determine to which organizations recognized service organization status will be granted and revoked.

...

Mid-South District

Ov. 4-35

To Request Action and Closer Examination of Recognized Service Organization Status regarding Matters of Human Sexuality, and To Amend Bylaws 6.2.3–4

WHEREAS, Since before the fall into sin, God created human beings male and female (Gen. 1:27); and

WHEREAS, Since before the fall into sin, God gave man and woman to be husband and wife (Gen. 2:24); and

WHEREAS, After the fall into sin, God reiterates that he still gives man and woman to be husband and wife in marriage (Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:7; Eph. 5:31); and

WHEREAS, Sin is anything that goes contrary to God’s purpose and design (1 John 5:17); and

WHEREAS, Our country has adopted policies and practices that uphold, promote, and uplift LGBTQIA+ positions on gender, sexuality, and marriage that are contrary to God’s design and are therefore sinful according to God’s Word (e.g. ruling that marriage is no longer exclusively the lifelong union of one man and one woman); and

WHEREAS, The LGBTQIA+ community is supported, uplifted, and celebrated at many times and places (e.g. Pride month, Pride parades, etc.); and

WHEREAS, The Christian is called to not follow in the deeds of darkness, but rather, is to lead a holy and God-pleasing life (Eph. 5:11; 1 Peter 2:9); and

WHEREAS, Such a God-pleasing life does not seek to remain in sin nor to celebrate it, but repents of it, receives forgiveness for it, and strives to sin no more (Rom. 6:1–2; Psalm 32:5; John 8:11); and

WHEREAS, The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) published a report on marriage and sexuality entitled, *A Chaste and Decent Life: An Update to Human Sexuality 1981*, which concludes that, “attitudes towards gender identity and dysphoria, homosexuality and homosexual marriage, and societal pressures regarding sexuality, among others, have changed markedly in the last four decades,” yet still maintaining that “God’s intention for human sexuality does not change” (LCMS CTCR, [adopted 2022], 37); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has upheld and reaffirmed such positions regarding marriage and sexuality, as recently as the 2023 Synod convention (Resolution 5-11, “To Reaffirm Synod’s Biblical Positions on Marriage and Sexuality”); and

WHEREAS, The granting of recognized service organization (RSO) status by the Synod “signifies that a service organization, while independent of the Synod, fosters the mission and ministry of the church, engages in program activity that extends the mission and ministry of the Synod, is in harmony with the programs of the Synod, and respects and does not act contrary to the doctrine and practice of the Synod” (Bylaw 6.2.1); and

WHEREAS, Many resources from the Synod and its partners (Lutheran Church Extension Fund, Concordia Plan Services, etc.) are made available to the RSOs of the Synod to support their work; and

WHEREAS, The Office of the Secretary of the Synod is tasked with receiving and facilitating applications for RSO status (Bylaw 6.2.4 [a]); and

WHEREAS, The Office of National Mission (ONM) and the Office of International Mission (OIM) are tasked with the granting of RSO status (Bylaw 6.2.4); and

WHEREAS, Lutheran Community Services Northwest (LCSNW) and Lutheran Social Services of Northern California (LSSNorCA) have both been granted RSO status; and

WHEREAS, LCSNW, as recently as June of 2024, participated in an annual Spokane Pride Parade “as they do every year” in an effort to make their communities “more healthy, just, hopeful and [sic] *Prideful* for all,” (“Pride is more than a month at LCSNW; it’s a mindset to serve LGBTQ clients,” *lcsnw.org/2024/06/pride-is-more-than-a-month*”, accessed Oct. 1, 2024); and

WHEREAS, LSSNorCA stands with the LGBTQIA+ community and proudly supports them, as stated in a 2023 letter from the CEO of the LSSNorCA, (“Statement on LGBTQIA+ Pride,” *www.lssnorcal.org/file_download/b8699925-8345-437f-8cda-dad7d95d3d77*, accessed Oct. 1, 2024); therefore be it

Resolved, That the RSO status of LCSNW and LSSNorCA be terminated immediately; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod members support and encourage their respective district presidents as they go about their task given them in Bylaw 6.2.1 (c) of overseeing the RSOs under their ecclesiastical supervision.

Resolved, That the Office of the Secretary decline any applications for RSO status received from any organization supporting, uplifting, celebrating, or otherwise promoting LGBTQIA+ groups, agendas, thoughts, ideas, ideals, etc., including organizations seeking RSO status that are partnered with an organization supporting, advocating, or otherwise promoting the same; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct the ONM and OIM not to grant or renew RSO status to any organization supporting, uplifting, celebrating, or otherwise promoting LGBTQIA+ groups, agendas, thoughts, ideas, ideals, etc., including organizations seeking RSO status that are partnered with an organization supporting, uplifting, celebrating, or otherwise promoting LGBTQIA+ groups, agendas, thoughts, ideas, ideals, etc.; and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 6.2.3 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

6.2.3 Program administration shall be carried out by the Offices of National and International Mission according to these bylaws, and according to policies and criteria developed by the Synod Board of Directors, mission boards, and mission offices.

(a) The Board of Directors of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod shall adopt common policies and criteria for granting of recognized service organization status by Synod’s mission offices, such policies relating to expectations for the corporate structure and governance of the organizations, statements regarding their legal and corporate independence from the Synod, and the necessary relation of their work to the mission and ministry of the Synod as generally expressed in its Constitution and Bylaws. These policies shall include an agreement with the recognized service organization stating that they adopt and will uphold the biblical definition of manhood, womanhood, and marriage, as adopted by the Synod and that they will not endorse, support the work of, nor enter into partnerships with other organizations who either undermine or do not uphold the same. The Board of Directors shall approve the standard form of agreement to be entered into by the Synod and each recognized service organization.

...

and be it finally

Resolved, That Bylaw 6.2.4 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

6.2.4 Subject to policies adopted by the Synod’s Board of Directors and the respective mission board, recognized service organization status may be granted by the Office of National Mission or the Office of International Mission to a service organization (other than an auxiliary) that extends the mission and ministry of the Synod but is not part of the Synod as defined by its Constitution and Bylaws.

(a) Applications for recognized service organization status shall be made to the Office of the Secretary of the Synod, which will facilitate the application as follows:

...

(4) To be declined are all applications for RSO status from organizations currently supporting, uplifting, celebrating, or otherwise promoting groups, agendas, thoughts, ideas, ideals, etc., contrary to God’s design for man and woman as well as applications from organizations seeking RSO status that are partnered with the same.

(b) Within the area of its responsibility and in accordance with policies and criteria developed by the Synod Board of Directors, the respective mission board and office, each mission office shall determine to which organizations recognized service organization status will be granted and revoked.

...

South Wisconsin District

Ov. 4-36

To Offer Care and Support for Families Affected by Homosexuality, Transgenderism, and Sexual Libertinism

WHEREAS, God in His almighty power has made humans in His image, which has subsequently been defaced and damaged through original sin (Genesis 1; Ap II 17–18; FC SD I 10–11); and

WHEREAS, God made humans male and female (Gen. 1:27; Matt. 19:4), and designed marriage between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24) for the purposes of companionship and support (Gen. 2:18, 20–23), procreation (Gen. 1:28), and protection from sin (1 Cor. 7:1–9); and

WHEREAS, God has designed and gifted sexual intimacy and intercourse to occur only within marriage between one husband and one wife (Ex. 20:14; Deut. 5:18; Num. 5:11–31; Matt. 5:27–30); and

WHEREAS, The world and our own sinful flesh continue to tempt Christians away from God’s design for marriage and sexuality, with errors such as sexual libertinism, homosexuality, and transgenderism; and

WHEREAS, The families of our congregations and church workers face these temptations and struggle to find resources for instruction, spiritual care, and personal counseling that are faithful to biblical designs for marriage and sexuality; and

WHEREAS, The Synod’s Created Male and Female task force, created by the Office of National Mission in accordance with 2019 Resolution 11-03A, “To Encourage Synod to Develop Resources to Aid Congregations and Schools regarding Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Issues,” and continued by the Synod as instructed in 2023 Res. 1-04A, “To Continue to Address Sexual Orientation

and Gender Identity Issues,” has begun its work in studying these problems among rostered church workers and in Synod schools, identifying existing and needed resources, and developing programs that might offer care to those struggling with these temptations and their families; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention encourage its member congregations and church workers to pray for those whose families have been affected by homosexuality, transgenderism, and sexual libertinism, and also encourage them to remain steadfast in their commitment to uphold and teach God’s design for marriage and sexuality while navigating difficult familial relationships, and lovingly support them as they bear these burdens; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod thank the Created Male and Female task force for its work, and continue the task force in the next triennium, with a specific encouragement to develop and facilitate conferences, seminars, and retreats to help the families of our congregations and church workers who have loved ones dealing with these temptations; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct its seminaries, colleges, and other responsible agencies (districts, recognized service organizations [RSOs], etc.) to identify biblically faithful Lutheran counselors who will abide by God’s revealed design for marriage and sexuality, and aid in providing theological education and standards to ensure their biblical faithfulness; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct its seminaries, colleges, and other responsible agencies (districts, RSOs, etc.) to identify and support theologically trained pastors, seminarians, and laypeople who may wish to seek further training in counseling in order to provide care to those struggling with these challenges; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod encourage the institutions of the Concordia University System to establish or expand counseling programs that provide both for biblically faithful counseling to students tempted by homosexuality, and transgenderism, and sexual libertinism, and for the training of biblically faithful counselors to care for those inside and outside of the church who are tempted or whose lives and families have been affected by homosexuality, transgenderism, and sexual libertinism.

Missouri District

Ov. 4-37

To Continue to Oppose Practice of Couples Living Together outside Marriage and To Support Pastors and Congregations Who Lovingly Call to Repentance, Give Absolution, and Help to Live in Harmony with God’s Word

WHEREAS, The Sixth Commandment commands Christians to live chaste and decent lives in word and deed (SC I, Ed. 1942); and

WHEREAS, God’s Word condemns fornication, that is, sleeping with someone who is not your spouse (Galatians 5; Ephesians 5; Colossians 3); and

WHEREAS, Jesus calls Christians not to conform to the ways of the world, but to be salt and light in the world (Matthew 5) and to “abstain from the passions of the flesh” and to “[k]eep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable,” so that they may not accuse us of being evil doers (1 Peter 2:11–12); and

WHEREAS, God’s Word does not want us to live in a way that tempts others to sin. Living together outside of marriage not only sets a bad example, but it also tempts the youth of the congregation and those who may be struggling with sexual immorality to believe that this is acceptable Christian living. Jesus says, “whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 18:6); and

WHEREAS, God’s Word calls Christians to repent of sin and bear fruit in keeping with repentance. St. Paul writes, “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted” (Gal. 6:1); and

WHEREAS, Cohabitation before marriage in the Christian congregation is a common source of grief for faithful servants of the Word, whose work should “be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you” (Heb. 13:17 NIV); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod affirm that couples living together outside of marriage are living contrary to God’s Word; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention voice their support for pastors and congregations who lovingly call such couples to repent, who offer absolution to them, and who help and guide such couples to bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

Circuit 5 (Mitchell)
South Dakota District

Ov. 4-38

To Amend Bylaws to Provide Clarity and Address Practical Considerations for Specialized Spiritual Care Ministry

Rationale

The Office of National Mission (ONM) requests attention to the bylaws that address the work of Specialized Spiritual Care Ministry. Several updates are needed. First, the language utilized by recognized service organizations and other agencies that provide specialized spiritual care has changed over time. Organizations that serve people who are ill, aging, or disabled no longer refer to their work as being “institutional.” Additionally, the ONM’s Specialized Spiritual Care Ministry endorses workers for broader work than chaplaincy, which has historically referred to an ordained pastor associated with a physical chapel in which worship services are conducted. The term “institutional chaplain” utilized in Synod Bylaws is outdated and leaves out the specialized spiritual care work of the ministers of religion—commissioned who do not lead worship services and serve in related chaplaincy or counseling roles. Secondly, the ONM and the Office of International Mission (OIM) have determined that the work of chaplains serving in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is more closely aligned and thus better supported by the Ministry to the Armed Forces which is a department of the OIM. The bylaw that references the VA has the calling agency as the Board for National Mission and needs to be updated.

Proposed Action

Therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 2.11.1 (h) be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING**Active Members**

2.11.1 To remain on the roster of the Synod as an active member, an ordained or commissioned minister of religion must be a communicant member of a congregation which is a member of the Synod (except as provided in paragraph [c] below) and be regularly performing the duties of one of the following::

...

(h) A military ~~or institutional~~ chaplain or a Specialized Care worker endorsed by the Synod.

...

and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.8.2 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING**Board for National Mission**

3.8.2 The Board for National Mission is charged with developing and determining policies for the coordination of and in support of district ministries which support congregations and schools (Bylaw 1.2.1 [n]). These policies shall embrace and apply the mission and ministry emphases adopted by the national convention. Under the leadership of the President of the Synod, pursuant to Bylaw 3.3.1.1.1, the board shall assist in identifying the specific goals for the Office of National Mission. Policies determined by the board (implemented by staff) may include but not be limited to:

- strong national mission leadership
- Lutheran school ministries and accreditation
- human care and domestic mercy efforts
- stewardship
- evangelism
- church planting and revitalization
- youth ministry

Upon recommendation of the Office of National Mission, the Board for National Mission shall serve as a calling agency for ~~institutional and agency chaplains and other non foreign specialized ministers (e.g., Veterans Administration chaplains, Bureau of Prison chaplains, hospital chaplains, pastoral counselors, and teachers of chaplaincy and pastoral counseling)~~ church workers serving in chaplaincy and counseling roles in institutions and agencies (e.g. Bureau of Prisons, hospitals, spiritual care counselors, and teachers of spiritual care education) after consultation with the appropriate district presidents(s) (cf. Bylaw 2.12.1.4).

and be it finally

Resolved, That Bylaw 6.2.2 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING**6.2 Recognized Service Organizations**

...

6.2.2 Policies shall distinguish the three classes of recognized service organization, with criteria, procedures, and benefits appropriate to each, further distinctions being drawn within the categories as needed:

(a) A *witness service organization*, under the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions, engages in Word or Word-and-Sacrament ministry (including chaplaincy roles), religious media/programming, mission society activity, support of specific missions, mission-and-ministry training, church worker professional development, church worker care, or other work directly related to the church's proclamation. A witness service organization is governed solely by Synod (or partner church)

congregations or a board comprising solely members of member congregations of the Synod (or its partner churches).

...

Board for National Mission

Ov. 4-39**To Use Title *Chaplain* within the Synod Exclusively for Ordained Clergy**

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture teaches that the pastoral office is entrusted with the public preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments (Matt. 28:18–20; John 20:21–23; 1 Cor. 4:1); and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions affirm the necessity and centrality of the called and ordained pastor in the life of the Church (AC XIV; Tr 67–74); and

WHEREAS, The term *chaplain* historically designates an ordained clergyman entrusted with the spiritual care of a specific community, institution, or military unit, thus reflecting a pastoral function; and

WHEREAS, The usage of *chaplain* for individuals not holding the Office of the Public Ministry can create confusion regarding who is authorized to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments, potentially undermining the pastoral office and our confession of the Office of the Holy Ministry; therefore be it

Resolved, That the 2026 Synod convention adopt the position that the title *chaplain* within Synod contexts be reserved for ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament; and be it further

Resolved, That institutions, agencies, and ministries within the Synod be encouraged to ensure that titles and job descriptions make clear any distinction between ordained chaplains and other spiritual-care providers (e.g., deaconesses, lay ministers, or pastoral counselors) who may assist but are not called and ordained to the Office of the Holy Ministry; and be it further

Resolved, That districts, circuit visitors, and local congregations be urged to instruct their members regarding the proper use of the term *chaplain*, reaffirming our confessional understanding that preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments are entrusted to the pastoral office; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks for the faithful service of all who provide spiritual care within our fellowship, while upholding in doctrine and practice that the title *chaplain* belongs to those ordained to serve as called ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1).

South Wisconsin District

Ov. 4-40**To Encourage Use of Chalice**

WHEREAS, The people of God in the Lord's Supper receive the holy body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the institution of Jesus; and

WHEREAS, Communion confesses our unity with our brothers and sisters in the Christian congregation; and

WHEREAS, The Lord Jesus passed a single cup to His disciples at the Last Supper; and

WHEREAS, St. Paul speaks of a single "cup of blessing" in 1 Corinthians 10:16; and

WHEREAS, Artists across the centuries depict the common, historical, and regular practice of Christians using the chalice; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod encourage its congregations to offer the chalice as an option when the Lord's Supper is celebrated as we strive to be more closely united with one another in doctrine and practice.

North Dakota District

Ov. 4-41

To Celebrate Progress and to Encourage Increasing Faithfulness in Offering Every Sunday Communion

WHEREAS, In convention, the Synod passed 1995 Resolution 2-08A, "To Encourage Every Sunday Communion," stating:

Resolved, That The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in convention encourage its pastors and congregation to study the scriptural, confessional, and historical witness to every Sunday communion with a view to recovering the opportunity for receiving the Lord's Supper each Lord's Day;

and

WHEREAS, For three decades since the aforesaid passed 1995 Res. 2-08A, faithful pastors, congregations, and theologians within the Synod have diligently studied, taught, and advocated for the practice of offering the Lord's Supper every Sunday with many congregations increasing the frequency that Holy Communion is offered; and

WHEREAS, The reception of the gifts of God offered to His people in this Sacrament, including the forgiveness of our sins (examples include but are not limited to Matt. 26:26–28; LC V 21–22) and the strengthening of our faith to the blessing of both body and soul (1 Cor. 11:28–30; LC V 23–24) is essential; and

WHEREAS, Every Sunday Communion, as advocated in 1995 Res. 2-08A, remains in full accord with the Word of God (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 11:20, 24–26, 33; Heb. 4:16) and our Lutheran Confessions (AC XXIV 1, 34; Ap XXIV 1; SC Preface 21–22; LC V 24); and

WHEREAS, A number of resources have been produced in these past three decades to aid our pastors, congregations, and theologians in their study, teaching, and advocacy for every Sunday Communion, including such examples as various issues of *The Lutheran Witness* magazine, *The Lutheran Witness* blogpost series on the Lord's Supper from late 2020 and early 2021 (witness.lcms.org/tag/series-our-lords-supper/), the Rev. Dr. Kenneth W. Wieting's *The Blessings of Weekly Communion* (Concordia Publishing House [CPH], 2006) and *Lutheranism 101: The Lord's Supper* (CPH, 2012), and other resources from CPH and other Synod sources; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Minnesota South District in convention celebrate the progress that has been made regarding the offering of every Sunday Communion in our Synod, giving thanks to God for the faithful labors of those pastors, congregations, and theologians who have worked to renew this practice among us; and be it further

Resolved, That the district in convention reaffirm its confession that the Holy Communion is a precious treasure of the Church, given by the Lord for our great good and as such something to be offered and received regularly and often, in accordance with our

Lord's Institution, and encouraging all its pastors, congregations, and theologians to continue prayerfully studying, teaching, and consider offering every Sunday Communion where that is not yet the regular practice; and be it further

Resolved, That the district president instruct circuit visitors as to the benefits of weekly and frequent reception of the Lord's Supper, and that they instruct the pastors and the congregations on behalf of the district president; and be it further

Resolved, That the district president provide a list of resources for pastors and congregations to appreciate the benefits of frequent reception of the Lord's Supper; and be it finally

Resolved, That the district memorialize the Synod in convention to encourage the Synod President to author a resource for district presidents, pastors, and congregations to have a greater appreciation for frequent reception of the Lord's Supper.

Minnesota South District

Ov. 4-42

To Encourage Unequivocal Affirmation of First Communion Prior to Confirmation as God-Pleasing Practice and To Encourage Congregations to Commune Visiting Communicant Children

WHEREAS, Many member congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod receive children as communicants to the Lord's Supper through the Rite of First Communion prior to Confirmation (*Lutheran Service Book [LSB] Agenda*, 25–27), and, therefore, have non-confirmed yet communicant children who regularly and faithfully commune at their home congregations; and

WHEREAS, The majority of our member congregations do not receive children as full communicant members until they have completed Confirmation and have gone through the Rite of Confirmation (*LSB Agenda*, 28–31); and

WHEREAS, Both the Rite of First Communion prior to Confirmation as well as the Rite of Confirmation are countenanced and legitimated by the Synod as evidenced by the use of and presence of each rite in the *LSB Agenda*; and

WHEREAS, Both rites exist, not by divine command, but as human ordinances, and thus neither has the status of a Sacrament (Ap XIII 6); and

WHEREAS, Neither rite confers the status of worthy communicant, which is determined not by a human ordinance, "but that person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: 'Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,'" (SC VI; 1 Cor. 11:27–29); and

WHEREAS, Both rites fulfill the prescription of the Lutheran Confessions that "people are admitted only if they first had an opportunity to be examined and heard" (AC XXIV 6–7) and "the sacrament is made available to those who wish to partake of it, after they have been examined and absolved" (Ap XXIV 1); and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions do not require uniform rites, ordinances, and ceremonies for the sake of the unity of faith and the Church (AC VII 3; Ap XV 18), thus allowing disparate rites to admit children to the Lord's Supper; and

WHEREAS, Refusal to commune such visiting children who have been legitimately received to the Lord's Table through instruction, examination, and absolution, which precedes the Rite of First Communion prior to Confirmation, causes such little ones, whose

angels always behold the face of their Father in heaven, to stumble through confusion and offense (Matt. 18:6; see Ap XV 49); therefore be it

Resolved, That the English District in convention unequivocally affirm the practice of first Communion prior to confirmation as a God-pleasing practice and a legitimate way to faithful reception of the Lord's Supper; and be it further

Resolved, That the English District in convention encourage member congregations and pastors of the English District to recognize the validity of the aforementioned practice of first Communion prior to confirmation that they may commune visiting children who, though not yet confirmed, are nevertheless communicant members in good standing at their home congregations; and be it further

Resolved, That the English District in convention memorialize the 2026 Synod convention to adopt the same position; and be it further

Resolved, That the English District survey her member congregations in order to determine the percentage of congregations making use of the Rite of First Communion prior to Confirmation, and publish the results of said survey among our congregations; and be it further

Resolved, That the English District in convention memorialize the 2026 Synod convention to survey all member congregations in order to determine the percentage of congregations making use of the Rite of First Communion prior to Confirmation, and publish the results of said survey among the congregations of Synod; and be it finally

Resolved, That the English District prepare a tool kit for congregations and pastors that both equips pastors who desire to implement such a rite to teach about the practice of first Communion prior to confirmation and that, likewise, equips pastors to instruct congregations who do not yet understand the God-pleasing nature of the Rite of First Communion prior to Confirmation so that such congregations who do not observe this practice gladly welcome and receive visiting communicant children who desire to receive the Lord's Supper, and that encourages all communicant members to announce for Communion when visiting congregations other than their own.

English District

Ov. 4-43

To Call All in Synod to Love, Peace, and Brotherly Care

WHEREAS, Christ our Lord says, "By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35); and

WHEREAS, St. Paul writes, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:31–32); and

WHEREAS, Our Synod has too often been torn by harsh words, pride, and strife, which weaken our witness and grieve the Spirit; and

WHEREAS, The unity of the Church does not rest in uniformity of human will but in the pure preaching of the Gospel and the right use of the Sacraments (AC VII); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod urge all its members, from laity to pastors to leaders, to repent of anger, pride, and harsh speech; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod call on all its members to "bear with one another in love" (Eph. 4:2), to speak well of each other, to pray for one another, and to seek peace; and be it finally

Resolved, That we, brothers and sisters in Christ, commit ourselves anew to walk in love, so that our life together may be marked not by strife but by joy in the Gospel, to the glory of God and the good of His Church.

Christ Greenfield, Gilbert, AZ; Circuit 16 (Faribault), Minnesota
South District; Circuit 28, Pacific Southwest District

Ov. 4-44

To Exhort Members to Earnestly and Regularly Pray for and Pursue Synodical Unity, and To Appoint a Task Force

WHEREAS, Our Lord Jesus Christ prayed for the unity of His Church so that the world might believe He has been sent by the Father (John 17:11, 20–23); and

WHEREAS, Jesus stated, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35), and "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16); and

WHEREAS, The apostle Paul enjoins God's people to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1–3); and

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture is filled with many other similar prayers for, and exhortations to pursue, unity and reconciliation in the Church (Psalm 133:1; Matt. 5:23–25; 7:1–5; 18:15–35; Rom. 12; 15:5; 1 Cor. 1:10; 12:12; 2 Cor. 13:11; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 4:4–6; Phil. 1:27; 2:1–11; Col. 3:14; 1 Peter 3:8; 1 John 4:20); and

WHEREAS, The first objective listed in Article III of the Synod Constitution is to "conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3–6; 1 Cor. 1:10), work through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom. 16:17), and heresy"; and

WHEREAS, Unity in the Church is a gift from God (Rom. 15:5–6) we should humbly seek from Him in prayer; and

WHEREAS, Division and acrimony between Christians severely compromises the witness of the Church to the world and may directly impede the proclamation of the Gospel and may, thereby threaten the eternal salvation of numerous souls; and

WHEREAS, Such disunity, where it is not necessary to maintain fidelity to the Scriptures and the Confessions, but is rather the result of human sin, tarnishes God's name and thus violates the Second Commandment; and

WHEREAS, The Synod is frequently known even outside of itself for its internal conflicts and for the refusal of pastors, congregations, and circuits to commune together; and

WHEREAS, Strife and division in the Church for sinful reasons are indications that the Church is reflecting the ways of the world rather than providing a godly alternative to it; and

WHEREAS, Satan, who is the father of all lies and a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44), fervently desires to catechize Christians in the ways of hell and in demonic discord that so frequently marks interactions in the world; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention strongly urge its members to pray fervently, both in corporate worship and as individuals, for the unity and health of the Synod, believing that all things are possible with God (Phil. 4:13); and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention exhort its members to review and renew their commitment to the Eighth Commandment and to self-restraint in speech and anger (James 1:19); and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention implore its members to be quick to listen (James 1:19) and to seek out opportunities to listen to and dialogue with those with whom they disagree, in order that mutual understanding, fidelity to doctrine, harmony, forgiveness, and reconciliation might be facilitated and abound among us; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention encourage its members to employ extraordinary efforts toward caution, patience, clear communication, and love when navigating issues which have historically been or have the potential to be a source of division, and that all such issues be approached with a posture of humility and repentance for any ways in which we have contributed to disunity in the past; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention exhort its members to resist the temptation to imitate secular partisanship by lording it over each other and employing slander, coercion, secrecy, and power as the default means of addressing disagreements, but rather to seek to be servants of all (Matt. 20:25–28), to engage in substantive and long-suffering efforts toward reconciliation with those who have something against us (Matt. 5:23–25), and to display the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:1–11); and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention require the organization of a task force representative of the Synod's makeup as a whole to study and develop the following recommendations: to clarify the distinction between doctrine and adiaphora (matters of indifference neither commanded nor forbidden by God) in matters which are currently the source of conflict; to avoid imitating patterns of secular politics and partisan ways of relating to each other within the Church; and to address and resolve divisions of altar fellowship within the Synod where any such divisions are not a matter of conscience borne out of doctrinal necessity, but instead stem from differences of opinion or preference.

Michigan District

Ov. 4-45

To Address Persecution in the Church

WHEREAS, Our Lord stated that in the latter days His Church and her members would face persecution (Mark 13); and

WHEREAS, This persecution has continued in many and various ways from the earliest days of the Church, in ways subtle and overt; and

WHEREAS, This persecution will increase until our Lord comes again in glory; and

WHEREAS, Many Christians, desiring to be good, faithful, and to make a good confession do not know how to, or are fearful to do so in such an environment; therefore be it

Resolved, That pastors be encouraged to continue training and equipping the saints to face this persecution faithfully and in good conscience, and be strengthened in the same themselves; and be it further

Resolved, That the SELC District give consideration to addressing this topic among her congregations and pastors to give advice and counsel; and be it finally

Resolved, That the district memorialize the Synod to continually take up this issue to equip her church workers and congregations to face the persecution of these gray and latter days with faithfulness and joy, knowing that the Lord will work all things for the good of His Church and His sheep.

SELC District

Ov. 4-46

To Judge Practice by Word Alone

WHEREAS, The Word of God is pure, trustworthy, altogether righteous, and endures forever (Psalm 19, Isaiah 6:8); and

WHEREAS, Faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ (Rom. 10:17); and

WHEREAS, Faith, drawn from the Word of God, directs our practice as well as our doctrine; and

WHEREAS, Martin Luther promoted the embraced understanding of *Sola Scriptura*, that is our Lutheran heritage and Scriptural foundation; and

WHEREAS, Jesus declared, "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life," (John 6:63); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod be encouraged to continue to search the Scriptures, to continue to abide in the Word (John 8:31–32) and to "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" (Collect for the Word, *The Lutheran Hymnal* [CPH, 1941], p. 14) the Word as both clergy and laity; and be it further

Resolved, That we review and scrutinize our practice of the faith according to the Word of God so as not to prescribe or reject practices of faith and/or church life based on tradition or popes and councils, but on the Word *alone* and, as it rightly exposit the Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, so as not to promote legalistic restrictions or limitations based on human reason but maintain the liberty for which Jesus set us free, with a conscientious permission of variation in the areas of adiaphora.

St. Paul
Albion, MI

Ov. 4-47

To Encourage Raising Up Public Servants

WHEREAS, Our Lord commands us to pray for those who serve in public office: "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior." (1 Tim. 2:1–3); and

WHEREAS, Our Lord commands us to respect these levels of government: "Let every person be subject to the governing

authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” (Rom. 13:1); and

WHEREAS, Our Lord reminds us through the words of St. Paul, “... the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing.” (Rom. 13:6); and

WHEREAS, Serving in elected or appointed offices within our local community, county, state, and nation is a God-ordained vocation; therefore be it

Resolved, That pastors and congregations of the Texas District be encouraged to continue to pray for peace and goodwill among all the people of our nation, especially praying that the eyes of all people would turn to our Lord and Savior through whom we have true peace; and be it further

Resolved, That pastors and congregations of the district be encouraged to pray for those serving at city, county, state, and federal levels of government; and be it further

Resolved, That pastors and congregations of the district be encouraged in providing a good example for others in how to discuss politics, politicians, and all aspects of public service; and be it further

Resolved, That pastors and congregations of the district be encouraged to identify, encourage, and raise up from within our midst those with the gifts and abilities to serve God and their neighbor in public service; and be it finally

Resolved, That the district memorialize the Synod in convention to encourage congregations of the Synod to do the same.

Texas District

Ov. 4-48

To Oppose Federal Immigration Raids and Call for Pastoral Advocacy

WHEREAS, The Synod has consistently affirmed the common humanity and dignity of all people as beings created in the image of God; and

WHEREAS, Current federal policies involving expanded enforcement actions by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) have reportedly included raids near “sensitive areas,” such as churches, which disrupts the free exercise of religion and creates an atmosphere of fear for our immigrant neighbors; and

WHEREAS, Synod President Matthew Harrison has previously emphasized that the Synod is “pro-immigrant” and has encouraged congregations to provide compassionate action and assistance to those facing deportation; and

WHEREAS, Scripture mandates that we “welcome the stranger” (Matt. 25:35) and “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31), regardless of their documentation status; and

WHEREAS, The 2026 Synod convention serves as the primary legislative body for the Synod to speak on matters of public concern and provide direction to its officers (Bylaw 3.1.1); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod formally oppose the use of aggressive tactics by ICE and CBP that infringe upon the sanctity of worship and the safety of our communities; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod President issue a bold public statement in 2026, speaking up for the safety and civil rights of all residents,

including those being targeted for mass deportation; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod President be urged to use the influence of his office to advocate with government officials for humane immigration reform that prioritizes family unity and human dignity over punitive enforcement; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod be encouraged to provide spiritual, legal, and material support to those in our midst who are impacted by these federal actions, ensuring that no one stands alone in the face of these challenges.

Markham
Markham, IL

Ov. 4-49

To Provide Direction concerning Disputes Appearing on Social Media

WHEREAS, Social media platforms have become principal venues where an increasing number of members of the Synod publicly express disagreement with each other’s actions as well as their application of the Synod’s positions on doctrine and practice; and

WHEREAS, Such disagreements, when amplified online, risk undermining the unity of the Church, tend to confuse the faithful, and often distort the Synod’s confession to the wider world; and

WHEREAS, The Synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) has recognized both the constructive and destructive potential of social media in its 2019 report, *A Snapshot of Trending Tools: Christians and Social Media* (resources.lcms.org/reading-study/ctcr-library-social-issues-and-citizenship); and

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture bids God’s people to live in harmony and unity with one another and to use edifying speech that builds up and not tears down (cf. Psalm 133:1–3; Eph. 4:29; 5:2); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod encourage its rostered workers, congregations, and lay members of its congregations to avoid using social media to express their disagreements, and for the sake of theological clarity, pastoral care, and a spirit of reconciliation, seek in-person opportunities to engage each other in civil and respectful conversations; and be it further

Resolved, That the CTCR further study how social media discourse impacts the unity of the Church and provide updated resources for congregations to respond faithfully to online attacks on Synod church workers and the congregations in which they are serving.

Circuit 7 (Washington, East)
Southeastern District

Ov. 4-50

To Encourage Production of Sunday School Material for Very Small Congregations

WHEREAS, The Holy Scriptures command the Church to teach all nations, baptizing and instructing them in all that Christ has commanded (Matt. 28:19–20), and to train up children in the way they should go (Prov. 22:6); and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions, particularly the Small Catechism, affirm the duty of parents and the Church to catechize children in the Christian faith (SC Preface; LC Shorter Preface); and

WHEREAS, Very small congregations in the Synod, often with limited resources and including several age groups in one class, face challenges in providing consistent, high-quality Sunday school instruction; and

WHEREAS, A Lutheran, lectionary-based Sunday school curriculum, designed for flexibility and ease of use, would support small congregations in faithfully teaching the Word of God to children; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has a history of providing educational resources to support congregations in their catechetical responsibilities, as seen in the work of Concordia Publishing House (CPH) and the Synod's Office of National Mission (ONM); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Montana District memorializes the Synod in convention to direct the appropriate entities, such as the ONM or CPH, to produce a digital, Lutheran, lectionary-based Sunday school curriculum that can be easily applied to very small congregations; and be it further

Resolved, That this curriculum be designed to be doctrinally sound, rooted in the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, structured for flexibility to accommodate the very limited resources and the occasional attendees; and be it further

Resolved, That the curriculum include practical materials, such as lesson plans, activities, and resources that can be easily implemented by lay leaders or pastors of small congregations; and be it further

Resolved, That the curriculum be a cost-effective option for very small congregations; and be it finally

Resolved, That the LCMS encourage its congregations to support and pray for this effort, that all children in the LCMS may grow in the knowledge and love of Christ through faithful catechesis (Eph. 4:12–13).

Montana District

Ov. 4-51

To Address Uses of Artificial Intelligence

WHEREAS, Man is fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14) in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27); and

WHEREAS, All First Article gifts, including powerful technological tools such as artificial intelligence (AI), are created by human beings with the gifts and abilities that God has granted to us as the pinnacle of the created order (Gen. 1:26–28; 2:7; 5:1–2); and

WHEREAS, These gifts can be harnessed for human flourishing as we seek to love God and neighbor (Deut. 6:4–5; Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:37–39; Mark 12:30–31); and

WHEREAS, The fall into sin has made us dead to God and darkened our minds; and

WHEREAS, The fall into sin has also adversely affected every aspect of creation, including the development and use of these powerful innovations (Rom. 8:22); and

WHEREAS, Computer algorithms bear no inherent morality, no eternal soul, no love or fear of God, and no prayerful heart to guide its decisions; and

WHEREAS, These tools are designed with the distinct values and purposes of their fallen human creators in mind; and

WHEREAS, These tools may shape us in subtle, yet meaningful ways—including our understanding of God, humanity, and the world around us; and

WHEREAS, AI raises deep, crucial questions that challenge God's revelation about what it means to be human, which are often rooted merely in human capacities rather than in divinely granted ontological status; and

WHEREAS, We alone, as God's image bearers, created by the Father through the Son and given His Holy Spirit in Baptism, bear the moral responsibility for the development and use of tools (Rom. 12:1–2); and

WHEREAS, AI algorithms could serve as a digital ministry assistant, creating and curating digital content and communications; and

WHEREAS, The use of AI (e.g., ChatGPT) is now being experimented with by churches to create sermons, prayers, images, hymns, and other resources for use in worship; and

WHEREAS, AI algorithms may soon be tasked to function as automated chaplains, more available and responsive than other community members, so that people may come to rely on it for spiritual sustenance instead of on Word and Sacrament; and

WHEREAS, AI and other emerging technologies afford us unprecedented opportunities for advancement across industries and throughout our societies, but may also have dangerous and dehumanizing outcomes if not utilized with godly wisdom and discernment; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod state unequivocally that our intrinsic value is as image bearers—not rooted in what we do or contribute to society—and that human dignity must be central to any ethical principles, guidelines, or regulations for any and all uses of these powerful emerging technologies; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod affirm that God's unchanging Word is more than sufficient for whatever ethical challenges, questions, and opportunities we may face today or in the future as these technologies continue to be developed and deployed in our communities; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod acknowledge the powerful nature of AI and other emerging technologies to potentially draw us from our reliance on true Word and Sacrament ministry; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod proactively engage and shape these emerging technologies rather than simply respond to the challenges of AI and other emerging technologies after they have already affected our churches and communities; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod encourage all who employ these tools to do so in honest, transparent, and Christ-like ways that focus on loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:37–40), never seeking to willfully deceive others or take advantage of them for unjust gain or the accumulation of power; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod establish a task force to further study the use of AI technology in the church; and be it further

Resolved, That the Council of Presidents (COP), the Office of the President (OTP), and the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) produce a joint document to be presented in a manner that allows for appropriate theological reflection and study of the use of AI; and be it finally

Resolved, That the COP, the OTP, and the CTCR provide practical guidance to individuals and congregations in the use of AI in ministry and in the general life of God's people.

Eastern District; Board of Directors, Eastern District

Ov. 4-52

To Reject Use of Sermons Created by Artificial Intelligence

WHEREAS, The capabilities and regular use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Large Language Models (LLMs) have dramatically increased in recent years; and

WHEREAS, These tools are being experimented with and are now commonly used in many industries and across many vocations; and

WHEREAS, These tools are advertised to pastors as time-saving devices for the writing of sermons; and

WHEREAS, Pastors are called to spend more time in God's Word, not less; and

WHEREAS, Biblically based and doctrinally sound resources are readily available as reference tools utilized by pastors; and

WHEREAS, It has pleased God to call flesh-and-blood men, created in His image, baptized and redeemed in the blood of Jesus, to search for lost sheep, to call sinners to repentance, to announce forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name, and to be His preachers and teachers in this world (Matt. 28:18–20; John 20:19–23; Acts 1:8; AC V; AC XIV); and

WHEREAS, It is contrary to God's establishment of the Office of the Ministry and His design and plan for His Church to be served by an artificial intelligence created in the image and likeness of men (Eph. 4:4–15); and

WHEREAS, AI is unguided by the power of the Holy Spirit and susceptible to the influence of the devil (the wolf in technological clothing) and can be used to deceive God's people (John 8:44); and

WHEREAS, The primary duties of the called and ordained pastor are the in-person preaching of the Lord's Word to the congregation(s) entrusted to his care, the visitation of the sick and dying, and the administration of the Lord's Sacraments according to the Lord's institution (2 Tim. 4:1–5); and

WHEREAS, No AI can replace this incarnational, relational, in-person work; and

WHEREAS, Those pastors who would use AI and LLMs to craft a complete sermon are turning away from the very work of the ministry to which they have been called; and

WHEREAS, Those pastors who would use AI and LLMs to craft a complete sermon espouse—knowingly or unknowingly—a functional view of the Office of the Ministry, deny the incarnational reality of the Lord's ministry among His people, and do not walk in concord but apart from their brothers in the Office of the Ministry who labor at faithful preaching and administration of His Sacraments; therefore be it

Resolved, That the president of the Montana District develop a communication tool that can be sent out to all congregational boards of elders; and be it further

Resolved, That the elders and other leaders of each congregation in the district recognize the “wolf in technological clothing” and discuss with their pastor the great dangers of the use of AI for creating a complete sermon; and be it further

Resolved, That the elders and other leaders of each congregation in the district declare without equivocation that the congregation will not accept AI-created sermons preached from their pulpits under any circumstances; and be it further

Resolved, That each pastor in the district reject every public and private temptation to make use of this and other such tools in the delivery of God's Law and Gospel to His people; and be it finally

Resolved, That the district in convention ask the Synod in convention to adopt and make this resolution their own, that the Synod may walk together on this issue.

Montana District

Ov. 4-53

To Acknowledge the Witness of Charlie Kirk and Establish September 10 as Day of Prayer for Faithful Witnesses in Our Time

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture commends the faithful witness of those who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, confessed Christ unto death, as seen in the souls under the altar crying for justice (Rev. 6:9–11) and the great cloud of witnesses surrounding us in the faith (Heb. 12:1); and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions honor the saints and martyrs not for their merits or intercession, but as examples of God's grace in sustaining believers through suffering and death for the Gospel's sake (Augsburg Confession XXI, “Of the Worship of the Saints,” which teaches that we should give thanks to God for their faithful testimony and imitate their confession of Christ); and

WHEREAS, The Synod maintains a calendar of commemorations for prophets, apostles, reformers, and faithful witnesses who proclaimed the truth of Scripture amid persecution, thereby reminding the Church that Christ Himself is the Lord of history and the One who preserves His confessors; and

WHEREAS, These commemorations teach the faithful to give thanks for God's sustaining grace, to take courage from those who endured opposition for the sake of the Gospel, and to be strengthened in the hope of the resurrection, confessing with St. Paul that “if we endure, we will also reign with him” (2 Tim. 2:12); and

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk, a public Christian and outspoken defender of biblical truths on life, marriage, and religious liberty, was assassinated by sniper fire on Sept. 10, 2025, while addressing a Turning Point USA event in Utah; and

WHEREAS, Kirk's public efforts and final witness were inseparably tied to his confession of Christ, and his death occurred in the context of cultural hostility toward the Gospel, reminding the Church of the words of St. Peter: “[I]f anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name” (1 Pet. 4:16); and

WHEREAS, Sept. 10 provides a fitting place within the Church Year to remember faithful witnesses of Christ, standing in continuity with the season that turns our attention to the apostles, prophets, and evangelists, culminating in the Feast of St. Matthew (Sept. 21); and

WHEREAS, Locating this remembrance within the Church's ordered calendar helps the faithful see that the same Lord who called and sustained the first witnesses continues to raise up

confessors in every age, thereby strengthening the unity of the Church across time; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention acknowledge Charlie Kirk as a modern Christian witness whose death on Sept. 10, 2025, serves as a testimony to the enduring power of the Gospel; and be it further

Resolved, That LCMS Worship establish Sept. 10 as a Day of Prayer for Faithful Witnesses in Our Time, with reference to Charlie Kirk as one such example, providing resources for congregations including suggested readings (e.g., Acts 7:54–60 on Stephen’s martyrdom) and hymns (e.g., “A Mighty Fortress”), that the Church may be strengthened in boldness and consolation; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod districts and congregations be encouraged to observe this day annually with prayers for the persecuted Church, sermons on faithful suffering, and educational materials drawing from the Confessions to explain martyrdom and faithful witness as an example of God’s grace, not human achievement; and be it finally

Resolved, That this commemoration remind the Synod of our baptismal calling to bear the cross, imitating the saints in faith while relying solely on Christ’s merits for salvation (Ap IV); and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm its rejection of violence and incendiary rhetoric within our churches, schools, and communications.

Circuit 12 (Western Michigan)
English District

Ov. 4-54

To Recognize Charles James Kirk as Christian Martyr

Preamble

Charles (Charlie) James Kirk was publicly murdered on Sept. 10, 2025, moments after giving a defense for the historical resurrection of Jesus Christ and confessing the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Charlie Kirk, one of the most outspoken Christians of his generation, encouraged young people to go to a Bible-believing church and frequently gave a defense for the reason for the hope that was in him with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15b). Many young people were led to go to church and confess their Christian faith on account of Charlie Kirk’s confession.

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk frequently and vocally confessed his Christian faith around the country, through public events, podcasts, and interviews; and

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk went to college campuses where so many young people abandon the Christian faith and encouraged them to go to a Bible-believing church; and

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk encouraged young people to lead a chaste and decent life (SC I, Sixth Commandment), to get married and have children according to God’s holy will (Gen. 1:28; 2:24; 9:1; Psalm 127:3; Matt. 19:5; Eph. 5:31), and to raise children to be Christians (Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:1–4); and

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk, in faithfulness to God’s Word, spoke truthfully in defense of the unborn against the murder of abortion, against transgender ideology as an affront to God’s Word and Truth, and defended biblical marriage as the lifelong union between one man and one woman; and

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk set a Christian example of defending the reason for the hope that is in him with gentleness and respect, confessing Jesus as our risen Lord who grants salvation to all who believe in Him (1 Peter 3:15b); and

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk was murdered publicly before the world because of his Christian witness; and

WHEREAS, The murder of Charlie Kirk resulted in his defense of the Christian faith being shared in numerous videos across the internet, resulting in many being encouraged to seek out a Bible-believing church; and

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk’s widow, in her Sept. 12, 2025, address to the nation, used her platform to confess Jesus Christ as the Savior of sinners and urged everyone who was moved by Charlie’s death to join a Bible-believing church; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) is a Bible-believing church body; and

WHEREAS, The LCMS receives and embraces “the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear fountain of Israel,” which is “the only true standard or norm by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged” (FC SD, Comprehensive Summary, 3); and

WHEREAS, A Christian martyr is a Christian who bears witness for Christ through his confession and life and dies on account of that witness; and

WHEREAS, The Evangelical Lutheran Church acknowledges Christian martyrs who were murdered for their confession of Christ; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to God for Charlie Kirk’s public confession of Christ Jesus as the only Savior of sinners; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod recognize Charles James Kirk as a Christian martyr.

Circuit 1 (Metro-South Shore), South Wisconsin District; Circuit 18 (Montevideo), Minnesota North District; Circuit 8 (Hastings), Nebraska District; Circuit 8 (Mount Pleasant), Iowa East District

Ov. 4-55

To Commend Confession That Charles James Kirk Died a Christian Martyr

Preamble

Charles (Charlie) James Kirk was publicly murdered on Sept. 10, 2025, moments after giving a defense for the historical resurrection of Jesus Christ and confessing the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Charlie Kirk, one of the most outspoken Christians of his generation, encouraged young people to go to a Bible-believing church and frequently gave a defense for the reason for the hope that was in him with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15b). Many young people were led to go to church and confess their Christian faith on account of Charlie Kirk’s confession.

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk frequently and vocally confessed his Christian faith around the country, through public events, podcasts, and interviews; and

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk went to college campuses where so many young people abandon the Christian faith and encouraged them to go to a Bible-believing church; and

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk encouraged young people to lead a chaste and decent life (SC I, Sixth Commandment), to get married and have children according to God's holy will (Gen. 1:28; 2:24; 9:1; Psalm 127:3; Matt. 19:5; Eph. 5:31), and to raise children to be Christians (Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:1–4); and

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk, in faithfulness to God's Word spoke truthfully in defense of the unborn against the murder of abortion, against transgender ideology as an affront to God's Word and Truth, and defended biblical marriage as the lifelong union between one man and one woman; and

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk set a Christian example of defending the reason for the hope that is in him with gentleness and respect, confessing Jesus as our risen Lord who grants salvation to all who believe in Him (1 Peter 3:15b); and

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk was murdered publicly before the world because of his Christian witness; and

WHEREAS, The murder of Charlie Kirk resulted in his defense of the Christian faith being shared in numerous videos across the internet, resulting in many being encouraged to seek out a Bible-believing church; and

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk's widow, in her Sept. 12, 2025, address to the nation, used her platform to confess Jesus Christ as the Savior of sinners, and urged everyone who was moved by Charlie's death to join a Bible-believing church; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), while not in full doctrinal agreement with Charlie Kirk, nonetheless is a Bible-believing church body; and

WHEREAS, The LCMS receives and embraces “the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear fountain of Israel,” which is “the only true standard or norm by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged” (FC SD, Comprehensive Summary, 3); and

WHEREAS, The term *Christian martyr* can refer narrowly to Christians who are put to death by governmental authority for their confession of Christ, for example, John the Baptist, St. Stephen, etc.; and

WHEREAS, The term *Christian martyr* can refer more broadly to any Christian who, like Charlie Kirk, is killed for his public profession of the Christian faith; and

WHEREAS, The Evangelical Lutheran Church acknowledges Christian martyrs who were murdered for their confession of Christ; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to God for Charlie Kirk's public confession of Christ Jesus as the only Savior of sinners; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod commend its pastors and congregations when they confess that Charles James Kirk died a Christian martyr.

Pastors' Conference
Wyoming District

Ov. 4-56

To Celebrate Concordia Historical Institute Centenary and Renew the Synod's Commitment to Treasure and Trumpet Its Redeemed History

Rationale

Concordia Historical Institute (CHI) will observe its centenary anniversary on April 28, 2027, under the theme: “Treasuring & Trumpeting Our Lutheran History—for All the Saints.”

Though officially incorporated as a Missouri State nonprofit in 1927, the institute's origins reach back to the organizational documents drafted in 1839 by the Saxons under Martin Stephan before they immigrated to Missouri—plans that included provision for a church archivist. This same conviction regarding the importance of preserving historical materials found expression in the founding Constitution of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) in 1847, when the office of Synod “Chronicler” was established.

After the death of the first generation of Synod leaders and the subsequent scattering and loss of important historical materials related to the Synod's early years, a renewed commitment to preserving and proclaiming the redeeming work of Christ in the Synod's history took shape. Various local efforts to safeguard historical materials continued until 343 charter members signed the constitution of the Concordia Historical Society (*Die Konkordia-Historische Gesellschaft*), crafted by Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (CSL), professor and administrator Ludwig Fuerbringer on Nov. 4, 1910. This society became the institutional model for CHI, which the Synod in convention recognized and commended in 1929 and later designated as the official LCMS “Department of Archives and History” at the 1965 Synod convention (Res. 14-11, *Proceedings*, 188).

Over the past 99 years, CHI has actively curated and published “Ebenezers” (i.e., memorials, 1 Sam. 7:12) of its history through its journal, the *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, the longest-running Lutheran historical journal in North America, first published in April 1928 and comprehensively revised and expanded in 2014.

Since the construction of the CHI building on the campus of CSL in 1952, books, manuscripts, photographs, paintings, artifacts, and commemorative coins and medals have been displayed to commemorate Christ's gracious work among the people and congregations of the Synod. Today, CHI manages a permanent museum exhibit chronicling the history of the Synod at the LCMS International Center in Kirkwood, Mo. It also provides regularly rotating exhibits in the CHI Exhibition Hall on the CSL campus—and more recently, publishes printed exhibit catalogs and posts digital exhibits online.

The CHI staff responds daily to inquiries regarding the people, places, and events spanning the 179-year history of the Synod, providing the Synod with increased access to its archival materials and new publications that instill and deepen interest in Lutheran history.

The institute continues to serve as the “corporate memory” of the Synod, steadfastly reminding the Synod of its responsibility to learn with joy from the Lord's redeeming hand in preserving and nurturing His people—especially in times of crisis—over these many years. CHI continues to offer archival services to districts, congregations, Synod entities, and leaders who bear fiduciary

responsibility not only to maintain records but also to secure them for posterity.

Therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for the historical treasures entrusted to it over the past century and make fuller use of the historical resources offered through CHI, to her great benefit and blessing; and be it further

Resolved, That members, congregations, districts, as well as Synod departments and entities continue to uphold the institute through prayer and financial support by becoming annual members of CHI and sustaining their financial contributions and estate gifts (with those of sufficient means becoming annual members of CHI's Director's Circle or Vault Society), so that the work and proper staffing of the institute may be sustained and continue; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod renew its commitment to retrieve, organize, preserve, and share her rich history for the benefit of both church and community; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention earnestly remind congregational, district, and Synod leaders of their fiduciary responsibilities to maintain and secure records that document our shared history—especially in those unfortunate circumstances when a congregation or educational institution closes; and be it further

Resolved, That historical materials of various kinds held in private hands (often in fragile and deteriorating condition) be shared with the church and community and be made available to be copied or deposited with CHI for preservation and safekeeping; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod pause and take Martin Luther's warning to heart, asking the Lord for a greater appreciation of her redeemed history and the historical treasures entrusted to her care, that our joy and thanksgiving for Christ's work among us might increase.

Board of Governors
Concordia Historical Institute

5. Theology and Church Relations

REPORTS

R1–R1.1, R10, R12, R62–R62.13

OVERTURES

Ov. 5-01

To Recognize Altar and Pulpit Fellowship with Evangelical Lutheran Christian Church of Bolivia

Preamble

Iglesia Cristiana Evangelica Luterana, the Evangelical Lutheran Christian Church (ICEL) has its roots in the work of the Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM) that began in the 1970's, primarily in rural, Quechua-speaking areas of southern Bolivia. NLM built an infrastructure for its missionaries and mission work in Bolivia, including a retreat center and office in Cochabamba and a training center and radio station in Sucre. Internal migration from the rural areas to the large cities spurred development of congregations in several of the major cities. The congregations affiliated with NLM formed an independent church body (ICEL) in 1997. Its first president was a layman, Mario Delgado.

Mr. Delgado received the first visit of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) from then area secretary Rev. Douglas Rutt. Rev. Rutt connected ICEL with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (IELB) which invited a delegation of ICEL to visit a conference on mission in Brazil in 2000 in São Paulo. This represented ICEL's first contact with a confessional Lutheran church body in Latin America, and eventually led to IELB President Carlos Winterle signing an agreement of altar and pulpit fellowship with the ICEL in 2002. At this time, ICEL also began participating as an observer in regional meetings of the International Lutheran Council (ILC). There was also contact with and support from LCMS sister churches in Chile and Argentina.

NLM had established a training school in Sucre, Bolivia called CLET Centro Luterano de Estudios Teológicos, Lutheran Center of Theological Studies (CLET) as well as a more advanced seminary in Arequipa, Peru called Seminario Teológico Luterano Latinoamericano, Latin American Lutheran Theological Seminary (SETELA). When the NLM closed the program at CLET (for financial reasons), ICEL began to seek other possibilities for theological education of future pastors. While ICEL remains thankful for the mission endeavors of NLM in Bolivia, ICEL no longer has a formal relationship with NLM.

The LCMS Office of International Mission (OIM) began working indirectly with ICEL in 2012 when 20 scholarships were awarded to Seminario Concordia of Buenos Aires, Argentina for the purpose of forming pastors for the Argentine Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELA), partner churches and others—including four Bolivian pastors. At the same time, Luther Academy began to offer two courses a year in Bolivia, taught by professors such as Rev. Cristian Rautenberg and Rev. Omar Kinas of Chile and Rev. Mark Braden of the LCMS. When Concordia El Reformador Seminary (CMSCR) opened in 2017 in Santiago, Dominican Republic, three Bolivian students transferred to that institution. Presidents of ICEL have regularly attended all annual CMSCR symposia.

In September 2018, a delegation of OIM pastors attended the ordination of Rev. Osmel Soliz, one of the first Bolivian graduates of the seminary scholarship program. The liturgy followed the historic ordo and the ordination rite included a quia subscription to the Lutheran Confessions. The delegation, including Rev. Ted Krey, Rev. Dr. Arthur Just, and Rev. James Sharp, also engaged in informal discussions with members of the ministerium and the national council of ICEL about issues such as the Sacraments, the office of the Holy Ministry, and worship. In 2019, Bolivia was included as one of the countries under Rev. Sharp's responsibility in order to facilitate continued communication between ICEL and OIM.

In May 2020, ICEL presented a document on the office of the Holy Ministry signed by the entire Bolivian ministerium to Rev. Krey and Rev. Joel Fritsche. This document affirmed the scriptural and confessional doctrine of the pastoral office and represented ICEL's firm commitment to move away from its pietistic theological roots. CMSCR began monthly zoom lectures with ICEL leaders/pastors which included Scriptural and confessional teaching on the office of the Holy Ministry and other topics. At a 2021 meeting of the ILC in Mexico City, the ICEL asked the IELB to ordain the (previously un-ordained) ministerium of ICEL, since the two church bodies had already been in altar and pulpit fellowship since 2002. As part of their ordination oaths, each ICEL pastor confessed the Old and New Testament Scriptures to be the inspired and inerrant Word of God, the only rule for all faith and life, and a quia subscription to the Lutheran Confessions as a true and faithful exposition of the Holy Scripture.

LCMS observers, including the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Shaw, LCMS Director of Church Relations, were present for this and related events. During the first-ever LCMS FORO with ICEL held March 23–24, 2022, in Sucre, Rev. Dr. Shaw presented copies of Luther's Small Catechism in Quechua, a first for ICEL. During and after the March 25–26, 2022, ICEL National Convention, Rev. Dr. Shaw met with the Rev. Limberth Fernández, ICEL President, and the ICEL Executive Committee for ICEL-LCMS exploratory fellowship discussions, which included discussion of the basis for church fellowship, i.e., agreement in the Gospel in all its articles founded on the authority of Holy Scripture and the testimony of the Lutheran Confessions. In June 2022, President Fernández wrote to President Matthew Harrison requesting formal fellowship discussions with the LCMS.

A Bolivia dialogue team was appointed by President Harrison consisting of LCMS representatives Rev. Dr. Shaw, Rev. Dr. Joel Lehenbauer, Rev. Mark Braden, Rev. Michael Frese, and Rev. James Sharp. The first round of official fellowship talks with ICEL was held in St. Louis in April 2023, followed by an initial familiarization overview and discussion with the CTCR on April 13. A second round of official fellowship discussions was held in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in April 2024. These dialogues exhibited a remarkable unity in doctrine and practice. By this time, the ICEL Constitution and Religious Canon had been revised to reflect a confessional Lutheran understanding of church and ministry, a commitment to the entirety of the Book of Concord as a true and faithful exposition of the Holy Scripture, and clear processes for ICEL to walk and work together as a church body in witness, service, and fellowship.

A third round of official fellowship discussions took place in February 2025, with President Fernández meeting with the CTCR

in St. Louis. At this meeting, the CTCR unanimously recommended recognition of altar and pulpit fellowship with ICEL pursuant to Bylaw 3.9.5.2.2 (b)(2), which authorizes the LCMS President to declare recognition of fellowship after consultation with the Praesidium “subject to the endorsement of the subsequent Synod convention.” In a letter to President Fernández dated May 4, 2025, President Harrison officially declared recognition of fellowship with ICEL. On May 24, 2025, a divine service celebrating the official recognition of fellowship was held in the chapel of Concordia the Reformer Seminary in the Dominican Republic. This service included representatives from the LCMS, its sister churches in Latin America, and faculty, students and staff of CMSCR.

WHEREAS, The ICEL is a confessional Lutheran church in Bolivia consisting of around 1000 baptized members in 15 congregations served by 12 ordained pastors; and

WHEREAS, Formal discussions directed toward altar and pulpit fellowship with the ICEL began in 2022 and concluded in February 2025, when the CTCR unanimously recommended recognition of fellowship with ICEL; and

WHEREAS, The ICEL accepts all the canonical books of the Sacred Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testaments as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and practice and the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, compiled in the Book of Concord of 1580, as a correct exposition of Holy Scripture; and

WHEREAS, The ICEL is in altar and pulpit fellowship with the LCMS’s sister church in Brazil (IELB); and

WHEREAS, The ICEL has requested altar and pulpit fellowship with the LCMS; and

WHEREAS, Bylaw 3.9.5.2.2 (b)(2) says: “Formal recognition of altar and pulpit fellowship between the Synod and a small, formative, emerging confessional Lutheran church body (identified as such by the President of the Synod as chief ecumenical officer) may be declared by the Synod President only after the approval of the commission and consultation with the Praesidium. Such recognition shall be subject to the endorsement of the subsequent Synod convention”; and

WHEREAS, The CTCR has unanimously recommended the recognition of fellowship with the ICEL as a faithful Lutheran church body, after having carefully and thoroughly considered this matter by means of extensive correspondence, reports on meetings with ICEL representatives, and the examination of pertinent documents that describe the doctrine and practice of the ICEL; and

WHEREAS, President Matthew C. Harrison, by virtue of the authority vested in him according to Bylaw 3.9.5.2.2, wrote to President Limberth Fernández on May 4, 2025, stating: “I declare the recognition of altar and pulpit fellowship between our two churches. Praise God!”; therefore be it

Resolved, That we acknowledge with gratitude the unity of confession that has been given to our church bodies under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; and be it further

Resolved, That this convention formally endorse the recognition of altar and pulpit fellowship between the ICEL and the LCMS; and be it further

Resolved, That we give thanks to God for the faithful Lutheran witness ICEL provides within its own country, and beyond; and be it further

Resolved, That we encourage and walk with ICEL as they proclaim the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world; and be it further

Resolved, That we pray for God’s blessings in the coming years on this agreement in the confession of the Gospel that we enjoy as sister church bodies; and be it finally

Resolved, That in thanksgiving for this partnership in the Gospel, the convention assembly celebrate its approval by rising and singing the common doxology.

Commission on Theology and Church Relations

Ov. 5-02

To Support and Encourage Recognition of Altar and Pulpit Fellowship with Lutheran Mission—Australia

Preamble

By its own acknowledgement, the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand (LCANZ; hereafter LCA) has struggled with deep theological divisions for decades. One of the most public areas of disagreement has been the question of what the Scriptures teach regarding the ordination of women to the pastoral office. In a document published in July 2024 the LCA stated: “Despite more than three decades of theological study and debate within the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand (LCANZ), we remain divided on whether or not the Scriptures permit the ordination of women” (Lutheran Church of Australia, *Way Forward Detailed Framework*, 2024, 3).

As this statement illustrates, the longstanding division in the LCA over women’s ordination has been rooted in fundamentally differing understandings of the authority and interpretation of Scripture itself. Lutheran Mission-Australia (LM—A) President Matthew Anker has stated: “The key issue that led to the establishment of LM—A was the undermining of the authority of the Word of God in the LCA’s theology and life together. Even before women’s ordination was introduced, we no longer shared the same confession and needed to be unyoked from heterodoxy, which constantly demands sacrifice through compromise.” In addition to the question of the ordination of women, other troubling theological developments evident in the LCA (as articulated by LM—A leaders) include the ambiguous commitment of many LCA leaders and pastors to the Lutheran Confessions, Gospel reductionism, antinomianism, the unscriptural theology of many of those teaching church workers, the devolving theological agenda and trajectory of the LCA college and seminary, a lack of faithful adherence to clear and orthodox LCA public statements such as its own constitution and the LCA’s Theses of Agreement (including the Theses of Agreement’s teaching on church fellowship), lack of church discipline, etc.

For many years, pastors and laity in the LCA fully committed to the authority of Scripture and to the truth of the Lutheran Confessions remained in the LCA, hopeful of a return to its foundational confession and commitments. Those hopes were severely undermined at the LCA’s 2021 convention, when then-Bishop John Henderson publicly stated: “We are not going to solve this issue [women’s ordination] with further truth claims, even about Scripture.” (“Agenda 3.1”,

lca.app.box.com/s/disizprdt6mrps427dqw5yfyfkte1twv, accessed March 19, 2026) Soon thereafter, in early 2022, several LCA

pastors met to form a group called “Lutherans Confessing Christ,” anticipating the likelihood that the LCA would soon formally endorse women’s ordination, which would make it necessary for some pastors, laity, and congregations to leave the LCA for reasons of conscience. Anticipating this eventuality, LM—A was established as a legal entity in May 2024. In June 2024, Rev. Anker was called to serve as LM—A President. At the LCA’s October 2024 convention, the LCA officially changed its position to allow for the ordination of women to the pastoral office. The next month, LM—A was officially launched and President Anker was officially installed as its President by Rev. Antonio Reyes of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines (an LCMS sister church).

From July 2024 to the present, over 70 informational sessions have been held around Australia to inform interested individuals and congregations of the existence, purpose, and mission of the LM—A. The first LM—A congregation was established on Dec. 1, 2024. Currently, there are 19 LM—A congregations, together with around a dozen congregations pursuing or contemplating membership. The LM—A currently has 18 ordained pastors, with several others in the process of colloquizing into the LM—A.

During the past triennium, both before and after the legal formation of the LM—A, current LM—A leaders met formally and informally with Synod leaders, including President Matthew Harrison, Director of Church Relations—Assistant to the President the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Shaw, Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) Executive Director the Rev. Dr. Joel Lehenbauer, both Synod seminary presidents, and others. These meetings confirmed that, as is clearly stated in its Constitution and Confessional Statement, the LM—A accepts “without reservation the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as a whole and in all their parts, as the divinely inspired, written and inerrant Word of God, and as the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine and life,” and that it “rejoices in the clear, biblical and evangelical teachings of the Lutheran Confessions” because (*quia*) they are in full agreement with the Word of God. In December 2025, LM—A President Anker met with the CTCR and, after thorough discussion and consideration, the CTCR unanimously recommended recognition of altar and pulpit fellowship with LM—A pursuant to Bylaw 3.9.5.2.2 (b)(2).

WHEREAS, The LM—A is a small but growing confessional Lutheran church in Australia consisting of around 1,000 baptized members in 19 congregations served by 18 ordained pastors; and

WHEREAS, LM—A leaders, pastors and congregations are to be strongly commended and encouraged for their faithful and courageous confession of the truth of God’s Word in response to heterodox positions taken by the LCA due to erroneous views of the authority and inerrancy of Holy Scripture; and

WHEREAS, Formal and informal discussions directed toward altar and pulpit fellowship with LM—A leaders began in 2022 and concluded in December 2025, when the CTCR unanimously recommended recognition of fellowship with LM—A; and

WHEREAS, The LM—A accepts all the canonical books of the Sacred Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testaments as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and practice and the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, compiled in the *Book of Concord* of 1580, as a correct exposition of Holy Scripture; and

WHEREAS, The LM—A is actively pursuing altar and pulpit fellowship with the Synod’s sister churches in Canada (LCC), Finland (ELMDF), and the Philippines (LCP); and

WHEREAS, The LM—A has been a full, voting member of the International Lutheran Council since September 2025; and

WHEREAS, LM—A leadership has expressed a hope for altar and pulpit fellowship with the Synod; and

WHEREAS, At its December 2025 meeting the CTCR unanimously recommended recognition of altar and pulpit fellowship with LM—A pursuant to Bylaw 3.9.5.2.2 (b)(2), which says: “Formal recognition of altar and pulpit fellowship between the Synod and a small, formative, emerging confessional Lutheran church body (identified as such by the President of the Synod as chief ecumenical officer) may be declared by the Synod President only after the approval of the commission and consultation with the Praesidium. Such recognition shall be subject to the endorsement of the subsequent Synod convention”; and

WHEREAS, The LM—A will hold its first churchwide convention in August 2026, at which time it hopes to recognize altar and pulpit fellowship with the LCMS; and

WHEREAS, President Matthew Harrison has expressed strong support for recognition of fellowship with LM—A, and has indicated his hope to be able to recognize fellowship at or after the LM—A’s first convention; therefore be it

Resolved, That we acknowledge with gratitude the unity of confession that has been given to our church bodies under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; and be it further

Resolved, That this convention commend and support the CTCR’s recommendation to recognize altar and pulpit fellowship with the LM—A and President Harrison’s hope to do the same at the appropriate time; and be it further

Resolved, That we give thanks to God for the faithful Lutheran witness the LM—A provides within its own country and beyond; and be it further

Resolved, That we encourage and support the LM—A as they proclaim the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world; and be it finally

Resolved, That as a sign of encouragement and support of the LM—A’s confession and witness and in joyful anticipation of our mutual recognition of altar and pulpit fellowship in the near future, the convention assembly rise and sing the common doxology.

Commission on Theology and Church Relations

Ov. 5-03

To Address Concerns with Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church

WHEREAS, The Holy Scriptures enjoin us to maintain the unity of the faith in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3, 13); and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions state: “The church is the assembly of the saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. And it is enough for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, rites or ceremonies instituted by human beings be alike everywhere” (AC VII 1–3, Kolb/Wengert); and

WHEREAS, “Apostolicity” in the Church is found not in a flesh-and-blood lineage of men, but rather, in the apostolicity of doctrine,

which consists of continuing steadfast in the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42), as the Lutheran theologian Hermann Sasse confesses: "Authentic apostolic succession, then, is always and only the succession of doctrine" (Hermann Sasse, "Successio Apostolica" in *Letters to Lutheran Pastors*, ed. Matthew C. Harrison [CPH, 2014]: 2:437); and

WHEREAS, Questions have been raised with the Bishop of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC), a church in altar and pulpit fellowship with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) since 2013, that he has been teaching so-called "apostolic succession" (teaching it as a succession of duly consecrated bishops), teaching that it is necessary for a church to have a valid ministry, and thereby sowing doubts about the validity of the ministry of the LCMS; and

WHEREAS, By promoting this teaching and interjecting itself in the life of another sister church body, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (IELB), namely, by asserting the claim of apostolic succession, by ordaining deacons, and by establishing congregations outside of Siberia, the SELC has created scandal, confusion, and disharmony in the aforementioned church body and in the confession of the one true and saving Gospel; and

WHEREAS, The Bishop of the SELC is also identified as the "guiding bishop" of the Independent Anglican Congregation in Thailand (IAC), *inachurchthailand.com/independent-anglican-church-in-thailand-about-us*, a church that supports the blessing of LGBTQ unions (*inachurchthailand.com/weddings-blessings*); and

WHEREAS, Fraternal conversations have already taken place between the President of the Synod and the Bishop of the SELC without resolution of these concerns; therefore be it

Resolved, That the President of the Synod admonish the Bishop of the SELC to cease and desist immediately in these unwanted intrusions in the life of the IELB; and be it further

Resolved, That the President of the Synod, in consultation with the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), engage in conversation with the leadership of the SELC to assist them in embracing a genuinely biblical, Lutheran confession of the one Office that Christ Jesus has instituted for the pure preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments; and be it further

Resolved, That the President of the Synod, in consultation with the CTCR, admonish the bishop of the SELC to withdraw immediately from the unionistic relationship with the IAC; and be it finally

Resolved, That the President of the Synod report the outcome of these efforts to the 2029 Synod convention with a recommendation as to whether the conditions for altar and pulpit fellowship with the SELC still apply.

Zion
Fort Wayne, IN

Ov. 5-04

To Admonish and Review Fellowship with Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church

WHEREAS, The Holy Scriptures enjoin us to maintain the unity of the faith in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3, 13); and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions state: "The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the

sacraments are administered rightly. And it is enough for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings be alike everywhere" (AC VII 1–3, Kolb/Wengert); and

WHEREAS, "Apostolicity" in the Church is found not in a flesh-and-blood lineage of men, but rather, in the apostolicity of doctrine, which consists of continuing steadfast in the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42), as the Lutheran theologian Hermann Sasse confesses: "Authentic apostolic succession, then, is always and only the succession of doctrine" (Hermann Sasse, "Successio Apostolica" in *Letters to Lutheran Pastors*, ed. Matthew C. Harrison [CPH, 2014]: 2:437); and

WHEREAS, The bishop of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC), a church in altar and pulpit fellowship with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod since 2013, has taught that so-called "apostolic succession," which he defines as a succession of duly consecrated bishops, is necessary for a church to have a valid ministry; and

WHEREAS, By promoting this teaching and interjecting itself in the life of another sister church body, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (IELB), by asserting the claim of apostolic succession, by ordaining deacons, and by establishing congregations outside of Siberia, the SELC has created scandal, confusion, and disharmony in the confession of the one true and saving Gospel; and

WHEREAS, The bishop of the SELC is also identified as the "guiding bishop" of the Independent Anglican Congregation in Thailand (IAC), a church that according to its website (*inachurchthailand.com/weddings-blessings*) allows for the blessing of LGBTQ unions; therefore be it

Resolved, That the President of the Synod admonish the bishop of the SELC to immediately cease and desist in these unwanted intrusions into the life of the IELB; and be it further

Resolved, That the President of the Synod, in consultation with the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), engage in conversation with the leadership of the SELC to assist them in embracing a genuinely biblical, Lutheran confession of the one Office Christ Jesus has instituted for the pure preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments; and be it further

Resolved, That the President of the Synod, in consultation with the CTCR, admonish the bishop of the SELC to withdraw immediately from the unionistic relationship with the IAC; and be it finally

Resolved, That the President of the Synod report the outcome of these efforts to the 2029 Synod convention with a recommendation as to whether the conditions for altar and pulpit fellowship with the SELC still obtain.

Beautiful Savior, Spokane, WA; Grace, San Mateo, CA;
Circuit 2 (St. Paul Metro), Minnesota South District;
Circuit 9 (Decatur), Indiana District

Ov. 5-05**To Admonish and Converse with
Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church**

WHEREAS, The Holy Scriptures enjoin us to maintain the unity of the faith in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3, 13); and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions state, “The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. And it is enough for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings be alike everywhere” (AC VII 1–3, Kolb/Wengert); and

WHEREAS, The bishop of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC), a church in altar and pulpit fellowship with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod since 2013, has taught that so-called “apostolic succession” is necessary for a church to have a valid ministry; and

WHEREAS, By promoting this teaching and interjecting itself in the life of another sister church body, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (IELB), by asserting the claim of apostolic succession, by ordaining deacons, and by establishing congregations outside of Siberia, the SELC has created scandal, confusion, and disharmony in the confession of the one true and saving Gospel; and

WHEREAS, The bishop of the SELC is also identified as the “guiding bishop” of the Independent Anglican Congregation in Thailand (IACT), a church that according to its website (*inachurchthailand.com/weddings-blessings*) allows for the blessing of LGBTQ unions; therefore be it

Resolved, That the President of the Synod admonish the bishop of our Siberian sister church to immediately cease and desist in these unwanted intrusions into the life of the IELB; and be it further

Resolved, That the President of the Synod in consultation with the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) engage in conversation with the leadership of the SELC to assist them in embracing a genuinely biblical, Lutheran confession of the one Office our Christ Jesus has instituted for the pure preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments; and be it further

Resolved, That the President of the Synod in consultation with the CTCR admonish the bishop of the SELC to withdraw immediately from the unionistic relationship with the IACT; and be it finally

Resolved, That the President of the Synod report the outcome of these efforts to the 2029 Synod convention with a recommendation as to whether the conditions for altar and pulpit fellowship with the SELC still obtain.

Elm Grove, Elm Grove, WI ; Immanuel, Eagle, NE

Ov. 5-06**To Address Evangelical Lutheran Church in
Kenya Membership in Lutheran World Federation**

WHEREAS, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK) is a partner church body of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, in full altar and pulpit fellowship with the same; and

WHEREAS, The ELCK is also a member church of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) as indicated by the LWF website (*lutheranworld.org/member-churches*); and

WHEREAS, The LWF includes member churches such as the heterodox Evangelical Lutheran Church in America that engage in anti-biblical teachings and practices, including the ordination of women and the performance of same-sex “marriages”; and

WHEREAS, Membership in the LWF establishes altar and pulpit fellowship with these member churches and implies agreement with their anti-biblical teachings and practices; and

WHEREAS, Constitution Article VI 2 states as one of the conditions of membership in the Synod the “renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description”; and

WHEREAS, The North Dakota District currently supports the ELCK through Project 24; and

WHEREAS, This support of a church body in fellowship with the LWF suggests fellowship on the part of the district with the LWF; and

WHEREAS, The President of the Synod (Bylaw 3.3.1.1.2) and Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR, Bylaw 3.9.5.2.2) are assigned responsibility for evaluating existing fellowship relations with other church bodies; therefore be it

Resolved, That the district in convention direct the district president to monitor the progress of the President of the Synod and CTCR regarding ELCK and LWF fellowship; and be it further

Resolved, That the district president report to the spring pastors’ conferences in 2025, 2026, and 2027 and through district media; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention be memorialized to reevaluate the partner church body status of the ELCK in view of the ELCK’s membership in the LWF.

North Dakota District

Ov. 5-07**To Declare State of “Fellowship in Protest” with
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia**

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) has confessed that “All Christians are required by God ... to have church-fellowship only with orthodox church-bodies,” (LCMS, *A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* [adopted 1932], 28) in accordance with the Divine Command to avoid those who “cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught,” (Rom. 16:17); and

WHEREAS, The Formula of Concord, in line with this Biblical truth, confesses that external fellowship in the church is to be based upon agreement “in the doctrine and all its articles,” as well as “in the right use of the holy Sacraments,” (FC SD X 31); and

WHEREAS, For this reason, the basis for the establishment of church fellowship between the LCMS and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia (ELCL or LELB) was “doctrinal agreement between our two churches,” (2001 Res. 3-05); and

WHEREAS, The LCMS repudiates “unionism, that is, church-fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God’s command, as causing divisions in the church, Rom. 16:17; 2 John 9, 10, and involving the constant danger of losing the Word of God entirely, 2 Tim. 2:17–21,” (*A Brief Statement*, 28); and

WHEREAS, The LCMS has also confessed that “The orthodox character of a church is established not by its mere name nor by its outward acceptance of, and subscription to, an orthodox creed, but by the doctrine which is actually taught in its pulpits, in its theological seminaries, and in its publications,” (*A Brief Statement*, 29); and

WHEREAS, In September 2023, then Archbishop Janis Vanags publicly communed two bishops of the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA), a heterodox church body which permits its dioceses to ordain women, and as a matter of policy permits its preachers to advance many false doctrines held by the Reformed, charismatic, and Romanist churches; and

WHEREAS, During the ACNA’s 2024 Provincial Assembly, an ecumenical dialogue report was presented that additionally testified to this fact; and

WHEREAS, The same report testifies that the ACNA had been accorded full altar and pulpit fellowship by the ELCL on the basis that the ELCL already had fellowship with the wider Anglican Communion; and

WHEREAS, Our Lord does not tell us to treat our erring brother as a Gentile after a single rebuke, but instead requires patience (Matt. 18:16–17); and

WHEREAS, The LCMS has previously, in response to the errors of her sister churches, declared she is *in statu confessionis*, in a state of confession, which “is not tantamount to the breaking of fellowship. If, however, the circumstances which called forth the protest are not corrected in due time, the implication is that the protest will lead to the severance of fellowship relations,” (1971 Convention Report 2-01, Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Workbook*, Appendix B, 39); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod recognize that there is not complete doctrinal agreement with the ELCL on account of differences in the doctrine of church fellowship; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod declare that she is in a state of confession against the ELCL for her unionist fellowship with the Anglican Communion; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct its President, as its chief ecumenical officer, as well as the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), to provide for new doctrinal discussions with the ELCL on the issue of church fellowship, to the end that the ELCL might be brought to repentance; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod implore its members to pray fervently for true doctrinal agreement to be established by these discussions, that we may dwell together in unity; and be it further

Resolved, That the CTCR produce a report on the status of these discussions and their fruits, and to disseminate this report for widespread study prior to the 2029 Synod convention; and be it finally

Resolved, That in light of the results of these dialogues, the Synod reconsider its relationship to the ELCL in the 2029 Synod convention, whether to (1) rescind the state of confession; (2) continue the state of confession; or (3) break fellowship.

Good Shepherd
Lincoln, NE

Ov. 5-08

To Recognize That the Synod Is Not in Altar and Pulpit Fellowship with *Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche*

Preamble

Attempts to introduce women’s ordination into *Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche*, or the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (SELK) (which is currently listed as a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod [LCMS] partner church and a member of the International Lutheran Council), have been actively underway for at least 25 years. At best, the SELK is unable to give a clear confession on God’s Word as applied to the Office of the Holy Ministry, and accordingly, is not in altar and pulpit fellowship, which is a gift of God that exists by His grace on the basis of complete agreement in doctrine and practice.

In 2000, the SELK published “*Die wesentlichen Argumente zur Frage einer Ordination von Frauen zum Amt der Kirche, soweit sie bisher in der Selbständigen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche (SELK) geäußert wurden*” (www.selk.de/download/fo-pap.pdf), or “The Main Arguments on the Question of the Ordination of Women to the Office of the Church, as far as they have been expressed so far in the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK)”.

In 2009, the SELK further published *Dokumentation zum Beratungsprozess “Ordination von Frauen zum Amt der Kirche” in der Pfarrerschaft der SELK 1999–2009*, or *Documentation of the Consultation Process “Ordination of Women to the Office of the Church” in the Clergy of the SELK 1999–2009*. One of the documents contained therein, entitled “*Gruppenantrag an den 11. Allgemeinen Pfarrkonvent im Mai 2009 als Gegenantrag zum Antrag der Kirchenleitung und des Kollegiums der Superintendenten*” (p. 43), 31 SELK pastors asserted in a proposed overture (never adopted) that no consensus was reached on the theological interpretation of Scripture regarding women’s ordination and further, that while the ordination of women remains prohibited in the SELK, the ordination of women was to be deemed a matter of church order, not doctrine, and left to the church’s discretion, and discussion would remain open.

Most recently, at the 15th General Pastoral Convention of the SELK held June 23–27, 2025, 47 percent of the pastors present considered it theologically possible for the SELK to have some members who practice women’s ordination. Yet rather than repenting of the fact that nearly half of its pastorate would allow the possibility of a position clearly contrary to Scripture, 80 percent of the pastors voted to assure supporters of women’s ordination of “brotherly cooperation, respect for their position, and a willingness to listen to their concerns” rather than rebuking those holding to this false doctrine (Matthew Block, “SELK Pastoral Convention Offers Clarity on Ordination,” Aug. 14, 2025, ilcouncil.org/2025/08/14/selk-pastoral-convention-offers-clarity-on-ordination).

Further, 88 percent of the SELK delegates voted to “commit themselves to continuing to promote the services of women in the SELK as provided for in the church regulations: pastoral assistants, lecturers, church council members, church councilors, deacons, catechists, lecturers at the *Lutherischen Theologischen Hochschule*, etc.” (*ibid.*)

To assert that there are scriptural and confessional arguments in favor of women’s ordination, and that the issue is not a matter of

doctrine, is clearly contrary to the Word of God, which clearly teaches that women are not to be called and ordained into, nor carry out the public functions of, the pastoral office (1 Tim. 2:12; 1 Cor. 14:34). (To be clear, SELK as such has not adopted this position, but continues to work to overcome a dissensus, not at present regarded as church divisive, in which both sides acknowledge the other to believe its position is scriptural.)

The actions of the SELK follow a pattern that has occurred most recently in the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA), which continued *discussions* and voted on six occasions to ordain women until eventually a majority was achieved in 2024. This pattern has been recognized by, among others, Dr. Matthew Becker, then an ordained minister in the LCMS, who in 2010 asserted that clear majorities of the SELK favored women's ordination, and predicted that the SELK and the LCA would ordain women. Becker criticized Synod President Matthew Harrison's efforts to dissuade the Japan Lutheran Church (JLC) from ordaining women (Matthew Becker, "Women's Ordination and LCMS Partner Churches," *Transverse Markings: One Theologian's Notes*, Dec. 7, 2010, matthewlbecker.blogspot.com/2010/12/womens-ordination-and-lcms-partner.html). The parallels between the SELK and the LCA are also recognized by another liberal voice in the Synod (Karl Wyneken, "Let's Include Women in the Pastoral Office," *The Daystar Journal*, Aug. 21, 2016, thedaystarjournal.com/lets-include-women-in-the-pastoral-office). Sadly, President Harrison's faithful and fraternal efforts were unsuccessful as the JLC did adopt women's ordination and as a result, the 2023 Synod convention recognized that the Synod was not in fellowship with the JLC (2023 Res. 5-07).

SELK Bishop Hans-Jörg Voigt has asserted "The convention is striving for clarity on the [women's ordination] issue." However, clarity and unity must be grounded firmly on pure doctrine, not on an agreement to disagree. The SELK states that "a majority of its members *currently* [emphasis added] consider it impossible for the practice of the ordination of women and the rejection of this practice to coexist on equal terms in the SELK" (Matthew Block, "SELK Pastoral Convention Offers Clarity on Ordination," Aug. 14, 2025, ilcouncil.org/2025/08/14/selk-pastoral-convention-offers-clarity-on-ordination). Notably absent from the SELK's public statements is the assertion that a dual system cannot exist because the alternative—women's ordination—is false doctrine.

The SELK is already promoting female pastoral assistants, deacons, and theology professors, and is unable to advance a clear theological justification for the limitation of the Office of the Holy Ministry to men.

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture clearly teaches that women are not to be called and ordained into, nor carry out the public functions of, the pastoral office (1 Tim. 2:12; 1 Cor. 14:34); and

WHEREAS, The SELK officially approves of and practices the service of women as pastoral assistants, deacons, and theology professors, and has voted by a strong majority that advocacy of full women's ordination is to be the topic of cooperation and respect rather than condemning it as false doctrine not to be tolerated in the church of God; and

WHEREAS, The Synod recognizes with deep sadness and regret that differences in doctrine and practice exist between the Synod and the SELK; and

WHEREAS, Twenty-five years of formal and informal doctrinal discussions in the SELK have neither resolved the issue of women's

ordination in favor of the scriptural position, nor offered any basis for assuming that it will be resolved in the foreseeable future; and

WHEREAS, The Synod understands altar and pulpit fellowship to be a gift of God that exists by His grace on the basis of complete agreement in doctrine and practice; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod affirm the inerrancy, inspiration, clarity, and authority of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19–21); and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod with deep sorrow and regret declare that it can no longer recognize altar and pulpit fellowship with the SELK; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod acknowledge and express deep regret over its own shortcomings and failures in not giving adequate attention to these theological concerns, and repent especially of its own actions causing confusion and lack of clarity on the issue of women's ordination, including without limitation installing women as chaplains and allowing vested women deacons in the Divine Service; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod herewith commit itself to openly and eagerly pursuing further doctrinal discussions with the SELK should the SELK at any time be open to such discussions, in the hope that by God's grace our church bodies might once again attain complete agreement in doctrine and practice and once again enjoy the gift of God-given and God-pleasing altar and pulpit fellowship.

St. Paul
Brookfield, IL

Ov. 5-09

To Reconsider Altar and Pulpit Fellowship with The American Association of Lutheran Churches

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) declared altar and pulpit fellowship with The American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC) at its 2007 convention (Res. 3-01); and

WHEREAS, The AALC has in recent years received into its membership numerous pastors and congregations that are former LCMS members, including pastors removed from the LCMS roster for cause; and

WHEREAS, The Synod recognizes fellowship with partner churches on the basis of agreement in doctrine and practice; and

WHEREAS, In these matters, the AALC has raised doubts about its agreement with the LCMS and its willingness to work together as a partner church; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention call the AALC to repentance for its failures in ecclesiastical supervision and church relations and urge them to rectify these errors; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod dissolve its fellowship with the AALC at the 2029 Synod convention unless those errors have been rectified in advance of that convention to the satisfaction of the President of the Synod as the chief ecumenical officer of the Synod.

Circuit 13 (Indiana)
English District

Ov. 5-10

To Encourage and Promote Biblical Teaching of Creation

WHEREAS, Christians are surrounded by teaching that contradicts the Scriptures concerning creation; and

WHEREAS, Many of the most prominent defenders and institutions of the biblical doctrine of creation produce literature that has false teaching mixed into it; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) is one of the largest denominations to uphold the Lord's six-day creation of the universe (LCMS, *A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* [adopted 1932], Article 1); therefore be it

Resolved, That we urge the Synod's congregations, pastors, district leadership, and schools to uphold and promote the biblical teaching of creation and to provide increased educational opportunities on the subject; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod leadership and institutions (such as Concordia Publishing House and institutions of higher learning) be encouraged to make this a priority for the next triennium and in years to come.

South Wisconsin District

Ov. 5-11

To Restore Apostles' Creed to Historical Form regarding Christ's "Descent into Hell"

WHEREAS, All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16); and

WHEREAS, God's Word is never to be added to nor subtracted from (Rev. 22:18–19; Deut. 18:20); and

WHEREAS, God's Word is very clear that Christ Jesus died, was buried, and was fully dead in the grave until raised to life by God on the third day, Sunday (Matt. 12:40; 16:21; 17:22–23; 20:18–19; 27:50–28:7; Mark 15:37–16:6; Luke 23:44–24:8; John 19:30–20:18; Acts 2:22–32; Rom. 4:24–25; 8:11; 10:9; 1 Cor. 15:3–8); and

WHEREAS, Psalm 16:10 and Acts 2:27 and 2:31 reference Christ Jesus not being abandoned to the grave (Sheol in Hebrew, Hades in Greek), meaning abandoned in the realm of the dead; and

WHEREAS, The Hebrew word *Sheol* and the Greek word *Hades* are not the equivalent of our English word *hell*; and

WHEREAS, The English word *hell*, in contemporary understanding and usage, is the sum total combination of multiple biblical words and concepts, including

- *Gehenna* — the garbage dump outside of Jerusalem, formerly the place of child sacrifices before Jerusalem became the holy city of the Israelites, a place where there was a constant fire because of the garbage being burned;
- *Tartarus* (2 Peter 2:4) — the place where God sent the angels who had sinned, placing them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment;
- The abyss (Luke 8:31; Rev. 9:1–2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3) — a place of confinement and perhaps suffering for the evil spirits;

- The lake of fire and brimstone (Rev. 20:10) — a place of torment into which the devil will be thrown, where the beast and the false prophet have already been thrown, to suffer for all eternity;
- A final judgment place for those who did not confess (Rom. 10:9) and believe in (John 3:16; Mark 16:16) Christ as Lord and did not serve Him with their lives on earth, or said another way— “who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thess. 1:8), described as a place of great suffering, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12), where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched (Mark 9:48), where there is everlasting punishment (Matt. 25:46) in the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41), punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power (2 Thess. 1:9), and
- *Abaddon* (mentioned in the Hebrew text of Job 26:6; 28:22; 31:12; Prov. 15:11; Psalm 88:11; and the Greek text of Rev. 9:11), which seems to be a place of destruction in the Old Testament references and the literal Hebrew name of the angel who reigns as king over the bottomless pit in the Revelation text, also known as Apollyon in Greek; and

WHEREAS, The Greek word *φυλακή*, used in 1 Pet. 3:19, which is often translated as *prison* in the English text, literally means a place where something or someone is carefully watched, protected, or guarded, and is also the exact word used by Luke in Luke 2:8 as the shepherds “kept watch” over their flocks by night, is never used to imply a place of suffering or punishment; and

WHEREAS, Francis Pieper in his *Christian Dogmatics* ([CPH, 1951] II:314) cites 1 Peter 3:19 as the proof text for Christ Jesus' descent into hell spoken of in the modern Apostles' Creed; and

WHEREAS, Even if this text from 1 Peter 3:19 was referencing our modern understanding of hell it would still be properly placed in the Creed after Christ Jesus was “made alive by the Spirit,” after the resurrection, not before as is stated in the modern Apostles' Creed; and

WHEREAS, The Old Roman Creed, upon which the Apostles' Creed was based, does not contain any mention of Jesus' descent into hell (e.g., Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* [New York: Harper and Row, 1931], 46–47); and

WHEREAS, The Nicene Creed, which predates the Apostles' Creed, also does not contain any mention of a descent into hell by Jesus following His death; and

WHEREAS, There is no clear text of Scripture that speaks of Jesus “descending” to some place after His death, nor any text of Scripture that speaks of Jesus going to a place called *hell* nor to a place that carries with it our modern understanding of that term; and

WHEREAS, The only reference to Christ Jesus descending to the lower parts of the earth is in Eph. 4:9, and is most probably a reference to Jesus' incarnation, to His descent from heaven to earth (Phil. 2:7), used in contrast to His ascent back into heaven (Eph. 4:8); but if this descent is a reference to Psalm 16:10 or Acts 2:27, 31, then it is a reference to Sheol and/or Hades, not a reference to our modern understanding of hell; and

WHEREAS, The earliest versions of the Apostles' Creed were written in Greek, and the oldest record we have of this Creed is in a letter from Marcellus of Ancyra to Pope Julius I in or about A.D. 340–341 and has no inclusion of the phrase “descended into hell”

(J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, Third Ed. [London: Longman Group, 1972], 102–3) furthermore, when this phrase is found in later Greek versions of the Creed more than 300 years later, the phrase in question states that Jesus descended into “Hades,” which means to the dead or the grave, and not to a place of punishment (i.e. Gehenna, Tartarus, Apollyon, or the abyss); and

WHEREAS, The first appearance of this phrase is in only one of the two Latin versions of the Apostles’ Creed from Rufinus, circa A.D. 390, where it was written as “*descendit ad inferos*,” which meant that Jesus “descended to those below,” but the phrase does not show up again until A.D. 650, when it became the official version of the Apostles’ Creed adopted by the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent; and

WHEREAS, The Greek translations today have this phrase as “κατελθόντα εἰς τὰ κατώτατα,” which translated means “descended to the lower ones,” again consistent with Psalm 16:10 (Sheol) and Acts 2:27, 31 (Hades), that Christ Jesus after dying on the cross was in the realm of the dead until raised back to life on resurrection Sunday; and

WHEREAS, Somewhere along the way the original Latin word *inferos*, (meaning *lower*) referring to those below, the dead ones in Sheol/Hades, became *infernos*, from which we get our English word *inferno* (meaning a fire), which came to be used for our modern word and understanding of hell; and

WHEREAS, Paul in 1 Cor. 15:3–4 states: “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,” thus highlighting those things that we should be confessing in our Creed concerning Christ’s death, that He was “crucified, died, and was buried” and that “the third day He rose again from the dead,” with no mention of any descent into hell; and

WHEREAS, It is clear from the original insertion of this phrase into the Apostles’ Creed that it was not meant to represent Christ’s post-resurrection visit to preach to the spirits in prison referenced in 1 Peter 3:19, but rather, it seems to have been inserted to show the genuine and complete deadness of Jesus, which is taught and supported throughout the Scriptures, thus making the power of Christ Jesus over death that much more significant and His identification with and participation in the human condition that much more real, since He really was dead; and

WHEREAS, The original Greek and Latin versions of the “descent into hell” phrase all referred to the realm of the dead and not a place of suffering, thus it is placed between Jesus’ burial and His resurrection, which then also means that it belongs as part of Christ’s state of humiliation and not exaltation; and

WHEREAS, Our modern word *hell* simply does not reflect the original intent of the state of Christ Jesus between His burial and His resurrection; and

WHEREAS, A creed is a statement of belief, and as such our Christian creeds should only contain those things which are clear and explicit in the Scriptures, and which are necessary to our faith and confession; and

WHEREAS, There is no clear word in the Scriptures that states that Jesus descended to a place that corresponds with our modern understanding of hell at any point in His life, death, or after His resurrection; and

WHEREAS, This non-biblical addition to the Apostles’ Creed does not add clarity to the essence of our faith and confession, but rather serves to compel the confessor to confess something which is not clearly taught in the Holy Scriptures, and which adds no value to the Creed nor to our theology; and

WHEREAS, Some of the other Christian church bodies who confess the Apostles’ Creed have translated this phrase as “He descended to the dead,” (including but not exclusive to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The Episcopal Church) which is consistent with the origin of this phrase and with the placement of this phrase before Christ’s resurrection on the third day, or have left the phrase “descended into hell” out of the creed entirely, which is consistent with the Old Roman Creed; therefore be it

Resolved, That The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in convention commend this resolution to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) for further study; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod encourage all of its rostered pastors to study the history and addition of the phrase “He descended into hell” into the Apostles’ Creed since it wasn’t part of the old Roman Creed from which the Apostles’ Creed was developed, nor did this phrase reference a descent of Christ into a place of suffering in any of the early translations or understandings when it was first added to the Creed; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod encourage all of the rostered pastors of the Synod to educate their people as to the non-biblical nature of the phrase “descended into hell” in the Apostles’ Creed, and that the Synod allows pastors after educating their congregations to change the word *hell* to *Hades* in the Creed to reflect the original word as drawn from the Holy Scriptures (Acts 2:27, 31), or to change *hell* to “the realm of the dead,” to reflect the original phrase in the Apostles’ Creed, and thus to remain in agreement with the biblical references and teaching concerning the state/place of Jesus following His burial but before His resurrection; and be it finally

Resolved, That if the CTCR finds the rationale of this overture to be true, that the Synod would have the courage and the integrity to return the Apostles’ Creed to its original form, either without a reference to Christ’s descent into hell altogether, or to change its form back to the way it was when it was first introduced to the Creed, being that after Christ Jesus died and was buried He “descended to Hades,” or that He “descended to the realm of the dead.”

Christ
Austin, TX

Ov. 5-12

To Review Practice of Divine Call in Synod Constitution and Bylaws

WHEREAS, Our Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Office of the Holy Ministry in Matt. 28:18–20 and John 20:21–23, and our Lutheran Confessions teach us, and we are bound to the doctrine that the *ministerium docendi evangelii et porrigendi sacramenta*, “the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments” (AC V 1), is a divinely instituted office, which should never be confused with human offices and positions; and

WHEREAS, The Synod’s theology teaches us that, in its practice, the church may transfer an ordained minister to another post only

by means of another legitimate call or else depose him for only one or more of these causes: ungodly doctrine, ungodly life, or incompetence; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has over the years, at almost every convention, revised its Bylaws with regard to aspects of governance and structure that affect the divinely instituted office of the *ministerium docendi evangelii et porrigendi sacramenta* (AC V 1); and

WHEREAS, In the Synod's Bylaws, the following sections pertain to the employment and deposal of persons holding the divinely instituted office: (1) expulsion from the Synod of either congregations or rostered workers (Bylaw sections 2.14–2.17); (2) restricted or suspended status (Bylaws 2.13.2–2.13.4); (3) removal of officers or board members of the Synod or districts (Bylaws 1.5.7–1.5.8); (4) removal of seminary faculty or administrators (Bylaws 3.10.5.7.5–3.10.5.7.9); (5) removal of university faculty or administrators (Bylaws 3.10.6.9.4–3.10.6.9.6); and (6) dispute resolution (Bylaw section 1.10); and

WHEREAS, The Commission on Handbook (COH) regularly revises and reviews the constitution and Bylaws according to the directives of the Synod in convention; therefore be it

Resolved, That in the coming triennium the COH be assigned the project of reviewing not only all the sections listed in the fourth whereas above, but also all parts of the *Handbook*, to ensure that such sections and parts are in compliance with our doctrine and practice of the divinely instituted office of the *ministerium docendi evangelii et porrigendi sacramenta* (AC V 1); and be it further

Resolved, That in order to assist with this task, the COH be urged to consult three orthodox statements of our doctrine of the ministry: (1) The 2003 report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Theology and Practice of "the Divine Call"*; (2) Kurt Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance* (Fort Wayne: IFLCR, 1990, 103–173, especially 157–160); and (3) Robert D. Preus, "The Doctrine of the Call in the Confessions and Lutheran Orthodoxy", (John A. Maxfield, ed., *Church and Ministry Today: Three Confessional Lutheran Essays* [Saint Louis: Luther Academy, 2001], 1–50); and be it finally

Resolved, That the COH report its findings to the 2029 Synod convention, along with any proposed revisions to the Bylaws to bring them more fully into compliance with the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and our doctrine and practice of the divine call.

Mission of the Cross
Crosslake, MN

Ov. 5-13

To Request Comprehensive Review When Call Is Terminated or Self-Terminated

WHEREAS, The Synod has committed to caring for pastors and church workers in one of its seven mission priorities, to wit: "promote and nurture the spiritual, emotional, financial, and physical well-being of pastors and professional church workers" (2023 Res. 4-03, "To Affirm and Continue Mission Priorities for 2023–26 Triennium," *Proceedings*, 136–37); and

WHEREAS, There are a number of reasons a person might self-terminate a Divine Call (e.g., age of retirement, mental or physical health concerns or incapacitations, personal conviction, etc.); and

WHEREAS, There is biblical precedent for the non-death ending of a tenure of service (e.g., Num. 8:23–26); and

WHEREAS, The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) discussed termination of a Divine Call in its 2003 Report, *Theology and Practice of "the Divine Call,"* only from the perspective of outside termination and not self-termination; and

WHEREAS, Care should be given to the worker and the people of God served by the worker throughout the length of a Divine Call, including if a call is terminated or self-terminated; and

WHEREAS, There is a paucity of theological rationale and practical direction in the Synod for the many ways a Divine Call might be self-terminated before death; and

WHEREAS, There can be confusion in the church over legitimate and illegitimate reasons for terminating or self-terminating a Divine Call, which might result in anxiety over candidate status; therefore be it

Resolved, That church workers and congregations be given clear teaching on the theological and practical procedures when a Divine Call is terminated or self-terminated; and be it further

Resolved, That the English District memorialize Synod to instruct the CTCR to offer clarity regarding theological and practical considerations for the ways a Divine Call might be legitimately or illegitimately terminated or self-terminated; and be it further

Resolved, That the district in convention memorialize the Synod that the Council of Presidents is to establish support and training materials for church workers who self-terminate their Divine Call legitimately; and be it finally

Resolved, That district presidents and circuit visitors work with the workers and congregations of their districts to support their called church workers before, during, and after times of termination or self-termination.

English District

Ov. 5-14

To Study How to Amend Practice of Issuing "Divine Calls" to Positions Not in Direct Service of Proclamation of Gospel and Administration of Sacraments

WHEREAS, Article V of The Augsburg Confession (AC) states, "So that we may obtain this faith [namely, that (our) sins are forgiven for Christ's sake (AC IV 2)], the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted"; and

WHEREAS, AC XIV states, "Our churches teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call"; and

WHEREAS, The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope (Tr) 60 states, "The Gospel assigns those who preside over churches the command to teach the Gospel (Matt. 28:19), to forgive sins (John 20:23), to administer the Sacraments, and also to exercise jurisdiction"; and

WHEREAS, The Smalcald Articles (SA) III X 2 teaches that "[the bishops] do not even want to be true bishops, but worldly lords and princes, who will neither preach, nor teach, nor baptize, nor administer the Lord's Supper, nor perform any work or office of the Church"; and

WHEREAS, The Constitution of the Synod accepts these confessions as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God (Const. Art. II 2); and

WHEREAS, The Office of the Ministry is rightly called a divine office because it was divinely instituted by Christ (Eph. 4:11; Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23), and other offices not instituted by Christ but instituted by men, which the Church has freedom to create by human arrangement (Tr 60–82), should not be called divine offices; and

WHEREAS, A number of “called” positions within the Synod and its auxiliaries do not require teaching the Word or administering the Sacraments; and

WHEREAS, The practice of issuing divine calls to positions that are not in the direct service of the proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the Sacraments conflicts with the referenced portions of the Confessions, and creates confusion regarding the nature of the divine call; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Montana District convention memorialize the 2026 Synod convention to direct the President of the Synod to appoint a committee consisting of at least one theological professor from each seminary and one district president to study how the practice of issuing divine calls (Bylaw 3.11.1) to positions without direct involvement in the proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the Sacraments may be amended to comply with the Confessions; and be it further

Resolved, That by July 30, 2028, this committee make its recommendations to the Board of Directors (BOD) regarding Synod practice on the calls it issues; and be it finally

Resolved, That these recommendations, together with the BOD response to the recommendations, be reported to the 2029 Synod convention.

Montana District

Ov. 5-15

To Encourage and Promote Sound Teaching on Eschatology or *Last Things*

WHEREAS, Christians are surrounded by teachings that contradict the Scriptures concerning eschatology or the *last things*; and

WHEREAS, Errant eschatology teachings, such as that of premillennial dispensationalism, Seventh-day Adventism, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and others hold significant religious sway in our society; and

WHEREAS, Sadly, many Lutherans are influenced by errant teachers who hold heterodox views on the end times; and

WHEREAS, The physical resurrection of the body has suffered diminished emphasis in recent decades among Christians; and

WHEREAS, Many of the most prominent defenders of and institutions focused on the biblical doctrine of the *last things* produce literature that has false teaching of other confessions mixed into it; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is one of the largest protestant denominations to uphold the sound teaching of amillennialism; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention encourage its congregations, pastors, district leaders, and schools to deliberately uphold and promote the sound teaching of eschatology and to provide increased educational opportunities on the subject to

catechize about this important area of the counsel of God; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention encourage Concordia Publishing House and experts in institutions of higher learning (universities and seminaries) to make this a publishing and public teaching priority for the next triennium and in the years to come, providing up-to-date resources at both laity-accessible and academic levels.

Circuit 25 (Kenosha), South Wisconsin District; Circuit 26 (Racine), South Wisconsin District

Ov. 5-16

To Reaffirm and Encourage Teaching and Practice of Closed Communion

WHEREAS, Members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are bound by the Lutheran Confessions to regard Holy Scripture as the teaching of the Holy Supper of our Lord, Jesus Christ:

- That His body and blood are truly and substantially present, distributed, and received in, with, and under the elements of the bread and wine (AC X); and
- That these are received by both the believing and unbelieving participants, by those who eat in repentance and faith, to “forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation” (SC VI) and by those who eat in unrepentance or unbelief, to judgment (Ap XXIV; FC Ep VII; FC SD VII); and
- That to obtain such faith, the preaching office is instituted by our Lord to administer the Gospel and the Sacraments (AC V), with those filling it thus having grave responsibility for the souls in their care (SC VI); and

WHEREAS, The true unity of the Church is found in the pure teaching of the Gospel and right administration of the Sacraments (AC VII); and

WHEREAS, St. Paul himself admonishes the Corinthians against assembling to eat the Supper of our Lord with divisions among them, thus coming together not for the better but for the worse (1 Cor. 11:17–18); and

WHEREAS, True doctrine necessarily regulates practice, as the confessors write, “The custom has been retained among us of not administering the sacrament to those who have not previously been examined and absolved” (AC XXV); and, “In our churches Mass is celebrated every Sunday and on other festivals, when the sacrament is offered to those who wish for it after they have been examined and absolved” (Ap XXIV), and as our Lord says, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it” (Luke 8:21); and

WHEREAS, The responsibility of pastors as stewards of the mysteries of God is not as hirelings or pleasers of any man or group of men, but as servants of Christ; it being required of stewards that they be faithful (1 Cor. 4:1–2); and keep watch over souls as those who will have to give an account (Heb. 13:17); therefore be it

Resolved, That the pastors of our Synod be exhorted, as duty bound by the office before the almighty God, to whom they will have to give an account for the souls entrusted to them, to teach, exhort, practice, and defend closed Communion, communing only those who have been *examined and absolved*, who are neither living in open, unrepentant sin, nor under the ban, who have been taught and confess, not only the true doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, but all

doctrines as taught in the Small Catechism, who eat and drink at the Lord's Table as those who gladly hear and believe whatsoever their Lord teaches, professing no doctrine contrary to that taught where they commune, and whose church membership reflects said confession, except in rare, temporary, and extraordinary cases of pastoral discretion; and be it further

Resolved, That the congregations and congregants of our Synod be exhorted, in the fear of God and love of the pastors He sends, so that they may serve "joyfully, and not sadly" (Heb. 13:17 RSV), both to support and uphold the practice of closed Communion in our congregations, and to refrain, as a matter of conscience and Christian truthfulness and out of concern for the true unity of the Church in oneness of teaching, from communing at altars of differing confessions; and be it further

Resolved, That the district presidents of our Synod be exhorted, as true ecclesiastical supervisors, and as men who will also have to give account for the ministry committed to their care, to teach, exhort, defend, and further the practice of closed Communion among the members (congregations and pastors) committed to their care, and pastors and congregations be encouraged to keep on record with their district office a copy of the Communion statement currently in use in their parish and their Communion practice; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Minnesota North District reaffirm the doctrine and practice of closed Communion and pass this resolution onto the Synod convention.

Minnesota North District

Ov. 5-17

To Reaffirm, Enforce, and Restore Faithful Eucharistic Practice and Synodical Discipline concerning Unionism and Open Communion

WHEREAS, The Holy Scriptures teach that pastors are stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1), charged to watch over souls as those who must give an account (Heb. 13:17), and are commanded to warn, instruct, examine, and withhold the Sacrament when necessary for the good of souls (1 Cor. 11:27–29; Ezek. 3:17–21; Titus 1:7–9); and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions explicitly teach and confess that the Sacrament of the Altar is to be given only to those who have been instructed, examined, and absolved, and that admission to the Sacrament belongs to the pastoral office and not to individual self-determination (AC XXIV; XXV; Ap XXIV; SA III VIII; LC V); and

WHEREAS, The writers of the Lutheran Confessions understood instruction and examination for admission to the Lord's Supper as concrete, pastoral acts involving personal request for the Sacrament, confession of faith, catechetical understanding, repentance, and inquiry into life and conduct, as articulated by Martin Luther, who taught that the Sacrament is not to be given indiscriminately, but only after prior examination regarding what the communicant has learned from the catechism and whether he intends to forsake sin, lest Christ's Church be treated as a common trough rather than guarded as the communion of saints (Martin Luther, "An Open Letter to Those in Frankfurt on the Main, 1533," in *Closed Communion?*, John T. Pless and Matthew C. Harrison, eds. [CPH, 2017], 14; *Luther's Works*, 40:292–293; 53:32–34); and

WHEREAS, The Constitution requires the renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description as a condition of acquiring and holding membership in the Synod (Const. Art. VI), and mandates the removal of members who persistently violate these conditions after repeated admonition (Const. Art. XIII); and

WHEREAS, The President of the Synod and the district presidents are constitutionally charged with ecclesiastical supervision, including the duty to admonish, reprove, and, when admonition fails, to report and initiate disciplinary action against those who depart from the Synod's confession and conditions of membership (Const. Art. XI, XII; Bylaw section 2.14); and

WHEREAS, The practice commonly referred to as "functionally open communion," as defined by Rev. Dr. Joel Biermann, professor of systematic theology at Concordia Seminary, occurs when "the determination of who is an appropriate recipient (and not merely a 'worthy' recipient) of the Lord's Supper is left exclusively in the hands of the individual contemplating eating and drinking, and when the church's concern is limited to an individual's worthiness without further consideration of that person's confession," such that professed adherence to closed communion is rendered meaningless by actual practice (Joel D. Biermann, "Step Up to the Altar: Thinking about the Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 72 no. 2 [2008]: 153); and

WHEREAS, A substantial number of congregations and pastors within the Synod currently practice open communion in its explicit or functional forms, thereby permitting participation in the Sacrament without pastoral determination of doctrinal unity, instruction, examination, confession, and absolution, in direct contradiction to the Synod's confession and constitutional commitments; and

WHEREAS, Such practices constitute a form of unionism in sacramental practice, place communicants in spiritual danger, undermine pastoral responsibility, erode doctrinal unity, and contradict the Synod's stated confession while being widely tolerated in practice; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention reaffirm that the practice commonly known as open communion, including functionally open communion, is incompatible with Holy Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and the conditions of membership in the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct the President of the Synod and the Council of Presidents (COP) to enforce the existing constitutional and bylaw provisions concerning unionism and sacramental practice, particularly Constitution Articles VI and XIII and Bylaw section 2.14, without exception or partiality; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod require the President of the Synod and the district presidents to initiate formal ecclesiastical supervision and admonition in cases where congregations or pastors persistently practice open communion in any form, following the procedures already established in the Bylaws; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct that where such admonition is rejected and the offending congregation or pastor refuses to publicly renounce open communion, the appropriate disciplinary steps—including suspension or expulsion from Synod membership—be carried out in accordance with the Constitution and Bylaws; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct the President of the Synod and the COP to come to the aid of any pastor who is opposed, disciplined, threatened, harassed, removed, or otherwise mistreated by his congregation for faithfully administering the Lord's Supper according to Holy Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and the Synod's doctrine and practice of closed communion; and be it further

Resolved, That where a congregation persists in resisting, punishing, or mistreating a pastor for insisting upon faithful Eucharistic practice after admonition and instruction, the Synod require the appropriate district president, under the supervision of the President of the Synod, to exercise ecclesiastical supervision and discipline toward that congregation, up to and including suspension or expulsion from Synod membership, in accordance with the Constitution and Bylaws; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod instruct the COP, in cooperation with the Commission on Theology and Church Relations and other appropriate synodical entities, to develop and disseminate clear guidance and catechetical resources to assist congregations and pastors in restoring faithful Eucharistic practice, including instruction, examination, confession, absolution, and pastoral care of communicants as confessed in the Lutheran Symbols; and be it further

Resolved, That such resources emphasize the pastoral responsibility for admission to the Sacrament, the proper distinction between worthiness and unity of confession, and the evangelical purpose of church discipline as care for souls and preservation of the Gospel; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod call upon all congregations and pastors to repent of practices that contradict our confession, to receive correction in humility, and to labor together toward genuine unity of doctrine and practice for the sake of Christ's Church and the salvation of souls; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod remind all member congregations and individual members that according to Bylaw 1.3.4.1, "Members agree to uphold the confessional position of the Synod (Constitution Art. II) and to assist in carrying out the objectives of the Synod (Constitution Art. III), which are objectives of the members themselves. While congregations of the Synod are self-governing (Constitution Art. VII), they, and also individual members, commit themselves as members of the Synod to act in accordance with the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod under which they have agreed to live and work together and which the congregations alone have the authority to adopt or amend through conventions."

St. Thomas
Magnolia, TX

Ov. 5-18

To Request Commission on Theology and Church Relations to Produce Study Document to Further Understanding and Conversations on Pastoral Exceptions to Closed Communion

WHEREAS, The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) in its 1999 report, *Admission to the Lord's Supper: Basics of Biblical and Confessional Teaching* states that the Lord's Supper was given to us by God to maintain and preserve unity and that

giving the Supper to those whose public confession is heterodoxy, "threatens and contradicts ... the pure proclamation of the death of Christ for us" (46); and

WHEREAS, The document also recognizes and embraces the reality that there can be "rare and genuinely difficult situations of unusual personal need and pastoral care" (47); and

WHEREAS, The report admits that "it will never be possible to compile a list of 'acceptable exceptions,'" explaining that "life in this present evil age will not allow for such simplicity and precision" (48); and

WHEREAS, At the same time, the report states that, while "the Synod has always recognized this ... we must engage one another in respectful mutual conversation over the controverted specifics of the 'situations of emergency, and special cases of pastoral care, or extraordinary situations and circumstance' which call for 'the necessity of exercising responsible pastoral care'" (48); and

WHEREAS, The report states that the Synod "must be willing to search for the balance between personal faith and need on the one hand, and the corporate dimensions and unity implied in and demanded by the Lord's Supper on the other hand" (47); and

WHEREAS, The report suggests that cases for these rare and difficult exceptions are likely "times of emergency, of war, of severe illness or intense personal crisis," and "situations involving individuals who are in a *state of confession*," (47) but gives no more examples or guidance; therefore be it

Resolved, That the CTCR provide the Synod with a study document that:

1. summarizes the 1999 report and gives clarification on what is meant and understood by rare, difficult, and unusual in the context of the document;
2. provides guidance for the necessary follow-up pastoral care and on-going engagement with persons for whom exceptions have been made and how long such exceptions might persist;
3. gives a number of case studies that include examples of when such an exception might be made, examples of when it might seem that it could be made but should not, controversial instances where it is unclear and men of goodwill and faith might disagree, and study questions;

and be it further

Resolved, That this report be completed by the next Synod convention and made available to the Synod for use by congregations, circuits, and districts for engagement on these issues with the aim of promoting unity and faithful, evangelical practice.

Circuit 13 (Indiana)
English District

Ov. 5-19

To Reaffirm Sanctity of Human Life in Regard to Practice of In Vitro Fertilization

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture teaches that human life is a sacred gift from God, who is the Creator of all life (Gen. 1:26-28; Psalm 139:13-16); and

WHEREAS, Scripture affirms that all human beings are created in the image of God and that this image is bestowed upon each person at conception (Jer. 1:5; Luke 1:41-44); and

WHEREAS, Christ sanctified and redeemed all human beings, including human embryos, in His incarnation and conception by the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary, His shed blood upon the cross, His resurrection, and His ascension to the right hand of the Father (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:20–23); and

WHEREAS, The tradition of the Christian Church, in accordance with the creation order revealed in Holy Scripture, has consistently upheld the sanctity of human life and the dignity of procreation as an act that belongs within the marital union between a man and a woman (Gen. 1:27–28; Heb. 13:4; Matt. 19:4–6); and

WHEREAS, The practice of In vitro fertilization (IVF) involves the creation of human embryos outside the womb, which can result in the destruction or indefinite freezing of embryos, which contradicts the biblical teaching on the sanctity of human life; and

WHEREAS, IVF can commodify human life by treating embryos as objects to be purchased, stored, or discarded, instead of recognizing them as persons created in the image of God; and

WHEREAS, The desire for procreation of children is good, right, and godly in the context of marriage; and

WHEREAS, The Synod recognizes the pain of childlessness and that some people, desiring to have children, may have used IVF without a full understanding of any potential theological implications; and

WHEREAS, Every child, regardless of how he or she is conceived, is created by God the Father, redeemed by God the Son, and called by God the Holy Spirit to be in an eternal relationship with Him by faith; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod condemn the needless loss of life that can occur through the use of IVF; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod support married couples who have troubled consciences with respect to prior use of IVF, and encourage ministry to them and to all people such that they may receive the comfort of Christ and His redeeming love; and be it further

Resolved, That all our congregations faithfully and compassionately speak to the God-given value and worth of all human beings; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod urge its members to uphold the biblical understanding of procreation as a sacred act within the marital union; and be it finally

Resolved, That this matter be referred to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations in order to provide theological clarity.

Ohio District

Ov. 5-20

To Oppose Practice of In Vitro Fertilization

WHEREAS, God is the Creator of life and the Author of marriage and family, having instituted the procreative union of husband and wife in marriage as the proper context for the generation of children (Gen. 1:28; 2:24); and

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture teaches that children are a gift from the Lord and that He alone opens and closes the womb (Gen. 29:31; Psalm 127:3); and

WHEREAS, The practice of in vitro fertilization (IVF) removes the procreation of children from the one-flesh union of husband and

wife and subjects human life to technological manipulation, at times with commodification; and

WHEREAS, IVF routinely results in the creation of multiple embryos, many of whom are frozen indefinitely, discarded, or subjected to destructive research, thereby violating the sanctity of human life created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27; Psalm 139:13–16); and

WHEREAS, The Sixth Commandment teaches that the gift of procreation belongs within the marital union, and reproductive technologies that bypass this union undermine God's design for marriage and family (Ex. 20:14; Heb. 13:4); and

WHEREAS, The Synod, in its official doctrinal statements, affirms the sanctity of all human life from conception and opposes all practices that devalue or destroy that life; and

WHEREAS, Compassion must be shown to couples struggling with infertility, offering them pastoral care, prayer, and ethical alternatives that uphold the dignity of life and the order of creation; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod affirm that all children, regardless of the circumstances of their conception, are gifts of God and bearers of His image, fully deserving of love, care, and dignity; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod oppose the practice of IVF on biblical and theological grounds, especially insofar as it leads to the destruction, freezing, or instrumentalization of human embryos; and be it further

Resolved, That pastors and congregations be encouraged to teach and counsel the faithful concerning God's design for marriage and procreation, including the moral and theological problems surrounding IVF; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod promote and support pastoral care, ethical medical consultation, and adoption as loving alternatives for couples suffering infertility, in accordance with our confession of faith and biblical witness.

Circuit 25 (Kenosha), South Wisconsin District;

Circuit 26 (Racine), South Wisconsin District

Ov. 5-21

To Address the Practice of In Vitro Fertilization

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture teaches that human life is a sacred gift from God, who is the Creator of all life (Gen. 1:26–28; Psalm 139:13–16); and

WHEREAS, Scripture affirms that man is made in the image of God and that this image is bestowed upon each person at conception (Jer. 1:5; Luke 1:41–44; Gen. 9:6); and

WHEREAS, Christ sanctified and redeemed even human embryos in His incarnation and conception by the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary, His shed blood upon the cross, His resurrection, and His ascension to the right hand of the Father (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:20–23); and

WHEREAS, The tradition of the Christian Church, in accordance with the creation order revealed in Holy Scripture, has consistently upheld the sanctity of human life and the dignity of procreation as an act that belongs within the marital union between a man and a woman (Gen. 1:27–28; Heb. 13:4; Matt. 19:4–6; also found in the early Christian document Didache 2.2 “You shall not murder a child by abortion, nor kill a child at birth”); and

WHEREAS, The practice of In vitro fertilization (IVF) involves the creation of human embryos outside the womb, often resulting in the destruction or indefinite freezing of embryos, which contradicts the biblical teaching on the sanctity of human life and proper context for procreation; and

WHEREAS, The practice of IVF undermines biblical understanding, reducing the child to a product of human will and technological manipulation rather than seeing and receiving the child as a gift from God (Gen. 30:2; Psalm 127:3); and

WHEREAS, The use of IVF introduces a separation between the procreative and unitive aspects of marriage, thereby undermining the integrity of the marital union as God intended it (Gen. 2:24; Eph. 5:31–33; LC I 206–9); and

WHEREAS, The practice of IVF often involves surrogacy, which is the rental of another woman's womb, also undermining the integrity of the marital union as God intended it; and

WHEREAS, IVF commodifies human life, treating embryos as objects to be used, purchased, stored, or discarded rather than recognizing them as persons created in the image of God (Gen. 9:6), deserving of dignity, protection, and all the rights thereof; and

WHEREAS, IVF commonly uses gametes (sperm and eggs) taken from a third party, thus violating the one flesh union and depriving the child of his natural right to his biological mother and father; and

WHEREAS, The desire for children is good, right, and godly, but Scripture teaches that sinful means may not be used to procure a good end; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Wyoming District affirm children conceived by IVF are created in the image of God; and be it further

Resolved, That the district condemn the practice of IVF as contrary to the teachings of Scripture, the tradition of the Church, the sanctity of human life, and the one flesh union; and be it further

Resolved, That the district urge its members to uphold the biblical understanding of procreation as a sacred act within the marital union, rejecting practices that treat human life as a commodity or a product of human will; and be it further

Resolved, That the district commit to educating its members about the ethical and theological problems and spiritual dangers surrounding IVF and surrogacy, encouraging them to seek alternatives that respect the sanctity of life and the God-given dignity of all human beings; and be it further

Resolved, That pastors of the district be exhorted to provide pastoral counseling and absolution for those who have engaged in the practice of IVF; and be it finally

Resolved, That the entire pastorate of the Synod be encouraged to do the same.

Wyoming District

Ov. 5-22

To Believe, Teach, and Confess *Missio Dei*

Rationale

Holy Scripture does not present God as static or withdrawn, but as living, active, and outward-moving in love. From the first chapters of Genesis to the sending of the Son, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the sending of the baptized into the world, Scripture bears witness to a single, unifying motif: God is a sending God. This sending is not peripheral to who God is. It belongs to His very heart. The theological term *Missio Dei*—the mission of God—does not

introduce a new theme into Scripture, nor does it impose a modern agenda upon the biblical text. Rather, it serves as a lens that reveals Scripture's coherence, center, purpose, and direction. When read through this lens, the Bible emerges not as a collection of disconnected doctrines or moral instructions, but as the unified testimony to God's gracious movement toward His fallen creation in Jesus Christ.

Much has been written about the church's decline in the modern world. Attendance is measured, programs are evaluated, and strategies are revised. Yet these concerns, while not insignificant, fail to name the deeper issue confronting the church today. Whenever the church relegates its mission focus and priorities to activities, duties, and performances, it is guilty of being disconnected from the *Missio Dei*. It will be marked by distractions, disruption, and a disassembly from Christ's apostolic authority, priority, and promises. The crisis of the church is not fundamentally numerical, cultural, or institutional, but theological and obediential—a resistance to God's sending Word that shapes how Scripture itself is to be read. This crisis appears whenever mission becomes optional, the church turns inward, identity becomes based in human sentiment, and the Gospel becomes transactional. As a result, the church throughout history has frequently come to understand herself as a religious institution with its own mission, rather than as a sent body of believers—a people who exist because God sends the baptized in Christ.

Therefore be it

Resolved, That we as a Synod believe, teach, and confess that the *Missio Dei*—the mission of God—belongs to God alone, flows from His eternal love, and finds its center, fulfillment, and authority in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the One sent by the Father for the life of the world (John 3:16–17); and be it further

Resolved, That we as a Synod believe, teach, and confess that God is a sending God, and that His sending does not begin with human need or cultural crisis, but with His own being and will, so that from the sending of the Son, to the sending of the Spirit, to the sending of the baptized, God reveals Himself as the Lord who goes out in love to seek, save, and restore who and what is lost; and be it further

Resolved, That we as a Synod believe, teach, and confess that the *Missio Dei* is the primary lens through which Holy Scripture is rightly read and understood; because Scripture itself is the unified testimony of God's sending heart—revealing who He is, what He has done in Christ, and how He sends His people into the world; and be it further

Resolved, That we believe, teach, and confess that Jesus Christ is the Sent One and the Sending One, vested with all authority to forgive sins and give life, so that all doctrine finds its center in the Gospel—that we are freely justified for Christ's sake through faith—and all other teachings are either antecedent to this truth or flow from it; and be it further

Resolved, That we as a Synod believe, teach, and confess that according to the Gospel all the baptized in Christ are co-heirs and co-associates with Christ, not by merit or office, but by grace alone, and are enjoined in God's mission through Christ and for His sake alone; and be it further

Resolved, That we as a Synod believe, teach, and confess that the church exists because God sends, and that the church remains the church only insofar as she lives from the Gospel and is sent into the world in love, truth, humility, and hope; and be it further

Resolved, That we as a Synod reject every understanding of mission that reduces it to programs, strategies, or institutional survival; separates the baptismal identity of God's people from their sending; replaces the Gospel with moralism, activism, or coercion; or locates authority in human hierarchy rather than God's Word; and be it finally

Resolved, That we as a Synod therefore confess with confidence and joy: The *Missio Dei* is not one doctrine among many, but the living heart of Scripture, the interpretive key to Christian identity, and the foundation for the church's being, purpose, and witness in the world—until that day when God's mission is complete and all creation is restored in Christ.

Christ the King
Kingwood, TX

Ov. 5-23

To Rescind 1981 Resolution 8-05 and Request Commission on Theology and Church Relations Report on Human Organ Donation and Transplantation

WHEREAS, The 1981 Synod convention adopted Resolution 8-05, "To Encourage Donation of Kidneys and Other Organs":

WHEREAS, We accept and believe that our Lord Jesus came to give life and to give it abundantly (John 10:10); and

WHEREAS, Through advances in medical science we are aware that at the time of death some of our organs can be transplanted to alleviate pain and suffering of afflicted human beings (see Gal. 6:10); and

WHEREAS, Our Heavenly Father has created us so that we can adequately and safely live with one kidney and can express our love and relieve the unnecessary prolonged suffering of our relative; and

WHEREAS, We have an opportunity to help others out of love for Christ, through the donation of organs; therefore be it

Resolved, That our pastors, teachers, and DCE's be encouraged to inform the members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod of the opportunity to sign a Universal Donor Card (which is to authorize the use of our needed organs at the time of death in order to relieve the suffering of individuals requiring organ transplants); and be it further

Resolved, That we encourage family members to become living kidney donors; and be it further

Resolved, That the program committees of pastors and teachers conferences be encouraged to include "organ and tissue transplants" as a topic on their agendas; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Board of Social Ministry and World Relief seek ways to implement this program so that the entire Synod may join in this opportunity to express Christian concern;

and

WHEREAS, Both medical technology and its academic, peer-reviewed, and published theological assessment have advanced significantly since 1981; and

WHEREAS, The recitals of 1981 Res. 8-05 may now be considered jejune and theologically dubious for the complex and morally weighty question of human organ donation and

transplantation and the implications of its encouragement and routinization realized since 1981; and

WHEREAS, The operative clauses of 1981 Res. 8-05 may improperly, even if unintentionally, burden the consciences of pastors, church workers, and laity who hold informed and serious concerns about the practice and moral implications of routinized human organ donation and transplantation; and

WHEREAS, The Synod is blessed with many gifted theologians considered experts in theological ethics who are well-informed on the moral significance and contemporary concerns of routinized human organ donation and transplantation; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention rescind 1981 Res. 8-05; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention ask the Commission on Theology and Church Relations to produce a document to be published before the 2029 convention that considers and evaluates the theological and moral implications of human organ donation and transplantation.

Circuit 9 (Decatur)
Indiana District

Ov. 5-24

To Urge Church of Christ to Stay and Do Her Duty

WHEREAS, God commands, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8); and

WHEREAS, Our Lord and Savior proclaims, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4); and

WHEREAS, The apostle Peter declares, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29); and

WHEREAS, The Scriptures admonish Christians to "consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb. 10:24–25); and

WHEREAS, Christian liberty should not be determined by someone else's conscience (1 Cor. 10:29); and

WHEREAS, The Large Catechism teaches that the Sacrament of the Altar is essential to the Christian faith, stating "A great number of people who hear the gospel, now that the pope's nonsense has been abolished and we are freed from his compulsion and commands, let a year, or two, three, or more years go by without receiving the sacrament, as if they were such strong Christians that they have no need of it. Others let themselves be kept and deterred from it because we have taught that none should go unless they feel a hunger and thirst impelling them to it. Still others pretend that it is a matter of liberty, not of necessity, and that it is enough if they simply believe. Thus the great majority go so far that they become quite barbarous and ultimately despise both the sacrament and God's Word" (LC V 40–41 [Kolb/Wengert]; cf. AC VII; XXIV; LCMS, *A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* [adopted 1932]); and

WHEREAS, During the years 2020, 2021, and 2022, responses to the COVID-19 pandemic included the cancellation of public, communal, in-person worship services by congregations, pastors, and affiliated educational institutions; and

WHEREAS, Online or virtual worship is not a substitute for corporate worship (Heb. 10:24–25; 2023 Res. 5-08A, “To Affirm In-Person Communion”); and

WHEREAS, These responses taught God’s flock and the world at large that public, communal, in-person worship is nonessential (while allowing grocery stores, liquor stores, and cannabis dispensaries to remain open), that such public worship of God by those who wish to do so can be forbidden by the consciences of others who do not wish to gather in public worship, and that public opinion or government demand can forbid public worship; and

WHEREAS, Great societal distress over the COVID-19 pandemic ought to have instead compelled the Church to keep her doors open instead of closing them and to remain faithful in her vow to “intend to continue steadfast in this confession ... and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it” (Rite of Confirmation, *Lutheran Service Book*, 273); therefore be it

Resolved, That we commend the desires of faithful pastors to care for their flocks in a time of pandemic, granting charity and a wide latitude of understanding to our brothers in the public exercise of the Office of the Holy Ministry due to the emergency nature of the situation at that time confronting us all; and be it further

Resolved, That pastors and congregations recognize that not offering public worship was sinful, even if done in ignorance, and repent where necessary; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod President and the Council of Presidents (COP) publicly encourage pastors, congregations, and educational institutions of the Synod to stay and do their duty by holding public worship services during any pandemic for those who wish to attend; and be it further

Resolved, That in the future, the Synod President and the COP should give proper concern and understanding to the doctrine of the two kingdoms, especially as it relates to resistance to government tyranny (*Brief Statement*); and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod President, the COP, and those who assist them be counseled and urged to instruct our pastors and congregations on the basis of Holy Scripture’s example and exhortation to gather and meet together and also celebrate the Lord’s Supper (Acts 2:42; Heb. 10:25) on the basis of the examples found in the Augsburg Confession VII and XXIV; and be it finally

Resolved, That in the future the Church should stay and do her duty and not abandon her people in such a crisis and instead exhort pastors and congregations not to abandon the holy, faithful people of God even if it should bring persecution, but rather that the sheep be gathered together accompanied by their pastors and comforted by the Word of God, by the Sacraments, by fellowship, and by prayer.

Wyoming District

Ov. 5-25

To Publicly Acknowledge Theological and Ecclesial Errors in Church’s Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

WHEREAS, God commands, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex. 20:8); and

WHEREAS, Our Lord and Savior proclaims, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4); and

WHEREAS, The apostle Peter declares, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29); and

WHEREAS, The Scriptures admonish Christians to “consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb. 10:24–25); and

WHEREAS, One’s Christian liberty should not be determined by someone else’s conscience (1 Cor. 10:29); and

WHEREAS, Regarding the Sacrament of the Altar, the Large Catechism (LC) teaches that “some allow themselves to be hindered and held up by the excuse that we have taught that no one should approach the Sacrament except those who feel hunger and thirst, which drive them to it. Some pretend that it is a matter of liberty and not necessary. They pretend it is enough to believe without it. For the most part, they go so far astray that they become quite brutish, and finally despise both the Sacrament and God’s Word.” (LC V 41); and

WHEREAS, During the years 2020, 2021, and 2022, responses to the COVID-19 pandemic by congregations, pastors, Synod leadership, and affiliated educational institutions included the cancellation of communal, in-person worship, the erroneous administration of the Sacrament of the Altar virtually or online, the urging of experimental and controversially-sourced vaccinations, and submission to overreaching governmental mandates; and

WHEREAS, These responses inculcated in God’s flock and the world at large the ideas that communal, in-person worship is nonessential, that worship of God should give way to earthly fear, and that public opinion or government demand can supersede the command of God; and

WHEREAS, These responses undoubtedly led to a burdening of Christian consciences and false accusations of not loving one’s neighbor as oneself; and

WHEREAS, The alarming extent of closures was documented in the December 2020 issue of *Reporter*, stating, “Only 15% of LCMS congregations held in-person church services on Easter Sunday” (Stacy Eising, “BNM business includes church worker recruitment, COVID-19, race,” *Reporter Online*, December 3, 2020, reporter.lcms.org/2020/bnm-business-includes-church-worker-recruitment-covid-19-race/); and

WHEREAS, The great societal distress over the COVID-19 pandemic ought to have compelled the Church to keep her doors open; and

WHEREAS, The examples of Daniel, Nehemiah, and the Ninevites (Dan. 9:1–19; Neh. 1:4–11; Jonah 3:6–10) show corporate repentance to be God-pleasing and salutary; therefore be it

Resolved, That we commend the desires of faithful pastors to care for their flocks in a time of pandemic, granting charity due to the nature of the situation confronting the Church because “the blood of Jesus [God’s] Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7); and be it further

Resolved, That in such future crises, the Church with her pastors would be encouraged to neither prohibit nor suspend the opportunity for communal, in-person worship, but allow the sheep who desire the comfort and strength of the Gospel to accompany their pastors; and be it further

Resolved, That those who are hindered from receiving the Sacrament be encouraged to reject the online or virtual

administration of the Sacrament and content themselves with the power of the Word of God and the exercise of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; and be it finally

Resolved, That we memorialize Synod to publicly acknowledge the theological and ecclesial errors committed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, to publicly call those who authorized or promoted such errors to repentance, to publicly encourage all Synod congregations, pastors, leadership, and affiliated educational institutions to reflect soberly on these failures and reaffirm, with renewed conviction, their fidelity to Christ, His Word, and the public ministry of Word and Sacrament, especially in times of crisis, and to appoint a Sunday during the year 2027 as a day of fasting, prayer, and repentance for the response to the COVID-19 pandemic during the years 2020, 2021, and 2022.

Circuit 9 (Nashville)
Mid-South District

Ov. 5-26

To Rejoice in Proclamation of God's Word by His Called and Ordained Servants

WHEREAS, We come to the Divine Service not to serve, but to be served by God through His called and ordained servants, as we confess our sins, hear His words of Absolution spoken by the pastor in the stead and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, hear Law and Gospel rightly divided, and receive the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood; and

WHEREAS, When we hear the words of forgiveness of our sins spoken by the pastor at Christ's command, we are to rejoice and to believe them as surely and certainly as if spoken by Christ Himself; and

WHEREAS, In the orientation of the service the words spoken from the altar, pulpit, and lectern are the words of God spoken for our benefit, whereas the congregation faces the altar and speaks back the words God has said to us; and

WHEREAS, It is a great blessing for all those in the congregation to hear the Word of God spoken by our pastors, who are our servants (Mark 9:35), and it is meet, right, and salutary that we should accept their service to us; and

WHEREAS, Faith comes by hearing (Rom. 10:17), and the use of lay readers for Scripture lessons denies those persons the comfort and benefit of hearing the Word of God spoken directly to and for them by their pastors; and

WHEREAS, No one should publicly preach and teach in the church without a rightly ordered call (AC XIV); there can be no clearer public teaching of the Word of God than reading it in the Divine Service; and thus the use of lay readers can confuse the vocations of the called and ordained pastor as servant of the Word, and of the congregation as hearers of the Word; and

WHEREAS, The use of lay readers can be understood wrongly as an individual "participating" in the conduct of the service, as though greater meaning, benefit, or stature is thereby obtained (and by implication, that those who do not read are taking a lesser role), and we ought not burden mistrained consciences in such manner, in contrast to the right understanding that the whole congregation benefits on an equal basis as it is served by the pastor; and

WHEREAS, As a practical matter the pastor is best suited to read the text without disruption or delay to the flow of the service, and

with due emphasis on the pronunciation and salient points of the text, particularly if it forms a portion of and context for the sermon; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks and rejoice in the proclamation of the Word by God's called and ordained servants; and be it further

Resolved, That the President of the Synod disseminate appropriate resources to assist pastors in catechizing their congregations to understand the great blessing of the role of the pastor in the Divine Service, so that rather than giving offense, laity who have been accustomed to reading Scripture lessons may rather understand and appreciate the service of the pastor for their benefit, and hear with great joy God's Word as it is read for them; and be it finally

Resolved, That the circuit visitors give emphasis in their visitations of all congregations in the next triennium toward following the practice of having Holy Scripture read by the pastor in worship.

St. Paul
Brookfield, IL

Ov. 5-27

To Condemn Use of Women as Lectors

WHEREAS, St. Paul admonishes St. Timothy to devote himself to the public reading of Holy Scripture (1 Tim. 4:13); and

WHEREAS, St. Paul writes, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet" (1 Tim. 2:12); and

WHEREAS, St. Paul instructs that women "remain silent" in the churches (1 Cor. 14:34 NIV); and

WHEREAS, The public reading of Holy Scripture in the context of the Divine Service constitutes interpretation, and therefore teaching, of the Scriptures being read; and

WHEREAS, Pastors are specially trained for the exegesis of Holy Scripture and for the communication of that exegesis through the public reading of the Holy Scriptures; and

WHEREAS, The public reading of Holy Scripture cannot be carried out in silence; and

WHEREAS, Women are therefore disqualified by St. Paul not only from holding the office of pastor, but also from the public reading of Holy Scripture; therefore be it

Resolved, That the North Dakota District in convention admonish the congregations of the district under no circumstances to make use of women as lectors for the public reading of Holy Scripture; and be it further

Resolved, That congregations and pastors found in defiance of this admonition be further warned and, if necessary, be subjected to disciplinary procedures as outlined in the Synod *Handbook* (Bylaw section 1.10); and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention condemn the use of women as lectors.

North Dakota District

Ov. 5-28

To Affirm That God Does Indeed Prohibit Females from Public Reading of Scriptures, for Reading Is Preaching/Heralding the Word

Preamble

It cannot be denied that we at Trinity Lutheran Church, Tryon, N.C., are concerned that the Synod is drawing ever closer to the edge of allowing female pastors—if we have not already fallen over and are hanging on that edge. The Rev. Dr. William Weinrich has provided the most significant argument against women pastors in his lengthy article, “It Is Not Given to Women to Teach” (Matthew C. Harrison and John T. Pless, eds., *Women Pastors? The Ordination of Women in Biblical Lutheran Perspective: A Collection of Essays* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008], 353–88). Our concern goes to the present practice within the Synod of female readers in the public service. If the intrinsic work of a pastor is to preach the Word, and if to read the Scriptures in the public service is to *preach* or to *herald*, as James plainly states in Acts 15:21, it is easy to consider that de facto we are there already. The following overture encourages a scripturally mandated reset regarding the Office of the Ministry before it is too late. For information on the practice of the Lutheran Reformers, see Gunther Stiller’s *Johann Sebastian Bach and Liturgical Life in Leipzig* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984, 66–74, 121, 136).

WHEREAS, The Synod holds the Bible to be the Word of God, both incapable of error and free from error, and that as stated in the Lutheran Confessions, We believe, teach, and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with all teachers should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testament alone” (FC Ep, Summary Content, 1 [Triglotta]); and

WHEREAS, The Synod recognizes that preaching in the services of the congregation is intrinsic to the Office of the Ministry, and therefore the Synod recognizes Jesus’ prohibition against females serving as preachers and does not allow females to preach; and

WHEREAS, By the Holy Spirit, James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem and brother of our Lord, authoritatively declares in Acts 15:21, “For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those [preaching/heralding] him (τοὺς κηρύσσοντας), since he is read (ἀναγινωσκόμενος) every Sabbath in the synagogues” (author translation); and

WHEREAS, This public reading of Moses (Genesis to Deuteronomy) itself entails his being preached/heralded as recognized and stated plainly by Gerhard Friedrich, “In Acts 15:21 the weekly reading of the OT Law in the synagogue is called a preaching of Moses” (κηρύσσω, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964], 3:705); and

WHEREAS, St. Paul refers to his own appointment as a herald/preacher (κηρυξ), apostle, and teacher (1 Tim. 2:7), leading up to his clear exclusion of a female (γυναῖκι) from teaching or exercising authority over a male (ἀνδρός) in 1 Timothy 2:12, “but for a female to teach I do not allow, neither to exercise authority over a male” (author translation) because of the order of creation and the way in which the female (γυνή) was involved in the fall; and

WHEREAS, The source of Synod’s *current position* that Scripture *does not prohibit women* from reading the Scriptures in the church service goes back to 1989 Resolution 3-14, “To Address

Appropriate Roles for Women and Men in Worship” (*Proceedings*, 118):

WHEREAS, The Gospel images and expectations of women—particularly those associated with the incarnation, the resurrection, and the ministry of Jesus—present strong and persistent recognition of the active and vital roles of service that women can offer to our Lord and to others; and

WHEREAS, The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) has stated that there are certain distinct functions which should not ordinarily be carried out by the laity (who may hold auxiliary offices) but which are to be exercised by the pastor, including the following:

1. Preaching in the services of the congregation
2. Leading the formal public services of worship
3. The public administration of the sacraments
4. The public administration of the Office of the Keys (Women in the Church, p. 42); and

WHEREAS, The CTCR has also stated in its report Women in the Church: “There is no ceremonial law in the New Testament regarding the reading of Scripture in the context of public worship. Nor is there explicit apostolic prohibition of such reading by women. Nevertheless, it is the opinion of the CTCR that the reading of the Scriptures is most properly the function of the pastoral office and should therefore not ordinarily be delegated to a lay person, woman or man,” (Women in the Church, p. 45); and

WHEREAS, The use of lay assisting ministers, both female and male, is permitted within the rubrics of Lutheran Worship for the reading of the lessons, except the Gospel and the leading of the prayers of the people; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod urge and encourage the continued service of women and men to our Lord and His church in accordance with His will as set forth in Holy Scripture; and be it further

Resolved, That the CTCR report Women in the Church and especially Section III, “Guidelines for Practice,” be commended for study and guidance; and be it finally

Resolved, That the congregations of the Synod proceed with care and sensitivity in making decisions permitting the lay reading of the Scriptures, recognizing decisions in this regard lie in the area of Christian judgment.

Action: *Adopted (15).*

and

WHEREAS, The 2005 Commission on Theology and Church Relations report *The Service of Women in Congregational and Synodical Offices with Guidelines for Congregations*, in its section “Scriptural and Confessional Basis” (20), states:

...

4. Neither the Scriptures nor the Lutheran Confessions provide a detailed list of the activities required of pastors in the congregations they “are called to serve.” Intrinsic to this office, however, are the following functions: “1) preaching in the services of the congregation; 2) leading the formal public services of worship; 3) the public administration of the sacraments; and 4) the public administration of the office of the keys.”

5. The Synod, based on its understanding of what the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions teach, has adopted resolutions which permit women to vote in congregational assemblies (without any limitations on the matters on which they may vote) *and to read the Scriptures in public worship services, thereby indicating that these activities are not distinctive functions of the pastoral office nor do they constitute "official functions [that] would involve public accountability for the function of the pastoral office"* (cf. 1969 Res. 2-17; 1989 Res. 3-14) [emphasis added];

and

WHEREAS, The practice of having female readers of the Holy Scriptures in the public worship service was based on the faulty and limited view (a reductionist view) of *preaching* as an intrinsic function of the Office of the Ministry, without proper consideration that the Holy Spirit defines the public reading of the Holy Scriptures as preaching/heralding (Act 15:21) and the responsibilities of an overseer to be "[public] reading, exhortation, teaching" (1 Tim. 4:13, author translation) and that St. Paul in his holy office calls himself a herald, apostle, and a teacher (κηρυξ καὶ ἀπόστολος· ἀλήθειαν λέγω ἐν χριστῷ, οὐ ψεύδομαι· διδάσκαλος) (1 Tim. 2:7), *and because a careful reading of Scripture does not put the public reading of Scripture outside the office of preaching, but even equates that reading with preaching*; therefore be it

Resolved, That we exercise great care when it comes to the clear words of the Holy Spirit: that to *read* Scripture is to *herald* or *preach* it, and give thanks to God that it is so, because—in the days of the apostles—Jewish rabbis did not regularly *preach Jesus* the way Moses does, and yet through the public reading of Moses the truth was preached and hearts were prepared for the apostles' teaching that Jesus is the Christ; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod hereby acknowledge Jesus Christ's prohibition against females reading the Scriptures in the public services of His Church, rescind its erroneous 1989 Res. 3-14, as well as correct its statements, rubrics, and practices, and Synod pastors everywhere repent of the error of inviting females to publicly read (which is to preach/herald) the Scriptures in the services of Christ's Church, even as we comfort those females that *they* have not sinned, who have followed their pastor's and the Synod's lead down this perilous path.

Trinity
Tryon, NC

Ov. 5-29

To Correct Erroneous Practice of Women Lectors

WHEREAS, God created man first and then the woman (Genesis 2; 1 Tim. 2:13); and

WHEREAS, On the basis of this order of creation God commands women not to teach or to exercise authority over men in the churches, but to remain silent and learn in quietness and all submission, which St. Paul explains as follows:

Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control. (1 Tim. 2:11–15 NKJV);

and as follows:

Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. (1 Cor. 14:34–35 NKJV);

and

WHEREAS, "Learn in quietness and all submission" and "they are not permitted to speak" explicitly exclude women from speaking the Scripture lessons to the whole congregation in the Divine Service; and

WHEREAS, Many congregations in the Synod have accepted the practice of women speaking the Scripture lessons to the congregation; and

WHEREAS, The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) 1985 report, *Women in the Church: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice*, by claiming on page 45 that there is no apostolic prohibition of women reading the lessons in the public service, directly contradicts St. Paul who says "Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak"; and

WHEREAS, This practice, being contrary to the Word of God, is thereby destructive to the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3) which we as Christians are to pursue; and

WHEREAS, The public reading of Scripture is listed by St. Paul as one of St. Timothy's official duties as pastor (1 Tim. 4:13; cf. Acts 13:15); and

WHEREAS, While circumstances may arise when laymen may and even must read the lessons before the congregation in place of the pastor, the Scriptures specifically prohibit women from this task based on the order of creation; therefore be it

Resolved, That the CTCR revisit and correct the 1985 CTCR report, *Women in the Church: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice*, specifically regarding the practice of women reading the Holy Scriptures publicly before the congregation; and be it further

Resolved, That the CTCR revisit the issue of whether the public reading before the congregation constitutes an official duty and authoritative act of the pastoral office in view of 1 Tim. 4:13; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod affirm that the men, as heads of their own households, should be the leaders in their congregations; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod call on its president and pastors to study together and teach their congregations what the Scriptures teach about the roles of men and women in the home and the church, that we might gain a better understanding and stronger agreement on what God's Word says concerning our various stations in life.

Mission of the Cross
Crosslake, MN

Ov. 5-30

To Reaffirm Doctrine of Men Serving in Office of Holy Ministry

WHEREAS, Scripture tells us that only certain men (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:7–9; Matt. 10:2–4) can enter the Office of the Holy Ministry (1 Cor. 14:33–35; 1 Tim. 2:11–15; Titus 1:5–9; 2 Tim. 2:2); and

WHEREAS, Many Lutheran church bodies around the world and in the United States have fallen victim to the way of the world and have begun to ordain women; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Minnesota North District reaffirm the biblical doctrine that only certain men can serve in the Office of the Holy Ministry; and be it further

Resolved, That the district send this resolution to the 2026 Synod convention, so that the Synod can give a faithful witness of this doctrine to Christians around the world.

Minnesota North District

Ov. 5-31

To Reconsider Issue of Woman Suffrage in the Church

WHEREAS, The 1969 Synod convention adopted Resolution 2-17, “To Grant Woman Suffrage and Board Membership,” permitting congregations to adopt women’s suffrage and, at the same time, stating that any such suffrage in the congregation must not conflict with the order of creation or infringe on the pastoral office (*Proceedings*, 88–89); and

WHEREAS, An important principle of our Lutheran Reformation was found in Martin Luther’s own confession at Leipzig in 1519 (*Luther’s Works [LW]* 31:322) and at Worms in 1521 (*LW* 32:112–17) that councils can and do err; and

WHEREAS, The Scriptures clearly prohibit women from exercising authority over men as noted in 1 Tim. 2:11–12 and 1 Cor. 14:34–35; and

WHEREAS, The polity of many Synod congregations grants members of the voters’ assembly authority over weighty matters, including the calling of a pastor and the final excommunication of a sinner; and

WHEREAS, A voters’ assembly that gives equal authority to both men and women overturns the order of creation and undermines the God-given distinction between men and women revealed in the Scriptures; and

WHEREAS, Our Synod strongly opposed the practice of women’s suffrage in the church for the first 122 years of its history on the basis of the Word of God, and many of its pastors and congregations continue to oppose the practice to the current day; and

WHEREAS, Scripture offers to women praiseworthy vocations to serve God as wives, mothers, and in various capacities within the church (e.g., altar guilds, ladies’ groups, mercy work, and as teachers or deaconesses, etc.), which do not conflict with the divinely ordained principle that a woman must not exercise authority over a man; and

WHEREAS, The church should not be at all ashamed of God-given distinctions in the area of gender despite the pressure to align our teaching and practice—in part or in full—with the culture; and

WHEREAS, The biblical principles that speak to suffrage in the church are in no way invalidated by the fact that men, at times, fail to humbly and faithfully carry out the charge to sacrificial headship in the family, church, and state; therefore be it

Resolved, That the pastors and congregations of the Synod be encouraged to study the matter on the basis of the Word of God; and be it further

Resolved, That the congregations of the Synod together with their pastors be encouraged to reconsider the practice of women’s suffrage in light of the Holy Scripture; and be it finally

Resolved, That our seminary faculties and the Commission on Theology and Church Relations reconsider and restudy the issue according to the teachings of the Bible.

Circuit 8 (Horicon)
South Wisconsin District

Ov. 5-32

To Reconsider Issue of Woman Suffrage in the Church

WHEREAS, The 1969 Synod convention adopted Resolution 2-17, “To Grant Woman Suffrage and Board Membership,” permitting congregations to adopt women’s suffrage and, at the same time, stating that any such suffrage in the congregation must not conflict with the order of creation or infringe on the pastoral office (*Proceedings*, 88–89); and

WHEREAS, An important principle of our Lutheran Reformation was found in Martin Luther’s own confession at Leipzig in 1519 (*Luther’s Works [LW]* 31:322) and at Worms in 1521 (*LW* 32:112–17) that councils can and do err; and

WHEREAS, The Scriptures clearly prohibit women from exercising authority over men as noted in 1 Tim. 2:11–12 and 1 Cor. 14:34–35; and

WHEREAS, The polity of many Synod congregations grants members of the voters’ assembly authority over weighty matters, including the calling of a pastor and the final excommunication of a sinner; and

WHEREAS, Voting in the congregation is often an act of authority over men in that it determines matters affecting both men and women; and

WHEREAS, A voters’ assembly that gives equal authority to both men and women overturns the order of creation and undermines the God-given distinction between men and women revealed in the Scriptures; and

WHEREAS, Our Synod strongly opposed the practice of women’s suffrage in the church for the first 122 years of its history on the basis of the Word of God, and many of its pastors and congregations continue to oppose the practice to the current day; and

WHEREAS, Scripture offers to women praiseworthy vocations to serve God as wives, mothers and in various capacities within the church (e.g., altar guilds, ladies’ groups, mercy work, and as teachers or deaconesses, etc.), which do not conflict with the divinely ordained principle that a woman must not exercise authority over a man; and

WHEREAS, The church should not be at all ashamed of God-given distinctions in the area of gender despite the pressure to align our teaching and practice—in part or in full—with the culture; and

WHEREAS, The biblical principles that speak to suffrage in the church are in no way invalidated by the fact that men, at times, fail to humbly and faithfully carry out the charge to sacrificial headship in the family, church, and state; therefore be it

Resolved, That the pastors and congregations of the Synod be encouraged to study this matter on the basis of the Word of God; and be it further

Resolved, That the congregations of the Synod together with their pastors be encouraged to reconsider the practice of women's suffrage in light of the Holy Scripture.

Immanuel
Mayville, WI

Ov. 5-33

To Reconsider Issue of Woman Suffrage in the Church

WHEREAS, The 1969 Synod convention adopted Resolution 2-17, "To Grant Woman Suffrage and Board Membership," permitting congregations to adopt women's suffrage and, at the same time, stating that any such suffrage in the congregation must not conflict with the order of creation or infringe on the pastoral office (*Proceedings*, 88–89); and

WHEREAS, The Scriptures ordain male-headship in Gen. 2:18–23 and both reaffirm and warn us that it would be challenged in Gen. 3:16; and

WHEREAS, An important principle of our Lutheran Reformation was found in Martin Luther's own confession at Leipzig in 1519 (*Luther's Works [LW]* 31:322) and at Worms in 1521 (*LW* 32:112–17) that councils can and do err; and

WHEREAS, The Scriptures clearly prohibit women from exercising authority over men as noted in 1 Tim. 2:11–12 and 1 Cor. 14:34–35; and

WHEREAS, The polity of many Synod congregations grants members of the voters' assembly authority over weighty matters, including the calling of a pastor and the final excommunication of a sinner; and

WHEREAS, Voting in the congregation is clearly an act of authority over men in that it determines matters affecting both men and women; and

WHEREAS, A voters' assembly that gives equal authority to both men and women overturns the order of creation and undermines the God-given distinction between men and women revealed in the Scriptures; and

WHEREAS, Our Synod strongly opposed the practice of women's suffrage in the church for the first 122 years of its history on the basis of the Word of God, and many of its pastors and congregations continue to oppose the practice to the current day; and

WHEREAS, Scripture offers to women praiseworthy vocations to serve God as wives, mothers, and in various capacities within the church (e.g., altar guilds, ladies' groups, mercy work, and as teachers or deaconesses, etc.), which do not conflict with the divinely ordained principle that a woman must not exercise authority over a man; and

WHEREAS, The church should not be at all ashamed of God-given distinctions in the area of gender despite the pressure to align our teaching and practice—in part or in full—with the culture; and

WHEREAS, The biblical principles that speak to suffrage in the church are in no way invalidated by the fact that men, at times, fail to humbly and faithfully carry out the charge to sacrificial headship in the family, church, and state; therefore be it

Resolved, That the pastors and congregations of the Synod be encouraged to study this matter on the basis of the Word of God; and be it further

Resolved, That the congregations of the Synod work together with their pastors to restore the Synod's historic position of male-only suffrage, that is, the proper roles of both men and women in light of the Holy Scripture.

Trinity
Clinton, MA

Ov. 5-34

To Direct that the Synod and Its Commission on Theology and Church Relations Study and Reexamine Woman Suffrage in Light of Synod's Historic Practice and Holy Scripture, so as to Address and Resolve Confusion and Disunity

Preamble

Over the last 56 years (since the 1969 Synod convention) there has been confusion in the Synod about the roles of men and women in the church. We see the disunity and confusion in our Synod because one congregation permits women to vote and to serve in offices such as chairman or vice chairman, while another congregation practices male-only suffrage and only permits men to serve in offices such as chairman or vice chairman. In 1969, the Synod in convention said congregations may continue the practice of male-only suffrage or they may alter their constitutions to allow woman suffrage as long as it does not exercise authority over men. From 1847 until 1969, the Synod not only taught that women may not hold the office of pastor, but that women may not hold any public office in the church wherein they exercise authority over men. This also includes the voters assembling, which, per Synod's "Guidelines for Constitutions and Bylaws of Lutheran Congregations," is "the governing body of this congregation and shall be empowered to administer and manage all its affairs" (2013 *Workbook*, 327). The voters represent the congregation, act on her behalf, and make the final, binding decisions for the congregation. Thus, to be a voter is to hold public office in the church wherein one represents the congregation and exercises authority over the congregation, which is also made up of men. God's Word forbids women from exercising authority over men in 1 Corinthians 14:34; Ephesians 5:22; 1 Timothy 2:11–12; 1 Peter 3:1; and 1 Corinthians 11:3.

WHEREAS, God forbids women to serve in public office wherein they supervise or exercise authority over men as noted in 1 Timothy 2:11–12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34–35; these passages speak broadly and not only of the office of pastor; and

WHEREAS, The voters assembly is the governing body of the congregation, which means the voters assembly exercises authority over men. The Synod's "Guidelines for Constitutions and Bylaws of Lutheran Congregations" states: "The voters assembly shall be the governing body of this congregation and shall be empowered to administer and manage all its affairs" (*ibid.*). To be a voter is to hold public office, that is, to act and make decisions on behalf of the whole and exercise authority over the congregation, which includes things like church discipline, excommunication, calling a pastor, removing a pastor, appointing church officers, doctrinal matters, spending, etc.; and

WHEREAS, The Synod opposed woman suffrage for the first 122 years of its history based on God's Word and many pastors and congregations continue to strongly oppose it; and

WHEREAS, Woman suffrage permits women to vote against their husbands (their heads), which violates God's order of creation and undermines marriage and the unity of the family as noted in Ephesians 5:22; Genesis 3:16; and 1 Peter 3:1; and

WHEREAS, Woman suffrage permits and leads women away from God's command to obey and submit to their husbands as the church obeys and submits to Christ in all things (Eph. 5:22–24); and

WHEREAS, Woman suffrage undermines the Gospel by undermining the male headship principle upon which principle the Gospel rests (Rom. 5:12–19); and

WHEREAS, God calls men to be heads, that is, God calls men to lead, which entails men making the final decisions for their families according to God's Word and what is best for the family; the responsibility of headship is laid on men and men lead rightly when they consult God's Word, their own families, and others in the congregation; and

WHEREAS, Male-only suffrage does not deny women a say in congregational affairs, but only the final say, which belongs to the men; every woman and child in the congregation has a say, but the final say rests with the men who are called by God to be heads; and

WHEREAS, The Church is called to be a light to the world and not to conform to the ways of the world, which constantly attacks God's order of creation; and

WHEREAS, It is sinful for Christians to support a practice that militates against God's Word on His assigned roles to men and women; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod and the Commission on Theology and Church Relations—for the sake of the Gospel, that it be kept pure for the sake of the souls of men and the glory of God that His Word be honored in our midst—study and reexamine the practice of woman suffrage in light of Scripture and the history of Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That such study would intentionally include among its participants pastors and professors who affirm Synod's historic position, in order that this position receives appropriate representation and attention.

Circuit 5 (Mitchell)
South Dakota District

Ov. 5-35

To Affirm Role of Women in the Church

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture clearly teaches that the pastoral office is reserved for qualified men, and therefore prohibits women from publicly preaching, teaching, or leading worship in the assembled congregation (1 Timothy 2; 1 Corinthians 11; 1 Corinthians 14); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has repeatedly affirmed this biblical teaching and opposed the ordination of women into the pastoral office as contrary to the Word of God (1971 Res. 2-04; 1977 Res. 3-15; 1986 Res. 3-10; 1998 Res. 3-25A); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has also consistently maintained that these scriptural prohibitions do not apply to women voting in their congregations or serving on boards and committees at the congregational, district, or Synod level (1969 Res. 2-17; 1986 Res. 3-09; 1995 Res. 3-05; 2004 Res. 3-08A); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has urged against practices such as women serving as elders or assisting in the distribution of the Lord's

Supper, due to potential confusion with the distinct functions of the pastoral office (1989 Res. 3-10; 2016 Res. 5-14); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has stated that the public reading of Scripture lessons by women is not forbidden by Scripture, while encouraging congregations to act with care and sensitivity in such matters, recognizing this as an area of Christian judgment (1989 Res. 3-14); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod again unequivocally reaffirm its opposition to the ordination of women to the pastoral office as contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm its doctrinal and practical positions regarding women's suffrage and participation in boards, committees, and commissions of the Synod, as well as appropriate forms of service in the public worship life of the church; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod encourage women to exercise their Spirit-given gifts in faithful service within congregations, districts, and Synod structures to the glory of God and the building up of Christ's Body; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod commend the faithful service of women throughout its history and in the present, and actively encourage women to serve the church in various commissioned and lay vocations, including but not limited to: teachers, directors of Christian education, directors of Christian outreach, directors of family life ministry, directors of parish music, deaconesses, parish assistants, and directors of church ministries (Bylaw 2.6.1.1), as well as many unpaid roles of leadership, mercy, witness, and support; and be it finally

Resolved, That congregations, districts, and agencies of the Synod be urged not to restrict the service of women beyond what Scripture clearly prohibits, in faithful adherence to the resolutions and doctrinal positions of Synod.

South Lake
League City, TX

Ov. 5-36

To Affirm Inspiration and Authority of Mark 16:9–20

WHEREAS, The Holy Scriptures of the prophets (Old Testament) and apostles (New Testament) are the foundation of Christ's Church on earth, with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20); and

WHEREAS, The Scriptures, along with the Lutheran Confessions, which are normed by the Holy Scriptures, are the unalterable rule and norm of all doctrine and practice for and in all her congregations, and by which all rostered ministers are pledged before God to conduct their office; and

WHEREAS, Scripture is never a matter of private opinion or interpretation but is given by the Holy Spirit through holy men whom that same Spirit moved, inspired (2 Peter 1:20–21; 2 Tim. 3:16–17), and gave their very words; and

WHEREAS, The Gospel according to St. Mark is a universally accepted Gospel in the New Testament canon of Scriptures and was never included among the so-called antilegomena, that is, those books the inclusion of which some church leaders spoke against when the canon was accepted by the Christian church; and

WHEREAS, Two ancient Greek texts of the Holy Scriptures, rediscovered in the 19th century and originating from the fourth

century (namely, Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus), contain texts of the Gospel of Mark with unusual truncations (that is, visually abnormal endings when compared to the appearance of other endings of books in the same codex), excluding the last 12 verses, Mark 16:9–20, as they appear in our Bibles; and

WHEREAS, This truncation is unheard of before the writings of Eusebius of Caesarea (A.D. 339) in the fourth century (and later those of Jerome [A.D. 420], apparently quoting him) and his comment about texts that exclude this section does not preclude his own acknowledgment of that text as authoritative, nor Jerome's omitting it in his Latin translation of the Bible, and since 19th-century scholarship that began to be critical of the inclusion of these 12 verses as well as Moses' authorship of the Pentateuch has been well countered by the arguments of scholarship supporting the church's and Bible's claims of its own origins by such scholars as John Burgan (A.D. 1813–88) and expressed carefully and exhaustively by modern scholars such as Nicholas Lunn (see Nicholas P. Lunn, *The Original Ending of Mark: A New Case for the Authenticity of Mark 16:9–20* [Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014]); and

WHEREAS, Churchmen, such as Eusebius and Jerome, being aware of these texts and their omission in some manuscripts, and living much closer to the historical context of their appearance, yet neither speaking against their inclusion, nor themselves excluding these texts as authoritative from their own use and quotation, were in a much better position to evaluate their authenticity than the musings of modern scholars of Scriptures, let alone unbelieving scholars who have a record of attacking the veracity of the sacred text; and

WHEREAS, Exclusion of the last 12 verses of Mark by textual critics renders this Gospel incomplete and prone to erroneous interpretation as compared to the other Gospels, because the resurrection would be thus promised by the Lord (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34) without witness of its fulfillment, because Christ's personal promise of the Holy Spirit and commissioning His disciples to preach to the world would be missing, and because lacking both a birth and a resurrection narrative Mark's Gospel would invite a Gnostic interpretation; and

WHEREAS, Mark 16:16 is the authoritative statement in Scripture on Baptism, chosen by Luther to teach about the efficacy of Baptism in his Large and Small Catechisms, and is a cornerstone of the doctrine of Baptism that is memorized and used to affirm baptismal regeneration in all our congregations; and

WHEREAS, Footnotes flagging words and sections of modern Bibles as missing in ancient versions serve no purpose for laymen, except to undermine their confidence in God's preserving the text of His Word, but only invite them to believe the Bible is flawed and inaccurate; and

WHEREAS, Our Synod was warned in the events of the Seminex walkout in 1974 that reason is not to be used to silence or to replace the Word of God by its judgments (magisterial use of reason), but is to be used to draw out from Scriptures what God is saying in it (ministerial use of reason); and

WHEREAS, The Synod affirmed that all Scriptures are inspired by God and not subject to private interpretation (LCMS CTRC, *The Inspiration of Scripture* [March 1975]), but to the interpretation the Holy Spirit gives in scriptural context, by which the Holy Spirit gives faith and salvation when and where He will; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod affirm in convention that all of the Gospel according to St. Mark (including Mark 16:9–20), as it appears in over 95 percent of the Scriptures and biblical versions witnessed in all the history of the church, is not to be demoted to the status of antilegomenon but affirmed as inspired and authoritative; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod exhort Concordia Publishing House to include in this section of their published Bibles and commentaries: "Though a few ancient texts omit these verses, they are well attested in the vast majority of ancient New Testament texts and to the present day"; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod exhort our seminaries thoroughly to train future pastors in the arguments employed to support inclusion or exclusion of Mark 16:9–20 in the sacred text and to further remind them both of Christ's promise that Scripture would not be broken (John 10:35) and that His Word would never pass away (Matt. 24:35) as well as the scriptural admonitions and curses against adding or subtracting from God's Word (Deut. 12:32; Rev. 22:18–19).

St. Paul
Brookfield, IL

Ov. 5-37

To Clarify Doctrine of Holy Trinity over against Eternal Functional Subordination of the Son

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod confesses the doctrine of the Holy Trinity according to the Holy Scriptures and the ecumenical creeds, especially the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, that confess the Son as *homoousios* with the Father, equal in power, majesty, and glory; and

WHEREAS, Lutheran orthodoxy has consistently taught that distinctions within the Holy Trinity are grounded in the eternal relations of origin, namely, that the Father begets, the Son is begotten, and the Holy Spirit proceeds, and not in eternal relations of authority and submission; and

WHEREAS, The teaching commonly known as the Eternal Functional Subordination of the Son to the Father (EFS), asserts an eternal relation of authority and obedience between the Father and the Son within the immanent Trinity, thereby introducing subordination into the Trinity, which the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions assign to Christ only according to His assumed human nature; and

WHEREAS, A recently published scholarly article, "Eternal Subordination of the Son: Arianism Past and Present," (Carl L. Beckwith, *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 89, no. 4 [Oct, 2025]: 307–328) has further demonstrated that EFS is incompatible with the Lutheran orthodox doctrine of the Trinity; and

WHEREAS, This same article exposes the chief proponents of EFS among evangelicals and further notes, in a documented footnote, that a book published by Concordia Publishing House (CPH) (Matthew C. Harrison and John T. Pless, eds., *Women Pastors? The Ordination of Women in Biblical Lutheran Perspective*, [CPH, 2008]), had at one time promoted or reflected this false teaching; and

WHEREAS, The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) report, *The Order of Creation* (adopted 2022), treats a focal text for EFS proponents, 1 Corinthians 11:3, in a way that could be read ambiguously or misleadingly, insofar as the text's reference to

God being the head of Christ is not clearly and consistently distinguished as referring to God's headship over Christ according to His assumed human nature and not referring to an eternal relation of the Father to the Son; and

WHEREAS, It is not clear to what extent the false teaching of EFS may still have currency within the Synod, especially where language is used about being "ontologically equal and functionally subordinate"; and

WHEREAS, In addition to EFS, there have arisen modern social trinitarian teachings that view God as an inherently relational being, emphasizing the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three distinct, conscious persons in an eternal, perichoretic, loving communion who serve as a model for human relationships; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has entrusted the CTCR with the task of providing clear, confessional theological guidance for the church and her institutions; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention request the CTCR to prepare and publish a theological clarification reaffirming the Lutheran orthodox doctrine of the Holy Trinity, evaluating contemporary social Trinity teachings and explicitly rejecting EFS; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention respectfully request the CTCR to revisit and clarify its interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:3 as presented in *The Order of Creation*; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod encourage ongoing catechesis of pastors, church workers, and congregations in the classical trinitarian doctrine confessed by the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, for the sake of the Gospel and the right confession of the Triune God.

Christ the King
Kingwood, TX

Ov. 5-38

To Declare Center for Missional and Pastoral Leadership to be Heterodox Tract and Mission Society

WHEREAS, It is a condition of membership in the Synod that members renounce unionism and syncretism of every description, including "participating in heterodox tract and missionary activities" (Const. Art. VI 2); and

WHEREAS, The Center for Missional and Pastoral Leadership partners with the Institute for Lutheran Theology (ILT) and its Christ School of Theology (CST, cst.ilt.edu/cmpl), an accredited online seminary whose faculty and students are both members and non-members of the Synod, which seminary is also in partnership with The Center for Wesleyan Studies (cst.ilt.edu/cws); and

WHEREAS, The ILT states that it forms pastors for "LCMC, NALC, CALC and the Augsburg Lutheran Churches as suitably prepared for ministry" (ilt.edu/faqs/#1645113466576-060f9d5f-d6a1, accessed Feb. 12, 2026); and

WHEREAS, The ILT also states that it is "the seminary for Canadian Association of Lutheran Churches (CALC), Augustana District of the LCMC, Augsburg Lutheran Churches and endorsed by the Lutheran Church of South Sudan" (ibid.), none of which is in fellowship with the LCMS; and

WHEREAS, The ILT and its CST states that they answer to no church denomination (ilt.edu/about-ilt/who-we-are); and

WHEREAS, *A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* (adopted 1932), Article 28, "On Church-Fellowship," states:

Since God ordained that His Word only, without the admixture of human doctrine, be taught and believed in the Christian Church, 1 Pet. 4:11; John 8:31, 32; 1 Tim. 6:3, 4, all Christians are required by God to discriminate between orthodox and heterodox church-bodies, Matt. 7:15, to have church-fellowship only with orthodox church-bodies, and, in case they have strayed into heterodox church-bodies, to leave them, Rom. 16:17. We repudiate unionism, that is, church-fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God's command, as causing divisions in the Church, Rom. 16:17; 2 John 9, 10, and involving the constant danger of losing the Word of God entirely, 2 Tim. 2:17-21.

and

WHEREAS, It is clear that an entity that purports to form pastors of mixed confessions with a faculty and students of mixed confessions is a heterodox tract and mission society within the meaning of Const. Art. VI 2; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod declare the Center for Missional and Pastoral Leadership, which operates in partnership with ILT and its CST, to be a heterodox tract and mission society.

Circuit 24 (Sedalia)
Missouri District

Ov. 5-39

To Declare Center for Missional and Pastoral Leadership to be Heterodox Tract and Mission Society

WHEREAS, It is a condition of membership in the Synod that members renounce unionism and syncretism of every description, including "participating in heterodox tract and missionary activities" (Const. Art. VI 2 c); and

WHEREAS, The Center for Missional and Pastoral Leadership partners with the Institute for Lutheran Theology (ILT) and its Christ School of Theology (CST, cst.ilt.edu/cmpl), an accredited online seminary whose faculty and students are both members and non-members of the Synod, which seminary is also in partnership with The Center for Wesleyan Studies (cst.ilt.edu/cws); and

WHEREAS, The ILT states that it forms pastors for "LCMC, NALC, CALC and the Augsburg Lutheran Churches as suitably prepared for ministry. We are the seminary for Canadian Association of Lutheran Churches (CALC), Augustana District of the LCMC, Augsburg Lutheran Churches and endorsed by the Lutheran Church of South Sudan" (ilt.edu/faqs/#1645113466576-060f9d5f-d6a1, accessed Feb. 12, 2026), none of which is in fellowship with the LCMS; and

WHEREAS, The ILT and its CST state that they answer to no church denomination (ilt.edu/about-ilt/who-we-are); and

WHEREAS, *A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* (adopted 1932), Article 28, "On Church-Fellowship," states:

Since God ordained that His Word only, without the admixture of human doctrine, be taught and believed in the Christian Church, 1 Pet. 4:11; John 8:31, 32; 1 Tim. 6:3, 4, all Christians are required by God to discriminate between orthodox and

heterodox church-bodies, Matt. 7:15, to have church-fellowship only with orthodox church-bodies, and, in case they have strayed into heterodox church-bodies, to leave them, Rom. 16:17. We repudiate unionism, that is, church-fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God's command, as causing divisions in the Church, Rom. 16:17; 2 John 9, 10, and involving the constant danger of losing the Word of God entirely, 2 Tim. 2:17–21.

and

WHEREAS, "Religious unionism consists in joint worship and work of those not united in doctrine. Its essence is an agreement to disagree. In effect, it denies the doctrine of the clearness of Scripture" (L. Fuerbringer, Th. Engelder, and P. E. Kretzmann, eds., *The Concordia Cyclopedia* [Concordia Publishing House, 1927], 774); and

WHEREAS, It is clear that an entity that purports to form pastors of mixed confessions with a faculty and students of mixed confessions is a heterodox tract and mission society within the meaning of Const. Art. VI 2; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod declare the Center for Missional and Pastoral Leadership, which operates in partnership with the ILT and its CST, to be a heterodox tract and mission society.

St. Paul
Brookfield, IL

Ov. 5-40

To Address Release and Use of *Luther's Large Catechism with Annotations and Contemporary Applications*

WHEREAS, 2013 Resolution 3-13A, "To Update the Synod's Catechetical Materials," asked the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), in collaboration with the Office of the President and Concordia Publishing House (CPH), to produce a catechetical compendium that would be "more comprehensive and apologetic in scope"; and

WHEREAS, 2016 Res. 5-12, "To Commend and Encourage Use of Luther's Catechisms," requested that the CTCR, in collaboration with the Office of the President and the faculties of Concordia Seminary and Concordia Theological Seminary, "explore the creation of an annotated and expanded edition of the Large Catechism for widespread use and study in the church"; and

WHEREAS, The volume underwent review by the CTCR and was certified by the Synod doctrinal review process; and

WHEREAS, The text of the Large Catechism to which we subscribe remains entirely unchanged in this volume while the essays attempt to engage contemporary questions concerning challenging and complex issues; and

WHEREAS, This volume is a significant and important project for one of the treasures of the Church and those who worked with faithfulness to produce it are to be commended; and

WHEREAS, President Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, the author of the foreword to this volume, acknowledged in writing on February 2, 2023, that portions of the publication, which has caused controversy due to some of its authorship and content, "might have been expressed more clearly" (Matthew Harrison, "Update from President Harrison on Large Catechism," *Reporter Online*, Feb. 2,

2023, *reporter.lcms.org/2023/update-from-president-harrison-on-large-catechism*); and

WHEREAS, On February 25, 2023, President Harrison spoke at a circuit forum in Hamel, Ill., to the volume's address of pedophilia and hidden sins of the flesh through the lens of Matthew 7:3–5 (John T. Pless and Larry M. Vogel, eds., *Luther's Large Catechism with Annotations and Contemporary Applications* [Concordia Publishing House, 2022], 242) required a careful reading, which was "unclear" and "could have been worded better," and then went on to say "there were numerous ones of those cases"; and

WHEREAS, Currently active theologians from heterodox church bodies who have not unconditionally subscribed to the Lutheran Confessions contributed to the volume; and

WHEREAS, Bringing clarity to this matter will do much for the sake of unity amid significant discord surrounding this volume; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention be memorialized to instruct CPH to cease distribution of the volume *Luther's Large Catechism with Annotations and Contemporary Applications*; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention direct CPH to divide *Luther's Large Catechism with Annotations and Contemporary Applications* into two volumes: the first volume to contain *Luther's Large Catechism with Annotations* and the second volume to contain the *Essays on Contemporary Applications*; and to include with the second volume a statement to indicate the Synod or church body affiliation of each author and that not all authors are in doctrinal agreement with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod; and be it finally

Resolved, That pastors be encouraged to use the first volume containing *Luther's Large Catechism with Annotations* for study and discussion; and pastors be encouraged to use the second volume containing *Essays on Contemporary Applications* as they see fit for study and discussion.

North Dakota District

Ov. 5-41

To Conclude *Created Male and Female* Task Force and Receive Its Recommendations

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture teaches the following truths concerning humanity: God created humanity to be male and female (Gen 1:27, Matt. 19:4); God instituted marriage between one man and one woman as a lifelong union for companionship and procreation (Gen 1:28; Gen. 2:18–24); and God commands chastity for those who are married and those who are single (Ex. 20:14; Deut. 5:18; Num. 5:11–31; Matt. 5:27–30); and

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture prohibits adultery, fornication, homosexuality, and other forms of sexual immorality as sin and as deviations from this created order (Ex. 20:15; Deut. 5:18; Num. 5:11–31; Rom. 1:18–32; Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 6:9–11); and

WHEREAS, Cultural attitudes in recent decades have increasingly advocated for views of sexual orientation and gender identity that are at odds with Scriptural truth; and

WHEREAS, In fulfillment of 2019 Resolution 11-03A, "To Encourage Synod to Develop Resources to Aid Congregations and Schools regarding Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Issues," the Office of National Mission (ONM) created the *ad hoc* "Created

Male and Female Task Force” to aid in identifying and producing resources that might “confess the truth boldly and minister compassionately both to those who experience sexual orientation and gender identity issues and those who care for them”; and

WHEREAS, 2023 Resolution 1-04A continued the task force with mandates to consider conducting field research; to “recommend and advocate for strategies and structural approaches to serve the Church better and address the challenges posed by contemporary sexual ethics, recommend and coordinate implementation with Synod entities and organizations that will best deliver resources to the Church, and encourage congregations to raise awareness of media propaganda, cultural intimidation, and mounting pressures upon all people to affirm viewpoints contrary to clear teaching in Holy Scripture, responding to those influences by the study of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions (particularly the Small Catechism)”; and finally to report on its work and make further recommendations to the 2026 Synod convention; therefore be it

Resolved, That the final report of the task force be commended to the Synod for consideration and guidance; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention take up the recommendations proposed therein, including the following:

- That the ONM continue facilitating retreats for families affected by sexual orientation and gender identity confusion in the coming triennium and begin to recruit and train potential facilitators so these retreats might be expanded nationally;
- That the Council of Presidents (COP), in conjunction with the ONM, develop lists of theologically trustworthy counselors to whom they might refer those struggling with sexual orientation, gender identity, and related issues, as well as criteria for evaluating and recommending those counselors;
- That the COP, in conjunction with the seminaries and administrators of the Concordia University System and its colleges, consult with one another regarding the development of counseling programs specifically designed to train counselors to deal theologically and ethically with such issues, as well as further training for clergy in addressing them at the congregational level;
- That the ONM, in collaboration with the staff of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) and Concordia Publishing House, continue developing specific counter-cultural and apologetic resources critiquing LGBTQIA+ positions and continue promoting biblically faithful resources on these topics through the website hosted by the ONM (*createdmaleandfemale.org*); and
- That the CTCR, in consultation with the ONM and the seminaries, consider if and how studies might be produced on the family as a unit and the foundation for a healthy society (man and woman, husband and wife, parents and children, procreation and chastity, vocation and the three estates), biblical anthropology, same-sex attraction, and gender dysphoria;

and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention receive the *Created Male and Female* Task Force report and these recommendations as a conclusion to its work, give thanks to the individual task force members for their labors, and pray that God might heal individuals,

families, congregations, and communities from the ills and consequences of these sinful behaviors and ideas.

Board for National Mission

Ov. 5-42

To Amend Bylaw 3.3.1.1.2 (c) to Designate President’s Director of Church Relations as His Primary Representative for Ecclesiastical Relations with Other Church Bodies

WHEREAS, The Synod in 1962 established the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) (1962 Resolution 6-03, “Commission on Theology and Church Relations”); and

WHEREAS, In 2007, President Gerald B. Kieschnick created a Church Relations unit within the Office of the President to address increased ecumenical opportunities to strengthen confessional Lutheran church bodies worldwide and to meet the increased requirements of managing those ecumenical relations in a manner that would allow for more direct communication, supervision, and coordination within the Office of the President itself; and

WHEREAS, In 2008, Dr. Samuel H. Nafzger retired after lengthy service (1974–2008) as the executive director of the CTCR to begin service as the Synod’s first director of Church Relations, assistant to the President; and

WHEREAS, Since 2008, the President of the Synod, being the chief ecumenical officer of the Synod, has called a director of Church Relations, assistant to the President, as his primary representative in his daily bishop-to-bishop ecclesiastical engagements and support; and

WHEREAS, LCMS Church Relations, on behalf of the President and based on his guidance, has continued to provide daily strategic, operational, and field-level leadership, planning, and support for ecclesiastical relations worldwide, now with 104 church bodies, including the annual International Church Relations Conference, regional gatherings, theological education to advance unity of confession with sister churches and others, theological dialogues with churches seeking recognition of church fellowship with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), and church body visitation (2026 Report R1.1); and

WHEREAS, LCMS Church Relations, on behalf of the President and based on his guidance, regularly collaborates with other church relations stakeholders, to include: (1) the CTCR as it assists the President of the Synod at his request in church relations matters that bear on doctrinal integrity (Bylaw 3.9.5.2.2), and in its bylaw responsibilities to recommend to the Synod recognition of altar and pulpit fellowship with another church body (Bylaw 3.9.5.2.2 [b]); (2) the Office of International Mission in its support and encouragement of sister churches (Bylaw 3.8.3.4); (3) the LCMS seminaries in their theological education support to sister church seminaries and at other venues; (4) LCMS districts and congregations in their support to sister church bodies and others; and (5) the International Lutheran Council in its programs that encourage confessional Lutheranism; therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.3.1.1.2 (c) be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

3.3.1.1.2 The President shall be the chief ecumenical officer of the Synod.

...

(c) He or his representative shall represent the Synod in official contacts with other church bodies. The director of Church Relations shall ordinarily serve as the President's representative for ecclesiastical relations with other church bodies. LCMS Church Relations may be staffed in accordance with the Bylaws of the Synod and the human resources policies of corporate Synod.

Board of Directors, English District;
Board of Directors, Iowa East District

Resolved, That the district encourage its members to engage in faithful and appropriate ecumenical dialogue with other communions that confess the Nicene Creed; and be it finally

Resolved, That the district memorialize this resolution to the 2026 Synod convention.

Atlantic District

Ov. 5-43

To Refer Some Assignments from Commission on Theology and Church Relations to Seminaries

WHEREAS, Assignments to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) from Synod conventions and other sources continue to multiply and the CTCR's workload and backlog continues to grow; and

WHEREAS, The lengthy extension of time for a CTCR report to be discussed, prepared, and issued manifests the difficulty and complexity of the assignment and the corresponding need for greater expertise and deliberative care in its consideration; therefore be it

Resolved, That any convention assignment to the CTCR that is not completed within six years of its original tasking shall be relinquished by the CTCR and referred to our two seminaries, which shall convene a joint faculty committee for further study on the issue for completion and final reporting to the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That the CTCR is encouraged to refer any issue at any time to our two seminaries for final study and reporting to the Synod.

Circuit 13 (SW 3)
Ohio District

Ov. 5-44

To Give Thanks to God for 1700th Anniversary of First Council of Nicaea

WHEREAS, The year 2025 marked the 1700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea, its having begun in Asia Minor on May 20, A.D. 325; and

WHEREAS, The Nicene Creed is a significant ecumenical creed for the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church; and

WHEREAS, According to St. John, our Lord Jesus Christ prayed for the unity of the Church on the night in which he was betrayed (John 17); and

WHEREAS, The confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church are in concord with the ancient symbols of the faith, including the Nicene Creed; and

WHEREAS, The Psalmist says, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" (Psalm 133:1); therefore let it be

Resolved, That the Atlantic District in convention gives thanks to God for the 1700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea by rising to confess the Nicene Creed; and be it further

Resolved, That the district continue to commit to sharing the Christian faith in its congregations, schools, and agencies; and be it further

6. Pastoral Ministry and Seminaries

REPORTS

**R1, R1.2, R1.2.2–R1.2.3, R2.1, R5, R5.2,
R13–R13.6, R62.3, R62.10, R62.13**

OVERTURES

Ov. 6-01

To Uphold Seminary Formation That Faithfully Teaches All Doctrines of Scripture and Lutheran Confessions and Practices That Accord with Them

WHEREAS, Pastors of the Synod vow to teach in accordance with Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions; and

WHEREAS, Seminary formation equips men to teach, defend, and apply these doctrines faithfully amid cultural and ecclesial pressures; and

WHEREAS, Doctrinal unity is preserved not only through agreement in teaching but also through practices that accord with that teaching; and

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16–17); and

WHEREAS, The Augsburg Confession describes the pastoral office as exercised in faithfulness to Scripture and good order (AC XXVIII); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm seminary formation focused on the full teaching of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions; and be it further

Resolved, That districts of the Synod continue to uphold pastoral vows through visitation and ecclesiastical supervision; and be it further

Resolved, That seminaries continue to emphasize liturgical, doctrinal, and pastoral formation consistent with the Synod’s confession; and be it finally

Resolved, That the church implore the Holy Spirit to grant pastors steadfastness in the truth.

Good Shepherd, Lincoln, NE;
Trinity (Decatur Rd), Fort Wayne, IN

Ov. 6-02

To Uphold Deep and Broad Study of Holy Scripture in Synod Seminaries

WHEREAS, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, have historically grounded pastoral formation in sustained, direct engagement with the text of Holy Scripture in the original languages; and

WHEREAS, Faithful pastoral ministry requires not merely acquaintance with the biblical text through secondary sources, but the ability to read, translate, and interpret Holy Scripture firsthand for preaching, teaching, catechesis, and pastoral care; and

WHEREAS, The Church benefits when pastors are formed to handle the Word of God with confidence rooted in direct textual study rather than dependence upon external aids alone; and

WHEREAS, Our Lord commands His Church to love God not only with heart and soul but also with mind (Matt. 22:37), and St. Paul exhorts ministers to “rightly handl[e] the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm and encourage the seminaries of the Synod to maintain and deepen rigorous instruction in the original languages of Holy Scripture, emphasizing direct translation and exegetical engagement with the biblical text; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod encourage the seminaries to resist trends toward reduced or merely introductory engagement with the biblical languages in pastoral formation; and be it further

Resolved, That the seminaries be commended and encouraged to double down on forming pastors who are capable of independent, faithful handling of the Scriptural text in the original languages for the sake of the Church’s preaching and teaching; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for His Word and pray for pastors formed to proclaim it faithfully and confidently.

Mount Hope, Casper, WY; St. Paul, Milford Center, OH;
Trinity (Decatur Rd), Fort Wayne, IN

Ov. 6-03

To Uphold Deep and Broad Study of Holy Scripture in Synod Seminaries

WHEREAS, The seminaries of the Synod emphasize rigorous study of Holy Scripture, including instruction in the original languages, exegesis, and faithful application; and

WHEREAS, Such study is foundational for faithful preaching, teaching, pastoral care, and doctrinal discernment within the church; and

WHEREAS, Our Lord commands love for God with heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:37); and

WHEREAS, The Augsburg Confession teaches that faith is given through the ministry of the Word (AC V); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm its commitment to deep and broad study of Holy Scripture in its seminaries; and be it further

Resolved, That the seminary curricula continue to emphasize original languages, hermeneutics, and pastoral application; and be it further

Resolved, That congregations be encouraged to foster vocations that value rigorous study of God’s Word; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for His Word faithfully taught and proclaimed.

Good Shepherd
Lincoln, NE

Ov. 6-04

To Uphold Deep and Broad Study of Holy Scripture in Synod Seminaries

WHEREAS, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, have historically grounded pastoral formation in sustained, direct engagement with the text of Holy Scripture in the original languages; and

WHEREAS, Faithful pastoral ministry requires not merely acquaintance with the biblical text through secondary sources, but the ability to read, translate, and interpret Holy Scripture firsthand

for preaching, teaching, catechesis, pastoral care, evangelism, and defense of the faith; and

WHEREAS, The Church benefits when pastors are formed to handle the Word of God with confidence rooted in direct textual study rather than dependence upon external aids alone; and

WHEREAS, Our Lord commands His Church to love God not only with heart and soul but also with mind (Matt. 22:37), and St. Paul exhorts ministers to “rightly handl[e] the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15); and

WHEREAS, St. Paul pronounces the very words of Scripture and indeed every word of Scripture as “God-breathed and useful” (2 Tim. 3:16 NIV) and himself declares and defends the Gospel of Christ with arguments based on the precise wording of the sacred Scriptures; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Luther warned that the devil himself seeks to deprive the Church of the biblical languages: “We do not see many instances where the devil has allowed [Greek and Hebrew] to flourish by means of the universities and monasteries; indeed, these have always raged against the languages and are even now raging. For the devil smelled a rat, and perceived that if the languages were revived a hole would be knocked in his kingdom which he could not easily stop up again. Since he found he could not prevent their revival, he now aims to keep them on such slender rations that they will of themselves decline and pass away. They are not a welcome guest in his house, so he plans to offer them such meager entertainment that they will not prolong their stay. Very few of us, my dear sirs, see through this evil design of the devil” (*Luther’s Works* 45:358); and whereas Dr. Luther perceived that nothing less than the Gospel itself was at stake: “In proportion then as we value the gospel, let us zealously hold to the languages. For it was not without purpose that God caused his Scriptures to be set down in these two languages alone—the Old Testament in Hebrew, the New in Greek” (ibid., 359); and

WHEREAS, Dr. C.F.W. Walther envisioned thus regarding his seminary in 1883: “In this house, neither the word of man nor the wit and wisdom of man, but rather the Word of God and the entire Word of God, and that which serves the elucidation and application of that Word, shall be studied with unwearied diligence, day after day, from the first rays of the morning until late after nightfall” (cf. C.F.W. Walther, “1883 Dedication Address,” *Concordia Journal* 15 no. 3 [July 1889]: 224); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod seminaries, across all their programs, maintain and enhance courses of study that attend to careful, thorough study of Holy Scripture and ensure that all pastors certified for ordination demonstrate strong knowledge of and glad reception of “the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the ... only true standard or norm by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged” (FC SD, Comprehensive Summary, 3); and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm and encourage the seminaries to maintain and deepen rigorous instruction in the original languages of Holy Scripture, emphasizing direct translation and exegetical engagement with the biblical text; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod encourage the seminaries to resist trends toward reduced or merely introductory engagement with the biblical languages in pastoral formation; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod seminaries be commended and encouraged to double down on forming pastors who are capable of

independent, faithful handling of the scriptural text in the original languages for the sake of the Church’s preaching and teaching; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod seminaries instill in our future pastors those habits and disciplines that maintain the ongoing study of Scripture, including the knowledge and use of the biblical languages, throughout a lifetime of ministry, and that circuits and districts foster and encourage the same; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for His Word and pray for pastors formed to proclaim it faithfully and confidently.

Board of Regents
Concordia Seminary

Ov. 6-05

To Uphold Deep and Broad Study of *Book of Concord* in Synod Seminaries

WHEREAS, The *Book of Concord* serves as the Church’s binding doctrinal confession because (Latin: *quia*) it faithfully confesses the teaching of Holy Scripture, as set forth in the Formula of Concord (FC Ep, Summary Content); and

WHEREAS, Pastoral formation within the Synod requires more than familiarity with the Lutheran Confessions, but sustained study that forms pastors who confess, teach, and practice theology in full accord with them; and

WHEREAS, The unity of the Church is preserved when pastors are formed to interpret Scripture and conduct ministry within the shared doctrinal framework of the Confessions; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has consistently affirmed *quia* subscription to the Lutheran Confessions as foundational to pastoral formation and ecclesial trust; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm and encourage the seminaries of the Synod to maintain and deepen comprehensive, integrated instruction in the *Book of Concord* throughout the curriculum; and be it further

Resolved, That confessional formation not be treated as a discrete academic subject alone, but as a hermeneutical and theological framework shaping all pastoral instruction; and be it further

Resolved, That the seminaries be encouraged to form pastors whose preaching, teaching, and practice flow from a robust *quia* commitment to the Lutheran Confessions; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for the Lutheran Confessions and pray for pastors who confess them faithfully in doctrine and life.

Mount Hope, Casper, WY; St. Paul, Milford Center, OH;
Trinity (Decatur Rd), Fort Wayne, IN

Ov. 6-06

To Uphold Deep and Broad Study of *Book of Concord* in Synod Seminaries

WHEREAS, The *Book of Concord* serves as the Church’s binding doctrinal confession because (Latin: *quia*) it faithfully confesses the teaching of Holy Scripture, as set forth in the Formula of Concord (FC Ep, Summary Content); and

WHEREAS, Pastoral formation within the Synod requires more than familiarity with the Lutheran Confessions, but sustained study

that forms pastors who confess, teach, and practice theology in full accord with them; and

WHEREAS, The unity of the Church is preserved when pastors are formed to interpret Scripture and conduct ministry within the shared doctrinal framework of the Confessions; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has consistently affirmed *quia* subscription to the Lutheran Confessions as foundational to pastoral formation and ecclesial trust; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm and encourage the seminaries of the Synod to maintain and deepen comprehensive, integrated instruction in the *Book of Concord* throughout the curriculum; and be it further

Resolved, That confessional formation not be treated as a discrete academic subject alone, but as a hermeneutical and theological framework shaping all pastoral instruction; and be it further

Resolved, That the seminaries be encouraged to form pastors whose preaching, teaching, and practice flow from a robust *quia* commitment to the Lutheran Confessions and to ensure that all pastors certified for ordination demonstrate knowledge of and glad reception of the Lutheran Confessions; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for the Lutheran Confessions and pray for pastors who confess them faithfully in doctrine and life.

Board of Regents
Concordia Seminary

Ov. 6-07

To Uphold Deep and Broad Study of *Book of Concord* in Synod Seminaries

WHEREAS, The *Book of Concord* sets forth the Lutheran Confessions as faithful expositions of Holy Scripture and provides doctrinal clarity and unity for the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Seminary formation integrates confessional study to prepare pastors who subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions without reservation; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has consistently affirmed the Lutheran Confessions as the doctrinal basis for theology and practice within the Synod; and

WHEREAS, The Formula of Concord identifies the Lutheran Confessions as the Church's binding doctrinal standard (FC Ep, Summary Content); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm its commitment to deep and broad study of the *Book of Concord* in its seminaries; and be it further

Resolved, That the faculty of the Synod's seminaries continue to integrate confessional theology throughout the curriculum; and be it further

Resolved, That the congregations of the Synod be encouraged to support confessional education within the Synod; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for the confessional heritage entrusted to His Church.

Good Shepherd
Lincoln, NE

Ov. 6-08

To Require Theological Competency Standards for Eligibility to Exercise Ecclesiastical Oversight *De Iure Humano*

Rationale

One of the historic strengths of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) has been its theologically competent clergy. From the earliest days of its history the Synod has developed and utilized a variety of avenues for the preparation of its pastors, each with a focus upon theological competency in providing pastoral care to God's people. From the log cabin seminary in Perry County to the establishment of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, from the early work of Wyneken and Loehe to Concordia Springfield and Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, theological competency has been a hallmark of our work together. (For more on this see the white paper, "An Ordained LCMS Pastor for Every Synod Congregation: Nine Recommendations for Forming and Providing Pastors in the LCMS," posted May 2, 2024, nowlcms.org/resources/pastoral-formation-paper/; John C. Wohlrabe Jr., "The Role of the Seminaries in the LCMS, 1847–2001," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 85, nos. 3–4 [July/Oct. 2021]: 215–39, ctsfwmedia.s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/CTQ/CTQ%2085.3-4.pdf.)

One of the challenges before the Synod over the past few decades has been to meet the need of identifying, training, forming, and certifying enough men for the pastoral office in order to serve the congregations of the Synod. This has required a continuation of our historical pastoral formation legacy coupled with creative development of newer routes and programs. Recent studies have demonstrated that this need has become acute (see James A. Baneck, "A White Paper on the Current Context of Pastoral Formation," LCMS Pastoral Education, May 12, 2020, files.lcms.org/file/preview/0EjuRABQuTtWmQiglpaMvaazkDv7L5ng).

In order to meet the demand for ministers of religion—ordained the Synod has considered a number of routes to the pastoral office. Currently the Synod has at least seven programmatic routes for pastoral formation. These are:

- Residential Master of Divinity (M.Div.)
- Residential Alternate Route (RAR)
- Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP)
- Specific Ministry Pastor to General Pastor Certification (GPC)
- Center for Hispanic Studies (CHS)
- Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT)
- Cross-Cultural Ministry Center (CMC)

Of these many routes, some are certificated programs and some award graduate degrees. They can result in differing rostered status with differing opportunities for service. All are committed to the formation of certified men for the pastoral office.

While all varied routes yield competent and certified men to serve in the pastoral office, the theological depth of formation varies from program to program. This overture is concerned with developing a mechanism or standard by which those ordained pastors called upon to supervise other ministers of religion—ordained will possess and demonstrate higher levels of theological acumen. Such offices of

oversight include circuit visitors and district presidents, as well as supervisors of vicars/interns.

It is important here to distinguish between standards for the pastoral office, which are *de iure humano* (by human right) and *de iure divino* (by divine right). With respect to standards *de iure divino*, ordination is ordination, a divine call is a divine call, and a pastor is a pastor. Consideration of limitations on the pastoral office that are self-imposed *de iure humano* is another matter. Here the focus is the development of organizational standards for the purpose of distinguishing tasks and responsibilities in the ecclesial polity within which we live and serve.

The first and most important standard *de iure humano* pertaining to consideration for the office of ecclesiastical oversight (district presidents and circuit visitors) is fidelity to the confessional standard of the Synod articulated in Constitution Article II:

The Synod, and every member of the Synod, accepts without reservation:

1. The Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice;
2. All the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God, to wit: ...

Indeed, all who are rostered in the Synod subscribe to these confessional standards. They are the standards to which ministers of religion, both ordained and commissioned, adhere. Since this is the introductory standard pertaining to all rostered workers, it is natural that those entrusted with theological and ecclesiastical oversight possess and demonstrate an exceptional comprehension of and facility with the same.

The Scriptures demonstrate the appropriateness of such exceptional grasp: St. Paul points out the exceptional responsibility of being a theological overseer (ἐπισκοπή, 1 Tim. 3:1); Jesus reminds His disciples that with greater responsibility comes greater expectation and accountability (περισσότερος, Luke 12:48); St. Peter admonishes all believers that “if these qualities are yours and are increasing [verb: πλεονάζω], they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8). If this is true of parishioners, it is certainly true of clergy.

In order to maintain such levels of competency for its ministerium, the Synod has put into place benchmarks to demonstrate theological competency. The seminaries utilize an instrument by which initial admittance competency can be verified: the Entry Level Competency Exams. The Synod also has exit standards in place resulting in certification for ordination. Additionally, the Synod adopted 2019 Resolution 6-04, “To Support, Encourage, and Expect Continuing Education for all Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Pastors,” which requires ongoing theological education. This is not unique, as many secular professions require ongoing professional development, especially to hold positions of supervision.

The intention of this overture involves the *de iure humano* reality that not all training is equal with respect to depth of theological understanding. Ecclesiastical oversight assumes that such overseers possess and exercise more extensive theological acumen for the purpose of ongoing formation within the ministerium.

Therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention assign the Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) to study a requisite standard of post-ordination competency for eligibility to exercise theological and

ecclesiastical oversight of ministers of religion—ordained in the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That the PFC, in collaboration with the Council of Presidents, bring a report with recommendations to the 2029 Synod convention.

Pastors’ Conference (Oregon)
Northwest District

Ov. 6-09

To Amend Bylaw 2.13.1 to Clarify Terminology for Specific Ministry Pastor Mentorship and Oversight Rationale

In 1998 the Synod added to its Bylaws a set of definitions, now designated as section 1.2 “Definition of Terms.” Two important definitions are those of *supervision* and *oversight*. In the Synod’s Bylaws, outside of “ecclesiastical supervision,” the term “supervision” means “to have authority over, to direct actions, to control activities” [1.2.1(u)]. “Oversight” means “to monitor; to make inquiry and receive a response thereto; to make suggestions; to bring concerns to the attention of a higher authority” [1.2.1(p)]. In 1998 it proved necessary, for example, to make it clear that the Synod’s Board of Directors cannot control the activities of the various synodwide corporate entities or issue binding directives to their boards. With respect to synodwide corporate entities, it has *oversight*.

When the Synod established its Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program almost a decade later, via 2007 Res. 5-01B, it adopted Bylaws providing that a specific ministry pastor serves under the *supervision* (not specifically termed “ecclesiastical supervision”) of his district president and another pastor who is not a specific ministry pastor. The next sentence refers again to the specific ministry pastor being under *supervision* of another pastor, who in some instances may be a neighboring Synod pastor who has no call to the church served by the specific ministry pastor. The definition of *supervision* (“to have authority over, to direct actions, to control activities”) that had been placed into the Bylaws largely to clarify the spheres of authority for various governing boards does not apply to the relationship between a specific ministry pastor and his district president. Nor does it necessarily apply to the specific ministry pastor’s relationship with the non-specific ministry pastor who oversees him. This inapt use of defined terms, along with its potential for introducing confusion, was noted by the Commission on Constitutional Matters (Op. 23-3017) and referred to the Commission on Handbook for improvement.

The word *oversight*, as defined in the Bylaws, seems much more fitting for the efforts of non-specific ministry pastors who work with all specific ministry pastors. In the revision below, this term is paired with another, *mentorship*. Current nomenclature within the SMP program speaks of specific ministry pastors and their “mentors.” Together, the two words account for both the monitoring and the nurturing services that designated non-specific ministry pastors render to specific ministry pastors.

Therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 2.13.1 be amended as follows:

~~PRESENT~~/PROPOSED WORDING***Specific Ministry Pastor Status and Limitations***

2.13.1 A “specific ministry pastor” is a minister of religion—ordained who has completed the requirements for service as a specific ministry pastor and has been examined by one of the Synod’s seminaries, has received a regular call, and has been placed by the Council of Presidents into a specific Word and Sacrament ministry context. He is eligible to serve only in that specific ministry context for which he has been trained and may not be offered or accept a call for ministry for which he has not been certified as determined by his district president. He shall serve under the ecclesiastical supervision of his district president and under the oversight and mentorship of another pastor who is not a specific ministry pastor.

(a) ~~Because he is under supervision of another pastor has been prepared for service of limited jurisdiction~~ and because a specific ministry pastor’s theological education has been formed in part by and for a specific ministry context, he may not be placed or called into ecclesiastical roles that exercise pastoral oversight outside the context of his call.

(b) A specific ministry pastor is not eligible to

(1) serve as a voting delegate to a national convention of the Synod—but may serve as an advisory delegate to national conventions and as a pastoral delegate to district conventions;

(2) hold any elected or appointed office on the district or national Synod level that is assigned by the Bylaws of the Synod to “a pastor” or “an ordained minister” (although specific ministry pastors may serve in all other capacities, especially representing the ministerial contexts in which they serve);

(3) supervise vicars; or

(4) serve as a circuit visitor.

(c) The ministers of religion—ordained records maintained by district presidents as well as the official membership roster of the Synod shall distinguish between specific ministry pastors and other pastors.

Commission on Handbook

Ov. 6-10

**To Amend Bylaw 3.10.5.7
to Address Seminary Adjunct Faculty**

WHEREAS, Both Concordia Seminary and Concordia Theological Seminary make use of contracted faculty, bearing various titles including “adjunct faculty,” “guest instructors,” “guest professors,” or “visiting instructors” (hereafter “adjuncts”); and

WHEREAS, The standard procedure is that adjuncts are appointed by the president through the provost and in consultation with the pertinent department chairman. Their services to the seminary are provided on a contractual basis, rather than through a call to the faculty; and

WHEREAS, Adjuncts must conform to the doctrinal standards of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod by upholding the accepted doctrinal statements of the Synod, including Article II of the Synod Constitution; and

WHEREAS, CCM Op. 23-3031, “Seminary Adjunct Faculty,” has determined that “No bylaw sets forth specific procedures for appointment of part-time or temporary faculty,” (i.e. adjuncts); and

WHEREAS, The lack of an adjunct specific bylaw has resulted in CCM Op. 23-3031 stating that “[t]he [seminary] board [of regents]

could choose to undertake such appointments directly, or it could choose to permit the president to undertake such appointments subject to ultimate approval or ratification by the board. The board could also choose to delegate this task to a committee in accordance with Bylaw 1.5.3.3. These examples are not intended to exhaust all legitimate possibilities; so long as the choices of the board do not conflict with another express provision of the Bylaws, it is free to accomplish its task of ‘approving’ as it sees fit”; and

WHEREAS, The lack of an adjunct specific bylaw has also resulted in CCM Op. 23-3031 stating “[o]ur analysis begins with Bylaw 3.11. Bylaw 3.11.1 (a) provides that ‘[m]embers of the Synod who are appointed to positions requiring an ordained minister or commissioned minister shall receive a solemn call.’ If a specific position being filled by a part-time faculty member requires that the person filling that position be an ordained or commissioned minister (rather than merely incidentally being filled by one), then Bylaw 3.11.1 (a) would require that person to receive a solemn call. Having received a call into that specific position, the position would be a ‘called position’ under the Bylaws, including Bylaw 4.4.3 (a)”;

and

WHEREAS, Such a practice of calling and installing adjuncts would be administratively cumbersome and would be counterproductive for the seminary and for the church; and

WHEREAS, The ordinary delegation of this responsibility to the seminary president and administration is wise, and workable; and

WHEREAS, The boards of regents at both seminaries have for decades, understood the Synod Bylaws to require board approval of regular full-time faculty members but not to require direct board approval of adjuncts; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention amend Bylaw 3.10.5.7 as follows:

~~PRESENT~~/PROPOSED WORDING***Seminary Faculties***

3.10.5.7 The faculty of each theological seminary of the Synod shall consist of the president, the full-time faculty, and the part-time faculty.

...

(c) Adjunct instructors must conform to the doctrinal standards of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod by upholding the accepted doctrinal statements of the Synod, including Article II of the Constitution of the Synod. Such adjuncts are appointed by the president through the provost and in consultation with the pertinent department chairman. Their services to the seminary are provided on a contractual basis. Adjuncts are not called to the faculty. The president of the institution shall make known to the respective board of regents the names and duties of the adjuncts, the boards ratifying the adjuncts.

Board of Directors
Iowa East District

Ov. 6-11

**To Amend Bylaws to Reinsert 2007 Pastoral
Colloquy Bylaws from Policy Manual**

WHEREAS, The 2010 Synod convention removed numerous pastoral colloquy bylaws and added Bylaw 3.10.2.2 (a) which directs the Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry (CCPM) to develop, instead, policies that are now in the *Policy Manual* for

Admission to the Pastoral Ministry of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod by Colloquy (CCPM Policy Manual); and

WHEREAS, For 61 years prior to the 2010 Synod convention (i.e., from 1949–2010), the Synod Bylaws for pastoral colloquy, as contained in the *Handbook*, reflected the more fulsome details of policy and procedure that existed in the Bylaws until 2010; and

WHEREAS, In response to the 2010 Synod convention action, the CCPM placed the removed bylaws into its policy manual; and

WHEREAS, These former bylaws (now policies) have changed a little bit in the 16 years since then, though a great percentage of the material remains unchanged; and

WHEREAS, As is the case with policy manuals, in general, the *CCPM Policy Manual* can be changed at any time by the four-member CCPM; and

WHEREAS, There are many important requirements for pastoral colloquy that have been in place for many years and regarding changes to which it would be wise to involve a larger representative body in a more deliberate process; and

WHEREAS, The well-known *Handbook* is a more accessible place to house these important requirements for pastoral colloquy rather than the lesser-known *CCPM Policy Manual*; and

WHEREAS, This overture does not seek or intend to introduce to the bylaws any substantial changes to the requirements for pastoral colloquy as contained in the *CCPM Policy Manual*; therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.10.2.2 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

B. Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry

3.10.2 The Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry shall be responsible for the reception and processing of applications for individual membership in the Synod through colloquy.

3.10.2.1 The Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry shall consist of the First Vice-President of the Synod as chairman, a district president appointed by the Council of Presidents, and the presidents of the seminaries or their representatives.

3.10.2.2 The Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry shall establish and monitor academic, theological, and personal standards for admission to the office of the pastoral ministry by colloquy after consultation with the faculties of the seminaries. It may consider and approve those applicants who meet the requirements for eligibility as specified in this bylaw and concerning whom no valid objection is made pursuant to paragraph (c). In consultation with the President of the Synod, it shall develop any necessary additional policies to govern eligibility and the process to be followed to determine qualifications and suitability for pastoral service in the Synod.

~~(a) In consultation with the President of the Synod, it shall develop all necessary policies to govern eligibility and the process to be followed to determine qualifications and suitability for pastoral service in the Synod. Only such male applicants shall be considered eligible to apply for colloquy who are~~

(1) ministers in good standing in other Christian church bodies (or independent congregations), are graduates of programs of study leading to ordination of no less than 60 semester hours or the equivalent thereof in length from accredited institutions, and have served at least three years in a recognized ministry of their church body, unless granted an exception to either of these last two requirements by the colloquy committee; or

(2) graduates of programs of study leading to ordination of no less than 60 semester hours or the equivalent thereof in length from accredited institutions, who have been communicant members in good standing of congregations of the Synod for

at least two years immediately prior to the time of application (unless granted an exception to either of these last two requirements by the colloquy committee), and whose congregations adhere to Bylaw 2.5.2; or

(3) pastors emeriti from other church bodies may apply according to category 2 above. If certified by the committee, they may be placed on the roster of the Synod according to Bylaw 2.7.5.

(b) Applicants for colloquy shall be directed to the president of the district where the applicant resides.

(1) The district president shall refer the applicant to a district interview committee, who shall give a report and recommendation to the district president.

(2) The district president shall recommend qualified applicants to the chairman of the colloquy committee. Such recommendation shall be processed according to the policies and procedures adopted by the Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry.

(c) The colloquy committee shall publish notice of its intent to interview an applicant in an official periodical of the Synod unless the applicant requests such notice be delayed until after his interview.

(1) If no valid objection is received by the committee within 30 days after the publication of such notice, the applicant may be interviewed.

(2) If the applicant was interviewed first, notice shall then be published and upon publication 30 days be given for valid objections to be received.

(3) The committee, in its sole discretion, shall decide whether an objection is valid. Its decision shall not be the subject of any appeal.

(d) The colloquy committee shall arrange for an in-person colloquy, or discussion, with qualified applicants. The decision on each applicant shall be made on the basis of the colloquy application and examination and shall be the sole prerogative of the colloquy committee.

(e) The criteria by which the colloquy committee shall determine an applicant's readiness for certification are to be based upon adopted standards, including, but not limited to,

(1) areas of general education;

(2) understanding of and agreement with the scriptural and doctrinal positions of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod;

(3) familiarity with the history and polity of the Synod;

(4) studies in theology assuring a well-rounded education in the major fields of theological discipline;

(5) positive experience in the work of the pastoral ministry; and

(6) demonstrated moral character ("above reproach").

(f) The colloquy committee, at its sole discretion, shall determine the content and amount of academic work, personal study programs, or supervised ministry that may be required prior to certification. To this end, the committee may assign residential and/or online seminary coursework, mentored readings, and/or a formal vicarage or a shorter informal internship.

(g) The committee, at its discretion, may require a second colloquy interview following the completion of such study and/or supervised ministry.

(h) Decisions to declare applicants qualified for the pastoral ministry and to certify for placement shall be at the sole discretion of the committee.

(i) The committee shall:

(1) certify for placement those applicants who have satisfactorily completed the colloquy interview and any other requirements as assigned by the colloquy committee;

(2) report this action to the applicant, the Office of Pastoral Education of the Synod, and to the appropriate district president; and

(3) publish a report of its favorable action in an official periodical of the Synod.

(ej) Every applicant whom the committee declares qualified shall be assigned his first call by the Council of Presidents acting as the Board of Assignments.

(k) The colloquy committee shall report to the Synod in convention.

3.10.2.3 Applicants for the ordained ministry recommended by the respective district president who are eligible for colloquy under the Colloquy Committee's published policies may make application to the committee. Other applicants for the ordained ministry, such as Ministers of Religion—Commissioned, laymen of a special ethnic or linguistic group, and laymen who have fulfilled at least ten years of significant service in a congregation, may make application to a seminary for the Residential Alternate Route or any other appropriate program.

3.10.2.4 The LCMS laymen and commissioned ministers who complete a program of study leading to ordination or its equivalent at a non-LCMS seminary are not eligible for colloquy on that basis.

3.10.2.5 All men desiring the ordained ministry who do not meet the eligibility requirements of the foregoing bylaws shall be directed to the seminaries for consideration in other programs.

Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry

Ov. 6-12

To Encourage Transparency and Clarity in Pastoral Colloquy Process

WHEREAS, The Augsburg Confession (AC) teaches "so that we may obtain [the faith that God counts for righteousness], the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted" (AC V 1), and also "that no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call" (AC XIV); and

WHEREAS, Bylaws provide that the Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry (CCPM), in consultation with the President of the Synod, shall develop all necessary policies to govern eligibility and the process to be followed to determine qualifications and suitability for pastoral service in the Synod, and that decisions to certify applicants shall be at the sole discretion of the committee (Bylaw 3.10.2.2 [a-b]); and

WHEREAS, Bylaws further specify eligibility and routes, including that applicants recommended by a district president and eligible for colloquy under the CCPM's published policies may make application to the committee, while "the LCMS laymen and commissioned ministers who complete a program of study leading to ordination or its equivalent at a non-LCMS seminary are not eligible for colloquy on that basis," and that men not meeting those eligibility requirements shall be directed to the seminaries for consideration in other programs (Bylaws 2.5.2; 3.10.2.3–3.10.2.5; and

WHEREAS, Congregations shall call and be served only by those who have been admitted to ministry according to the Bylaws of the Synod (Bylaw sections 2.6–2.8, 2.10; Bylaw 3.10.2.3), candidates

qualified for first call, or ministers from church bodies in fellowship when agreements are in place; and

WHEREAS, The Synod continues to monitor pastoral formation and routes to ordination through the Pastoral Formation Committee, which reviews, coordinates, and reports on non-colloquy routes and considers long term strategy for pastoral formation; and

WHEREAS, Transparency and clarity in published policies, criteria, interview standards, and benchmarks foster trust, strengthen mission partnership, and help congregations walk in good order; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention direct the CCPM, in consultation with the President of the Synod and its seminaries, to publish and maintain on the Synod's website a concise, plain language summary of pastoral colloquy eligibility categories, required documentation, interview standards, and theological benchmarks, with cross references to Bylaws 3.10.2.2–3.10.2.5 together with a simple process flow and typical timeline; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention request the Council of Presidents to provide an annual summary to the congregations and rostered workers of the Synod regarding pastoral colloquy procedures, application volume, certification numbers, and any policy updates, by means of regular Synod communications and pre-convention publications; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention encourage district presidents, congregations, and rostered workers to support men pursuing colloquy by offering mentorship, theological guidance, and appropriate congregational endorsement in harmony with the *Handbook* provisions cited above; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to God for the men He is raising up to preach Christ crucified and risen, and pray for renewed zeal to identify, encourage, and form such men for service in Christ's Church.

Christ Greenfield, Gilbert, AZ; Circuit 16 (Faribault),
Minnesota South District; Circuit 28, Pacific Southwest District

Ov. 6-13

To Encourage Transparency and Clarity in Pastoral Colloquy Process

WHEREAS, The Holy Scriptures declare, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15); and

WHEREAS, The Augsburg Confession (AC) teaches, "that we may obtain [the faith that God counts for righteousness], the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted" (AC V 1), and that "no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call" (AC XIV); and

WHEREAS, Bylaws provide that the Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry (CCPM), in consultation with the President of the Synod, shall develop all necessary policies to govern eligibility and the process to be followed to determine qualifications and suitability for pastoral service in the Synod, and that decisions to certify applicants shall be at the sole discretion of the committee (Bylaw 3.10.2.2 [a-b]); and

WHEREAS, Bylaws further specify eligibility and routes, including that applicants recommended by a district president and

eligible for colloquy under the CCPM's published policies may make application to the committee, while "the LCMS laymen and commissioned ministers who complete a program of study leading to ordination or its equivalent at a non-LCMS seminary are not eligible for colloquy on that basis," and that men not meeting those eligibility requirements shall be directed to the seminaries for consideration in other programs (Bylaws 2.5.2; 3.10.2.3–3.10.2.5); and

WHEREAS, Congregations shall call and be served only by those who have been admitted to ministry according to the Bylaws of the Synod (Bylaw sections 2.6–2.8, 2.10; Bylaw 3.10.2.3), candidates qualified for first call, or ministers from church bodies in fellowship when agreements are in place; and

WHEREAS, The current colloquy process for admission to the pastoral ministry in the Synod lacks clear and consistent articulation of the specific metrics, objectives, and expectations required for approval by the CCPM, thereby creating uncertainty and inconsistency for applicants and congregations seeking to evaluate readiness for service; and

WHEREAS, Transparency and clarity in published policies, criteria, interview standards, and benchmarks foster trust, strengthen mission partnership, and help congregations walk in good order; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention direct the CCPM, in consultation with the President of the Synod and its seminaries, to publish and maintain on the Synod's website a concise, plain language summary of pastoral colloquy eligibility categories, required documentation, interview standards, and theological benchmarks, with cross references to Bylaws 3.10.2.2–3.10.2.5 together with a simple process flow and typical timeline; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention request the Council of Presidents to provide an annual summary to the congregations and rostered workers of the Synod regarding pastoral colloquy procedures, application volume, certification numbers, and any policy updates, by means of regular Synod communications and pre-convention publications; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention encourage district presidents, congregations, and rostered workers to support men pursuing colloquy by offering mentorship, theological guidance, and appropriate congregational endorsement in harmony with the *Handbook* provisions cited above; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to God for the men He is raising up to preach Christ crucified and risen, and pray for renewed zeal to identify, encourage, and form such men for service in Christ's Church.

Circuit 9
Texas District

Ov. 6-14

To Affirm Exclusive Seminary Path and In-Person Formation for Pastoral Ministry

WHEREAS, The Lord calls His church to faithfulness in doctrine and practice (John 8:31; Acts 2:42); and

WHEREAS, Scripture teaches that pastoral ministry involves close mentoring and modeling of life and doctrine (2 Tim. 2:2; 1 Tim. 4:12–16); and

WHEREAS, The Synod Constitution and Bylaws reserve for seminaries approved and sanctioned by convention, currently Concordia Theological Seminary (CTSFW) and Concordia Seminary (CSL), collectively, "seminaries," the responsibility to educate, form, and train pastors for the Synod; and

WHEREAS, The unity of faith and confession is best preserved through agreed-upon structures and processes, including residential Master of Divinity programs at Synod seminaries; and

WHEREAS, In-person, face-to-face formation fosters accountability, spiritual growth, and communal life essential to pastoral preparation (Heb. 10:24–25); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention affirm that the Synod-sanctioned residential seminaries—currently, CTSFW and CSL—are the exclusive path for pastoral education, formation, and training in the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That congregations and rostered workers actively recruit, encourage, and support men to pursue pastoral ministry through these seminaries; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention affirm that in-person, face-to-face education and formation is essential to the process of preparing men for the pastoral office; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod commend the residential model of pastoral formation as the standard for theological education in the Synod.

Good Shepherd, Lincoln, NE; Memorial, Houston, TX

Ov. 6-15

To Reaffirm the Synod's Routes to Ministry

WHEREAS, 2023 Resolution 6-02A, "To Encourage Proper Pastoral Formation through Our Synod's Seminaries," resolved, "that districts and members of the Synod honor, use, and promote Synod-approved programs and not create independent programs of pastoral preparation or direct men to pastoral preparation programs outside of our Synod's seminaries as such efforts are not in accord with the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod (Const. Art. III 3; Bylaw 3.10.4)" (*Proceedings*, 161); and

WHEREAS, Members of the Synod have created independent programs of pastoral education such as The Center for Missional and Pastoral Leadership Formation (thecenter.info/cmpl/, accessed Jan. 22, 2026); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm the routes to the Office of the Holy Ministry created by the Synod are the only routes to ordination and service as ordained ministers of the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That the ecclesiastical supervisors of those members who are engaging in independent programs of pastoral education be directed to evangelically correct them, stressing that their work is not in accord with the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod; and be it finally

Resolved, That such members unwilling to cease their engagement of independent programs of pastoral education be removed from the roster of the Synod.

Circuit 3
Southern Illinois District

Ov. 6-16**To Affirm Exclusive Use of Synod Seminaries to Prepare Men for Office of Holy Ministry**

WHEREAS, The Lord Christ has called His Church to faithfulness in the things of God (John 8:31), which is sustained in the Church by the faithful transmission of the faith to and through the future pastors of the Church; and

WHEREAS, The Lord Christ has called His Church to love toward one another (John 13:35), which is exercised by the creation of agreed-upon modes of undertaking corporate action; and

WHEREAS, The Lord Christ has called His Church to a unity of faith that is identical with and tantamount to continuing steadfast in the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42), all the teachings of Holy Scripture and their expression in the *Book of Concord*, that is, "the Gospel in all its articles" (LCMS, *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles*, [adopted 1973], Article IV; see also John 17:20–21; Eph. 4:4–6; FC SD X 31); and

WHEREAS, Constitution Article III 1 reflects our Lord's will by stating that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) shall "conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3–6; 1 Cor. 1:10), work through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom. 16:17), and heresy"; and

WHEREAS, In Const. Art. III 3, in pursuance of the aforementioned objective and in love, the Synod names and reserves for itself, on behalf of the members (that is, the rostered workers and congregations) of the Synod, the recruitment and training of pastors; and

WHEREAS, Likewise in pursuit of the objectives of the Synod, bylaws reserve for the two seminaries, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW), and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (CSL), the duty, to the exclusion of other seminaries, to educate, form, and train future pastors of the Synod (Bylaw sections 2.7–8) (notwithstanding that bylaws countenance the possibility of a pastor from another church body later in life emerging from the darkness of a false confession, recognizing his agreement in doctrine and practice with the Synod, and wishing therefore to serve in the ministerium of the Synod by providing such men with the possibility of entering membership in the Synod via the colloquy program, Bylaw 3.10.2); and

WHEREAS, Through the exclusive use of its two seminaries and by His grace alone the Lord has for nearly 180 years preserved in the Synod the true confession of His name and practice that accords with it; and

WHEREAS, The education, formation, and training of pastors are best accomplished in a face-to-face, live, and residential setting, as the history of our two seminaries demonstrates; and

WHEREAS, The dangers of educating, forming, and training men for the ministry of the Synod in seminaries outside the oversight of the Synod and associated with heterodox groups are patent; and

WHEREAS, The Center for Missional and Pastoral Leadership (CMPL, thecenter.info/cmpl), an online seminary under the umbrella of the Institute for Lutheran Theology (Brookings, SD, ilt.edu) and affiliated with the heterodox North American Lutheran Church, offers coursework to students from LCMS congregations leading to the Master of Arts (M.A.) in Religion, the Master of Ministry (M.Min.), and the Master of Divinity (M.Div.), the latter two of which are widely recognized as requisite education and

formation for the pastorate (in other words, one would not seek the M.Min. or the M.Div. if he did not wish to become a pastor); and

WHEREAS, Unite Leadership Collective (ULC, uniteleadership.org) directs and facilitates the enrollment of students from LCMS congregations in the M.A. and M.Div. programs of another online seminary, namely, Luther House of Study (LHOS, lutherhouseofstudy.org); and

WHEREAS, A congregation of the LCMS has commissioned and installed a female M.Div. graduate of LHOS as a church worker in that congregation and has ordained and installed a male M.Div. graduate of LHOS as a site pastor in one of its satellites; and

WHEREAS, The plea from leaders of ULC and the CMPL to enroll students in their programs pivots on the pastor shortage in the LCMS, indicating that both entities wish to use their respective seminary programs to educate, form, and train pastors for the LCMS; and

WHEREAS, The conditions of membership (Const. Art. VI) for all members of the Synod, both rostered workers and congregations, require the "renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description" and the "regular call of pastors" (which is defined in Bylaw sections 2.7–8); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod gathered in convention rise and sing the *Te Deum* in thankfulness to the Lord for His gracious preservation of CTSFW and CSL, and for the faithful ministry of the nine generations of graduates in the congregations of the Synod, through whom as "fellow workers" (1 Cor. 3:9) the Lord has preserved the faith among us; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod gathered in convention affirm the residential M.Div. education, formation, and training of the future pastorate of the Synod as the standard within the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod congregations and rostered workers pray with heartfelt fervor and regularity to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into His harvest (Matt. 9:38); and be it further

Resolved, That Synod congregations and rostered workers turn with renewed vigor to the recruitment of able and apt men for the pastorate of the Synod (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1) and encourage and support them in completing the residential M.Div. program at CTSFW or CSL; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod congregations and their members generously support the work of CTSFW and CSL in providing a theologically rich residential M.Div. program for the education, formation, and training of future pastors of the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That no man be encouraged by pastors or congregations in the Synod to seek theological education, formation, and training for the pastoral office except at CTSFW or CSL; and be it further

Resolved, That the district presidents with ecclesiastical oversight over the congregations and rostered workers advocating for, recruiting for, and teaching in LHOS and CMPL, and using their graduates in church work offices admonish those congregations and rostered workers for placing at risk their own and the Synod's faithfulness in the things of God; for breaking love by intentionally working against the Synod's objective to recruit and train pastors and the agreed-upon means of achieving that objective, which harms love by militating against doing all things decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40); and for inviting false doctrine from and

ecclesial association with heterodox church bodies, which militates against the Lord's will that the church be kept in unity of faith and confession (Rom. 16:17); and be it further

Resolved, That unless the congregations and rostered workers advocating for, recruiting for, teaching in, and receiving church workers from LHOS and CMPL heed the admonition of the district president under whose ecclesiastical supervision they stand, such rostered workers be placed on restricted status (Bylaw 2.13.2) as having violated the conditions of membership (Const. Art. VI); and be it further

Resolved, That district presidents follow to their end the processes surrounding restricted status; and be it finally

Resolved, That if the district presidents fail to fulfill their duty to the Bylaws on behalf of the Synod toward those who persist in advocating for, recruiting for, teaching in, and employing as church workers graduates from LHOS and the CMPL, the President of Synod exercise his duty under Const. Art. XIII and Bylaw section 2.15.

Emmaus, Fort Wayne, IN; Good Shepherd, Pleasant Prairie, WI;
Pastors' Conference, South Wisconsin District;
Pastors' Conference, Wyoming District

Ov. 6-17

To Affirm Exclusive Use of Synod Seminaries to Prepare Men for Office of Holy Ministry

WHEREAS, The pastors' conference of the Mid-South District, in regular session, desires that the Synod and its districts, circuits, and congregations reaffirm all the teachings of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions as expressed in the *Book of Concord*, and practices that agree with these symbols of the Evangelical Lutheran Church; and

WHEREAS, The district pastors' conference wishes to memorialize the 2026 Synod convention to affirm the exclusive use of the Synod's seminaries to prepare men for the Office of the Holy Ministry; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has created certain means to train, prepare, and assign men into ministries of the Synod in an orderly and agreed-upon process; and

WHEREAS, The Lord Christ has called His Church to a unity of faith in *what is* taught, preached, and confessed, by which it fully embraces the call of continuing steadfast in the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42), that is, in all the teachings of Holy Scripture and the Evangelical Lutheran standards expressed in the *Book of Concord* (John 17:20–21; Eph. 4:4–6; FC SD X 31); and

WHEREAS, Constitution Article III 1 reflects our Lord's will by stating that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) shall “conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3–6; 1 Cor. 1:10), work through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom. 16:17), and heresy”; and

WHEREAS, The Bylaws provide for the two seminaries of the Synod, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW), and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (CSL); and

WHEREAS, The two recognized seminaries of the Synod, to the exclusion of other seminaries, were established to educate, form, and train the pastors of the Synod (Bylaw sections 2.7–8); and

WHEREAS, The Bylaws provide for the possibility of a pastor from another unrelated church body to emerge from another confession and provide a means by which a pastor may join, by examination and by his agreement in doctrine and practice, with the Synod (Bylaws 2.7.2; 3.10.2–3.10.2.5); and

WHEREAS, A man from another church body, wishing to serve in the ministerium of the Synod, may do so, providing such a man is certified and received into the ordained membership of the Synod via the colloquy program (Bylaw 3.10.2); and

WHEREAS, Through the exclusive use of its two seminaries and by His grace alone, the Lord has for nearly 180 years preserved in the Synod the true confession of His Word and practice in accord with Holy Scripture; and

WHEREAS, The education, formation, and training of pastors are best accomplished through an in-person, face-to-face, live, and residential setting, as the history of our two seminaries and the Synod demonstrate; and

WHEREAS, Educating, forming, and training men for the possible ministry of the Synod in seminaries that are outside the approval, oversight, and support of the Synod and that are associated with heterodox groups risks confusion and unnecessary and difficult division; and

WHEREAS, The Center for Missional and Pastoral Leadership (CMPL, thecenter.info/cmpl/), an unauthorized online seminary under the umbrella of the Institute for Lutheran Theology (Brookings, SD, ilt.edu/) and affiliated with the heterodox North American Lutheran Church, has offered coursework to students from LCMS congregations leading to the Master of Arts (M.A.) in Religion, the Master of Ministry (M.Min.), or a Master of Divinity (M.Div.), the latter two of which are widely recognized as requisite education and formation for the pastorate; and

WHEREAS, Unite Leadership Collective (ULC, uniteleadership.org) (in partnership with Kairos University, an interdenominational university affiliated with the North American Baptist Conference) directs and facilitates the enrollment of students from LCMS congregations in M.A. and M.Div. programs of another online seminary, namely, Luther House of Study (LHOS, lutherhouseofstudy.org/); and

WHEREAS, The plea from leaders of ULC and the CMPL to enroll students in their programs has allegedly been given in response to the pastor shortage in the LCMS, indicating that both entities wish to use their respective seminary programs to educate, form, and train pastors for ministry in the LCMS; and

WHEREAS, The Council of Presidents at its April 29, 2025, meeting issued a clear statement on non-Synod seminaries, stating,

Our Synod needs pastors for all our congregations and mission outreach. We implore the Lord of the Church to send them. We commit ourselves to direct potential students for the pastoral office only to the routes to ordination approved by and accountable to Synod. The Council will not place graduates from other programs. The Council members agree not to ordain graduates from other programs. We commit ourselves to engage the Church, our Synod's seminaries, and Pastoral Formation Committee to strengthen the routes to ordination and address the challenges and opportunities for providing the Church well-formed candidates for the pastoral ministry. (Roy S. Askins, “LCMS Addresses Unauthorized, Non-LCMS Pastoral Formation Programs,” *Reporter Online*, May 8, 2025,

reporter.lcms.org/2025/lcms-addresses-unauthorized-non-lcms-pastoral-formation-programs/

and

WHEREAS, The conditions of membership (Const. Art. VI) for all members of the Synod, both rostered workers and congregations, require the “renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description” and the “regular call of pastors” (which is defined in Bylaw sections 2.7–2.8); and

WHEREAS, The faculties of the Synod seminaries have the responsibility to certify graduates for eligibility for placement and ordination and would have no provision for certifying non-Synod seminary graduates (Bylaw 2.8.1 [a, c]; 3.10.5.7.10 [h]); and

WHEREAS, The Synod colloquy program is not permitted to certify for ministry in the Synod any Synod laymen or commissioned ministers who complete a program of study leading to ordination or its equivalent at a non-LCMS seminary (Bylaw 3.10.2.4); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod gathered in convention be encouraged to rise and sing the *Te Deum* in thankfulness to the Lord for His gracious preservation of CTSFW and CSL, and for the faithful ministry of the nine generations of graduates to the congregations of the Synod, through whom as “fellow workers” (1 Cor. 3:9) the Lord has preserved the faith among us; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod gathered in convention be called upon to affirm the residential M.Div. education, formation, and training of the future pastorate as the standard within the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That the non-residential tracks toward ordination be utilized to the extent that is consistent with their design, purpose, and consistency with the doctrines, confession, and unity provided by the faculty from the authorized seminaries of the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod congregations and rostered workers pray with heartfelt fervor and regularity to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into His harvest (Matt. 9:38); and be it further

Resolved, That Synod congregations and rostered workers vigorously pursue recruitment of able and apt men for the pastorate of the Synod (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1) under the Synod’s *Set Apart to Serve* initiative, and encourage and support prospective students to apply for the residential M.Div. program at CTSFW or CSL; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod congregations and their members generously support the work of CTSFW and CSL in providing a theologically rich, residential M.Div. program for the education, formation, and training of future pastors of the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That pastors, congregations, and officials of the Synod encourage men interested in ministry to seek theological education, formation, and training in one of the recognized ministry tracks for the pastoral office at CTSFW or CSL; and be it further

Resolved, That the district presidents with ecclesiastical oversight over the congregations and rostered workers advocating for, recruiting for, or teaching in LHOS and the CMPL admonish those congregations and rostered workers for placing at risk their own and the Synod’s faithfulness to Holy Scripture, the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the holy things of God; for breaking unity and fraternity by intentionally working against the Synod and its seminaries to recruit and train pastors, which harms

unity by militating against all things being done in order (1 Cor. 14:40); and for inviting false doctrine from and ecclesial association with heterodox church bodies, which militates against the Lord’s will that the church be kept in unity of faith and confession (Rom. 16:17); and be it further

Resolved, That, unless the congregations and rostered workers recruiting for, teaching in, and receiving church workers from LHOS and the CMPL heed the admonition of the district president under whose ecclesiastical supervision they stand, such rostered workers be subject to application of Bylaw 2.13.4, as having violated the conditions of membership (Const. Art. VI); and be it further

Resolved, That district presidents follow through on their ecclesiastical responsibility in the processes surrounding Bylaw 2.13.2; and be it finally

Resolved, That, if the district presidents fail to fulfill their duty to the Bylaws on behalf of the Synod toward those who persist in receiving church workers from LHOS and the CMPL or recruiting students for the same with the prospects of such reception, the President of the Synod exercise his duty under Const. Art. XIII and Bylaw section 2.15.

Pastors’ Conference
Mid-South District

Ov. 6-18

To Affirm Exclusive Use of Synod Seminaries to Prepare Men for Office of Holy Ministry

WHEREAS, The Lord Christ has called His Church to faithfulness in the things of God (John 8:31), which is sustained in the Church by the faithful transmission of the faith to and through the future pastors of the Church; and

WHEREAS, The Lord Christ has called His Church to love toward one another (John 13:35), which is exercised by the creation of agreed-upon modes of undertaking corporate action; and

WHEREAS, The Lord Christ has called His Church to a unity of faith that is identical with and tantamount to continuing steadfast in the apostles’ teaching (Acts 2:42), all the teachings of Holy Scripture and their expression in the Lutheran *Book of Concord*, that is, “the Gospel, in all its articles” (LCMS, *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles*, [adopted 1973], Article IV; see also John 17:20–21; Eph. 4:4–6; FC SD X 31); and

WHEREAS, Constitution Article III 1 reflects our Lord’s will by stating that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) shall “conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3–6; 1 Cor. 1:10), work through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom. 16:17), and heresy”; and

WHEREAS, In Article III 3, in pursuance of the aforementioned objective and in love, the Synod names and reserves for itself, on behalf of the members (that is, the rostered workers and congregations) of the Synod, the recruitment and training of pastors; and

WHEREAS, Likewise in pursuit of the objectives of the Synod, bylaws reserve for the two seminaries of the Synod, namely Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW), and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (CSL), the duty, to the exclusion of other seminaries, to educate, form, and train the pastors of the

Synod (Bylaw sections 2.7–8) (notwithstanding that bylaws countenance the possibility of a pastor from another church body later in life emerging from the darkness of a false confession, recognizing his agreement in doctrine and practice with the Synod, and wishing therefore to serve in the ministerium of the Synod by providing such men with the possibility of entering membership in the Synod via the colloquy program, Bylaw 3.10.2); and

WHEREAS, Through the exclusive use of its two seminaries and by His grace alone the Lord has for nearly 180 years preserved in the Synod the true confession of His name and practice that accords with it; and

WHEREAS, The education, formation, and training of pastors are best accomplished in a face-to-face, live, and residential setting, as the history of our two seminaries demonstrates; and

WHEREAS, The dangers of educating, forming, and training men for the ministry of the Synod in seminaries outside the oversight of the Synod associated with heterodox groups are patent; and

WHEREAS, The Center for Missional and Pastoral Leadership Formation (CMPL, *thecenter.info/cmpl*), an online seminary under the umbrella of the Institute for Lutheran Theology (Brookings, SD, *ilt.edu*) affiliated with the heterodox North American Lutheran Church, offers coursework to students from LCMS congregations leading to the Master of Arts (M.A.) in Religion, the Master of Ministry (M.Min.), and the Master of Divinity (M.Div.), the latter two of which are widely recognized as requisite education and formation for the pastorate (in other words, one would not seek the Master of Ministry or the M.Div. if he did not wish to become a pastor); and

WHEREAS, There have been leaders within the Synod who have indicated their intent to use their respective seminary programs to educate, form, and train pastors for the Synod; and

WHEREAS, The conditions of membership (Const. Art. VI) for all members of the Synod, both rostered workers and congregations, require the “renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description” and the “regular call of pastors” (which is defined in the Bylaw sections 2.7–8); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod gathered in convention affirm the residential M.Div. education, formation, and training of the future pastorate of the Synod as the standard within the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod congregations and rostered workers pray with heartfelt fervor and regularity to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into His harvest (Matt. 9:38); and be it further

Resolved, That Synod congregations and rostered workers turn with renewed vigor to the recruitment of able and apt men for the pastorate of the Synod (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1) and encourage and support them in completing the residential M.Div. program at CTSFW or CSL; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod congregations and their members generously support the work of CTSFW and CSL, in providing a theologically rich, residential M.Div. education, formation, and training for the future pastors of the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That no man be encouraged by pastors or congregations in the Synod to seek theological education, formation, and training for the pastoral office except at CTSFW or CSL; and be it further

Resolved, That the district presidents with ecclesiastical oversight over the congregations and rostered workers advocating

for, recruiting for, and teaching in Luther House of Study (*lutherhouseofstudy.org*) and the CMPL and using their graduates in church work offices admonish those congregations and rostered workers for placing at risk their own and the Synod’s faithfulness in the things of God; for breaking love by intentionally working against the Synod’s objective to recruit and train pastors and the agreed-upon means of achieving that objective, which harms love by militating against doing all things decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40); and for inviting false doctrine in from and ecclesial association with heterodox church bodies, which militates against the Lord’s will that the church be kept in unity of faith and confession (Rom. 16:17); and be it finally

Resolved, That unless the congregations and rostered workers advocating for, recruiting for, teaching in, and receiving church workers from Luther House of Study and the CMPL heed the admonition of the district president under whose ecclesiastical supervision they stand, such rostered workers be placed on restricted status (Bylaw 2.13.2) as having violated the conditions of membership (Const. Art. VI).

St. Paul
Milford Center, OH

Ov. 6-19

To Affirm Exclusive Use of Synod Seminaries to Prepare Men for Office of Holy Ministry

WHEREAS, The Lord Christ has called His Church to faithfulness in the things of God (John 8:31), which is sustained in the Church by the faithful transmission of the faith to and through the future pastors of the Church; and

WHEREAS, The Lord Christ has called His Church to love toward one another (John 13:35), which is exercised by the creation of agreed-upon modes of undertaking corporate action; and

WHEREAS, The Lord Christ has called His Church to a unity of faith that is identical with and tantamount to continuing steadfast in the apostles’ teaching (Acts 2:42), all the teachings of Holy Scripture and their expression in the Lutheran *Book of Concord*, that is, “the Gospel, in all its articles” (LCMS, *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles* [adopted 1973] Article IV; see also John 17:20–21; Eph. 4:4–6; FC SD X 31); and

WHEREAS, Constitution Article III 1 reflects our Lord’s will by stating that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) shall “Conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3–6; 1 Cor. 1:10), work through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom. 16:17), and heresy”; and

WHEREAS, In Article III 3, in pursuance of the aforementioned objective and in love, the Synod names and reserves for itself, on behalf of the members (that is, the rostered workers and congregations) of the Synod, the recruitment and training of pastors; and

WHEREAS, Likewise in pursuit of the objectives of the Synod, the Synod Bylaws reserve for the two seminaries of the Synod, namely Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW), and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (CSL), the duty, to the exclusion of other seminaries, to educate, form, and train the pastors of the Synod (Bylaw sections 2.7–8) (notwithstanding that the Bylaws countenance the possibility of a pastor from another church body later in life emerging from the darkness of a false confession,

recognizing his agreement in doctrine and practice with the Synod, and wishing therefore to serve in the ministerium of the Synod by providing such men with the possibility of entering membership in the Synod via the colloquy program [Bylaw 3.10.2]); and

WHEREAS, Through the exclusive use of its two seminaries and by His grace alone the Lord has for nearly 180 years preserved in the Synod the true confession of His name and practice that accords with it; and

WHEREAS, The education, formation, and training of pastors are best accomplished in a face-to-face, live, and residential setting, as the history of our two seminaries demonstrates; and

WHEREAS, The dangers of educating, forming, and training men for the ministry of the Synod in seminaries outside the oversight of the Synod associated with heterodox groups are patent; and

WHEREAS, The Center for Missional and Pastoral Leadership Formation (CMPL, *thecenter.info/cmpl*), an online seminary under the umbrella of the Institute for Lutheran Theology (Brookings, SD, *ilt.edu*) affiliated with the heterodox North American Lutheran Church, offers coursework to students from LCMS congregations leading to the Master of Arts in Religion, the Master of Ministry, and the Master of Divinity (M.Div.), the latter two of which are widely recognized as requisite education and formation for the pastorate (in other words, no one would seek the Master of Ministry or the M.Div. if he did not wish to become a pastor); and

WHEREAS, Unite Leadership Collective (ULC, *uniteleadership.org*) directs and facilitates the enrollment of students from LCMS congregations in the Master of Arts and the M.Div. programs of another online seminary, namely, Luther House of Study (LHOS, *lutherhouseofstudy.org*); and

WHEREAS, The plea to enroll students from leaders of ULC and the CMPL pivots on the pastor shortage in the LCMS, indicating that both entities wish to use their respective seminary programs to educate, form, and train pastors for the LCMS; and

WHEREAS, The conditions of membership (Const. Art. VI) for all members of the Synod, both rostered workers and congregations, require the “renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description” and the “regular call of pastors” (which is defined in Bylaw sections 2.7–8); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod gathered in convention rise and sing the *Te Deum* in thankfulness to the Lord for His gracious preservation of CTSFW and CSL, and for the faithful ministry of the nine generations of graduates in the congregations of the Synod, through whom as “fellow workers” (1 Cor. 3:9) the Lord has preserved the faith among us; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod gathered in convention affirm the residential M.Div. education, formation, and training of the future pastorate of the Synod as the standard within the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod congregations and rostered workers pray with heartfelt fervor and regularity to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into His harvest (Matt. 9:38); and be it further

Resolved, That Synod congregations and rostered workers turn with renewed vigor to the recruitment of able and apt men for the pastorate of the Synod (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1) and encourage and support them in completing the residential M.Div. program at CTSFW or CSL; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod congregations and their members generously support the work of CTSFW and CSL, in providing a

theologically rich, residential M.Div. education, formation, and training for the future pastors of the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That no man be encouraged by pastors or congregations in the Synod to seek theological education, formation, and training for the pastoral office except at CTSFW or CSL; and be it further

Resolved, That the district presidents with ecclesiastical oversight over the congregations and rostered workers advocating for, recruiting for, and teaching in LHOS and the CMPL and using their graduates in church work offices admonish those congregations and rostered workers for placing at risk their own and the Synod’s faithfulness in the things of God; for breaking love by intentionally working against the Synod’s Objective to recruit and train pastors and the agreed-upon means of achieving that objective, which harms love by militating against doing all things decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40); and for inviting false doctrine in from and ecclesial association with heterodox church bodies, which militates against the Lord’s will that the church be kept in unity of faith and confession (Rom. 16:17); and be it further

Resolved, That unless the congregations and rostered workers advocating for, recruiting for, teaching in, and receiving church workers from LHOS and the CMPL heed the admonition of the district president under whose ecclesiastical supervision they stand, such rostered workers be placed on restricted status (Bylaw 2.13.2) as having violated the conditions of membership (Const. Art. VI); and be it further

Resolved, That district presidents follow to their end the processes surrounding restricted status; and be it further

Resolved, That this resolution does not adjudicate specific cases but directs the proper ecclesiastical authorities to act in accordance with existing bylaws; and be it finally

Resolved, That if the district presidents fail to fulfill their duty to the Bylaws on behalf of the Synod toward those who persist in advocating for, recruiting for, teaching in, and employing as church workers graduates from Luther House of Study and the CMPL, the President of Synod exercise his duty under Const. Art. XIII and Bylaw section 2.15.

Good Shepherd
Lincoln, NE

Ov. 6-20

To Affirm Exclusive Use of Synod Seminaries to Prepare Men for Office of Holy Ministry

WHEREAS, The Lord Christ has called His Church to faithfulness in the things of God (John 8:31), which is sustained in the Church by the faithful transmission of the faith to and through the future pastors of the Church; and

WHEREAS, The Lord Christ has called His Church to love toward one another (John 13:35), which is exercised by the creation of agreed-upon modes of undertaking corporate action; and

WHEREAS, The Lord Christ has called His Church to a unity of faith that is identical with and tantamount to continuing steadfast in the apostles’ teaching (Acts 2:42), all the teachings of Holy Scripture, and their expression in the *Book of Concord*, that is, “the Gospel in all its articles” (LCMS, *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles*, [adopted 1973], Article IV; see also John 17:20–21; Eph. 4:4–6; FC SD X 31); and

WHEREAS, Constitution Article III 1 reflects our Lord's will by stating that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) shall “conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3–6; 1 Cor. 1:10), work through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom. 16:17), and heresy”; and

WHEREAS, Const. Art. III, in pursuance of the aforementioned objective and in love, names and reserves for itself, on behalf of the members of the Synod, that is, the rostered workers and congregations of the Synod, the recruitment and training of pastors; and

WHEREAS, Likewise in pursuit of the objectives of the Synod, bylaws reserve for the two seminaries, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW), and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (CSL), the duty, to the exclusion of other seminaries, to educate, form, and train the pastors of the Synod (Bylaw sections 2.7–8) (notwithstanding that bylaws countenance the possibility of a pastor from another church body later in life emerging from the darkness of a false confession, recognizing his agreement in doctrine and practice with the Synod, and wishing therefore to serve in the ministerium of the Synod by providing such men with the possibility of entering membership in the Synod via the colloquy program, Bylaw 3.10.2); and

WHEREAS, Through the exclusive use of its two seminaries and by His grace alone, the Lord has for nearly 180 years preserved in the Synod the true confession of His name and practice that accords with it; and

WHEREAS, The education, formation, and training of pastors are best accomplished in a face-to-face, live, and residential setting, as the history of our two seminaries demonstrates; and

WHEREAS, The Center for Missional and Pastoral Leadership (CMPL, thecenter.info/cmpl/), an online seminary under the umbrella of the Institute for Lutheran Theology (Brookings, SD, ilt.edu/), offers coursework to students from congregations of the Synod leading to the Master of Arts (M.A.) in Religion, the Master of Ministry (M.Min.), and the Master of Divinity (M.Div.), the latter two of which are widely recognized as requisite education and formation for the pastorate; and

WHEREAS, Unite Leadership Collective directs and facilitates the enrollment of students from congregations of the Synod in M.A. and M.Div. programs of another online seminary, namely, Luther House of Study (LHOS, lutherhouseofstudy.org/); and

WHEREAS, The Council of Presidents (COP) has unanimously stated:

We commit ourselves to direct potential students for the pastoral office only to the routes to ordination approved by and accountable to Synod. The Council will not place graduates from other programs. The Council members agree not to ordain graduates from other programs. (Roy S. Askins, “LCMS addresses unauthorized, non-LCMS pastoral formation programs,” *Reporter Online*, May 8, 2025, reporter.lcms.org/2025/lcms-addresses-unauthorized-non-lcms-pastoral-formation-programs/)

and

WHEREAS, The final resolved of 2023 Resolution 6-02A states, “That districts and members of the Synod honor, use, and promote Synod-approved programs and not create independent programs of pastoral preparation or direct men to pastoral preparation programs

outside of our Synod's seminaries as such efforts are not in accord with the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod (Const. Art. III 3; Bylaw 3.10.4)” (*Proceedings*, 161); and

WHEREAS, Members of the Synod are engaged in teaching for CMPL and LHOS; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod gathered in convention affirm the residential M.Div. education, formation, and training of future pastors as the standard within the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That 2023 Res. 6-02A be hereby reaffirmed and emphasized; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod gathered in convention affirm that the Synod alone will develop and operate other alternate routes to ordination, including the Specific Ministry Pastor program, the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology, the Center for Hispanic Studies, the Cross-cultural Ministry Center, etc.; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod congregations and rostered workers with heartfelt fervor and regularity to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into His harvest (Matt. 9:38); and be it further

Resolved, That Synod congregations and rostered workers turn with renewed vigor to the recruitment of able and apt men for the pastorate of the Synod (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1) and encourage and support them in completing the residential M.Div. program at CTSFW or CSL; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod congregations and their members generously support the work of CTSFW and CSL in providing a theologically rich residential M.Div. program for the education, formation, and training of future pastors of the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That no man be encouraged by a pastor or congregation in the Synod to seek theological education, formation, and training for the pastoral office except at CTSFW or CSL; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention hereby fraternally admonish and beseech all members of the Synod who are engaged in the process of granting M.Div. and M.Min. degrees at CMPL or LHOS to reconsider and desist from this course of action that is contrary to the objectives of the Synod, the unanimous statement of the COP, and 2023 Res. 6-02A.

Board of Directors
Southern Illinois District

Ov. 6-21

To Strengthen Pastoral Formation in the Synod

WHEREAS, The Synod “under Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions” has established the objective to “recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers” (Const. Art. III 3), and has developed bylaws, policies, and processes to fulfill this objective; and

WHEREAS, The Synod in convention has passed resolutions further defining the processes for pastoral formation; and

WHEREAS, Congregations and rostered church workers, as members of the Synod, have agreed to abide by these standards; and

WHEREAS, Para-church organizations have established online, quasi-seminaries that subvert our agreed upon processes of pastoral formation; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention condemn all efforts to use these unauthorized processes and organizations; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod leadership make diligent efforts to ensure that only properly authorized processes are being used; and be it finally

Resolved, That the President of the Synod exercise oversight and execute appropriate discipline on offending district presidents, rostered church workers, and congregations.

Circuit 7 (Fort Wayne South)
Indiana District

Ov. 6-22

To Comply with and Apply Constitution Article VI 3 regarding Regular Call

WHEREAS, Some persons and organizations have challenged the authority of our seminaries, placement officers, and district presidents to teach, examine, and place candidates for the pastoral ministry in cooperation with congregations who call them; and

WHEREAS, Constitution Article VI 3 demands that “Conditions for acquiring and holding membership in the Synod” include the “regular call of pastors and any commissioned ministers ... as also the blamelessness of the life of such”; and

WHEREAS, The Synod in its wisdom over the years has always given the authority to teach, examine, and place candidates for the pastoral ministry to its two seminary faculties, their respective boards of regents, the Council of Presidents (COP), and various placement officers responsible to these faculties, boards, and council; and

WHEREAS, This arrangement has prevented both the accumulation of too much authority in one small group or a single person and, at the same time, prevented various sectarian and independent-minded persons and congregations from abandoning the fellowship, unity, and doctrine of the Synod by teaching, examining, and placing candidates apart from the Synod’s established ways and means; and

WHEREAS, In one situation in 1975, known as the “Seminary in Exile” or “Seminex,” a group of faculty members who had left their legitimate calls attempted to examine and place candidates apart from the Synod’s established ways and means, and the Synod in its 1975 convention authorized the Synod President to remove from office any and all district presidents who ordained candidates that came from Seminex (1975 Res. 5-02A, “To Deal with District Presidents Who Have Ordained or Who Have Authorized Ordination of Persons Who Are Not Properly Endorsed,” *Proc.*, 122–24); and

WHEREAS, President Jacob A.O. Preus followed the mandate of the 1975 convention by removing four Seminex-ordaining district presidents from their office, which led to the departure of 250 congregations into the synod known as the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC), which soon thereafter made overtures to the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) and American Lutheran Church (ALC) to form a new synod, now called the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA); and

WHEREAS, The example of Seminex demonstrates how serious our forefathers considered, and how they acted in, cases where Constitution Article VI 3 has been violated; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention urge, by the mercies of God, those who are challenging the authority of our seminaries, placement officers, and district presidents to cease and desist from these sectarian and divisive actions; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention hereby authorize the Synod President and the COP to counsel those who are challenging the authority of our seminaries, placement officers, and district presidents; and be it further

Resolved, That only after futile admonition and in accord with Constitution Article VI 3, the Synod President with a majority vote of the COP, is hereby authorized to remove from membership and the roster of the Synod those persons and congregations who ordain or install pastoral candidates apart from the existing process, which involves the two seminary faculties, their respective boards of regents, the COP, and various placement officers responsible to these faculties, boards, and council; and be it finally

Resolved, That candidates for the pastoral ministry who have received training to be Christian pastors apart from the Synod pastoral education system submit to colloquy, in accord with the 2023 Synod Bylaws.

Grace
San Mateo, CA

Ov. 6-23

To Affirm That Pastoral Formation in the Synod Is Done by Synod-Approved Seminaries

WHEREAS, The Office of the Holy Ministry has been instituted by Christ Himself (John 20:19–23; Eph. 4:11–16); and

WHEREAS, An objective of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) is to “recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth” (Const. Art. III 3); and

WHEREAS, A central purpose in the formation of the LCMS, 179 years ago, was to share together in the task of preparing and recognizing LCMS pastors, whom LCMS congregations would then be free to choose and call for service. Thus, the Synod has, from its beginning, supported and operated its own seminaries: Concordia Seminary (CSL) and Concordia Theological Seminary (CTSFW); and

WHEREAS, In May 2025, the presidents of CSL and CTSFW wrote letters to the Synod responding to questions about non-LCMS online theological programs appealing to LCMS students and donors; and

WHEREAS, The presidents of CSL and CTSFW clearly stated in their letters that graduates of these non-approved programs may not be ordained or installed in an LCMS congregation or ministry and that these non-approved programs are neither owned, operated, nor governed by the Synod; and

WHEREAS, These two presidents (of CSL and CTSFW) are two of the three members of the Pastoral Formation Committee, whose primary role is “ensuring that the Synod’s objective of training pastors is fulfilled consistently (Constitution Art. III 3)” (Bylaw 3.10.4); and

WHEREAS, The 2023 Synod convention, in Resolution 6-02A, “To Encourage Proper Pastoral Formation through Our Synod’s Seminaries,” resolved that “districts and members of the Synod honor, use, and promote Synod-approved programs and not create

independent programs of pastoral preparation or direct men to pastoral preparation programs outside of our Synod's seminaries" (*Proc.*, 160–61); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention acknowledge and affirm Bylaw 2.5.2 regarding calls and proper service, which states:

Congregations that are members of the Synod and their association schools shall call and be served only by (1) ordained ministers who have been admitted to their respective ministries in accordance with the rules and regulations set forth in these Bylaws and have thereby become members of the Synod; (2) candidates for the pastoral ministry who have satisfied the qualifications and requirements for assignment of first calls by the Council of Presidents acting as the Board of Assignments; or (3) ordained ministers who are members in good standing of church bodies that have been formally recognized to be in altar and pulpit fellowship with the Synod when agreements for such calls are in place.

and be it further

Resolved, That any congregation that should call or be served by a man not certified to serve as a pastor in the Synod be addressed by the appropriate Synod disciplinary process as described in Bylaw 2.5.4, which states:

Congregations that violate these requirements and persist in such violation shall, after due admonition, forfeit their membership in the Synod.

and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention also acknowledge and affirm Bylaws 2.6.2. and 2.6.4, regarding qualifications for and the right to Synod membership, which state:

Individuals who have been declared qualified for a first call and assigned first calls in accordance with Bylaw sections 2.7–2.9 shall, by the rites of both ordination or commissioning and installation in accordance with Bylaw section 2.10, become members of the Synod.

...

There is no inherent right to membership in the Synod, and the decision as to qualification for a first call and the assignment of first calls shall be at the sole discretion of the Synod.

and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to God for the work of our seminaries, CSL and CTSFW, and the Gospel they proclaim.

Missouri District

Ov. 6-24

To Affirm Exclusive Use of Synod Seminaries to Prepare Men for Office of Holy Ministry

WHEREAS, The Lord Christ has called His Church to faithfulness in the things of God (John 8:31), which is sustained in the Church by the faithful transmission of the faith to and through the future pastors of the Church; and

WHEREAS, The Lord Christ has called His Church to love toward one another (John 13:35), which is exercised by the creation of agreed-upon modes of undertaking corporate action; and

WHEREAS, The Lord Christ has called His Church to a unity of faith that is identical with, and tantamount to continuing steadfast

in the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42; see also John 17:20–21; Eph. 4:4–6; FC SD X 31); and

WHEREAS, Constitution Article III 1 reflects our Lord's will by stating that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) shall "conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3–6; 1 Cor. 1:10), work through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom. 16:17), and heresy," in part by the recruitment and training of pastors; and

WHEREAS, Bylaws reserve for the seminaries of the Synod the duty, to the exclusion of other institutions, to educate, form, train, and certify the pastors of the Synod, which is ideally done face-to-face, live, and in a residential setting (Bylaws sections 2.7–8); and

WHEREAS, Bylaws provide for men in willing agreement to the doctrine and practice of the Synod to serve as pastors through the colloquy program (Bylaw 3.10.2); and

WHEREAS, 2007 Resolution 5-01B, "To Establish Specific Ministry Pastor Program," approved the non-residential Specific Ministry Program for those training to become pastors in exceptional circumstances through our two seminaries (Bylaw 2.13.1); and

WHEREAS, There are clear dangers in educating, forming, and training men for the ministry in the Synod at seminaries outside the oversight of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, The Center for Missional and Pastoral Leadership (CMPL, thecenter.info/cmpl), an online seminary under the umbrella of the Institute for Lutheran Theology (Brookings, SD, ilt.edu) and affiliated with the heterodox North American Lutheran Church, offers coursework to students from Synod congregations leading to the Master of Arts (M.A.) in Religion, the Master of Ministry (M.Min.), and Master of Divinity (M.Div.), the latter two of which are widely recognized as requisite education and formation for the pastorate; and

WHEREAS, Unite Leadership Collective (ULC, uniteleadership.org) directs and facilitates the enrollment of students from LCMS congregations in the M.A. and M.Div. programs of another online seminary, namely, Luther House of Study (LHOS, lutherhouseofstudy.org); and

WHEREAS, The plea to enroll students from leaders of ULC and the CMPL appeals to a perceived pastor shortage in Synod, indicating that both entities wish to use their respective seminary programs to educate, form, and train pastors for the Synod; and

WHEREAS, The conditions of membership (Const. Art. VI) for all members of the Synod, both rostered workers and congregations, require the "renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description" and the "regular call of pastors" (which is defined in Bylaw sections 2.7–8); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod gathered in convention rise and sing the *Te Deum* in thankfulness to the Lord for His gracious preservation of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW), and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (CSL), and for the faithful ministry of the nine generations of graduates in the congregations of the Synod, through whom as "fellow workers" (1 Cor. 3:9) the Lord has preserved the faith among us; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod gathered in convention affirm the residential M.Div. education, formation, and training of the future pastorate of the Synod as the standard within the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod congregations and rostered workers pray with heartfelt fervor and regularity to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into His harvest (Matt. 9:38); and be it further

Resolved, That Synod congregations and rostered workers turn with renewed vigor to the recruitment of able and apt men for the pastorate of the Synod (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1) and encourage and support them in completing the residential M.Div. program at CTSFW or CSL; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod congregations and their members generously support the work of CTSFW and CSL in providing a theologically rich, residential M.Div. program for the education, formation, and training of future pastors of the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That no man be encouraged by pastors or congregations in the Synod to seek theological education, formation, and training for the pastoral office except at CTSFW or CSL; and be it further

Resolved, That the district presidents with ecclesiastical oversight over the congregations and rostered workers advocating for, recruiting for, and teaching in LHOS and the CMPL, and using their graduates in church work offices admonish those congregations and rostered workers for placing at risk their own and the Synod's faithfulness in the things of God; for breaking love by intentionally working against the Synod's objective to recruit and train pastors and the agreed-upon means of achieving that objective, which harms love by militating against doing all things decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40); and for inviting false doctrine from and ecclesial association with heterodox church bodies, which militates against the Lord's will that the church be kept in unity of faith and confession (Rom. 16:17); and be it further

Resolved, That unless the congregations and rostered workers advocating for, recruiting for, teaching in, and receiving church workers from LHOS and CMPL heed the admonition of the district president under whose ecclesiastical supervision they stand, such rostered workers be placed on restricted status (Bylaw 2.13.2) as having violated the conditions of membership (Const. Art. VI); and be it further

Resolved, That district presidents follow to their end the processes surrounding restricted status; and be it finally

Resolved, That if the district presidents fail to fulfill their duty to the Bylaws on behalf of the Synod toward those who persist in advocating for, recruiting for, teaching in, and employing as church workers graduates from LHOS and the CMPL, the President of Synod exercise his duty under Const. Art. XIII and Bylaw section 2.15.

Pastors' Conference
Indiana District

Ov. 6-25

To Seek *Koinonia* on Pastoral Formation and Routes to Ministry

WHEREAS, Jesus instructs us that the "harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Luke 10:2 NIV); and

WHEREAS, The issue of pastoral formation has received much attention in both official and unofficial forums over the last decade; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has historically recognized the need for collegial debate, collaborative decision-making, and consensus building, enshrining "the example of the apostolic church", "Acts 15:1-31," in the Constitution Preamble; and

WHEREAS, The witness of Scripture and the Early Christian Church was that "after there had been much debate" (Acts 15:7) on the controverted matter regarding the circumcision of Gentile converts a decision was made; and

WHEREAS, The Scriptures teach us to love one another and seek unity (1 Peter 1:3-8; Col. 3:12-14; Eph. 4:3); and

WHEREAS, The November 2025 report of the three-person Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) "Policy Requirements for the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) Program" (files.lcms.org/dl/f/smp-policy-requirements) has generated even more controversy, both for those who seek greater flexibility and those desiring greater limitation; and

WHEREAS, Concern has been generated by the development of non-Synod approved training programs by members of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, A variety of gatherings have sought to discuss the issue of pastoral formation outside a structured *Koinonia* process, leading to much conversation but little "mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren" (SA III IV); and

WHEREAS, A review of Synod resolutions shows a rich history and adaptive practice concerning pastoral formation and routes to ministry; and

WHEREAS, The *Koinonia* Project provides members of the Synod with a means through which we pray God will give greater harmony in our Synod's "Life Together" by showing where there is agreement and disagreement, and identifying how we as a church can move toward greater unity in teaching and practice; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention encourage the spirit of *koinonia* (fraternal conversation) throughout all the members and entities of the Synod concerning pastoral formation and routes to ministry; and be it further

Resolved, That the Council of Presidents (COP), the office of the President (OTP), and the PFC establish a process as described in Acts 15 of not less than two years that allows for much fraternal discussion and edification with respect to pastoral formation and routes to ministry, including residential and contextual methodologies; and be it further

Resolved, That the PFC, in cooperation with the COP and the OTP, utilizing past resolutions, reports, and current best practices in educational methodologies and outcomes, produce a joint document to be presented to facilitate a broad-based *koinonia* in a manner that allows for appropriate theological reflection, study, and feedback for implementation; and be it further

Resolved, That this process and document would also facilitate a rich discussion on the policy requirements for the SMP program in light of and in conjunction with an ongoing participation in the general ministry certification; and be it further

Resolved, That this process would preferably involve face-to-face discussions within circuits and districts between leaders, including laymen, that reflect the divergent and diverse positions with the process and the participants to be determined by consensus of the COP, OTP, and PFC; and be it finally

Resolved, That this process would produce a plan that would be presented at the 2029 Synod convention.

Board of Directors
Nebraska District

Ov. 6-26

To Seek *Koinonia* on Pastoral Formation and Routes to Ministry

WHEREAS, The issue of pastoral formation has received much attention in both official and unofficial forums of the Synod over the last decade; and

WHEREAS, Since 2010, the *Koinonia* Project has been developed and employed by the Synod with “the prayer that there be a cultural shift toward more open and honest discussion under the Word of God” (2016 Res. 4-05A, “To Continue and Expand the *Koinonia* Project,” *Proceedings*, 148); and

WHEREAS, The Synod in convention adopted 2016 Resolution 4-05A, resolving that “each member of the Synod and each member of a Synod congregation will follow the principles of the *Koinonia* Project, namely, that when there is disagreement regarding doctrine and practice the baptized will come together through their unity in Christ to live out that unity as they study the Word of God and pray”; and

WHEREAS, Various activities, statements, and reports since Jan. 1, 2025, have generated controversy within the Synod on the issue of pastoral formation and routes to ministry, evidencing disagreement within the Synod on the issue; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention encourage the spirit of *koinonia* (fraternal conversation) throughout all the members and entities of the Synod concerning pastoral formation and routes to ministry; and be it further

Resolved, That the Council of Presidents, the Office of the President, and the Pastoral Formation Committee establish and initiate a synodwide process consistent with the *Koinonia* Project of not less than two years that allows for much fraternal discussion and edification with respect to pastoral formation, including existing and potential routes to ministry, and anticipated future ministry needs for the members of the Synod; and be it finally

Resolved, That this process shall include face-to-face discussions within all circuits and districts of the Synod involving ministry leaders (ordained, commissioned, and lay) to reflect the various views, perspectives, and contexts in which the members of the Synod carry out ministry.

St. John
Seward, NE

Ov. 6-27

To Encourage Brotherly Speech about All Approved Pastoral Formation Routes and To Review Specific Ministry Pastor Pathways

WHEREAS, Our Lord commands His disciples to love one another and to use words that give grace (John 13:34–35; Eph. 4:29); and

WHEREAS, Our Lord tells His disciples that the “harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few,” (Matt. 9:37) and calls His

disciples to, “therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest,” (Matt. 9:38); and

WHEREAS, The Augsburg Confession (AC) teaches that “the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted” (AC V) and that “no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call” (AC XIV); and

WHEREAS, The Augsburg Confession and its Apology (Ap) confess that for the Church’s unity “it is enough to agree about the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments” (AC VII 2; Ap VII&VIII [IV] 30); and

WHEREAS, The Small Catechism bids us under the Eighth Commandment to “defend [our neighbor], speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way”; and

WHEREAS, Luther exhorted this same brotherly encouragement amongst those serving in pastoral ministry in his Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope (Tr), “In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul makes ministers equal. He also teaches that the Church is superior to [or *more than*] the ministers. Superiority or lordship over the Church or the rest of the ministers is not attributed to Peter. For he says, ‘All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas’ [3:21–22]. That is, do not let the other ministers or Peter assume for themselves lordship or superiority over the Church. Do not let them burden the Church with traditions. Do let the authority of anyone prevail more than God’s Word. Do not let the authority of Cephas be opposed to the authority of the other apostles, as they reasoned at the time, ‘Cephas, who is an apostle of higher rank, observes this. Therefore, both Paul and the rest ought to observe this.’ Paul removes this claim from Peter and denies that his authority is to be preferred to the rest or to the Church” (Tr 11); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod exhort pastors, professors, and congregational leaders to adopt a pastoral attitude of brotherly care toward all men serving through Synod approved routes to the pastoral office, including those in alternative or nonresidential programs, by refraining from labels or slogans that imply tiers among pastors, such as using “gold standard” to describe residential education over and above other routes towards ordination approved by the Synod, and outlined in Bylaw sections 2.6–2.10, and by practicing the Eighth Commandment through prayer, mentoring, welcome into circuit life, and encouragement in ongoing theological study; and be it further

Resolved, That official communications, curricular materials, and public forums of the Synod and its entities use consistent, upbuilding language when speaking of residential and nonresidential pastoral formation routes alike; and be it further

Resolved, That the appropriate Synod boards and commissions, in consultation with both seminaries and the Council of Presidents, review bylaws and policies related to the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program, including continuing-education expectations and years-in-ministry benchmarks, and bring recommendations that clarify fair and orderly pathways by which experienced SMP pastors, meeting defined theological and pastoral competencies, may be examined for eligibility to serve in general pastoral service; and be it further

Resolved, That this report and any proposed changes be published on the Synod website and submitted for inclusion in the *Workbook* no later than 180 days prior to the opening of the 2029 Synod convention; and be it finally

Resolved, That we commend one another to the Lord of the Church and seek to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3), so that our life together may bear a clear confession of Christ to the world.

Circuit 9
Texas District

Ov. 6-28

To Discuss Online Theological Education

WHEREAS, The Synod has a rich tradition of rigorous theological education and formation, for pastors and laity; and

WHEREAS, The primary focus of this theological education has historically been placed on the formation of future pastors at one of our residential seminaries; and

WHEREAS, The development of new digital technologies has created resources for furthering theological study in non-residential educational contexts; and

WHEREAS, The Specific Ministry Pastor program has served a specific constituency of the Synod with online theological education, yet other online sources have arisen in recent years both inside the Synod and outside of the Synod to fill this gap in theological education; and

WHEREAS, Increasing demand exists for theological education among many sectors of the Synod, including theologically interested laity, lay leaders serving in their local congregations, pre-seminary candidates, pastors seeking continuing education, among others; and

WHEREAS, The theological faculties of our seminaries and universities have much theological wisdom to offer congregations, church workers, and future church workers of the Synod; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention restate its commitment to residential pastoral formation as the primary and most beneficial means for the raising up of clergy and future theological leaders of our church body; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention also acknowledge the opportunities that exist to promote theological education using online resources by employing the theological and pedagogical excellence of our seminary and university faculties; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention commit itself to discussion of how online theological education might best serve the interests and needs of the congregations, church workers, and future church workers of the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That the Office of the President of the Synod establish a task force on online theological education in the next triennium, to include representatives from our seminaries, Concordia University System theology faculties, Office of Pastoral Education, Pastoral Formation Committee, and Council of Presidents, among others deemed suitable for this discussion; and be it finally

Resolved, That the task force report to the 2029 convention with specific recommendations for promoting online theological education in a way that supports and complements our residential seminaries, yet also meets the needs of our church body, such as lay theological education, lay congregational service, pre-seminary coursework, and continuing theological education for pastors and other church workers.

Christ, La Mesa, CA; Circuit 9 (Decatur), Indiana District

Ov. 6-29

To Encourage Synod Seminaries to Develop Online Master of Divinity Program

WHEREAS, The Synod has long recognized the importance of rigorous theological education and faithful pastoral formation through its two seminaries, Concordia Seminary (CSL) and Concordia Theological Seminary (CTSFW); and

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture affirms the necessity of equipping faithful shepherds for the Church, as St. Paul writes, “And he gave ... pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11–12, author translation), and further exhorts that a pastor “must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught” (Titus 1:9); and

WHEREAS, The Synod faces ongoing challenges in recruiting and preparing men for pastoral ministry, particularly in rural, underserved, and bi-vocational contexts; and

WHEREAS, Advances in digital learning platforms and theological pedagogy now make it possible to deliver high-quality, confessional instruction in online formats without compromising academic integrity or ecclesial accountability; and

WHEREAS, The academic landscape has seen accelerated use of remote learning across educational institutions, including the Synod seminaries, demonstrating both feasibility and demand for flexible theological education; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has resolved, in 2023 Res. 1-08A, “To Promote and Commend the Synod’s Digital and Online Resources” and, in 2023 Res. 6-02A, “To Encourage Proper Pastoral Formation through Our Synod’s Seminaries,” to discourage independent pastoral formation programs not authorized by the Synod; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention encourage CSL and CTSFW, in consultation with the Synod’s Pastoral Formation Committee, to explore and develop an affordable, accredited, online Master of Divinity program that maintains the theological depth, pastoral formation, and confessional integrity required for ordination in the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That such a program include robust mentorship, field education, and residential intensives as needed to ensure spiritual formation and ecclesial connection; and be it finally

Resolved, That the seminaries report progress on this initiative to the next Synod convention, including feasibility, timeline, and anticipated impact on pastoral recruitment and formation.

Circuit 29
Texas District

Ov. 6-30

To Encourage Pilot Online-Only Master of Divinity with Synod Seminaries

WHEREAS, the Synod’s objectives include “recruit[ing] and train[ing] pastors ... and provid[ing] opportunity for their continuing growth” (Const. Art. III 3), and the Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) is charged “with ensuring that the Synod’s objective of training pastors is fulfilled consistently,” with seminaries governed by boards of regents (Bylaws 3.10.4, 3.10.5); and

WHEREAS, “Seminaries will implement new routes to ordination only upon approval by resolution of the Synod” (Bylaw 3.10.4.2), yet a change in delivery mode for an existing Master of Divinity (M.Div.) is not a “new route,” and formation quality remains the standard; and

WHEREAS, Synod Bylaws have provided for preparation that “involv[es] extensive use of distance learning and/or a mentoring system,” while still requiring faculty certification and regular processes for first-call eligibility (2023 Bylaw 2.7.3, prior to non-substantive consolidation by the Commission on Handbook, Aug. 5, 2024); and

WHEREAS, Vicarage is required for all seminary students and “every vicar shall be assigned by the Council of Presidents, acting as the Board of Assignments” (Bylaw 3.10.5.7.10 [h][1–2]), ensuring district oversight; and

WHEREAS, Candidates must be declared qualified, receive and accept a call through assignment by the Board of Assignments, and proceed to ordination under district supervision; these standards are unchanged by this proposal (Bylaws 2.9.1; 2.10.2–2.10.4); and

WHEREAS, Augsburg Confession Article XIV teaches “that no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, unless he be regularly called,” a norm this pilot fully preserves; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has affirmed residential seminary education as the preferred option while encouraging proper pastoral formation through our seminaries (2019 Res. 6-02, “To Promote Residential Seminary Education as the Preferred Option for the Preparation of Men for Pastoral Ministry,” *Proceedings*, 158–59; 2023 Res. 6-02A, “To Encourage Proper Pastoral Formation through Our Synod’s Seminaries,” *Proc.*, 160–61); and

WHEREAS, The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) 2020 Standards permit comprehensive distance education and have no residency requirements for any degree except the Ph.D., contingent on approvals and quality with regular and substantive interaction (*ats.edu/Standards-Of-Accreditation*); and

WHEREAS, Both Concordia Theological Seminary (CTSFW) and Concordia Seminary (CSL) possess the governance, faculty oversight, admissions, curricular, assessment, and student-care policies required to administer such a pilot under Synod Bylaws and ATS accreditation; and

WHEREAS, Congregations and circuit forums may submit overtures to the Synod in convention following the Secretary’s instructions (Bylaw 3.1.6.2); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod encourage CTSFW and CSL to design and implement a joint or parallel online-only M.Div. pilot within the next three years, consistent with all applicable Synod Bylaws and resolutions and ATS accreditation standards; and be it further

Resolved, That admissions criteria and the initial cohort size(s) be set by each seminary under existing policies, with attention to academic readiness and pastoral aptitude; and be it further

Resolved, That field education and vicarage be conducted through supervised local placements under district oversight, with supervising pastors approved by the district president or his designee, faculty-defined outcomes, documented competencies, and mid-term/final evaluations, and that vicarages be assigned by the Council of Presidents (COP) as required; and be it further

Resolved, That CTSFW and CSL define and publish program governance, curriculum delivery, assessment (including proctored

and authentic evaluations), worship and devotional formation in an online environment, technology requirements, student support and duty-of-care, and safeguarding policies appropriate to online pastoral formation; and be it further

Resolved, That CTSFW and CSL secure all necessary ATS approvals for comprehensive distance education and any state or federal authorizations, maintaining program quality consistent with ATS Standards and “regular and substantive interaction” (The Commission on Accrediting, *2020 Standards of Accreditation*, [2020], 3, *ats.edu/Standards-Of-Accreditation*); and be it further

Resolved, That this pilot changes only instructional delivery and does not alter ordination standards, vicarage requirements, or first-call qualification processes; and be it further

Resolved, That the seminaries, in consultation with the Office of Pastoral Education and the COP, develop a practical plan for marketing, applicant screening, local site identification, supervising-pastor training, vicarage workflow, and the first enrollment cycle; and be it further

Resolved, That CTSFW and CSL identify internal and external funding sources as needed and report any funding needs to the appropriate Synod boards or commissions without specifying dollar amounts; and be it further

Resolved, That CTSFW and CSL report annually to the PFC, to the two boards of regents in joint session, and to the next Synod convention on approvals secured, enrollments, retention and completion, learning-outcome attainment, vicarage evaluations, first-call placement, student-support metrics, technology reliability, and budget impact, together with recommendations; and be it further

Resolved, That the pilot sunset after placement of the first full graduating cohort unless:

- (a) renewed by the respective boards of regents based on meeting the following metrics:
 - (1) each seminary’s board and faculty govern the pilot,
 - (2) ATS approval is secured, and
 - (3) Standard operating procedures are aligned to Synod Bylaws and ATS policies;
- and
- (b) reported for information to the Synod convention;

and be it finally

Resolved, That this overture be commended for use by any congregation or circuit wishing to encourage this pilot.

Christ Greenfield, Gilbert, AZ;
Circuit 28, Pacific Southwest District

Ov. 6-31

To Encourage Pilot Non-Residential Master of Divinity with Synod Seminaries

WHEREAS, the Synod’s objectives include “recruit[ing] and train[ing] pastors ... and provid[ing] opportunity for their continuing growth” (Const. Art. III 3), and the Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) is charged “with ensuring that the Synod’s objective of training pastors is fulfilled consistently,” with seminaries governed by boards of regents (Bylaws 3.10.4, 3.10.5); and

WHEREAS, “Seminaries will implement new routes to ordination only upon approval by resolution of the Synod” (Bylaw 3.10.4.2), yet a change in delivery mode for an existing Master of Divinity (M.Div.) is not a “new route,” and formation quality remains the standard; and

WHEREAS, Synod Bylaws have provided for preparation that “involv[es] extensive use of distance learning and/or a mentoring system,” while still requiring faculty certification and regular processes for first-call eligibility (2023 Bylaw 2.7.3, prior to non-substantive consolidation by the Commission on Handbook, Aug. 5, 2024); and

WHEREAS, Vicarage is required for all seminary students and “every vicar shall be assigned by the Council of Presidents, acting as the Board of Assignments” (Bylaw 3.10.5.7.10 [h][1–2]), ensuring district oversight; and

WHEREAS, Candidates must be declared qualified, receive and accept a call through assignment by the Board of Assignments, and proceed to ordination under district supervision; these standards are unchanged by this proposal (Bylaws 2.9.1; 2.10.2–2.10.4); and

WHEREAS, Augsburg Confession Article XIV teaches “that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called,” a norm this pilot fully preserves; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has affirmed residential seminary education as the preferred option while encouraging proper pastoral formation through our seminaries (2019 Res. 6-02, “To Promote Residential Seminary Education as the Preferred Option for the Preparation of Men for Pastoral Ministry,” *Proceedings*, 158–59; 2023 Res. 6-02A, “To Encourage Proper Pastoral Formation through Our Synod’s Seminaries,” *Proc.*, 160–61); and

WHEREAS, The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) 2020 Standards permit comprehensive distance education and have no residency requirements for any degree except the Ph.D., contingent on approvals and quality with regular and substantive interaction (*ats.edu/Standards-Of-Accreditation*); and

WHEREAS, Both Concordia Theological Seminary (CTSFW) and Concordia Seminary (CSL) possess the governance, faculty oversight, admissions, curricular, assessment, and student-care policies required to administer such a pilot under Synod Bylaws and ATS accreditation; and

WHEREAS, Congregations and circuit forums may submit overtures to the Synod in convention following the Secretary’s instructions (Bylaw 3.1.6.2); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod encourage CTSFW and CSL to design and implement a joint or parallel non-residential M.Div. pilot within the next three years, consistent with all applicable Synod Bylaws and resolutions and ATS accreditation standards; and be it further

Resolved, That admissions criteria and the initial cohort size(s) be set by each seminary under existing policies, with attention to academic readiness and pastoral aptitude; and be it further

Resolved, That field education and vicarage be conducted through supervised local placements under district oversight, with supervising pastors approved by the district president or his designee, faculty-defined outcomes, documented competencies, and mid-term/final evaluations, and that vicarages be assigned by the Council of Presidents (COP) as required; and be it further

Resolved, That CTSFW and CSL define and publish program governance, curriculum delivery, assessment (including proctored

and authentic evaluations), worship, and devotional formation in an online environment, technology requirements, student support and duty-of-care, and safeguarding policies appropriate to online pastoral formation; and be it further

Resolved, That CTSFW and CSL secure all necessary ATS approvals for comprehensive distance education and any state or federal authorizations, maintaining program quality consistent with ATS Standards and “regular and substantive interaction” (The Commission on Accrediting, *2020 Standards of Accreditation*, [2020], 3, *ats.edu/Standards-Of-Accreditation*); and be it further

Resolved, That this pilot changes only instructional delivery and does not alter ordination standards, vicarage requirements, or first-call qualification processes; and be it further

Resolved, That the seminaries, in consultation with the Office of Pastoral Education and the COP, develop a practical plan for marketing, applicant screening, local site identification, supervising-pastor training, vicarage workflow, and the first enrollment cycle; and be it further

Resolved, That CTSFW and CSL identify internal and external funding sources as needed and report any funding needs to the appropriate Synod boards or commissions without specifying dollar amounts; and be it further

Resolved, That CTSFW and CSL report annually to the PFC, to the two boards of regents in joint session, and to the next Synod convention on approvals secured, enrollments, retention and completion, learning-outcome attainment, vicarage evaluations, first-call placement, student-support metrics, technology reliability, and budget impact, together with recommendations; and be it further

Resolved, That the pilot sunset after placement of the first full graduating cohort unless:

- (a) renewed by the respective boards of regents based on meeting the following metrics:
 - (1) each seminary’s board and faculty govern the pilot,
 - (2) ATS approval is secured, and
 - (3) Standard operating procedures are aligned to Synod Bylaws and ATS policies;
- and
- (b) reported for information to the Synod convention;

and be it finally

Resolved, That this overture be commended for use by any congregation or circuit wishing to encourage this pilot.

Circuit 16 (Faribault)
Minnesota South District

Ov. 6-32

To Encourage Pilot Hybrid Master of Divinity with Synod Seminaries

WHEREAS, the Synod’s objectives include “recruit[ing] and train[ing] pastors ... and provid[ing] opportunity for their continuing growth” (Const. Art. III 3), and the Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) is charged “with ensuring that the Synod’s objective of training pastors is fulfilled consistently,” with seminaries governed by boards of regents (Bylaws 3.10.4, 3.10.5); and

WHEREAS, “Seminaries will implement new routes to ordination only upon approval by resolution of the Synod” (Bylaw 3.10.4.2), yet a change in delivery mode for an existing Master of Divinity (M.Div.) is not a new route and formation quality remains the standard; and

WHEREAS, Synod Bylaws have provided for preparation that “involv[es] extensive use of distance learning and/or a mentoring system,” while still requiring faculty certification and regular processes for first-call eligibility (2023 Bylaw 2.7.3, prior to non-substantive consolidation by the Commission on Handbook, Aug. 5, 2024); and

WHEREAS, Vicarage is required for all seminary students and “every vicar shall be assigned by the Council of Presidents, acting as the Board of Assignments” (Bylaw 3.10.5.7.10 [h][2]), ensuring district oversight; and

WHEREAS, Candidates must be declared qualified, receive and accept a call through assignment by the Board of Assignments, and proceed to ordination under district supervision (Bylaws 2.9.1; 2.10.2–4; AC XIV); these standards are unchanged by this proposal; and

WHEREAS, The 2019 and 2023 Synod conventions affirmed robust seminary formation, identifying residential education as preferred while encouraging appropriate use of distance modalities for pastoral formation (2019 Res. 6-02, “To Promote Residential Seminary Education as the Preferred Option for the Preparation of Men for Pastoral Ministry; 2023 Res. 6-02A, “To Encourage Proper Pastoral Formation through Our Synod’s Seminaries”); and

WHEREAS, The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) 2020 Standards permit hybrid and distance education and set no residency requirement for master’s degrees, contingent on approvals and quality with regular and substantive interaction (ATS, ats.edu/Standards-Of-Accreditation, accessed Mar. 2, 2026); and

WHEREAS, “The State of the LCMS Survey: 2025,” an informal, self-selected sample of 1,054 Synod pastors, staff, and lay leaders conducted by Rev. Zach Zehnder, President of *Red Letter Living*, reports that 60.2 percent of respondents indicate LCMS should offer an online option for the M.Div., that “reaching and retaining youth” is the most-selected challenge (44.3 percent), that a majority perceive national-level confidence gaps, and that pastoral pipeline concerns are widespread; while not a scientific poll, its findings align with known trends and signal openness to accredited online preparation; and

WHEREAS, Both Concordia Theological Seminary (CTSFW) and Concordia Seminary (CSL) possess the governance, faculty oversight, admissions, curricular, assessment, and student-care policies required to administer such a pilot under Synod Bylaws and ATS accreditation (Bylaws 3.10.5; 3.10.5.7); and

WHEREAS, Congregations and circuit forums may submit overtures to the Synod in convention following the Secretary’s instructions (Bylaw 3.1.6.2); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod encourage CTSFW and CSL to design and implement a joint or parallel hybrid M.Div. pilot within the next three years, consistent with all applicable Synod Bylaws and resolutions and ATS accreditation standards; and be it further

Resolved, That admissions criteria and the initial cohort size(s) be set by each seminary under existing policies, with attention to academic readiness and pastoral aptitude; and be it further

Resolved, That field education and vicarage be conducted through supervised local placements under district oversight, with supervising pastors approved by the district president or his designee, faculty-defined outcomes, documented competencies, and mid-term/final evaluations, and that vicarages be assigned by the Council of Presidents (COP) as required; and be it further

Resolved, That CTSFW and CSL define and publish program governance, curriculum delivery, assessment (including proctored and authentic evaluations), worship and devotional formation in a hybrid environment, technology requirements, student support and duty-of-care, and safeguarding policies appropriate to hybrid pastoral formation; and be it further

Resolved, That CTSFW and CSL secure all necessary ATS approvals for hybrid and distance education and any state or federal authorizations, maintaining program quality consistent with ATS standards and regular and substantive interaction; and be it further

Resolved, That this pilot changes only instructional delivery and does not alter ordination standards, vicarage requirements, or first-call qualification processes; and be it further

Resolved, That the seminaries, in consultation with the Office of Pastoral Education and the COP, develop a practical plan for marketing, applicant screening, local site identification, supervising-pastor training, vicarage workflow, and the first enrollment cycle, with attention to survey-identified needs (e.g., youth engagement, trust-building communication, pastoral pipeline); and be it further

Resolved, That CTSFW and CSL identify internal and external funding sources as needed and report any funding needs to the appropriate Synod boards or commissions without specifying dollar amounts; and be it further

Resolved, That CTSFW and CSL report annually to the PFC, to the two boards of regents in joint session, and to the 2029 Synod convention on approvals secured, enrollments, retention and completion, learning-outcome attainment, vicarage evaluations, first-call placement, student-support metrics, technology reliability, and budget impact, together with recommendations; and be it further

Resolved, That the pilot sunset after placement of the first full graduating cohort unless:

- (a) renewed by the respective boards of regents based on meeting the following metrics:
 - (1) each seminary’s board and faculty govern the pilot,
 - (2) ATS approval is secured, and
 - (3) Standard operating procedures are aligned to Synod Bylaws and ATS policies;

and

(b) reported for information to the Synod convention; and be it finally

Resolved, That this overture be commended for use by any congregation or circuit wishing to encourage this pilot.

South Lake
League City, TX

Ov. 6-33**To Address Pastoral Formation and Routes to Ministry**

WHEREAS, Jesus instructs us that the “harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Luke 10:2 NIV); and

WHEREAS, The means and methodologies of teaching and learning have greatly changed in recent decades; and

WHEREAS, Technology has greatly changed the delivery methods of education and the shaping of higher education in the same period; and

WHEREAS, Younger students are more comfortable with blended forms of education, using more non-traditional methods, including video conferencing, computer interaction, and other distance learning, rather than exclusively brick and mortar forms of instruction; and

WHEREAS, There are some students, potential candidates for the pastoral office, who need greater flexibility in acquiring the best possible theological education and formation; and

WHEREAS, The Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) has already examined many of the existing pieces for creating a distance education program leading to ordination; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention encourage the Council of Presidents, the Office of the President, and the PFC, in conjunction with the two seminaries of our Synod, to examine current best practices in educational methodologies and outcomes and to produce a plan, to be presented to the 2029 Synod convention, for blended distance education methods leading to ordination; and be it further

Resolved, That prior to implementation of distance education, each district of the Synod have the opportunity to discuss and comment on the program or programs.

Board of Directors
Nebraska District

Ov. 6-34**To Direct Pastoral Formation Committee to Bring Recommendation to 2029 Convention to Establish New Route(s) to Ordination, Utilizing and Making More Accessible Treasure of Synod Seminaries**

WHEREAS, Jesus commanded His disciples to make disciples by baptizing them and teaching them (Matt. 28:19–20); and

WHEREAS, Scripture teaches us that Jesus gave some to be shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:11–12); and

WHEREAS, Those who are to fill the role of shepherd/teacher/elder/overseer are to be men first of high character—“above reproach ... not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined”—and second, they “must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught,” so that they “may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:7–9); and

WHEREAS, Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession states, that “no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called” (Triglotta); and

WHEREAS, The Synod’s objectives include to “recruit and train pastors ... and provide opportunity for their continuing growth” (Const. Art. III 3); and

WHEREAS, During the history of the Synod, the methods of training pastors have frequently changed due to both external factors (wars, financial depression, and theological movements) and internal factors (surplus of pastors, shortage of pastors, “practical” needs and “theoretical” needs, as well as language, educational, and cultural challenges) (John C Wohlrabe Jr., “The Role of the Seminaries in the LCMS, 1847–2001,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 85 [July/Oct. 2021]: 215–39); and

WHEREAS, Those methods have utilized varying levels of academic training, both at the seminaries and in partnership with the seminaries including a Bachelor of Divinity, Master of Divinity (M.Div.), non-academic certification, Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP), the Cross-Cultural Ministry Center, and others; and

WHEREAS, The Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) has been charged with “ensuring that the Synod’s objective of training pastors is fulfilled consistently,” with seminaries governed by boards of regents (Bylaws 3.10.4–3.10.5); and

WHEREAS, Through the years, the seminaries themselves have seen the importance for them to fulfill different purposes, including scholarly, theological, pastoral, and missionary needs, and in the case of the Springfield seminary “to train men who, because of their educational background or age, could not fit well into the preparatory school – St. Louis system” (*ibid.*, n54, quoting Erich H. Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets: The Anatomy of a Seminary 1846–1976* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975], 177); and

WHEREAS, In 2007 Resolution 5-01B, “To Establish Specific Ministry Pastor Program,” which established the SMP program and was adopted [Yes: 908; No: 287] (*Proceedings*, 133–38), the convention recognized the need to “retain our commitment to the importance, need, and great strengths of residential pastoral education at both the certificate and M.Div. level, along with a commitment to the continuing education of all clergy” (136); and

WHEREAS, That same resolution (pp. 136–37) also recognized the necessity to:

- a. find a way to meet the existing and expanding needs for pastoral ministry, especially in the variety of contexts of mission and ministry in today’s church;
- ...
- e. restore our past creativity in recognizing the importance, need, and great strengths of alternative models of pastoral education leading to ordination, including a commitment to continuing education;
- f. utilize the advances in educational technology that allow for responsible pastoral education and formation through distance-education models; and
- g. develop a more coherent and comprehensive model for pastoral education by which various routes leading to certification, call, and ordination are coordinated and potentially interrelated, so that, for example, a student in a nonresidential certificate route might be able to engage also in a residential degree program;

and

WHEREAS, “The 2023 LCMS convention appealed to all LCMS congregations, districts and seminaries to prioritize and strongly

encourage such full-time, residential formation for prospective pastors (2023 Res. 6-02A and 6-03A)” (PFC, *Policy Requirements for the Specific Ministry Pastor Program: Admission, Administration and Supervision*, Nov. 2025, Premise 6); and

WHEREAS, The same aforementioned policy states “The SMP program should be structured in such a way that it does not discourage or detract from full-time, residential seminary preparation for men pursuing a lifetime of ministry in the LCMS” (*ibid.*); and

WHEREAS, The same November 2025 policy requirements for the SMP program state that they are “a reflection of the church’s prioritization of full-time pastoral formation in a seminary community” by creating age restrictions for participation, increasing prior membership and service requirements, and directing seminary admissions to prioritize those SMP applicants who fit a more narrow scope of ministry (*ibid.*, 5); and

WHEREAS, The needs previously expressed from 2007 Res. 5-01B still exist, particularly with regard to providing trained and qualified pastors for both existing congregations and new church plants; and

WHEREAS, Those needs are projected to increase in the coming years, specifically:

- LCMS Research Services indicates 754 ordained clergy will be reaching retirement age (67) in the next five years, 1,286 in the next 10 years, and 1,770 in the next 15 years. (*LCMS Data and Trends*, Oct. 10, 2024, as presented to the Texas District Board of Directors [BOD] on Jan. 28, 2025).
- LCMS Research Services further suggests that without replacement of those who are retiring, the number of current active ordained pastors in the Synod remaining in service will drop from approximately 5,000 to approximately 2,900 in those 15 years. (*LCMS Data and Trends*, Oct. 10, 2024, as presented to the Texas District BOD on Jan. 28, 2025).
- The Association of Theological Schools (ATS), which is one of two accrediting agencies for the St. Louis and Fort Wayne seminaries, indicates that by the seminaries’ reporting in the Fall of 2024, there were only 322 M.Div. students across all classes between both seminaries. That comes out to an average of only 80 M.Div. students/year that will be ordained in the Synod during this particular four-year cycle. (ATS 2024–2025 Table 2.12 [this is the most recent available data from ATS], ats.edu/files/galleries/2024-2025_annual_data_tables.pdf).
- If the current trends of retirement and replacement continue, the Synod will have 500–800 fewer active pastors serving in 10–15 years.
- Numbers from LCMS Research Services presented to the Texas District BOD during its 2025 presidential visitation indicated a relatively small number of pastors, only 96, who will be reaching retirement age (67) in 2060 and beyond, suggesting a very small number of pastors currently on the roster who are in their early 30s or younger and further indicating a much more aged clergy roster (*LCMS Data and Trends*, Oct. 10, 2024, as presented to the Texas District BOD on Jan. 28, 2025).

and

WHEREAS, Among the other “good, wise, and appropriate options” set forth by the PFC in their November 2025 SMP policy

requirements for the shortage of pastors were “church consolidation or partnerships, multi-point congregations, use of lay readers of sermons, a blessed closure that enables assets to be used for fruitful ministry elsewhere while ensuring existing members receive care at nearby LCMS congregations, and so forth” (PFC, Premise 5); and

WHEREAS, These options that are offered, while certainly appropriate in many situations, also can collectively reflect and subscribe to a shrinking church body rather than finding solutions to increase our proclamation of God’s Word and the footprint of sound confessional Lutheran theology in a world and culture that desperately needs it; therefore be it

Resolved, That the PFC, in collaboration, cooperation, and consultation with the two Synod seminaries and the Council of Presidents, and with additional consultation with the Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry, bring to the 2029 Synod convention, consistent with Bylaw 3.10.4.1, a recommendation to establish a proposal of a new route or routes to ordination that:

- Considers new levels of residential academic programs available at our seminaries that will cause them, as the 1866 Synod convention charged Synod’s leadership and seminary faculty, to “assume the responsibility that *as soon as possible* capable men are commissioned as *Reiseprediger*” (*Protokolle*, 12.&13. *Synodal-Bericht*, 74, emphasis added; a *Reiseprediger* being a traveling preacher who travels from place to place to preach and plant churches, especially serving vacant congregations), such programs to also consider the inclusion of bachelor programs that lead to ordination.
- Considers how to make our seminary training more accessible to those seeking to serve in the pastoral office for the sake of providing “good, wise, and appropriate options” for pastoral ministry:
 - To small congregations beyond those options that would involve consolidating or closing the church but rather offer hope and a path for revitalization and a robust participation in Christ’s great commission to make disciples.
 - To forming congregations and church plants that would otherwise not be able to offer Word and Sacrament ministry to their people and pastoral leadership to bring the Gospel and our Lutheran theology into new communities.
 - To multi-staff congregations who, in the spirit of Titus 1, have identified local leaders to be raised up to further the ministry and Gospel outreach of the church.
 - To congregations in regions of the U.S. where the cost-of-living often makes calling and providing for a pastor to move into the area not feasible.
- Considers reimagining existing routes, both residually and through distance education/online, to more aggressively address the current and impending pastor shortage for the sake of our Gospel witness and the furtherance of confessional Lutheranism.
- When combined with existing routes to ordination, both non-colloquy and colloquy, develops “a more coherent and comprehensive model for pastoral education by which various routes leading to certification, call, and ordination are coordinated and potentially interrelated, so that, for

example, a student in a nonresidential certificate route might be able to engage also in a residential degree program” (2007 Res. 5-01B, *Proc.*, 136–37);

and be it further

Resolved, That this recommendation(s) will be made available to the congregations and pastors of the Synod no less than one year prior to the 2029 Synod convention in order to receive feedback and further suggestions prior to the publishing of the 2029 *Convention Workbook*.

Board of Directors
Texas District

Ov. 6-35

To Ensure Pastoral Ministry in the Synod during Times of Shortage

WHEREAS, 2023 Synod convention Resolution 6-02A, “To Encourage Proper Pastoral Formation through Our Synod’s Seminaries,” “affirm[s] the necessity and fruitfulness of Synod-approved alternate routes to ministry to be used in appropriate ministry settings and for appropriately qualified candidates (currently, the Specific Ministry Pastor program, the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology, the Center for Hispanic Studies, the Specific Ministry Pastor-Español/English Program, the Cross-cultural Ministry Center, and the Residential Alternate Route program; previously, DELTO)” (*Proc.*, 161) and “‘strongly encourage[s] [district presidents and seminaries] to direct men to residential pastoral ministry routes [at our Synod’s seminaries]* as the preferred option’ (2019 Res. 6-02, [“To Promote Residential Seminary Education as the Preferred Option for the Preparation of Men for Pastoral Ministry,”] *Proc.*, 159, *brackets original)” as the way that the church operates during normal circumstances; and

WHEREAS, The Synod faces a growing pastoral shortage. The number of available pastors is inadequate, and congregations often wait an average of 24 months to complete the call process. This challenge is expected to intensify in the coming years; and

WHEREAS, Within 15 years, the average age of the current pastoral workforce will rise to 74, leading to a critical shortage of pastors. This will impact not only small congregations that cannot afford full-time pastors but also larger, well-resourced churches. Without intervention, there will be too few pastors to serve even half of existing congregations, let alone to support church planting and growth; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod gives thanks to God for the faithfulness of our Synod in providing this variety of scripturally and confessionally faithful pathways of pastoral formation to fulfill the need for laborers for the Lord’s harvest; and be it further

Resolved, That to ensure the ongoing proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the Sacraments, the 2026 Synod convention authorize district presidents to utilize all existing Synod-approved pastoral formation programs at their discretion, allowing them to determine the most suitable training pathway for candidates in their district; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod direct its seminaries to provide equal financial support for all approved pastoral formation programs, removing financial barriers and expanding access to pastoral training. By strengthening multiple formation pathways, the Synod will be better equipped to meet the needs of congregations and to continue advancing the mission of the church.

Ov. 6-36

To Expand and Strengthen Distance Learning Routes to Ordination

WHEREAS, The congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have been blessed with pastors and teachers who have been prepared for their service in a variety of ways over its history, either more academically or practically oriented; and

WHEREAS, The seminaries of the Synod are currently offering, beyond the now normative residential Master of Divinity (M.Div.) program, a variety of routes for pastoral formation that take into consideration the needs, desires, and contexts of the students, including the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology, Center for Hispanic Studies, Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program, SMP to General Pastor Certification (typically an eight-year program), the Residential Alternative Route, and the Cross-Cultural Ministry Center at Concordia University, Irvine; the Committee for Colloquy to the Pastoral Ministry also recently offered an SMP colloquy route to former lay deacons (2016 Res. 13-02A); and

WHEREAS, These programs, utilizing both in-person and online instruction, have formed and continue to form faithful and effective pastors; and

WHEREAS, The need for ordained ministers of the Gospel to serve the congregations of the Synod will only grow greater as retirements increase; and

WHEREAS, The need for faithful servants to expand further mission and ministry will also continue to grow; and

WHEREAS, Academic training has taken advantage of technology to offer distance education, and it has become a standard means of delivering training in many contexts in our culture; and

WHEREAS, It has become increasingly difficult and prohibitive for prospective seminary students to leave homes, family, employment, and ministry context to move cross-country to enroll in a four-year residential M.Div. program; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention enhance the ability of our alternate routes to ordination to meet the increasing demand for pastoral candidates by removing current restrictions on enrollment, geographic location, and ministry context, while maintaining the Synod’s doctrinal standards and the integrity of pastoral formation; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention increase the number of opportunities to prepare candidates for general ministry via existing and new routes (e.g., in person, hybrid, online) through our seminaries, so that congregations throughout the Synod may be served by faithfully formed pastors in a wide variety of contexts.

Southeastern District

Ov. 6-37

To Encourage Innovative Training of Pastors

WHEREAS, “[God] desires all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4); and

WHEREAS, Our gracious Lord established the Office of the Holy Ministry and calls men to serve as pastors over His dear flock; and

WHEREAS, Moved by compassion, Jesus declared, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the

Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Matt. 9:37–38); and

WHEREAS, This office of preaching should be treated in the church with diligence and good order, so that “no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, unless he be regularly called” (AC XIV); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has entrusted its two seminaries with the task of preparing well-formed pastors for the flock of God; and

WHEREAS, Throughout its history the Synod has been innovative in meeting the need to prepare as many pastors as possible. This includes:

- historically receiving candidates who were trained by Pastors Friedrich Brunn of Steeden, Theodor Harms of Hermannsburg, and Wilhelm Löhe of Neuendettelsau, Germany;
- by beginning a seminary in the parsonage of Pastor Wilhelm Sihler in Fort Wayne, Ind.;
- by beginning a log cabin seminary in Perry County, Mo. with pastors as the teachers; and
- by currently maintaining these two seminaries to train today’s candidates for the ministry through both the resident Master of Divinity program and the distance programs, which include the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology, the Center for Hispanic Studies, and the Specific Ministry Pastor program;

and

WHEREAS, Our Synod has been blessed through all of these programs; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod thank God for the history of innovative pastoral formation in our Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That we give our full support to both the residential and distance learning programs in our Synod and encourage full use of all the programs by both congregations and individuals; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod leadership be discouraged from putting up increased barriers to congregations and candidates who would avail themselves of these programs; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod continue to be innovative in training many faithful pastors to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ as our Savior.

Benediction
Milwaukee, WI

Ov. 6-38

To Give Thanks to God for Many Existing Routes to Office of Holy Ministry

WHEREAS, In 2006, the Atlantic District in convention passed resolutions designed to strengthen and expand the scope of mission and ministry by resolving to prepare 100 home-grown mission leaders for service to Lord and Church; and

WHEREAS, By God’s grace, well over 100 men and women have been developed, trained, and sent to serve in congregations of the district as lay deacons, ministers of religion—commissioned, and ministers of religion—ordained; and

WHEREAS, The benefits of this leadership development model have been visible signs of God’s grace in more than half of the

congregations of the district, as they exercise various spiritual gifts in service; and

WHEREAS, Mission opportunity remains at the highest level in the district, even as transitions in leadership demand more strong Lutheran Christian leaders in its congregations, schools, and agencies; and

WHEREAS, The Specific Ministry Pastor program, Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology, Center for Hispanic Studies, Concordia University Irvine’s Mission Training Center, residential M.Div., and General Pastor Certification programs have all provided excellent avenues for continuing the development toward the service of “home-grown mission leaders” in the district; therefore be it

Resolved, That the district in convention give thanks to God for the many existing routes to the Holy Ministry in the Synod by rising to sing the first stanza of “Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest” (*LSB* 498:1); and be it further

Resolved, That the district in convention memorialize the 2026 Synod convention with this resolution.

Atlantic District

Ov. 6-39

To Celebrate and Encourage Variety of Routes to Pastoral Formation in the Synod

WHEREAS, Jesus’ words still ring true such that there remains an urgent need for sending workers into the harvest fields where, “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (Luke 10:2; Matt. 9:37); and

WHEREAS, Among the main objectives listed in the Constitution is the preparation of such workers: “Recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continual growth” (Const. Art. III 3); and

WHEREAS, Another main objective in the Constitution is to “encourage congregations to strive for uniformity in church practice, but also to develop an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith” (Const. Art. III 7); and

WHEREAS, The Pastoral Formation Committee, working with the two seminaries of our Synod, Concordia Seminary (CSL) and Concordia Theological Seminary (CTSF), makes provision for both that uniformity and the appreciation of variety in recommending new routes leading to ordination (Bylaw 3.10.4.1); and

WHEREAS, New routes to ordination may only be implemented after “approval by resolution of the Synod” (Bylaw 3.10.4.2); and

WHEREAS, The Synod in convention has implemented a variety of routes of pastoral formation leading to ordination, which include the residential pathways of Master of Divinity and alternate route seminary education, and the non-residential pathways of the Specific Ministry Pastor program, Cross-Cultural Ministry Center, the Center for Hispanic Studies, and the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology; and

WHEREAS, This is in keeping with the history of our Synod which in the nineteenth century already instituted variety in its routes for training pastors, offering a more practical seminary in Springfield, Ill., and a more theological seminary in St. Louis, Mo., while

providing uniformity through a commitment to confessional fidelity in both programs; and

WHEREAS, The Office of Pastoral Education estimated that, “if current trends stay the same regarding retirements and new graduates (considering a 5% decrease each year in new graduates), the LCMS pastoral force will decline by 50% in the next 15 years. This is an estimate from 6,000 pastors in 2017 to 3,000 pastors in 2032” (“A White Paper on the Current Context of Pastoral Formation,” May 12, 2020, resources.lcms.org/reading-study/a-white-paper-on-the-current-context-of-pastoral-formation/, 7); and

WHEREAS, The *Set Apart to Serve* initiative is seeking to reverse this trend by encouraging the recruitment of men and women for church work vocations, as well as men to serve as future pastors; and

WHEREAS, Although residential seminary training remains a strength of our Synod, as both CSL and CTSFW provide well-prepared pastors for the church, the need continues to exceed the number of graduates; and

WHEREAS, There remains great need for Synod pastors to serve in geographic regions to which pastors or seminary graduates find relocation challenging due to high housing costs and other economic factors, where congregations cannot afford a full-time pastor but are seeking a pastor to serve bi-vocationally, where new mission starts are taking place, and in distinct cultural or ethnic communities; and to all of these situations, the non-residential routes to pastoral formation are particularly suited; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has decades of experience in preparing well-formed pastors by non-residential routes to pastoral formation, including the use of cohorts, in-person intensives, contextual education, and local mentors, as well as interactive synchronous and asynchronous online educational platforms; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod and its congregations continue to seek men to pursue these routes to becoming pastors; and be it further

Resolved, That the district celebrate the faithfulness of our Synod in providing this variety of scripturally and confessionally faithful pathways of pastoral formation to fulfill the need for laborers for the Lord’s harvest; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod retain all currently approved routes of pastoral formation (residential and non-residential), encourage recruitment to all currently approved educational pathways for ordination, and broaden access to each of the routes without preference of one over another.

Pacific Southwest District

Ov. 6-40

To Celebrate and Encourage Variety of Routes to Pastoral Formation in the Synod

WHEREAS, Jesus’ words still ring true such that there remains an urgent need for sending workers into the harvest fields where “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (Luke 10:2; Matt. 9:37); and

WHEREAS, Among the main objectives listed in the Constitution is the preparation of such workers: “Recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth” (Const. Art. III 3); and

WHEREAS, Another main objective in the Constitution is to “encourage congregations to strive for uniformity in church

practice, but also to develop an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith” (Const. Art. III 7); and

WHEREAS, The Pastoral Formation Committee, working with the two seminaries of our Synod, Concordia Seminary (CSL) and Concordia Theological Seminary (CTSFW), makes provision for both that uniformity and the appreciation of variety in recommending new routes leading to ordination (Bylaw 3.10.4.1); and

WHEREAS, New routes to ordination may only be implemented after “approval by resolution of the Synod” (Bylaw 3.10.4.2); and

WHEREAS, The Synod in convention has implemented a variety of routes of pastoral formation leading to ordination, which include the residential pathways of Master of Divinity and alternate route seminary education, and the nonresidential pathways of the Specific Ministry Pastor program, Cross-Cultural Ministry Center, the Center for Hispanic Studies, and the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology; and

WHEREAS, This is in keeping with the history of our Synod, which in the nineteenth century already instituted variety in its routes for training pastors, offering a more practical seminary in Springfield, Ill., and a more theological seminary in St. Louis, Mo., while providing uniformity through a commitment to confessional fidelity in both programs; and

WHEREAS, the Office of Pastoral Education estimated that, “if current trends stay the same regarding retirements versus new graduates (considering a 5% decrease each year in new graduates), the LCMS pastoral force will decline by 50% in the next 15 years. This is an estimate from 6,000 pastors in 2017 to 3,000 pastors in 2032” (“A White Paper on the Current Context of Pastoral Formation,” May 12, 2020, resources.lcms.org/reading-study/a-white-paper-on-the-current-context-of-pastoral-formation/, 7); and

WHEREAS, The *Set Apart to Serve* initiative is seeking to reverse this trend by encouraging the recruitment of men and women for church work vocations, as well as men to serve as future pastors; and

WHEREAS, Although residential seminary training remains a strength of our Synod, as both CSL and CTSFW provide well-prepared pastors for the church, the need continues to exceed the number of graduates; and

WHEREAS, There remains great need for Synod pastors to serve in geographic regions to which pastors or seminary graduates find relocation challenging due to high housing costs and other economic factors, where congregations cannot afford a full-time pastor but are seeking a pastor to serve bi-vocationally, where new mission starts are taking place, and in distinct cultural or ethnic communities; and to all of these situations, the non-residential routes to pastoral formation are particularly suited; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has decades of experience in preparing well-formed pastors by non-residential routes to pastoral formation, including the use of cohorts, in-person intensives, contextual education, and local mentors, as well as interactive synchronous and asynchronous online educational platforms; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod and its congregations continue to seek men to pursue these routes to becoming pastors; and be it further

Resolved, That the district celebrate the faithfulness of our Synod in providing this variety of scripturally and confessionally faithful

pathways of pastoral formation to fulfill the need for laborers for the Lord's harvest; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod retain all currently approved routes of pastoral formation (residential and non-residential), encourage recruitment to all currently approved educational pathways for ordination, and broaden access to each of the routes without preference of one over another, while recognizing the numerous benefits of traditional residential training.

Northwest District

Ov. 6-41

To Commend Residential Seminary Education and Voice Support for Synod Seminaries

WHEREAS, Constitution Article III names pastoral recruitment as one of the Synod's main objectives, along with the support of established synodical colleges, universities, and seminaries; and

WHEREAS, Residential seminary education has always been the gold standard in producing faithful pastors for the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Our Lord Jesus Himself gathered disciples around Him and instructed them personally for several years before sending them out into the world to preach and baptize; and

WHEREAS, The interpersonal communication and pastoral formation of residential education cannot be duplicated over the internet and computer screens; and

WHEREAS, The seminaries of the Synod enjoy the leadership of competent and visionary presidents in the Rev. Dr. Thomas Egger and the Rev. Dr. Jon Bruss; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention voice its support for residential seminary education as the unquestioned standard for pastoral formation; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention voice its support for our two seminaries, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne.

Circuit 5 (Mitchell)
South Dakota District

Ov. 6-42

To Affirm Residential Pastoral Education at Our Seminaries

WHEREAS, He who seeks the office of overseer desires a noble task (1 Tim. 3:1); and

WHEREAS, The apostles left all to follow Jesus (Luke 5:11; 18:28–30; Matt. 19:27), showing that the life of the ministry is one of sacrifice; and

WHEREAS, Jesus set an example of the importance of in-person theological education by teaching His apostles, in-person, for nearly three uninterrupted years (Acts 1:21–22); and

WHEREAS, During the time of instruction, Jesus warned His apostles to “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees” (Matt. 16:6), along with many other admonitions to watch, pray, guard, and then to baptize and teach all nations “to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19–20); and

WHEREAS, Those who seek the Office of the Holy Ministry are accountable to God (James 3:1); and

WHEREAS, Scripture teaches that pastors are especially to “hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9); and

WHEREAS, The history of education and research following the COVID-19 pandemic have shown that residential education is superior to online education (brookings.edu/articles/how-does-virtual-learning-impact-students-in-higher-education/); and

WHEREAS, Other disciplines that deal with the care of people such as physicians and surgeons, require intense in-person instruction; and

WHEREAS, The challenges the Church faces today make intense theological formation in God's Word more necessary, not less; and

WHEREAS, The care of souls in our parishes requires that our pastors be highly trained by orthodox Lutheran teachers and made ready for ministry, as the Scriptures declare in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–16; and

WHEREAS, Christ's sheep deserve the best and most well-trained under shepherds of the Good Shepherd possible; and

WHEREAS, The daily rhythm of worship in the seminary chapels, which is an integral aspect of residential seminary education and inculcates humility toward God's Word, is central for the personal and spiritual formation of pastors (Ap V 189); and

WHEREAS, Jesus has made in-person formation holy through His incarnation; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention reaffirm its commitment to residential seminary education at the Synod seminaries, in line with previous convention resolutions (e.g., 2019 Res. 6-02, “To Promote Residential Seminary Education as the Preferred Option for the Preparation of Men for the Pastoral Ministry,” 2023 Res. 6-02A, “To Encourage Proper Pastoral Formation through Our Synod's Seminaries,” and 2023 Res. 6-03A, “To Affirm and Strengthen the Synod's Commitment to Well-Formed Clergy for the Sake of the Gospel”); and be it further

Resolved, That all men aspiring to the Office of the Holy Ministry, regardless of background and means, be required to speak with an admissions officer at a Synod seminary, so they may be thoroughly acquainted with the benefits of the ministry and the church by a full residential formation; and be it further

Resolved, That all men aspiring to the Office of the Holy Ministry as candidates of the Master of Divinity (M.Div.) program or Alternate Route (meaning specifically the residential Alternate Route offered at both Concordia Theological Seminary and Concordia Seminary that which closely parallels the M.Div. program, but not the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology [EIIT], the Specific Ministry Pastor [SMP], the General Pastoral Certification [GPC], or the Center for Hispanic Studies [CHS] programs; cf. csl.edu/academics/programs/residential-alternate-route%20rar/ and ctsfw.edu/academics/programs/pgm/alternate-route/) program be required to pursue residential education at a Synod seminary or residential education at a seminary in altar-pulpit fellowship with the Synod; and be it finally

Resolved, That the seminaries, districts, congregations, and laity do their utmost to ensure the proper support of men training for the pastoral office, recognizing the sacrifices necessary for the training of ministers of the Gospel and the spread of the Gospel.

Iowa East District

Ov. 6-43**To Reaffirm Residential Seminary Formation as Preferred Route for Pastoral Preparation**

WHEREAS, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, exist for the purpose of forming pastors through comprehensive residential education, communal life, faculty mentorship, and supervised pastoral formation; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has affirmed residential seminary formation as the most complete means of preparing men for the general responsibilities of the pastoral office; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has historically recognized residential formation as the normative path for preparation for the pastoral office, with alternative routes serving defined and limited purposes; and

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture emphasizes careful preparation for the ministry of Word and Sacrament (Acts 6:4; Titus 1:9); and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions affirm the church's responsibility to maintain good order in doctrine and practice through faithful oversight of the pastoral office (FC SD X); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm residential seminary formation as the preferred and normative route for preparing men for the pastoral office; and be it further

Resolved, That district presidents, circuits, and congregations be encouraged to recommend and support qualified men for residential seminary study, including vocational encouragement and financial assistance; and be it further

Resolved, That the seminaries be encouraged to continue addressing concerns regarding the accessibility and feasibility of residential formation; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod pray for an increase in vocations to the pastoral office, trusting the Lord of the Church to provide faithful shepherds.

Trinity (Decatur Rd)
Fort Wayne, IN

Ov. 6-44**To Reaffirm Residential Seminary Formation as Preferred Route for Pastoral Preparation**

WHEREAS, The Evangelical Lutheran Church confesses the Holy Scriptures as the inspired Word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice (Const. Art. II 1); and

WHEREAS, The Evangelical Lutheran Church accepts the Lutheran Confessions in the *Book of Concord* as true expositions of Holy Scripture and as correct exhibitions of the church's doctrine (Const. Art. II 2); and

WHEREAS, The Synod requires pastors to vow before God and their congregations to preach, teach, and conduct their ministries in faithful conformity to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions (*Lutheran Service Book Agenda*, 166); and

WHEREAS, Faithful pastoral ministry requires not merely an acquaintance with the biblical text through secondary sources, but the ability to read, translate, and interpret Holy Scripture for preaching, teaching, catechesis, and pastoral care; and

WHEREAS, Faithful pastoral ministry requires not merely a familiarity with the Lutheran Confessions, but sustained

commitment to them as the theological framework within which pastors carry out their duties (2016 Res. 6-02); and

WHEREAS, The unity of the Synod is better cultivated when future pastors are formed in a residential setting that enables them to live out the liturgical life of the church and experience an extended time of "mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren" (SA III IV) that will prepare them to conduct ministry within the shared doctrinal framework of the Lutheran Confessions (2023 Special Presentations, "The Biblical and Reformation Heritage of LCMS Pastoral Formation," Lawrence R. Rast, Jr., *Proceedings*, 107-9; "Our Residential Seminaries: Deep Pastoral Formation and Worldwide Impact," Thomas J. Egger, *Proceedings*, 109-11); and

WHEREAS, Concordia Theological Seminary and Concordia Seminary have each been forming pastors committed to both the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions through comprehensive residential education, communal life, faculty mentorship, and supervised pastoral formation for over 175 years (2019 Res. 6-06; 2013 Res. 5-16); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm residential seminary formation as the preferred route for preparing men for the pastoral office (cf. 2016 Res. 6-03; 2019 Res. 6-02; 2023 Res. 6-02A; 2023 Res. 6-03A); and be it further

Resolved, That district presidents, circuits, and congregations be encouraged to recommend and support qualified men for residential seminary study, including vocational encouragement and financial assistance (2023 Res. 6-02A); and be it further

Resolved, That the seminaries continue addressing concerns regarding accessibility and feasibility of residential formation; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod pray for an increase in candidates for the pastoral office, trusting the Lord of the Church to provide faithful shepherds (Luke 10:2).

Faculty
Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne

Ov. 6-45**To Amend Bylaw 2.13.1 to Regularize Non-residential Routes under Specific Ministry Pastor Classification**

WHEREAS, Our Lutheran Confessions state "... that nobody should preach publicly in the church or administer the sacraments unless he is regularly called" (AC XIV, Tappert, Latin) and that ordination is an essential component of a regular, ordered call (Tr 67; 69-71); and

WHEREAS, Membership status and limitations noted in Bylaw 2.13 apply requirements and limitations on specific ministry pastors that include:

- eligibility to serve only in a specific ministry context;
- remaining under supervision by a general pastor;
- ineligibility for call outside of the context of his call;
- ineligibility to serve as a voting delegate to the national convention;
- ineligibility to be elected or appointed to any office at the district and Synod level assigned to a *pastor* or *ordained minister*;

- ineligibility to supervise vicars; and
 - ineligibility to serve as circuit visitor;
- and

WHEREAS, Other classifications of pastors (Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology [EIIT], Hispanic, Cross-cultural Ministry Center [CMC], and others) who are not graduates from a residential program track (Master of Divinity and Alternate Route) have been granted ordination without notation of how these non-residential tracks are to be managed in the context of Bylaw 2.13.1 (a–c); and

WHEREAS, Confusion on how to deal with ordained pastors who are not specific ministry pastors or graduates from residential ministry tracks continues to exist; and

WHEREAS, Non-residential tracks toward ordination are not currently treated in a similar manner as the Specific Ministry Pastor program (SMP) and SMP colloquy (2016 Res. 13-02A); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention adopt language for all ministers of religion—ordained trained via non-residential routes; and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 2.13.1 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Specific Ministry Pastor Status and Limitations

2.13.1 A “specific ministry pastor” is a minister of religion—ordained who has completed the requirements for service as a specific ministry pastor or of the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology, Hispanic ministry, Cross-Cultural Ministry Center, or any other non-residential ministry track and has been examined by one of the Synod’s seminaries, has received a regular call, and has been placed by the Council of Presidents into a specific Word and Sacrament ministry context. He is eligible to serve only in that specific ministry context for which he has been trained and may not be offered or accept a call for ministry for which he has not been certified as determined by his district president. He shall serve under the supervision of his district president and another pastor who is not a specific ministry pastor.

...

Mid-South District

Ov. 6-46

To Encourage Equal Outcomes in Routes to Pastoral Formation in the Synod

WHEREAS, Jesus’ words still ring true such that there remains an urgent need for sending workers into the harvest fields where, “the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few” (Luke 10:2; Matt. 9:37 NIV); and

WHEREAS, Among the main objectives for the purpose of the Synod listed in the Constitution is the preparation of such workers: “Recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth” (Const. Art. III 3); and

WHEREAS, Another main objective for the purpose of the Synod in the Constitution is to “Encourage congregations to strive for uniformity in church practice, but also to develop an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith” (Const. Art. III 7); and

WHEREAS, The Pastoral Formation Committee, working with the two Synod seminaries, Concordia Seminary and Concordia

Theological Seminary, makes provision for both that uniformity and appreciation of variety in recommending new routes leading to ordination (Bylaw 3.10.4.1); and

WHEREAS, New routes to ordination may only be implemented after “approval by resolution of the Synod” (Bylaw 3.10.4.2); and

WHEREAS, The Synod in convention has implemented a variety of routes of pastoral formation leading to ordination, which include the residential pathways of Masters of Divinity (M.Div.) and Residential Alternate Route (RAR), and the non-residential pathways of the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP), Cross-Cultural Ministry Center (CMC), the Center for Hispanic Studies (CHS), and the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT); and

WHEREAS, These routes do not offer equal outcomes as students are only able to earn a M.Div. degree through the residential routes, as compared to, for example, in the CMC route, only a Masters of Arts in Theology (MAT); some ordained pastors who have completed their route to ordination, such as specific ministry pastors, are also given a distinctly limited roster status; and

WHEREAS, Already in the 19th century the Synod instituted variety in its routes for training its pastors by offering a more practical seminary in Springfield, Ill., or a more theological seminary in St. Louis, Mo., without instituting a difference in roster status such that throughout the history of the practical seminary students graduating from the more practical seminary received the same roster status as those who graduated from the more theological seminary; and

WHEREAS, The roster distinction introduced for SMP graduates makes these pastors distinct from EIIT graduates, CHS graduates, and RAR graduates who also may be ordained without an academic degree and who have also received a lesser level of theological training than full M.Div. students; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions in the Treatise of the Power and Primacy of the Pope state that before God there is no substantive difference between ordained pastors (Tr 60–65); and

WHEREAS, The difference in roster status for specific ministry pastors creates confusion over their status as pastors among the pastorate and laity (such as the ability of specific ministry pastors to be on call lists, and the ability of specific ministry pastors to serve as ecclesiastical supervisors for commissioned ministers), even though the Lutheran Confessions are clear that an ordained pastor is a full pastor; and

WHEREAS, Congregations recognize and value their pastors based on the functions of the office they faithfully execute and spiritual care they provide, regardless of their pathway to ordination or official roster status; and

WHEREAS, All rostered pastors of the Synod serve under ecclesiastical supervision and under the mutual admonition of their fellow pastors; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Pacific Southwest District esteem all who hold the Office of the Public Ministry in the Synod with honor, and encourage all those pursuing pastoral ministry regardless of their pathway to ordination, thanking God for their service to His people and their commitment to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ; and be it further

Resolved, That the district memorialize the Synod in convention to develop a process through which a specific ministry pastor, after ten years of faithful and effective ministry, demonstrating ministerial competence and spiritual fitness, and grounded in the

daily work of pastoral ministry, may thereby apply for general ordination status on the roster of the Synod; and be it finally

Resolved, That the district memorialize the Synod in convention to create pathways for non-residential seminary students to earn an M.Div. degree and to allow the General Pastor Certification classes at the seminaries to continue to give opportunity for specific ministry pastors to earn an M.Div. by continuing their education.

Pacific Southwest District

Ov. 6-47

To Review and Streamline Specific Ministry Pastor to General Pastor Pathways

WHEREAS, The Synod has established the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program for pastoral service in specific contexts under defined parameters, and has long provided that, after further preparation and examination, an SMP pastor may be eligible for a change of status to serve as a general ministry pastor; and

WHEREAS, There is widespread desire among congregations and districts for clear, affordable, and efficient pathways by which men serving faithfully as SMP pastors may, after appropriate additional formation and examination, be eligible for such change of status in order to meet local mission needs; and

WHEREAS, The Bylaws of Synod charge the responsible boards, committees, and seminaries with developing and maintaining the policies that govern pastoral qualification, certification, placement, and academic standards; and

WHEREAS, The current pathways from SMP to general ministry vary in structure, sequence, cost, and time to completion, which causes confusion for congregations and candidates, creates avoidable financial burdens, and can delay the deployment of fully prepared workers into the harvest; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention direct the President of the Synod to convene, within six months of adjournment, a working group consisting of representatives of the Council of Presidents (COP), the Pastoral Formation Committee, the seminaries of the Synod (presidents and appropriate faculty), and the Office of the Chief Financial Officer, with consultation from the Concordia University System and Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF), to review and propose reforms to the pathways from SMP to general ministry; and be it further

Resolved, That this working group evaluate and recommend, without compromising doctrinal fidelity or pastoral competency, a unified and transparent pathway that includes clear entry criteria, recognition of prior learning with credit for demonstrated pastoral competencies, sequenced coursework available via distance and hybrid delivery, standardized comprehensive examination(s) appropriate to general ministry, and timely, published milestones for assessment and approval; and be it further

Resolved, That the working group propose measures to improve affordability, including but not limited to tuition caps or reduced tuition rates for SMP transition coursework, expanded scholarships targeted for SMP pastors, cohort models that reduce per-student cost, and responsible use of distance education to minimize travel and housing expenses; and be it further

Resolved, That the seminaries be directed to publish, within twelve months of convention adjournment, harmonized handbooks that set forth the reformed pathway, including syllabi, credit

expectations, examination rubrics, sample timelines, and a comprehensive schedule of fees; and be it further

Resolved, That the COP, in consultation with the seminaries, establish uniform policies and procedures for the examination and certification for change of status to general ministry pastor, and publish them together with the seminaries' handbooks; and be it further

Resolved, That the President of the Synod ensure that the above reforms are implemented and that progress reports be provided to the Synod through an official periodical at six-month intervals, with a final report, including any recommended bylaw changes, submitted to the 2029 Synod convention; and be it further

Resolved, That districts and congregations be encouraged to identify and financially support qualified SMP pastors pursuing change of status, and that LCEF and other partners be invited to create revolving funds, grants, or loan products to reduce out-of-pocket costs for candidates; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm that any change-of-status pathway for SMP pastors must preserve confessional subscription, thorough pastoral formation, and rigorous examination in doctrine and practice, so that the Church may be well served by pastors competent for the whole Office of the Public Ministry.

Christ Greenfield, Gilbert, AZ; South Lake, League City, TX

Ov. 6-48

To Amend Bylaw 2.13.1 to Provide Pathway for Specific Ministry Pastors to Receive Full Pastoral Certification

WHEREAS, Scripture establishes qualifications for the pastoral office, including requiring that an overseer be above reproach, able to teach, and manage his own household well (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9); and

WHEREAS, Article V of the Augsburg Confession affirms that God instituted the Office of the Ministry to provide the Gospel and the Sacraments; and

WHEREAS, These qualifications focus on character, faithfulness, and demonstrated capability rather than exclusively on specific educational credentials; and

WHEREAS, Specific ministry pastors serve faithfully in specialized Word and Sacrament ministry contexts under the supervision of district presidents and other pastors (Bylaw 2.13.1); and

WHEREAS, Current bylaws restrict specific ministry pastors from serving in roles beyond their specific ministry context without completing the Specific Ministry Pastor to General Pastor Certification (GPC) program; and

WHEREAS, The GPC program requires the specific ministry pastor to complete a minimum of an additional 28.5 credits of classwork, which presents significant time and financial challenges for those already serving in full-time pastoral ministry, requiring years of additional study while balancing congregational responsibilities and family obligations; and

WHEREAS, The Synod provides multiple pathways to general pastoral certification, including the Alternate Route (AR), Residential Alternative Route (RAR), Center for Hispanic Studies (CHS) Seminary Level Program, Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT) program, which all, unlike the Specific Ministry

Pastor (SMP) program, lead to full pastoral certification without restrictions upon completion (Bylaws 2.7.2–3; 2.8.1); and

WHEREAS, While candidates in the residential Master of Divinity program are required to complete only a single academic year of supervised internship (vicarage) as part of their preparation for ordination (Bylaw 2.8.1 [d]), specific ministry pastors complete a minimum of four years of supervised pastoral formation during their program and then continue to gain extensive pastoral experience through years of actual congregational ministry under supervision; and

WHEREAS, Many specific ministry pastors demonstrate through years of faithful service the theological competence, pastoral gifts, and ministerial fitness necessary for broader pastoral ministry; and

WHEREAS, A probationary period of substantial length would allow for proper evaluation of a specific ministry pastor's readiness for full pastoral certification while maintaining appropriate standards for the pastoral office; therefore be it

Resolved, That a pathway for specific ministry pastors to receive full pastoral certification after a probationary period be established; and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 2.13.1 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Specific Ministry Pastor Status and Limitations

2.13.1 A “specific ministry pastor” is a minister of religion—ordained who has completed the requirements for service as a specific ministry pastor and has been examined by one of the Synod’s seminaries, has received a regular call, and has been placed by the Council of Presidents into a specific Word and Sacrament ministry context. He is eligible to serve only in that specific ministry context for which he has been trained and may not be offered or accept a call for ministry for which he has not been certified as determined by his district president. He shall serve under the supervision of his district president and another pastor who is not a specific ministry pastor.

...

(d) After ten years of faithful service as a specific ministry pastor in good standing, upon approval of the congregation he serves and his district president, a specific ministry pastor may be certified for general pastoral ministry without completing additional coursework, provided he has demonstrated theological competence, pastoral fitness, and ministerial capability throughout his service. Upon such certification, he shall no longer be considered a specific ministry pastor and shall be eligible for all pastoral roles and responsibilities.

and be it finally

Resolved, That the Commission on Handbook be directed to update any other bylaws as necessary to support and implement this pathway for specific ministry pastors to receive full pastoral certification.

Board of Directors
Southeastern District

Ov. 6-49

To Require Completion of Academic Requirements prior to Specific Ministry Pastor Ordination

WHEREAS, Synod, at its 2001 convention passed Resolution 3-08B, “To Address Needs and Opportunities for Pastoral Ministry in Specialized Situations” (2001 *Proceedings*, 138–39); and

WHEREAS, 2001 Res. 3-08B provided for Licensed Lay Deacons to continue to be trained under supervision as approved by 1989 Resolution 3-05B (*ibid.*, 139); and

WHEREAS, 2016 Res. 13-02A, “To Regularize Status of Licensed Lay Deacons Involved in Word and Sacrament Ministry” (2016 *Proceedings*, 236–38) regularized ministries toward ordination consistent with the *Book of Concord* (AC XIV, Ap XIV); and

WHEREAS, 2016 Res. 13-02A provided several options toward ordination of existing Licensed Lay Deacons, including regional Specialized Ministry Pastor (SMP) colloquy, SMP program, and alternate route program; and

WHEREAS, 2007 Res. 5-01B “To Establish Specific Ministry Pastor Program” (2007 *Proceedings*, 133–38) provided for SMP candidates to receive “preordination curriculum, and post-ordination curriculum” (*ibid.*, 134) and to be ordained: “Ordination vows may be taken prior to the conclusion of a complete course of study provided that the ordained has received a preparation sufficient to preach and teach the Gospel rightly, administer the Sacraments correctly, and take his vows with integrity.” (*ibid.*); and

WHEREAS, 2007 Res. 5-01B reads in part:

...

Step 2: Preordination Curriculum

Upon entrance into the Specific Ministry Pastor Program, the student will be assigned as a vicar in a specific locality but normally will not be authorized to administer the Sacraments. He will preach sermons prepared in collaboration with and approved by his supervisor. At this point, he will participate in courses and seminars comparable to those offered to residential seminary students designed to prepare him in the following areas:

- *Catechism, hermeneutical principles, God and Christ, work of Christ, the Sacraments, worship, the Book of Concord, and preaching*
- *Possible residential seminars: intro to pastoral formation; issues in pastoral ministry*
- *Possible field seminars: basic mission planter training, etc.*

Step 3: Certification/Call/Ordination

After demonstrating competence in the preordination areas, the student must apply for an examination hearing by the seminary in order to be certified for call and ordination. Each student will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. The examination hearing shall include a review of the student’s portfolio, vicarage reports, an interview by the faculty, and recommendations by the district president and circuit counselor.

After certification, call, and ordination according to the usual order, the student is placed on the pastoral roster of the Synod as a “specific ministry pastor.” He now may preach and administer the Sacraments under supervision in a specific locality.

Step 4: Post-Call and Ordination Curriculum

Upon call and ordination, the student shall complete the remainder of the Specific Ministry Pastor Program. The following areas are intended to continue development of the foundational competencies necessary for serving as a specific ministry pastor:

- Old Testament content and theology, New Testament content and theology, gifts of Christ, body of Christ,

Church history and the history of Lutheranism, Christian education, pastoral theology, and theology of missions

- Residential seminars, possibly including pastoral formation, issues in pastoral ministry, team ministry, urban ministry, and spiritual formation
- Field seminars, possibly including basic mission planter training, edge gathering, and advanced mission planter training

and

WHEREAS, Steps 3 and 4, approved by resolution, provided that a certification, call, and ordination be allowed after completion of two years of successful preordination studies; and

WHEREAS, Step 4, approved by resolution, provided that the post-ordination curriculum includes “Old Testament content and theology, New Testament content and theology, gifts of Christ, body of Christ, Church history and the history of Lutheranism, Christian education, pastoral theology, and theology of missions, residential seminars, including pastoral formation, issues of pastoral ministry, team ministry, urban ministry, and spiritual formation. Field seminars included basic mission planting, edge gathering, and advanced mission planter training” (*ibid.*, 135); and

WHEREAS, Step 4 also included the caveat that “Refusal [or inability] to complete the Specific Ministry Program would result in the pastor’s removal from the Synod roster, at which point he is not eligible for a call” (*ibid.*); and

WHEREAS, The provision of ordination after two years, with the proviso that the rostered worker completes the additional two years of formal, required education, has led to men being removed from the Synod roster, and created confusion about the Office of the Holy Ministry; therefore be it

Resolved, That currently enrolled SMP students (preordination and post-ordination) continue in the SMP track of two years toward ordination and two years of required post-ordination requirements; and be it further

Resolved, That the program requirements of the SMP program, originally passed in 2007 Res. 5-01B, which allowed a student to be certified for call and ordination prior to the completion of the SMP program, be modified so that students admitted to the SMP program after the 2026 academic year shall be required to finish all academic requirements of the SMP program before ordination and placement on the Synod roster; and be it further

Resolved, That students who have completed the second academic year be designated as vicars, who may conduct specific and approved services under the supervision of their local pastor and with the approval of the respective seminary program director and district president; and be it finally

Resolved, That the vicar may receive compensation under the vicarage agreement with the congregation and seminary program, but without admission to the Synod roster.

Board of Directors
Mid-South District

Ov. 6-50

To Encourage Further Consideration of Requiring Successful Completion of Specific Ministry Pastor Coursework before Ordination and Placement on Ordained Roster

WHEREAS, The 2018 Mid-South District convention memorialized the 2019 Synod convention “To Request Synod to Move Ordination Upon Completion of SMP Four-Year Program” (2019 Ov. 6-07, *Workbook*, 451–52); and

WHEREAS, The 2019 Synod convention considered this overture together with similar overtures from other districts and congregations; and

WHEREAS, The 2019 Synod convention adopted Resolution 6-03A, “To Enhance the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) Program,” referring this matter to the Pastoral Formation Committee to “work to enhance the curriculum and standards of the SMP program between the two seminaries” and to “review the SMP program regarding the optimal timing for vicarage and ordination and report its recommendation to the joint boards of regents at its 2020 meeting, as well as to the Synod at large” (2019 *Proceedings*, 159); and

WHEREAS, Res. 6-03A further resolved “That the joint board [sic] of regents prepare an overture to the Synod on the timing of vicarage and ordination for the SMP program for consideration in convention in 2022” (*ibid.*); and

WHEREAS, The 2023 Synod convention considered the recommendations of the Pastoral Formation Committee and the joint boards of regents of the seminaries, which are forthcoming; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Mid-South District in convention reaffirm the importance of the Pastoral Formation Committee, the joint boards of regents, and the Synod’s consideration of the issues regarding the timing of ordination in the SMP program; and be it further

Resolved, That the district in convention encourage the Pastoral Formation Committee, the joint boards of regents of the seminaries, and the Synod in convention to consider moving ordination and placement on the minister of religion—ordained roster of the Synod from after the completion of the first two years of the SMP program to after the completion of all SMP education and academic requirements for applicants admitted after the 2026 academic year.

Mid-South District

Ov. 6-51

To Clarify Appropriate Uses of Specific Ministry Pastor Program in Accord with Synodical Intent

WHEREAS, The Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program was established by the Synod to prepare pastors for specific ministries under carefully defined conditions; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has repeatedly affirmed that residential seminary formation through the Master of Divinity program is the most complete means of preparing men for the general responsibilities of the pastoral office and the preferred route for pastoral preparation; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has explicitly stated that the SMP route is to be understood and positioned as the exception and should not

become the principal rule with respect to the preparation and ordination of pastors; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has further urged that seminaries, districts, congregations, and pastors consistently encourage and strive to make provisions for prospective SMP students to consider entering residential pastoral formation programs; and

WHEREAS, Clarity regarding the appropriate use of the SMP program serves both the integrity of pastoral formation and the unity of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, The use of the SMP program for staffing associate pastor positions, multi-site congregations, or satellite worship locations where residential seminary formation is a reasonable option risks transforming an exceptional pathway into a normative staffing model, contrary to the stated intent of the Synod (2013 Res. 5-04B); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm that the SMP program is intended for clearly defined and limited ministry contexts and is not to be used where a congregation or ministry setting could reasonably support a pastor formed through residential seminary programs (2013 Res. 5-04B); and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod clarify that the SMP program is not intended to function as a routine means of staffing associate pastor roles, multi-site congregations, or satellite ministry locations where residential pastoral formation is feasible; and be it further

Resolved, That districts and district presidents be encouraged to apply SMP policies consistently and in harmony with the Synod's stated intent that the SMP program remain an exceptional pathway rather than a normative staffing solution; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for faithful specific ministry pastors who serve under call in appropriate contexts, while continuing to uphold the integrity, unity, and catholicity of pastoral formation for the sake of Christ's Church.

Trinity (Decatur Rd)
Fort Wayne, IN

Ov. 6-52

To Affirm and Support Established Parameters of Specific Ministry Pastor Program

WHEREAS, The Synod established the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program to address ministry needs in specific contexts where residential seminary formation is not feasible; and

WHEREAS, The SMP program was intentionally designed as a limited and contextual pathway, distinct from the Master of Divinity program, which provides comprehensive formation including extensive study of Holy Scripture, theology, pastoral practice, and supervised formation; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has consistently affirmed that alternative pastoral formation programs exist to serve exceptional circumstances and are not intended to replace residential seminary education; and

WHEREAS, The Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC), acting under authority delegated by the Synod (Bylaws 3.10.4-3.10.4.7; 2016 Res. 6-01; 2019 Res. 6-02, 6-03A; 2023 Res. 6-03A), provides ongoing oversight of pastoral formation pathways to ensure faithfulness to Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and Synod intent; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has consistently maintained that the SMP program is to be understood as an exceptional pathway and not as a general or normative staffing model for congregations; and

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture exhorts ministers to rightly handle the "word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15); and

WHEREAS, The Augsburg Confession teaches that no one should publicly teach or administer the Sacraments without a rightly ordered call and proper preparation (AC XIV); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod affirm the SMP program as a valuable but exceptional pathway intended for clearly defined ministry contexts under carefully established parameters; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm that the SMP program is not intended to function as a normative staffing solution where residential seminary formation is reasonably feasible; and be it further

Resolved, That districts and congregations be encouraged to adhere faithfully to Synod-approved SMP policies and to prioritize residential seminary formation whenever feasible; and be it further

Resolved, That the PFC be encouraged to continue regular oversight of the SMP program to ensure it remains consistent with its original purpose and stated intent; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for faithful SMP pastors who serve under call for the sake of Christ's Church.

Trinity (Decatur Rd)
Fort Wayne, IN

Ov. 6-53

To Suspend New Specific Ministry Pastor Admissions pending Conformity with the Synod in Convention

Preamble

The Synod in convention established the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program (2007 Res. 5-01B, "To Establish Specific Ministry Pastor Program", *Proc.*, 133–138) as a flexible and exceptional pastoral formation pathway to address particular ministry needs and special circumstances, replacing the DELTO program and permitting a broad range of "specific ministries." From its inception, the program was not intended to function as a general or parallel route into the Office of the Holy Ministry, but as an accommodation to limited and specific situations.

In the years following its implementation, concerns arose regarding the scope, definition, and application of the SMP program. In response, the 2013 Synod convention acted deliberately to narrow and clarify the program's permissible use through Resolution 5-04B, "To Continue and Strengthen Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) Program" (*Proc.*, 139–40). That resolution explicitly directed district presidents not to approve SMP ministry sites that could reasonably be expected to support a general pastor or where the duties could be fulfilled by a minister of religion—commissioned, and reaffirmed that residential theological education remains the primary means for training men for pastoral ministry in the Synod.

Experience since the adoption of these restrictions indicates that the limitations established by the Synod in convention have not been consistently observed, and that the SMP program has been utilized in contexts beyond those authorized. This has resulted in ongoing confusion regarding the nature of "specific ministry," weakened

adherence to the Synod's stated norms for pastoral formation, and increased strain on ecclesiastical oversight.

This resolution does not adjudicate specific cases, nor does it reflect upon the faithfulness, calling, or service of men currently serving as specific ministry pastors. Rather, it proposes a suspension of new SMP admissions as a prudent and proportionate corrective measure, while allowing those already enrolled or serving to continue under the terms of their admission. Such action honors prior decisions by the Synod, prevents further nonconformity, and preserves the possibility of the SMP program's continued use should the Synod determine that it can be administered in full conformity with the limitations previously adopted by the Synod in convention.

WHEREAS, The 2007 Synod convention established the SMP program (2007 Res. 5-01B) to replace the DELTO program as a limited and exceptional pastoral formation pathway for specific ministry needs, not as a general route to the Office of the Holy Ministry; and

WHEREAS, The 2013 Synod convention adopted the "Sattgast Amendment" (2013 Res. 5-04B, "To Continue and Strengthen Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) Program"), directing district presidents *not to approve* specific ministry sites which could reasonably be expected to support a general pastor or sites where a minister of religion—commissioned could fulfill the duties pending reception of the recommendations from the SMP committee; and

WHEREAS, The SMP program has been utilized in contexts not authorized by the Synod in convention and contrary to the limitations adopted by the Synod in convention; and

WHEREAS, Such misuse reflects deficiencies in program structure and oversight rather than in the faithfulness or diligence of the men currently serving as SMP pastors; therefore be it

Resolved, That no new candidates shall be admitted into the SMP program after a date determined by the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That individuals already enrolled in or who have completed the SMP program prior to that date may complete their formation and serve according to the terms under which they were admitted; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod seek and implement alternative means, consistent with what has been adapted in convention, to support congregations and ministries unable to support a general pastor, as required by 2013 Res. 5-04B; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod's Bylaws be amended as necessary to implement this resolution; and be it further

Resolved, That should the Synod determine that the SMP program can be administered in full conformity with the limitations previously adopted by the Synod in convention—particularly that it be restricted to congregations and ministries unable to support a general pastor—then the Synod Bylaws may be amended to permit the continued use of the SMP program in that limited and exceptional form; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod's seminaries, districts, and congregations conform all pastoral formation practices to those programs explicitly authorized by the Synod in convention.

Good Shepherd
Lincoln, NE

Ov. 6-54

To Strengthen Post-Ordination Supervision for Specific Ministry Pastors

WHEREAS, The Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program includes post-ordination supervision as an essential component of ongoing pastoral formation and accountability; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has consistently emphasized the necessity of continued mentorship and oversight for pastors formed through contextual and limited-curriculum pathways; and

WHEREAS, Such supervision serves both pastors and congregations by promoting doctrinal fidelity, pastoral competence, and integration into Synod life; and

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture commends accountability among those entrusted with the care of souls (Prov. 27:17; Heb. 13:17); and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions recognize the Church's responsibility to exercise faithful oversight of those who preach and administer the Sacraments; therefore be it

Resolved, That districts be encouraged to strengthen post-ordination supervision of specific ministry pastors through regular reviews, continuing education, and assigned mentors; and be it further

Resolved, That guidance be provided to assist districts in fulfilling this responsibility faithfully; and be it further

Resolved, That specific ministry pastors be encouraged, where appropriate, to pursue additional theological study toward broader certification for service; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for supervisors and mentors who faithfully support specific ministry pastors in their ministry.

Trinity (Decatur Rd)
Fort Wayne, IN

Ov. 6-55

To Nullify Restrictive Policies Imposed on Specific Ministry Pastor Program and Restore Its Original Scope

WHEREAS, The Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program was established by the 2007 Synod convention to address urgent needs for Gospel proclamation in specific ministry contexts where full-time residential seminary formation was not feasible, emphasizing flexibility to serve small congregations, missions, and emerging needs without undue restrictions on applicants' age, prior membership duration, or mandatory consultations that could deter participation (2007 Res. 5-01B, "To Establish Specific Ministry Pastor Program"); and

WHEREAS, The SMP program has faithfully produced called and ordained pastors who serve valid ministries, as affirmed in the Pastoral Formation Committee's (PFC) recent premises (PFC, *Policy Requirements for the Specific Ministry Pastor Program: Admission, Administration and Supervision*, Nov. 2025, files.lcms.org/dl/f/smp-policy-requirements), and has been a blessing to the church by providing basic theological and pastoral formation under supervision, honoring the Divine Call while adapting to real-world economic and contextual pressures (2007 Res. 5-01B; cf. PFC Premise 3); and

WHEREAS, Subsequent convention actions (2013 Res. 5-03E, 5-04B; 2019 Res. 6-02, 6-04; 2023 Res. 6-02A, 6-03A, 6-06A) directed that the parameters for the SMP program be refined, but did not authorize the imposition of overly burdensome restrictions that limit accessibility, such as minimum age requirements or mandatory funding pledges, which exceed the original intent and hinder the program's flexibility, and impose administrative burdens, deter smaller or resource-limited congregations, and treat the SMP program as a secondary or discouraged route rather than a valid alternative, contrary to the 2007 vision of urgency and adaptability; and

WHEREAS, Constitution Article III calls for conserving and promoting the unity of the true faith through flexible means of pastoral formation, and past conventions have emphasized recruitment and support without overly prescriptive limits, making it prudent to restore the SMP program's original scope to better serve the harvest field (Matt. 9:37–38) and ensure broader access to the Office of the Holy Ministry, lest these restrictions risk exacerbating the Synod's pastor shortage by narrowing the applicant pool and discouraging participation; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention declare null and void the PFC's November 2025 policy requirements for the SMP program's admission, administration, and supervision, including policies one through eight and associated exceptions, as they exceed the directives of prior conventions and impose undue restrictions; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct the PFC, in consultation with the seminaries and Council of Presidents, to revert the SMP program to its original parameters as established in 2007 Res. 5-01B, emphasizing flexibility in applicant eligibility, voluntary rather than mandatory consultations and funding commitments, and supervision focused on initial formation without lifelong formalized documentation mandates; and be it further

Resolved, That the seminaries be encouraged to maintain the SMP program's curriculum focus on Lutheran theology and pastoral skills, while allowing broader access to ensure the program's vitality in addressing mission needs; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod affirm the value of all routes to ordination, including the SMP program, as equal means of fulfilling the divine call, and encourage ongoing recruitment efforts like *Set Apart to Serve* to increase the number of pastors without artificial barriers.

Christ
Milford, MI

Ov. 6-56

To Remove Age Requirement from Specific Ministry Pastor Admission, Administration, and Supervision Policy

WHEREAS, The Synod's Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) issued *Policy Requirements for the Specific Ministry Pastor Program: Admission, Administration and Supervision* (files.lcms.org/dl/f/smp-policy-requirements) in November 2025; and

WHEREAS, The policy, as written, contains a prescriptive minimum age requirement of 40 years old that is only supported by a premise statement (Premise 9) that states "Evidence shows greater completion rates ... for men over 40," and the premise statement

does not provide sufficient details to justify this claim, nor defines the completion rates broken down by age of admissions; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions consistently teach that the pastoral office depends on the call, the ability to teach the Gospel, and having the right doctrine in accordance with the Scriptures; the Lutheran Confessions never mention age; and within the Augsburg Confession (AC XIV) there are no age requirements; and

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture itself mentions no age requirements for pastoral ministry. For example, Jesus chose young men to be His disciples and the Apostle Paul entrusted ministry responsibilities to Timothy, who was perhaps in his late teens or early 20s, saying "let no one despise you for your youth" (1 Tim. 4:12); and

WHEREAS, The wider history of the Christian Church—including the Early Church, the Reformation, and the history of the Synod—shows no pattern of an age requirement to serve in the pastoral office. For example, St. Augustine was ordained around 36–37 years old (New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia, "St. Augustine of Hippo," newadvent.org/cathen/02084a.htm, accessed March 18, 2026), Martin Luther was ordained around 23–24 years old (Hans J. Hillerbrand, "Martin Luther," *Britannica*, Feb. 14, 2026, britannica.com/biography/Martin-Luther), and C.F.W. Walther was around 25 years old (Molly Lackey, "Our Great Heritage: C.F.W. Walther," *The Lutheran Witness*, Aug. 14, 2024, witness.lcms.org/2024/CFW-Walther/); and

WHEREAS, As the Synod faces a pastoral shortage, with Synod documentation (LCMS Pastoral Vacancy Report, Nov. 1998–Feb. 2026, lcms.org/how-we-serve/education/pastoral/pre-seminary), reporting more than 800 pastoral vacancies, including both calling and non-calling congregations and a shrinking membership (Joe Isenhower, Jr., "Reversing the LCMS Membership Decline: Not Just by Having More Children," *Reporter Online*, Feb. 28, 2017, reporter.lcms.org/2017/reversing-lcms-membership-decline), we should be encouraging men to seek the pastoral office if so led; while there should be well-defined requirements for those seeking the pastoral office, a prescriptive age should not be one of those requirements; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod Board of Directors direct the PFC to remove the age requirement from the *Policy Requirements for the Specific Ministry Pastor Program: Admission, Administration and Supervision* and amend any related bylaws or other policies of the Synod to reflect the above.

Christ Greenfield, Gilbert, AZ; Faith, Rochester, NY

Ov. 6-57

To Support the Specific Ministry Pastor Program and Remove Its Age Requirement

WHEREAS, The Synod continues to face significant pastoral shortages, particularly in rural, urban, ethnic, and mission-start contexts; and

WHEREAS, Many congregations of the Synod struggle to secure full-time seminary-trained pastors, leading to extended vacancies, limited Word and Sacrament ministry, and challenges in congregational vitality and growth; and

WHEREAS, The Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program has provided a faithful, rigorous, and supervised path for the formation and ordination of pastors to serve in specific ministry contexts under the oversight of the seminaries and districts; and

WHEREAS, Congregations served by SMP pastors have experienced stability in Word and Sacrament ministry, faithful proclamation of the Gospel, catechesis, pastoral care, and mission outreach within their unique local contexts; and

WHEREAS, The SMP program has enabled mature, faithful men with deep roots in their congregations and communities to be formed for pastoral service while remaining engaged in local ministry and vocations; and

WHEREAS, The Synod remains committed to maintaining high standards of theological education and pastoral formation, while also responding in creative and responsible ways to the real ministry needs of the church; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod affirm the value of the SMP program as a faithful and necessary pathway for pastoral formation and service; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod encourage continued support for the SMP program through its seminaries, districts, and congregations, including adequate resources, supervision, and mentoring for SMP candidates and pastors; and be it further

Resolved, That that the Synod urge districts and congregations to consider the SMP program as one faithful option for addressing pastoral shortages and mission needs, particularly in underserved communities; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm that the SMP program operates within the confessional, theological, and ecclesial standards of the Synod, while continuing to evaluate and strengthen the program to ensure faithful pastoral formation; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention remove the 40-year-old age requirement for admittance into the SMP program; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for the pastors formed through the SMP program and for the congregations that have been strengthened and sustained in Word and Sacrament ministry through their service.

Emmanuel
Kahului, HI

Ov. 6-58

To Add Specific Ministry Pastor Church Planter Designation including Applicants Under 40

WHEREAS, Congregations, circuits, and districts of the Synod are working diligently to establish new church starts that would benefit from seminary-trained church planters to provide future pastoral leadership; and

WHEREAS, The gift of church planting knows no artificial age restrictions, and knowing that our seminaries, where younger pastors are formed, are not producing an abundance of residential seminary M.Div. graduates who desire to serve in this role; and

WHEREAS, New church starts often benefit from a pastor who is willing to work bi-vocationally, who is already established with employment, a home, and relational networks in the area; and the low-residence requirement and contextual formation features of the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program make it better-suited than the residential model of education to prepare men to be this type of church planting pastor; and

WHEREAS, The new 2025 SMP Policy Requirement 6 states: “Seminary admissions will give priority to SMP applicants who will

serve congregations that could otherwise not receive Word and Sacrament ministry” (Pastoral Formation Committee, *Policy Requirements for the Specific Ministry Pastor Program: Admission, Administration and Supervision*, Nov. 2025); and

WHEREAS, The new 2025 SMP Policy Requirement 3 states, “SMP applicants must be at least 40 years old,” with a footnote that indicates, “Exceptions to Policy Requirements 1–3 may be recommended to the admissions committees of the seminaries by the Council of Presidents after approval by a majority of the COP” (Ibid.); therefore be it

Resolved, That the specific ministry designations of the original 2007 SMP Resolution (2007 Res. 5-01B) be restored to the new 2025 SMP Policy Requirements (Pastoral Formation Committee, LCMS, Nov. 2025, *LCMS Policy Requirements For The Specific Ministry Pastor Program*), and that all be given equal priority in the admission process to support the necessary work of church planting in the Synod; and be it finally

Resolved, That applicants under the age of 40, whose ministry context fulfills the Council of Presidents (COP) definition of a *New Church Start*, be recognized by the COP as a standing exception to Requirement 3 in the SMP policy document and be permitted to enroll in the SMP program with a *Church Planter* designation.

Board of Directors
Michigan District

Ov. 6-59

To Broaden and Reopen Specific Ministry Pastor Program for Wider Pastoral Formation and Service

WHEREAS, God desires all people to be saved and He established the Office of the Ministry so that, through the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments, people receive forgiveness and salvation, and no one should publicly teach or administer the Sacraments without a rightly ordered call, as confessed in the Lutheran Confessions (AC V; XIV); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has long entrusted pastoral formation to our seminaries for the church’s mission, and has also created the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) route to supply pastors in contexts where a residentially prepared pastor could not be called; and

WHEREAS, The SMP program has served the church by providing basic formation for men who serve under appropriate restrictions and supervision, thereby maintaining ministry in small, rural, ethnic, urban, and bi-vocational settings; and

WHEREAS, Recent policy changes to the SMP program have added admissions and supervision requirements, including, among others, a five-year Synod membership minimum, a three-year membership in the congregation of placement, a minimum age of 40, and supervision framed as ongoing for roster retention with only limited exceptions, which has narrowed the pool of otherwise faithful candidates and hindered mission in many contexts; and

WHEREAS, The Synod already provides mechanisms for good order and oversight through supervised calls and assisting capacity calls, therefore the church can prudently broaden access while preserving accountability; and

WHEREAS, C.F.W. Walther urged that a truly Evangelical Lutheran synod deals evangelically with congregations and assists them in acquiring orthodox pastors (“Duties of an Evangelical

Lutheran Synod,” in *At Home in the House of My Fathers*, ed. Matthew Harrison [St. Louis: CPH, 2011], 226), which directs the Synod toward pathways that supply shepherds for the flock rather than obstacles that prevent men from serving where the church calls them; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm the doctrinal foundation for all pastoral formation routes and calls, including SMP, in accord with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, particularly AC V and XIV, and direct that all changes below preserve the order of the call and the integrity of Word and Sacrament ministry; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod suspend, for the sake of the mission and pastoral supply, the following recent admissions restrictions for the SMP program: the five-year LCMS congregation membership minimum, the three-year membership in the congregation of placement minimum, and the age-40 minimum, and replace them with broadened criteria under district president and seminary oversight, retaining case-by-case vetting for doctrine, life, catechesis, and congregational need; and be it further

Resolved, That supervision of specific ministry pastors be retained in principle yet applied proportionately, time-bound, and tapered as men demonstrate competency and faithful service, rather than perpetual as a condition for roster retention, with the tapering recorded and reported through the established Church Worker Locator and Pastor’s Information Form (PIF) processes; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct the Council of Presidents (COP), the two seminaries, and the Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) to prioritize SMP applicants in underserved contexts, while opening eligibility to additional mission fields including small multi-point parishes, rural and frontier missions, ethnic and language specific plants, chaplaincy extensions under call, campus and mercy outposts, and bi-vocational sites, all under existing supervised call provisions and with seminary faculty and district president review of sites and supervisors; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod create a stackable, competency based bridge from SMP to the general pastor roster, directing the seminaries and the COP to publish, within twelve months, unified benchmarks that grant advanced standing for completed SMP coursework and supervised experience and that define any additional formation, language proficiency options, vicarage equivalencies, and examinations needed for colloquy or roster transition, with transparent timelines and costs; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod encourage the residential Master of Divinity (M.Div.) route as the preferred comprehensive route while clearly stating that the SMP route is a legitimate path to ordination for specific settings, and that men who complete the SMP program and the defined bridge benchmarks may, by examination and call, serve the wider church as general pastors; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct the Commission on Handbook, in consultation with the COP and the seminaries, to propose to the next convention amendments harmonizing bylaws on supervised service and mobility, and to review limitations that prevent specific ministry pastors from serving in certain Synod or district roles, recommending criteria by which experienced specific ministry pastors who complete the bridge benchmarks may be eligible for those roles, thereby aligning leadership eligibility with demonstrated competency and call while safeguarding ecclesiastical oversight; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod authorize the seminaries to admit qualified SMP applicants under age 40 when the district president certifies pastoral need and congregational support, and to accept applicants with fewer than five years of Synod membership when the district president certifies mature catechesis and doctrinal subscription and the site demonstrates readiness to support the man’s formation, and that the seminaries publish uniform admissions rubrics that implement this flexibility within six months; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod encourage districts and congregations to fund SMP students through scholarships and site commitments so that cost does not hinder the supply of pastors to underserved communities, and that the seminaries report annually on aid and outcomes by context; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct the PFC to withdraw restrictive language that frames SMP as ordinarily unsuitable for younger candidates and to frame SMP suitability by context, character, catechesis, competency, and call, acknowledging that the church, not a demographic metric, discerns fitness for service in accord with AC XIV; and be it further

Resolved, That the President of the Synod ensure that training is provided to district presidents, supervisors, and seminary personnel for consistent application of these policies and benchmarks, and that annual public reports on SMP admissions, contexts served, completion rates, bridge progress to general pastor status, and placement outcomes be made available, so the next convention can evaluate the fruit and make further adjustments; and be it finally

Resolved, That nothing in this resolution be construed as diminishing the church’s esteem for residential M.Div. formation, which the Synod continues to commend as a precious norm, even as we vigorously supply pastors for the fields now white for harvest.

Trinity
Mission, KS

Ov. 6-60

To Broaden and Reopen Specific Ministry Pastor Program for Wider Pastoral Formation and Service

Preamble

We observe the following:

- Confessional foundation: Augsburg Confession (AC) V and XIV set the pattern: ministry exists to deliver the Gospel through Word and Sacrament, and it is carried out by men rightly called. Opening Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) admission and mobility, with supervision in order, serves precisely this end in places that otherwise lack a pastor.
- Pastoral supply with integrity: The Pastoral Formation Committee’s (PFC) own premises acknowledge the ongoing shortage and the role SMP can play in underserved contexts. We honor that need while removing blunt constraints that exclude otherwise faithful men and sites ready to be served.
- Order and oversight already exist: Existing bylaws (Bylaw 2.13.1) address supervised service and assisting calls. Using those tools with clear benchmarks prevents disorder while enabling more service where needed.
- C.F.W. Walther’s Synod duty: To “assist [congregations] in acquiring upright [*rechtschaffener*] pastors” (“Duties of an

Evangelical Lutheran Synod,” in *At Home in the House of My Fathers*, ed. Matthew Harrison [St. Louis: CPH, 2011], 226) is a Synod obligation, not a suggestion. Opening SMP, then bridging to general pastor by competency, fulfills that duty.

- Clarity for candidates: A transparent, stackable bridge dignifies SMP service, encourages continued formation, and provides a credible onramp to the general pastor roster for those who complete the benchmarks. It also signals to congregations that the Synod is committed to placing pastors where sheep need shepherds.

WHEREAS, God desires all people to be saved and He established the Office of the Ministry so that, through the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments, people receive forgiveness and salvation, and no one should publicly teach or administer the Sacraments without a rightly ordered call, as confessed in the Lutheran Confessions (AC V; XIV); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has long entrusted pastoral formation to our seminaries for the church’s mission, and has also created the SMP route to supply pastors in contexts where a residentially prepared pastor could not be called; and

WHEREAS, The SMP program has served the church by providing basic formation for men who serve under appropriate restrictions and supervision, thereby maintaining ministry in small, rural, ethnic, urban, and bi-vocational settings; and

WHEREAS, Recent policy changes to the SMP program have added admissions and supervision requirements, including, among others, a five-year Synod membership minimum, a three-year membership in the congregation of placement, a minimum age of 40, and supervision framed as ongoing for roster retention with only limited exceptions, which has narrowed the pool of otherwise faithful candidates and hindered mission in many contexts; and

WHEREAS, The Synod already provides mechanisms for good order and oversight through supervised calls and assisting capacity calls, therefore the church can prudently broaden access while preserving accountability; and

WHEREAS, C.F.W. Walther urged that a truly Evangelical Lutheran synod deals evangelically with congregations and assists them in acquiring orthodox pastors (*ibid.*), which directs the Synod toward pathways that supply shepherds for the flock rather than obstacles that prevent men from serving where the church calls them; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm the doctrinal foundation for all pastoral formation routes and calls, including SMP, in accord with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, particularly AC V and XIV, and direct that all changes below preserve the order of the call and the integrity of Word and Sacrament ministry; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod suspend, for the sake of the mission and pastoral supply, the following recent admissions restrictions for the SMP program: the five-year LCMS congregation membership minimum, the three-year membership in the congregation of placement minimum, and the age-40 minimum, and replace them with broadened criteria under district president and seminary oversight, retaining case-by-case vetting for doctrine, life, catechesis, and congregational need; and be it further

Resolved, That supervision of specific ministry pastors be retained in principle yet applied proportionately, time-bound, and

tapered as men demonstrate competency and faithful service, rather than perpetual as a condition for roster retention, with the tapering recorded and reported through the established Church Worker Locator and Pastor’s Information Form (PIF) processes; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct the Council of Presidents (COP), the two seminaries, and the PFC to prioritize SMP applicants in underserved contexts, while opening eligibility to additional mission fields including small multi-point parishes, rural and frontier missions, ethnic and language specific plants, chaplaincy extensions under call, campus and mercy outposts, and bi-vocational sites, all under existing supervised call provisions and with seminary faculty and district president review of sites and supervisors; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod create a stackable, competency based bridge from SMP to the general pastor roster, directing the seminaries and the COP to publish, within twelve months, unified benchmarks that grant advanced standing for completed SMP coursework and supervised experience and that define any additional formation, language proficiency options, vicarage equivalencies, and examinations needed for colloquy or roster transition, with transparent timelines and costs; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod encourage the residential Master of Divinity (M.Div.) route as the preferred comprehensive route while clearly stating that the SMP route is a legitimate path to ordination for specific settings, and that men who complete the SMP program and the defined bridge benchmarks may, by examination and call, serve the wider church as general pastors; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct the Commission on Handbook, in consultation with the COP and the seminaries, to propose to the next convention amendments harmonizing bylaws on supervised service and mobility, and to review limitations that prevent specific ministry pastors from serving in certain Synod or district roles, recommending criteria by which experienced specific ministry pastors who complete the bridge benchmarks may be eligible for those roles, thereby aligning leadership eligibility with demonstrated competency and call while safeguarding ecclesiastical oversight; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod authorize the seminaries to admit qualified SMP applicants under age 40 when the district president certifies pastoral need and congregational support, and to accept applicants with fewer than five years of Synod membership when the district president certifies mature catechesis and doctrinal subscription and the site demonstrates readiness to support the man’s formation, and that the seminaries publish uniform admissions rubrics that implement this flexibility within six months; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod encourage districts and congregations to fund SMP students through scholarships and site commitments so that cost does not hinder the supply of pastors to underserved communities, and that the seminaries report annually on aid and outcomes by context; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct the PFC to withdraw restrictive language that frames SMP as ordinarily unsuitable for younger candidates and to frame SMP suitability by context, character, catechesis, competency, and call, acknowledging that the church, not a demographic metric, discerns fitness for service in accord with AC XIV; and be it further

Resolved, That the President of the Synod ensure that training is provided to district presidents, supervisors, and seminary personnel for consistent application of these policies and benchmarks, and that annual public reports on SMP admissions, contexts served, completion rates, bridge progress to general pastor status, and placement outcomes be made available, so the next convention can evaluate the fruit and make further adjustments; and be it finally

Resolved, That nothing in this resolution be construed as diminishing the church's esteem for residential M.Div. formation, which the Synod continues to commend as a precious norm, even as we vigorously supply pastors for the fields now white for harvest.

Circuit 16 (Faribault)
Minnesota South District

Ov. 6-61

To Clarify and Strengthen the Specific Ministry Pastor Program

WHEREAS, Many congregations and ministries of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod lack regular pastoral care because they cannot support a full-time pastor or are in challenging mission fields; and

WHEREAS, 2007 Resolution 5-01B, “To Establish Specific Ministry Pastor Program” (*Proceedings*, 133–38), adopted the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program as a faithful, multiple-track route to ordination for specific ministry contexts; and

WHEREAS, 2007 Res. 5-01B explicitly envisions specific ministry pastors serving not only congregations that cannot support a full-time pastor but also as church planters and as staff or associate pastors in larger congregations and multi-staff ministries under the supervision of a general ministry pastor; and

WHEREAS, The SMP program, as established, provides supervised theological formation and appropriate limitations while recognizing specific ministry pastors as truly called and ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention reaffirm the original intent of the SMP program as set forth in 2007 Res. 5-01B, including its use for specific ministry contexts such as congregations unable to support a full-time pastor, language and cultural missions, church plants, and service as staff or associate pastors in larger congregations under the supervision of a general ministry pastor; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod encourage districts, congregations, and seminaries to identify and support qualified men for SMP service wherever such specific ministry needs exist, including in larger congregations and multi-site ministries; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct the Council of Presidents, in consultation with the seminaries and the Pastoral Formation Committee, to review current SMP enrollment policies and recommend adjustments that remove unnecessary numerical caps or other restrictions so that enrollment is guided chiefly by mission needs, candidate qualifications, and capacity for faithful formation and supervision; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod encourage districts, congregations, and appropriate Synod entities to provide financial support so that no qualified SMP candidate is prevented from entering or completing the program solely because of financial hardship; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for the service of specific ministry pastors and their supervising pastors and take all appropriate actions to clarify and strengthen the SMP program in keeping with its original purpose, for the sake of the Gospel and the mission of Christ's Church.

Board of Directors
Southeastern District

Ov. 6-62

To Reduce Restrictions on Specific Ministry Pastors

WHEREAS, Our Lord Jesus Christ established the Office of the Public Ministry by sending out His apostles to preach, teach, and baptize those they went to serve; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod since its inception has faithfully overseen and consistently provided for the education and placement of qualified men to serve in the Office of the Public Ministry for local congregations; and

WHEREAS, The Synod established the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program at the 2007 Synod convention as a distance-based, specialized program of theological education available at both seminaries (2007 Res. 5-01B); and

WHEREAS, The SMP program is available to those selected by a congregation to serve as vicars for the first two years of the program; and

WHEREAS, Upon successful completion of the first two years and certification by seminary faculty, these students are ordained and complete two additional years of instruction; and

WHEREAS, Participants have the approval and support of their home church, the faculty of the seminary at which they train, and the district they serve; and

WHEREAS, Each specific ministry pastor is supervised by an experienced pastor of the Synod during and after his program of study; and

WHEREAS, Ordained pastors trained via this program face restrictions concerning service in the pastoral ministry, including the restriction of certain voting rights and the inability to hold office at the circuit and district levels; and

WHEREAS, The roster distinction introduced for SMP graduates makes these pastors distinct from Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology graduates, Center for Hispanic Studies graduates, and Residential Alternate Route graduates who also may be ordained without an academic degree and who have also received a lesser level of theological training than full M.Div. graduates; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions in the Treatise of the Power and Primacy of the Pope state that before God there is no substantive difference between ordained pastors (Tr 60–65); and

WHEREAS, The difference in roster status for specific ministry pastors creates confusion among the pastorate and laity over their status as pastors, even though the Lutheran Confessions are clear that an ordained pastor is a full pastor; and

WHEREAS, All rostered pastors of the Synod serve under ecclesiastical supervision and under the mutual admonition of their fellow pastors; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod plan to lift specific ministry pastor restrictions on voting and holding office at the circuit and district level, and that restrictions on voting and holding office at the circuit

and district level be lifted upon completion of the entire four-year SMP course of study; and be it further

Resolved, That we give thanks for the faithful and dedicated ministry of all pastors of the Synod.

Florida-Georgia District

Ov. 6-63

To Implore Council of Presidents to Fulfill 2019 Resolution 6-03A re Supervision of Specific Ministry Pastors

WHEREAS, Synod Bylaw 2.13.1 states that every specific ministry pastor “shall serve under the supervision of his district president and another pastor who is not a specific ministry pastor”; and

WHEREAS, The term “supervision” is left largely undefined apart from the general definition that supervision is “to have authority over, to direct actions, to control activities” (Bylaw 1.2.1 [u]) and is therefore open to a variety of interpretations; and

WHEREAS, There is a great variety of specific ministry pastors serving in a wide variety of contexts and with a great variety of education, years of service, and gifts; and

WHEREAS, This situation has created a number of questions regarding the amount and level of supervision that shall be employed as per Synod Bylaws; and

WHEREAS, The 2019 Synod convention adopted Resolution 6-03A, “To Enhance the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) Program,” which includes the resolve, “That the Council of Presidents in coordination with the Pastoral Formation Committee draft guidelines and training to enhance the mentoring and supervision of specific ministry pastors, taking into account the wide variety of abilities of pastors and the contexts in which they serve, to assist district presidents, circuit visitors, and supervising pastors in supporting the SMP pastors under their care” (2019 *Proceedings*, 159); and

WHEREAS, These guidelines and training either have not been completed or have not been widely promulgated throughout the Synod; and

WHEREAS, The number of specific ministry pastors continues to increase, thereby creating a growing and continuing need for such guidance and training; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention implore the Council of Presidents (COP) to complete this important assignment with the due and swift attention that is needed; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention thank the COP for their service and efforts.

SELC District

Ov. 6-64

To Give Thanks for the Work of, and To Amend Bylaws to Conclude, the Pastoral Formation Committee

WHEREAS, Prior to the restructuring implemented by the 2010 Synod convention, there existed a 14-member Board for Pastoral Education (BPE), all of whose voting members were elected by the Synod in convention (see 2007 Bylaw 3.8.2f.); and

WHEREAS, The BPE, in addition to acting as a resource for advice and coordination, had significant and substantive governance authority over the seminaries, including the right to approve seminary master plans; to approve new programs; to establish guidelines for distribution of Synod grants; to grant prior approval of faculty; to approve capital projects; to recommend consolidation, relocation, or divestiture of a seminary; to oversee pastoral colloquy; to set policies that were binding upon each seminary’s board of regents; and to appoint members of the seminary boards of regents for vacancies in Synod-elected positions; and

WHEREAS, Two convention cycles after abolishing the BPE, the Synod in convention created the Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) by adopting 2016 Resolution 6-01, which was based on the recommendation of the 2013 Res. 5-14A task force “that there be an entity ensuring that the seminaries *do* coordinate and collaborate with respect to” the various routes to ordination in the Synod; and

WHEREAS, The PFC’s responsibilities do not include any of the substantive governance responsibilities listed above as previously held by the BPE; and

WHEREAS, The PFC consists of only three voting members, none of whom is elected by the Synod in convention: namely, the two seminary presidents and the Chief Mission Officer of the Synod, together with the executive director of the Office of Pastoral Education, who is a non-voting advisory member. Consequently, only two individuals, both serving in similar contexts, can direct the course of the PFC’s actions; and

WHEREAS, To the extent the PFC is “responsible for ensuring that the Synod’s objective of training pastors is fulfilled consistently” (Bylaw 3.10.4) and is directed to “review ... seminary and pre-seminary education programs” (Bylaw 3.10.4.3) and to “monitor and receive reports from all directors and committees charged with oversight of all routes to ordination” (Bylaw 3.10.4.4), its structure creates a circular process, the two seminary presidents effectively reviewing and monitoring their own performance and that of their institutions—a function that belongs to the respective boards of regents (under Bylaws 3.10.5.1 and 3.10.5.6.1) and, for broader policy matters, to the Synod in convention; and

WHEREAS, Because the PFC lacks the substantive governing authority, broad membership, and direct accountability to convention of the former BPE, and because the PFC creates a redundant level of monitoring and review of seminary-related activities by a committee controlled by the seminary presidents (“For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged” [1 Cor. 11:31 KJV]), it is an unnecessary addition to the seminary governance structure. As such, we should give thanks for the work done to date and sunset the PFC; therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.4.3.8 be removed as follows:

~~PRESENT~~ PROPOSED WORDING

Chief Mission Officer

3.4.3 The Chief Mission Officer shall be responsible to the President of the Synod for the mission, ministry, and any programmatic and coordinative functions which are implemented according to the policies adopted by the Board for National Mission and the Board for International Mission.

...

~~3.4.3.8 The Chief Mission Officer shall, on behalf of the President, provide leadership, coordination, and oversight for pre-seminary education programs, seminary education, and post-seminary continuing education, and by providing advocacy for pastoral~~

St. Paul
Brookfield, IL

~~education and health within the Synod. He shall serve as the chairman of the Pastoral Formation Committee.~~

and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaws 3.10.4–3.10.4.7 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

D. Pastoral Formation Committee*Seminary Education Matters*

3.10.4 The Pastoral Formation Committee ~~shall be responsible for ensuring that the Synod's objective of training pastors is fulfilled consistently (Constitution Art. III 3). The Executive Director of the Office of Pastoral Education shall, on behalf of the President, provide leadership, coordination, and oversight for pre-seminary education programs, seminary education, and post-seminary continuing education, and provide advocacy for pastoral education and health within the Synod.~~

~~3.10.4.1 The committee shall recommend any new routes leading to ordination for approval by resolution of the Synod. Such a recommendation shall follow consultation with the two seminary boards of regents in their annual joint meeting.~~

~~3.10.4.2 Seminaries will implement new routes to ordination only upon approval by resolution of the Synod.~~

~~3.10.4.3 The committee shall review, assess, coordinate, support and make suggestions for improvement of all existing noncolloquy routes leading to ordination in the Synod, including seminary and pre-seminary education programs.~~

~~3.10.4.4 The committee shall monitor and receive reports from all directors and committees charged with oversight of all routes to ordination and shall foster coordination and collaboration among them.~~

~~3.10.4.5 The committee shall consider the long term strategic direction of pastoral formation within the Synod and facilitate discussion of the same with the two seminary boards of regents in their annual joint meeting.~~

~~3.10.4.6 The Pastoral Formation Committee shall comprise the following members:~~

Voting Members:

1. The Chief Mission Officer of the Synod, chairman
2. The presidents of the seminaries

Nonvoting Advisory Member:

The Executive Director of the Office of Pastoral Education

~~3.10.4.7 The Pastoral Formation Committee shall meet at least once per year, and shall report on its work at the annual joint meeting of the two seminary boards of regents. Additional meetings shall be determined by the chairman in consultation with the committee members.~~

and be it finally

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.10.5.3 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

E. Seminary Boards of Regents

3.10.5 Each seminary of the Synod, with its president and faculty, shall be governed by a board of regents, subject to general policies set by the Synod.

...

3.10.5.3 Once annually, the two seminary boards of regents shall meet jointly on a seminary campus. ~~Some of the meeting sessions shall be conducted jointly.~~ As part of the joint meeting, the joint boards shall review, assess, coordinate, support, and make suggestions for improvement of existing non-residential routes to ordination. Only the Synod in convention may approve any new routes leading to ordination.

Ov. 6-65

To Amend Bylaw 3.10.4.6 to Expand Pastoral Formation Committee for Broader Representation

WHEREAS, The Synod's objectives include training pastors for Word and Sacrament ministry (Const. Art. III 3); and

WHEREAS, The Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) is charged with ensuring that objective is fulfilled consistently (Bylaw 3.10.4), recommending new routes to ordination (Bylaw 3.10.4.1), and coordinating existing routes (Bylaw 3.10.4.3–4); and

WHEREAS, The current voting membership of the PFC consists of the Chief Mission Officer of the Synod, who serves as chairman, and the presidents of the two seminaries; the executive director of the Office of Pastoral Education serves as a nonvoting advisory member; and

WHEREAS, Pastoral formation involves and impacts congregations, districts, and the whole Synod, and would benefit from the wisdom and perspective of district presidents and parish pastors outside of the seminaries and national staff; and

WHEREAS, Adding representation from the Council of Presidents (COP) and convention-elected pastors will strengthen transparency, foster collaboration across the Synod, and reflect our shared commitment to faithful, mission-minded pastoral formation; therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.10.4.6 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

D. Pastoral Formation Committee

...

3.10.4.6 The Pastoral Formation Committee shall comprise the following members:

Voting Members:

1. The Chief Mission Officer of the Synod, chairman
2. The presidents of the seminaries
3. Two district presidents elected by the Council of Presidents to serve for the ensuing triennium
4. Two ministers of religion—ordained, nominated by the Committee for Convention Nominations and elected by the Synod in convention for the ensuing triennium

Nonvoting Advisory Member:

The Executive Director of the Office of Pastoral Education

Terms and Vacancies:

The two district presidents shall be elected by the Council of Presidents at its first regular meeting following each Synod convention and shall serve until the close of the next regular Synod convention or until their successors are elected. Should a district president so serving cease to hold the office of district president, the Council of Presidents shall elect a replacement for the remainder of the term. The two convention-elected pastors shall serve from the close of the convention at which they were elected until the close of the next regular Synod convention. Vacancies in these convention-elected positions occurring between conventions shall be filled by appointment of the President of the Synod, in consultation with the Council of Presidents, until the next regular Synod convention.

and be it further

Resolved, That the Secretary of the Synod and the Commission on Handbook make any and all conforming edits elsewhere in the *Handbook* (including nominations and elections processes) to implement these changes and maintain internal consistency; and be it further

Resolved, That the first election of the two convention-elected pastors take place at this convention for terms beginning at the close of this convention; and be it finally

Resolved, That the COP elect the two district presidents to serve for the ensuing triennium at its first regular meeting following this convention.

Christ Greenfield, Gilbert, AZ; Circuit 16 (Faribault), Minnesota South District; Circuit 28, Pacific Southwest District

Ov. 6-66

To Amend Bylaw 3.10.4.6 to Revise Composition of Pastoral Formation Committee

WHEREAS, Our Lord says, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2); and

WHEREAS, The objectives of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod include that it shall (Const. Art. III):

- recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth (III 3);
- Aid congregations by providing a variety of resources and opportunities for recognizing, promoting, expressing, conserving, and defending their confessional unity in the true faith (III 6); and
- Encourage congregations to strive for uniformity in church practice, but also to develop an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith (III 7);

and

WHEREAS, These godly objectives exist for the purpose of serving congregations in their bold witness of the Gospel through their Word and Sacrament ministry; and

WHEREAS, The Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) has been established to help carry out these objectives; and

WHEREAS, 2013 Resolution 5-03E, “To Provide Procedure for Establishing Policies Governing Specific Ministry Pastor Program,” established “that the Chief Mission Officer and one representative from each seminary shall, in consultation with the Council of Presidents, provide leadership, coordination, and oversight for the Specific Ministry Pastor program” and “that each seminary shall select its own representative” (*Proceedings*, 138–39); and

WHEREAS, The current PFC reflects this same composition with the addition of the executive director of the Office of Pastoral Education as a non-voting member of the committee (Bylaw 3.10.4.6); and

WHEREAS, Such composition consists of individuals very gifted and able, yet not directly accountable to the congregations and laity of the church; and

WHEREAS, The district presidents and laypeople do have such accountability and are on the ground floor of congregational needs regarding pastors and pastoral formation; and

WHEREAS, The need for sound doctrine and practice is the same for all of the congregations in the Synod, the application of the same can be affected by region and individual location; therefore be it

Resolved, That the PFC includes a broader representation of those served by the committee, including those who have a more direct accountability to the congregations of the Synod and are living out the very needs that the PFC seeks to meet; and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.10.4.6 be amended as follows:

~~PRESENT~~/PROPOSED WORDING

D. Pastoral Formation Committee

3.10.4.6 The Pastoral Formation Committee shall comprise the following members:

Voting Members:

1. The Chief Mission Officer of the Synod, chairman
2. The presidents of the seminaries or their representatives
3. One (1) district president from each geographical region of the Synod, to be selected by the district presidents within that region
4. One (1) lay member of a member congregation of the Synod from each geographical region of the Synod, to be selected by the district presidents within that region, and from a district distinct from the district president representative on the committee

Nonvoting Advisory Member:

The Executive Director of the Office of Pastoral Education

Trinity, Lexington Park, MD; Board of Directors, Texas District; Circuit 8 (Washington, South), Southeastern District

Ov. 6-67

To Amend Bylaw 3.10.4.6 to Expand Pastoral Formation Committee

WHEREAS, The 2016 Synod convention created the Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) (Res. 6-01), in order to facilitate greater coordination and collaboration between the two seminaries; and

WHEREAS, The PFC consists of the presidents of the two seminaries, the Chief Mission Officer (CMO) as its chair, and the Executive Director of the Office of Pastoral Education as non-voting advisory member; and

WHEREAS, In recent years changes to pastoral colloquy requirements and Specific Ministry Pastor admissions, and tensions over competing online seminaries have raised further questions about not only coordination and collaboration between the two seminaries, but with the Synod as a whole, including its districts, congregations, workers, and other agencies; and

WHEREAS, The districts, congregations, workers, and other agencies of the Synod have a vested interest in the formation of pastors and their voices should be heard; therefore be it

Resolved, That Synod in convention expands the PFC from its current three voting members to five; and be it further

Resolved, That the five-member PFC include the presidents of the two seminaries, the CMO as its chair, a district president appointed by the Council of Presidents, a faculty representative responsible for overseeing a pre-seminary program and appointed by the Institutional Advisory Council of the Concordia University

System, and the Executive Director of the Office of Pastoral Education as a non-voting advisory member; and be it finally

Resolved, That, to effect the above, Bylaw 3.10.4.6 be amended as follows:

~~PRESENT/PROPOSED~~ WORDING

D. Pastoral Formation Committee

...

3.10.4.6 The Pastoral Formation Committee shall comprise the following members:

Voting Members:

1. The Chief Mission Officer of the Synod, chairman
2. The presidents of the seminaries
3. One district president appointed by the Council of Presidents
4. One faculty representative responsible for overseeing a pre-seminary program, appointed by the Institutional Advisory Council of the Concordia University System

Nonvoting Advisory Member:

The Executive Director of the Office of Pastoral Education

Christ, La Mesa, CA; Circuit 9 (Decatur), Indiana District

Ov. 6-68

**To Amend Bylaw 3.10.4.6 to Revise
Composition of Pastoral Formation Committee**

WHEREAS, Our Lord says, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2); and

WHEREAS, The objectives of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod include that it shall (Constitution Article III):

- recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth (III 3);
- Aid congregations by providing a variety of resources and opportunities for recognizing, promoting, expressing, conserving, and defending their confessional unity in the true faith (III 6); and
- Encourage congregations to strive for uniformity in church practice, but also to develop an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith (III 7);

and

WHEREAS, These godly objectives exist for the purpose of serving congregations in their bold witness to the Gospel through their Word and Sacrament ministry; and

WHEREAS, The Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) has been established to help carry out these objectives; and

WHEREAS, 2013 Resolution 5-03E, “To Provide Procedure for Establishing Policies Governing Specific Ministry Pastor Program,” established “that the Chief Mission Officer and one representative from each seminary shall, in consultation with the Council of Presidents, provide leadership, coordination, and oversight for the Specific Ministry Pastor program” and “that each seminary shall select its own representative” (*Proceedings*, 138–39); and

WHEREAS, The current PFC reflects this same composition, with the addition of the executive director of the Office of Pastoral

Education as a nonvoting member of the committee (Bylaw 3.10.4.6); and

WHEREAS, Such composition consists of individuals who are very gifted and able, yet not directly accountable to congregations and laity of the church in the same way as those called and elected to congregational and district offices; and

WHEREAS, The district presidents and laypeople do have such accountability and, together with pastors and other church workers, serve “on the ground” in congregations and are therefore closely acquainted with congregational needs regarding pastors and pastoral formation; and

WHEREAS, The need for sound doctrine and practice is the same for all congregations of the Synod, while the application of the same may be affected by region and local context; therefore be it

Resolved, That the PFC include a broader representation of those served by the committee, including those who have more direct accountability to the congregations of the Synod and are living out the very needs that the PFC seeks to meet; and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.10.4.6 be amended as follows:

~~PRESENT/PROPOSED~~ WORDING

D. Pastoral Formation Committee

3.10.4.6 The Pastoral Formation Committee shall comprise the following members:

Voting Members:

1. The Chief Mission Officer of the Synod, chairman
2. The presidents of the seminaries or their representatives
3. One (1) district president from each geographical region of the Synod, to be
selected by the district presidents within that region.
4. One (1) lay member of a member congregation of the Synod
from each geographical
region of the Synod, to be selected by the district presidents
within that region, and
from a district distinct from the district president representative
on the committee.

Nonvoting Advisory Member:

The Executive Director of the Office of Pastoral Education

Board of Directors
Southeastern District

Ov. 6-69

**To Amend Bylaw 3.10.4.6 to Expand
Pastoral Formation Committee**

WHEREAS, An explicit purpose of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, along with missions, is to provide pastors for the congregations of the Synod (Constitution Article III 3); and

WHEREAS, The current system of graduate level residential training at an approved seminary continues to struggle to provide both the sorts and the numbers of pastors that the congregations of the Synod desire; and

WHEREAS, Questions surround how to maximize the specific ministry pastor program appropriately to maximize the benefit of its existence; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has established a Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC, Bylaw 3.10.4) of just three members to oversee the overall approach to pastoral formation; and

WHEREAS, Two of the three members of the PFC are seminary presidents and all three members of the committee are ordained, representing a narrow segment of interest; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod expand the PFC to include a wider range of voices and interests so that the voice of the church and the needs of congregations are better represented; and be it further

Resolved, That the PFC be comprised of:

- One seminary president
- One Synod executive
- One district president
- Three lay members selected by draw of suggested names submitted by district presidents of districts not already represented on the committee.

Resolved, That, to effect the above, Bylaw 3.10.4.6 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

D. Pastoral Formation Committee

...

3.10.4.6 The Pastoral Formation Committee shall comprise the following members:

Voting Members:

- ~~1. The Chief Mission Officer of the Synod, chairman~~
- ~~2. The presidents of the seminaries~~
 1. One seminary president
 2. One Synod executive
 3. One district president
4. Three lay members selected by draw of suggested names submitted by district presidents of districts not already represented on the committee

~~*Nonvoting Advisory Member:*~~

~~The Executive Director of the Office of Pastoral Education~~

Board of Directors
Michigan District

Ov. 6-70

**To Retain Current Structure
of Pastoral Formation Committee**

WHEREAS, The Synod has established the Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) to provide theological and ecclesial oversight of pastoral formation programs in harmony with Holy Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and the Synod's doctrinal commitments; and

WHEREAS, The current structure of the PFC reflects a deliberate balance of theological expertise, institutional accountability, and synodwide responsibility; and

WHEREAS, The PFC's work directly affects the integrity of pastoral formation, including the relationship between residential seminary education and contextual pathways authorized by the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Changes to the composition of doctrinal or formation-related committees may unintentionally alter their theological orientation or functional purpose; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has repeatedly affirmed the importance of careful, theologically grounded oversight in matters pertaining to the pastoral office (AC XIV; FC SD X); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod affirm the current structure and membership composition of the PFC as presently constituted; and be it further

Resolved, That no expansion or restructuring of the PFC be adopted that would alter its current balance of theological and institutional representation; and be it further

Resolved, That any future proposal affecting the structure of the PFC demonstrate clear theological necessity and broad synodwide consensus; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for faithful leaders who serve in pastoral formation oversight for the good order and unity of Christ's Church.

Good Shepherd, Lincoln, NE;
Trinity (Decatur Rd), Fort Wayne, IN

Ov. 6-71

**To Amend Bylaw 3.10.4.6 to Reform
Membership of Pastoral Formation Committee**

WHEREAS, The Synod is to, "Recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth" (Const. Art. III 3); and

WHEREAS, The Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) is responsible for ensuring that the "Synod's objective of training pastors is fulfilled consistently" (Bylaw 3.10.4); and

WHEREAS, The training of pastors is a matter of great importance to the entire Synod, including its congregations, in recognition of the many vocations to which pastors are called to serve the Synod, its congregations, educational institutions, mission outposts, and Recognized Service Organizations; and

WHEREAS, Given the breadth of offices to which pastors are called to serve the Synod, the PFC should, through its membership, have knowledge of the needs of the Synod as it considers recommendation of new routes to ordination (Bylaw 3.10.4.1) and coordinates existing non-colloquy routes to ordination (Bylaw 3.10.4.3); and

WHEREAS, District presidents, given their direct election by the members of the Synod and ecclesiastical supervision of those pastors assigned to their districts (Bylaw 2.12.1), are uniquely situated to understand, analyze, and provide insight into the needs, both current and anticipated, for pastors in the Synod; therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.10.4.6 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

D. Pastoral Formation Committee

...

3.10.4.6 The Pastoral Formation Committee shall comprise the following members:

Voting Members:

1. The Chief Mission Officer of the Synod, chairman
2. The presidents of the seminaries
3. Five district presidents, one from each of the five geographic regions of the Synod, each of whom shall be appointed by the Council of Presidents' members from such geographic region and shall serve for a term of one year.

Nonvoting Advisory Member:

The Executive Director of the Office of Pastoral Education

and be it further

Resolved, That the Council of Presidents shall elect the five presidents at its first regularly scheduled meeting held after the 2026 Synod convention and at its first regularly scheduled meeting subsequent to September 1 annually thereafter.

St. John
Seward, NE

Ov. 6-72

To Study the Feasibility of Intentional Seminary Professor Turnover and Parish Sabbatical

WHEREAS, The Synod *Handbook* specifies the procedures for appointing seminary faculty members and the election of seminary presidents to a five-year renewable term of office; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention direct the two seminaries and the Council of Presidents (COP) to conduct feasibility studies regarding a predetermined period of years for a seminary professor's term of service, and a predetermined sabbatical period of parish service to maintain contact with the local congregation, the setting into which seminary professors train students to enter; and be it further

Resolved, That the two seminaries and the COP report their findings to the Synod, via the Office of the President of the Synod, by a deadline to be determined by the Synod in convention.

Circuit 14 (Austin)
Minnesota South District

Ov. 6-73

To Amend Bylaw 3.10.5.7.2 to Provide Flexibility to Seminary Boards of Regents in Faculty Matters in Their Contexts

WHEREAS, Current Bylaw 3.10.5.7.2 circumscribes the ability of the seminary boards of regents (BOR) to balance the composition of their faculty appointments, as it is understood to require an "up or out" standard whereby faculty members who have served six years should either be granted continuing appointment status (tenure) or be terminated; and

WHEREAS, Current Bylaw 3.10.5.7.2 (d)(1) provides that persons who, prior to joining a seminary faculty, have taught at another educational institution of the Synod for at least four years can petition the BOR of the seminary for continuing appointment and receive credit for such prior service, meaning that the board must consider for tenure a person who may have taught at the seminary less than two years; and

WHEREAS, These requirements significantly limit the ability of a BOR, in light of its particular context, to determine the appropriate percentage of the seminary faculty that should hold tenured positions, insofar as currently, all faculty who serve six years have the right to petition for tenure; and

WHEREAS, Such requirements do not exist for faculty of the Concordia University System schools and are not required for accreditation purposes; therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.10.5.7.2 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Seminary Faculties

3.10.5.7.2 Each theological seminary shall have established policies and procedures related to appointments. There shall be two levels of faculty appointments: (1) Initial level, where the appointment can be terminated with no formal requirement for a show of cause; (2) continuing level, where termination requires a formal show of cause.

...

(d) Standards or qualifications for moving a faculty member from initial-level appointment to continuing-level appointment shall be the following:

~~(1) The faculty member shall ordinarily have completed four to six years of creditable service (periods of leave are not included) as a member of the faculty of one or more educational institutions of the Synod, at least the last two years of which shall have been in the seminary currently served.~~

~~(2) The faculty members shall, as determined by their academic discipline, regularly continue to demonstrate scholarly achievement that may be institutionally funded as determined by the board of regents.~~

...

~~(e) Steps in moving a faculty member from an initial level appointment to a continuing level appointment shall be the following:~~

~~(1) If the board of regents, on recommendation of the president of the seminary, determines that a faculty member meets the above requirements and is still at the initial level appointment, it shall either carry forward the procedure for promotion to a continuing level appointment or inform the faculty member of its decision not to do so, in which case the individual either may continue at the initial level appointment or be terminated. Any continuation of employment at the initial level appointment shall be on a year to year basis. Faculty employment during the initial level appointment period may be terminated without disclosure of cause. In cases in which the decision is made to terminate the individual's contract, the contract shall be extended for at least six months beyond the time at which notice is given. If the board of regents does not take up the question of promotion to a continuing level appointment at least nine months prior to the end of the sixth year of service, the faculty member may petition the board of regents to do so.~~

~~(2) After final review the board of regents may promote to a continuing level appointment status.~~

~~(f) Promotion to continuing-level appointment status shall in no case be construed as requiring or indicating advancement in rank or increase in salary.~~

...

St. Paul
Brookfield, IL

Ov. 6-74

To Direct Seminaries to Publish Annual Enrollment Numbers Every Fall

WHEREAS, The matter of pastoral formation has become a significant issue among many in the Synod; and

WHEREAS, There is great concern among many districts and congregations as to the number of pastors who are currently rostered and who will be rostered in the future; and

WHEREAS, Different views have been expressed by many in the Synod regarding whether or not a pastor shortage exists now and the extent of any potential shortage in the future; and

WHEREAS, The Synod does publish the number of rostered church workers, including pastors, in its various communications, giving a snapshot of the current number of pastors, but not giving a clear picture of what future pastor numbers will be; and

WHEREAS, The seminaries have not consistently published enrollment numbers in a manner easily accessible to obtain for districts and congregations and their members, thereby allowing them to better understand for themselves both the current realities and future probabilities of the status of the Synod's clergy roster; and

WHEREAS, Publications such as the Data Tables of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) (one of the two accrediting agencies for Concordia Seminary [CSL] and Concordia Theological Seminary [CTSFW])—which indicate that, by the seminaries' reporting to them in the fall of 2024, there were only 322 Master of Divinity (M.Div.) students across all classes between both seminaries—are not disseminated to congregations and workers as are Synod publications; (This information which reveals an average of only 80 M.Div. students/year to be ordained in the LCMS during this particular 4 year cycle can be found in ATS 2024-2025 Table 2.12 [this is the most recent available data from ATS]); and

WHEREAS, Numbers from LCMS Research Services presented to the Texas District Board of Directors during its 2025 presidential visitation indicated a relatively small number of pastors, only 96, who will be reaching retirement age (67) in 2060 and beyond, suggesting a very small number of pastors currently on the roster who are in their early 30s or younger; and

WHEREAS, Synod publications such as *The Lutheran Witness* and *Reporter* have wide circulation among congregations and their members; therefore be it

Resolved, That enrollment numbers for CSL and CTSFW be published in *Reporter* and other appropriate Synod publications every year in the fall upon the matriculation of the newest class at each school. Such numbers to include:

- the number of residential M.Div. students broken down by class (first year, second year, vicarage, fourth year)
- the number of students in the Specific Ministry Pastor program
- the number of students in other programs that lead to ordination
- the number of deaconess students, as well as the number of students in any other program which the seminaries consider important to report
- the number of students expected to be ordained and assigned in the coming academic year
- the number of students in the different academic programs by the following age groups: 21–26, 27–32, 33–40, 41–49, 50+
- the approximate cost per student per year in the different academic programs;

and be it further

Resolved, That districts and congregations be encouraged to use such information to bring an awareness of the need and value of ministerial recruitment; and be it finally

Resolved, That similar reporting be provided to congregations of the Synod and their members for other church worker programs in the schools of the Concordia University System.

Board of Directors
Texas District

Ov. 6-75

To Encourage the Council of Presidents to Prioritize Assignment of Seminary Candidates to Sole Vacancies over Associate Positions

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) currently has a shortage of pastors for open pulpits and altars; and

WHEREAS, The difficulty of open pulpits and altars will only get worse due to pastors in the baby boomer segment of the population retiring; and

WHEREAS, Each year, the Synod's seminaries are graduating fewer seminarians than the number of pastors needed by LCMS congregations; and

WHEREAS, For proper administration of the Sacrament of the Altar, a local church needs to have a pastor or share a pastor; therefore be it

Resolved, That the 2025 North Dakota District convention encourage the Council of Presidents and seminary placement offices to prioritize the assignment of ready seminary candidates to sole vacancies over associate vacancies.

North Dakota District

Ov. 6-76

To Participate in Building Culture of Church Work Formation and Recruitment

WHEREAS, Jesus said, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:37–38); and

WHEREAS, Since 1847, the Synod has adopted resolutions in nearly every convention to form and recruit pastors, teachers, and other commissioned church workers to preach, teach, and share the Gospel of Jesus for eternal salvation in these full-time vocations; and

WHEREAS, These convention resolutions urged that church work formation and recruitment intentionally take place in every congregation and school of the Synod, by pastors, teachers, commissioned church workers, and laity; and

WHEREAS, These convention resolutions urged *districts and congregations* to have an active committee focused on forming and recruiting our youth and adults to consider full-time church work; and

WHEREAS, The pastoral office is the one divinely mandated office by our Lord (John 20:19–23; Rom. 10:14–15; Eph. 4:11–16), and the seven commissioned church work vocations of the Synod have been established in love to support the Office of the Holy Ministry, namely, Lutheran teacher, director of Christian education (DCE), director of family life ministry, deaconess, director of parish

music, director of church ministries, and director of Christian outreach (*LSB Agenda*, 210, 218); and

WHEREAS, In the last several years, approximately twice as many pastors of the Synod have been exiting the pastoral office due to retirement or death compared to newly called and ordained pastors; and

WHEREAS, In April 2024, there were 51 unfilled calls of congregations requesting a seminary candidate, 406 congregations calling a sole pastor, 56 congregations calling a senior pastor, 67 congregations calling an associate pastor, and 529 congregations vacant congregations not calling for various reasons; and

WHEREAS, In 2023, there were requests from schools of the Synod to our Concordia universities for 455 new teachers, but there were only 84 graduates, and there were requests for 79 other commissioned workers, but only 64 graduates from Concordia universities; and

WHEREAS, *Set Apart to Serve* was established by the 2019 Synod convention with the overarching goal of developing a culture of church work formation and recruitment in every congregation, school, and entity of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, *Set Apart to Serve* is in full partnership and collaboration in this church work initiative with our two seminaries (including Christ Academy and *Vocatio*), all Concordia universities, all 35 districts, Concordia Publishing House (CPH), Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF), LCMS Youth Ministry, LCMS School Ministry, Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry, Colloquy Committee for Commissioned Ministry, LCMS Church Worker Wellness, the Lutheran Women's Missionary League, Higher Things, the Lutheran Educator's Association, the National Association of Directors of Christian Education, the Black Clergy Caucus, the Hispanic Missionary League, Chinese Lutherans in Mission Building, Concordia Plan Services, the LCMS Foundation, and more; and

WHEREAS, Through comprehensive research, *Set Apart to Serve* has identified pastors, Lutheran school teachers, DCEs, all other commissioned workers, parents, and laity as the primary influential adults who form, recruit, and encourage youth, from early childhood through grade 12, to consider full-time church work; and

WHEREAS, *Set Apart to Serve*, especially through partnerships with pilot congregations representing all 35 districts, has developed many high-quality resources for pastors, commissioned church workers, laity, and districts as they form, recruit, and encourage our youth to consider full-time church work, and these resources are available at resources.lcms.org/set-apart-to-serve; and

WHEREAS, The most essential experiences that have an impact on and influence youth to consider church work include regular attendance in the Divine Service to receive Christ's Word and Sacraments ("faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ," Rom. 10:17), authentic relationships with influential adults, opportunities for age-appropriate service in the church, participating in like-minded communities (e.g., youth group, LCMS Youth Gathering, Higher Things, Christ Academy at Concordia Theological Seminary, *Vocatio* at Concordia Seminary, LCMS camps), and engaging in conversations about godly vocations and church work vocations; and

WHEREAS, *Set Apart to Serve*, in partnership with CPH and with support from LCEF and the Concordia universities, has made available, at no cost to schools and congregations of the Synod, a church work formation and recruitment curriculum for early childhood through adult; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Mid-South District establish a *Set Apart to Serve* church work recruitment committee (e.g. working group, task force) to lead and assist congregations, schools, and church workers in their efforts of church work formation and recruitment; and be it further

Resolved, That all congregations be encouraged to establish a *Set Apart to Serve* committee (e.g. working group, task force) to form, recruit, and encourage their youth (from early childhood to grade 12) and adults to consider a full-time church work vocation; and be it further

Resolved, That all pastors, Lutheran teachers, commissioned church workers, and laity intentionally form, recruit, and encourage youth to consider a full-time church work vocation; and be it further

Resolved, That congregations, schools, and entities of the Synod make use of the many tested, high-quality *Set Apart to Serve* resources available at lcms.org/set-apart-to-serve and the CPH *Set Apart to Serve* curriculum available at cph.org/set-apart-to-serve-school-resource-kit; and be it further

Resolved, That district and congregation leaders and committees enhance their financial support of individuals who are enrolled in church work programs at our Concordia universities and seminaries; and be it finally

Resolved, That district and congregation leaders intentionally address the compensation and overall wellness, love, and appreciation of all ordained and commissioned church workers in district congregations, schools, and entities.

Mid-South District

Ov. 6-77

To Encourage Recruitment of Commissioned Workers

WHEREAS, Jesus tells us, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has established the *Set Apart to Serve* initiative which "encourages youth and adults to consider church work vocations primarily through their continued, faithful involvement within their congregation" (files.lcms.org/api/file/preview/sas-faqs-general); and

WHEREAS, Lutheran education has been a substantial part of the Synod since its foundation; and

WHEREAS, It is increasingly difficult to find qualified Lutheran teachers and commissioned ministers to serve in our Lutheran schools and churches; therefore be it

Resolved, That the pastors, commissioned workers, and congregations of the Texas District identify and encourage children, students, and adults to enter these much-needed vocations; and be it further

Resolved, That the pastors, commissioned workers, and congregations of the Texas District support commissioned workers through prayer, scholarships, other financial gifts, and mentorship to attend one of the universities of the Synod to be trained as a commissioned minister; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Texas District memorializes the Synod in convention to encourage congregations to do the same.

Texas District

Ov. 6-78**To Encourage Young People
to Enter Church Worker Vocations**

WHEREAS, Our Lord states that, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few,” and commands his Church to “pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:37–38); and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has a long, rich history of educating men and women towards church work vocations that continues to this day; and

WHEREAS, There is an apparent dearth of young people seeking to enter church work vocations, especially Lutheran school teachers and pastors; and

WHEREAS, Most church workers attribute their vocational decisions to mentors and other church work leaders throughout their lives; therefore be it

Resolved, That each and every church worker in the Synod be encouraged to set a goal of encouraging at least one individual per year towards professional church worker training; and be it further

Resolved, That every congregation in the Synod seek to support, both in encouragement and finances, the sending of young people to such institutions to train these workers; and be it further

Resolved, That every congregation facilitate the use of *Set Apart to Serve* and celebrate church worker Sundays throughout the year by highlighting various vocations; and be it further

Resolved, That every educational institution of the Synod urge and encourage its teachers to complete the Synod’s colloquy program and offer financial support; and be it finally

Resolved, That every church worker be encouraged to conduct oneself in word and deed in such a way that actively (and passively) encourages young people to seek church work vocations.

Michigan District

Ov. 6-79**To Support Bi- and Co-vocational Pastors
and Their Congregations**

WHEREAS, The Christian Church exists in an increasingly secular and post-Christian world; and

WHEREAS, Small, faithful congregations can find themselves, for a variety of reasons, in the circumstance of needing a pastor but being unable to provide a full salary; and

WHEREAS, Some congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are served by pastors who work bi-vocationally or co-vocationally (often called *tentmaker pastors*); and

WHEREAS, St. Paul himself provided for his physical needs as a tentmaker (Acts 18:1–4) while he served the Church in Corinth, thereby establishing bi-vocational ministry as a viable and honorable manner in which clergy may continue to serve the congregations to which they are called without bringing personal hardship to themselves or their families; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod support men who obtain degrees, diplomas, certifications, or other means that can be used to supplement and/or complement the pastoral ministry, should the need arise; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod develop and commend best-practice guidelines, including appropriate fiscal support from congregations

for the pastor and the pastor’s family, for congregations served by tentmaker pastors; and be it further

Resolved, That a synodwide database of resources be compiled, to include current and retired tentmaker pastors who can provide wisdom and encouragement from their experiences; and be it further

Resolved, That bi-vocational and co-vocational pastor candidates be encouraged to think strategically about how new vocational opportunities could support the mission and ministry of the congregation and the kingdom; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod provide or coordinate resources to support congregations, especially lay leadership, as they experience challenges related to their pastor having additional employment; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod continue to provide or coordinate coaching and wellness resources to those who serve as tentmaker pastors; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod encourage its districts to aid congregations and tentmaker pastors within their respective districts by using these resources and best practices to support their shared mission and ministry.

Southeastern District

Ov. 6-80**To Encourage Secular Vocational Training
for Current and Potential Ordained
and Commissioned Ministers**

WHEREAS, The Lord has commanded that those who preach the Gospel should receive their living from the Gospel (1 Cor. 9:3–18); and

WHEREAS, It is good, right, and salutary for churches to have a pastor (Titus 1:5); and

WHEREAS, There is a decline in church membership and attendance; and

WHEREAS, Financial strain and stress can come about for ordained and commissioned church workers and their families when salary guidelines are not met; therefore be it

Resolved, That the North Dakota District encourage congregations to follow the district salary guidelines for ordained and commissioned church workers; and be it further

Resolved, That district pastors catechize their congregations regarding biblical stewardship and first-fruits giving; and be it further

Resolved, That the district encourage ordained and commissioned church workers to develop other vocational skills as a means of income for the present and future needs of their families; and be it further

Resolved, That the district memorialize the Synod in convention and send this resolution to our seminaries and colleges to encourage current and potential ordained and commissioned church workers to develop other vocational gifts; and be it finally

Resolved, That district congregations whose ordained and commissioned church workers cannot be compensated according to district salary guidelines be admonished to show understanding, reduce expectations, and allot time for ordained and commissioned

church workers to seek ways to subsidize their salaries to alleviate any financial strain and stress upon their families.

North Dakota District

Ov. 6-81

To Mandate Continuing Education for Parish Pastors

WHEREAS, The Divine Call to the pastoral office is a sacred gift from the Holy Spirit, who appoints overseers through the Church (Acts 20:28), and once a pastor is certified, examined, ordained, and installed, no human authority can impose conditions that imply the call's insufficiency or place undue burdens that undermine the freedom of the Gospel; and

WHEREAS, Scripture nevertheless exhorts pastors to ongoing diligence in study and growth: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15) and "Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance" (Prov. 1:5), recognizing that faithful ministry requires continual honing of skills amid changing cultural, doctrinal, and pastoral challenges; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), in its Constitution (Const. Art. XII 7), bears responsibility for supervising doctrine, practice, and the welfare of its member congregations, including protecting them from pastors who, through neglect of ongoing formation, may falter in equipping the saints (Eph. 4:12) or guarding against false teaching (Titus 1:9), without impugning the validity of the Divine Call itself; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has long recognized the value of continuing education, as evidenced by programs such as Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support for new pastors and resources from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, which provide advanced degrees, workshops, and theological formation to enhance ministerial effectiveness; and

WHEREAS, Past Synod conventions have successfully passed resolutions emphasizing pastoral education and formation, such as 2019 Resolution 6-04, "To Support, Encourage, and Expect Continuing Education for all Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Pastors," which affirmed the Synod's desire for all pastors to engage in continuing education from ordination onward, and 2013 Res. 5-08B, "To Establish a Standard for Continuing Education of Pastors," which created a framework for qualified continuing education experiences and portfolios, providing precedent for further strengthening these efforts; and

WHEREAS, At the 2023 Synod convention, resolutions such as those addressing seminary formation and church worker well-being (e.g., 2023 Res. 1-07, "To Address Mental Health among Pastors and Other Professional Church Workers") underscored the Synod's commitment to holistic support for pastors, including ongoing education to prevent burnout, doctrinal drift, or skill atrophy; and

WHEREAS, Comparable professions requiring continuing education, such as physicians (50 hours every two years in many states, psychologists (36 hours), and physical therapists (30 hours), demonstrate that mandatory continuing education safeguards public welfare without diminishing professional authority, and similarly, mandating pastoral continuing education would align with these

standards to protect congregations while honoring the Divine Call by fostering excellence in ministry; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention direct the LCMS Office of Pastoral Education, in collaboration with the Council of Presidents and the seminaries, to develop and implement mandatory continuing education requirements for all active parish pastors, including a minimum of 20 hours every three years in categories such as exegetical theology, systematics, preaching, pastoral care, outreach, and administration, with flexibility for district-approved equivalents; and be it further

Resolved, That pastors shall report completion of these requirements to their district presidents as part of the triennial visitation process, with provisions for extensions in cases of hardship, and that non-compliance without cause may result in restricted status (Bylaw 2.13.2) or remedial support, ensuring accountability while respecting the permanence of the Divine Call; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod encourage congregations to support their pastors' participation through funding and time allowances, and that resources be made available at low or no cost to facilitate broad access, thereby advancing the Synod's mission to "conserve and promote the unity of the true faith" (Const. Art. III).

Christ
Milford, MI

Ov. 6-82

To Encourage Congregations to Establish Sabbatical Policy for Church Workers

WHEREAS, Church workers (rostered and lay) dedicate their lives to ministry, often facing significant demands that can lead to stress and burnout; and

WHEREAS, The biblical principle of rest and renewal, as seen in the Sabbath and the sabbatical year, underscores the importance of periodic restoration for those in ministry; and

WHEREAS, Sabbaticals provide church workers with opportunities for extended rest, personal renewal, and professional development, enhancing their effectiveness and longevity in ministry; and

WHEREAS, Well-planned sabbaticals lead to increased creativity, refreshed vision, and overall well-being for church workers, benefiting both them and their congregations; and

WHEREAS, A structured sabbatical policy, including eligibility criteria, duration, financial support, and reintegration planning, ensures the effectiveness and sustainability of such initiatives; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod encourage every congregation to establish a formal sabbatical policy for church workers, outlining eligibility, duration, and guidelines for implementation; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod make available resources to assist in the creation of these policies.

Board of Directors
Eastern District

Ov. 6-83**To Encourage Ministry Sabbaticals
for Church Workers**

WHEREAS, Ministry sabbaticals serve to bless both the church worker and the ministry; and

WHEREAS, The Word of God points to the command for Sabbath rest (Gen. 2:3; Ex. 20:8–11; Lev. 25:4f.); and

WHEREAS, Many Christian denominations strongly encourage pastors to take sabbaticals, recognizing the importance of periodic rest and renewal for sustained ministry effectiveness; and

WHEREAS, A ministry sabbatical is a structured time for spiritual reflection, study, personal development, and rest for church workers; and

WHEREAS, There is historical precedent in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod going back to the first Synod President, C.F.W. Walther, who in 1859 took a much-needed ministry sabbatical to be refreshed and renewed (“Walther’s Breakdown,” in Matthew C. Harrison, ed., *At Home in the House of my Fathers*” [CPH, 2011], 142–45); and

WHEREAS, Walther’s example of returning with renewed energy and great productivity blessed the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Currently we are seeing a decrease of seminary graduates, directors of Christian education, and Lutheran school teachers available to fill a growing number of calls and a growing number of church workers retiring; and

WHEREAS, A ministry sabbatical is an investment in a local ministry to reinvigorate the ministry and the church worker, strengthening it for future ministry; and

WHEREAS, Ministry sabbaticals can help church workers combat burnout, refresh their perspective, and return to ministry with renewed energy and focus; and

WHEREAS, Even some in the business world have recognized the benefit of offering sabbaticals to retain good workers; sabbaticals can also enable retention and longer service in churches; and

WHEREAS, Since COVID-19 we have seen higher expectations placed on church workers with decreased participation and a steady decline in many places, leading to discouragement and burnout among current church workers; and

WHEREAS, The need to continually cultivate longevity among current church workers is beneficial to the whole church; therefore be it

Resolved, That ministries study the benefits of ministry sabbaticals on their workers; and be it further

Resolved, That all districts provide a template for a ministry sabbatical policy guideline for ministries to adapt and adopt to their circumstances; and be it further

Resolved, That ministries be encouraged to set aside funding regularly to support their church workers in taking a sabbatical; and be it further

Resolved, That all districts work together to put together a list of available grants and scholarships which help provide necessary funding for a ministry sabbatical; and be it further

Resolved, That all districts avail themselves of available resources within Synod, including those provided by Lutheran Church Extension Fund (through Grace Place Wellness), to explore

and promote healthier church workers and healthier ministries; and be it finally

Resolved, That all districts identify pastors in the area who could be contacted for possible service during the sabbatical.

Florida-Georgia District

Ov. 6-84**To Establish Commissioned Male Diaconate**

WHEREAS, A commissioned female diaconate graduate level training program was authorized by the Synod in 2001 (Res. 5-06B) and established in 2002 to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ through a ministry of works of mercy, spiritual care, and teaching the Christian faith, as inspired by the example of Phoebe from the Scriptures (Rom. 16:1–2); and

WHEREAS, This program has yielded great success in training many women for mercy work in our Synod; and

WHEREAS, Not all men are called to be pastors but may be called to serve in a diaconate role; and

WHEREAS, Scripture also provides us with the examples of Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus as male deacons who engaged in acts of spiritual service (Acts 6:1–7); and

WHEREAS, The Church is encouraged to ensure that deacons are tested and well-qualified (1 Tim. 3:8–13); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod’s seminaries (Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne) include men for commissioned diaconate education and certification for the purpose of training qualified men to engage in the ministry of works of mercy, spiritual care, and teaching the Christian faith.

Our Savior
Laurel, MD

Ov. 6-85**To Standardize Vacancy Pastor Remuneration
Guidelines**

WHEREAS, There are over 500 vacancies in our Synod at any given time with the average vacancy duration approaching three years; and

WHEREAS, These congregations call upon neighboring circuit pastors or retired pastors to assist with those vacancies *locum tenens* (to hold the place of); and

WHEREAS, The number of pastors available to serve a vacancy is decreasing; and

WHEREAS, Congregations need guidance from the circuit visitor or district president to determine appropriate remuneration for pastors serving the vacancy, especially if the duties of preaching, teaching, catechizing, and visiting hospitals and the homebound are divided up among several pastors, each taking a particular role in serving the vacant congregation; and

WHEREAS, The current practices manifest widely divergent pay scales between adjacent districts, affecting vacant congregations within the same metropolitan area; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Council of Presidents (COP) be directed to review current practices synodwide for the remuneration of pastors serving vacancies; and be it further

Resolved, That the COP prepare equitable remuneration guidelines for the remuneration of pastors serving vacancies, taking into consideration such things as congregation size, duties to be performed, and regional cost of living.

Circuit 13 (Rock Island)
Central Illinois District

Ov. 6-86

To Celebrate and Encourage Lay Service

WHEREAS, "It is to this true church of believers and saints that Christ gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and it is the proper and only possessor and bearer of the spiritual, divine, and heavenly gifts, rights, powers, offices, and the like that Christ has procured and are found in His church" (C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis IV, J.T. Mueller, tr. [CPH, 1987], 49); and

WHEREAS, "All Christians, that is, all who have come to faith in Christ, are spiritual priests and thus have the call to preach the Gospel" (Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III [CPH, 1953], 440); and

WHEREAS, "But after we have become Christians through this Priest [i.e., Christ] and His priestly office, incorporated in Him by Baptism through faith, then each one, according to his calling and position, obtains the right and the power of teaching and confessing before others this Word which we have obtained from Him. Even though not everybody has the public office and calling, every Christian has the right and the duty to teach, instruct, admonish, comfort, and rebuke his neighbor with the Word of God at every opportunity and whenever necessary." (*Luther's Works*, 13:333); and

WHEREAS, The Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope were written by, and first subscribed to, by laity; and

WHEREAS, "Christ Himself instituted the office of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Many functions belong to this office: evangelizing, preaching, teaching, shepherding, supervising, admonishing, disciplining, and administering. Because it is often difficult or impossible for one person to perform all the functions of the ministry, the church may entrust various functions of this office to a number of persons" (LCMS CTCR, *The Ministry in its Relation to the Christian Church* [adopted 1973], 12); and

WHEREAS, "A distinction must be made between 'office' and 'function.' Failure to make this distinction results in confusion. For instance, when a congregation is temporarily without a man to fill the office of the public ministry in its midst, it may ask a properly supervised teacher or a lay leader to perform some functions of the office of the public ministry. This is done in an emergency situation and not as a mere convenience. However, performing such functions does not make those who do them holders of the office of the public ministry. Even in such emergency situations a congregation properly requests a man who does hold the office of the public ministry and is serving as pastor in a neighboring congregation to assume that office for them as 'vacancy pastor' or 'interim overseer.' Thus the oversight and accountability remain with one whom the church has called and designated as a pastor and who supervises those who temporarily perform some pastoral functions. Such practices are common and reveal a 'folk' understanding of the ministry even if the root of such practices is

not consciously analyzed" (LCMS CTCR, *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature* [adopted 1981], 16); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to the Lord of the Church for using the entire priesthood of all believers, especially the laity, in fulfilling His mission to seek and save the lost; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to those members of the laity who serve in positions that aid in carrying out the functions of the public ministry as needs arise within the context of a local congregation; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention affirm and encourage the laity as they exercise their gifts in service to the local congregation, recognizing that such service does not obscure or confuse the Office of the Public Ministry but aids and supports the work of the public ministry and that carrying out specific functions of the ministry does not put them into the office; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention affirm each congregation's freedom to utilize the laity in accord with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

Pacific Southwest District

Ov. 6-87

To Celebrate and Encourage Lay Service

Preamble

God has established the Office of the Holy Ministry so as to ensure the public proclamation of the Gospel and proper administration of the Sacraments, and the establishment of that office does not invalidate the gifts and service of the priesthood of all believers, including those who have not been called into the Office of the Holy Ministry. This overture seeks to celebrate, affirm, and encourage the service of those who, while they may fulfill a function of the office as the needs of the congregation dictate, are nevertheless not in the Office of the Holy Ministry.

WHEREAS, "It is to this true church of believers and saints that Christ gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and it is the proper and only possessor and bearer of the spiritual, divine, and heavenly gifts, rights, powers, offices, and the like that Christ has procured and are found in His church" (C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis IV, J.T. Mueller, tr. [CPH, 1987], 49); and

WHEREAS, "All Christians, that is, all who have come to faith in Christ, are spiritual priests and thus have the call to preach the Gospel" (Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III [CPH, 1953], 440); and

WHEREAS, "But after we have become Christians through this Priest [i.e., Christ] and His priestly office, incorporated in Him by Baptism through faith, then each one, according to his calling and position, obtains the right and the power of teaching and confessing before others this Word which we have obtained from Him. Even though not everybody has the public office and calling, every Christian has the right and the duty to teach, instruct, admonish, comfort, and rebuke his neighbor with the Word of God at every opportunity and whenever necessary." (*Luther's Works*, 13:333); and

WHEREAS, The Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope were written by, and first subscribed to, by laity; and

WHEREAS, “Christ Himself instituted the office of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Many functions belong to this office: evangelizing, preaching, teaching, shepherding, supervising, admonishing, disciplining, and administering. Because it is often difficult or impossible for one person to perform all the functions of the ministry, the church may entrust various functions of this office to a number of persons” (LCMS CTR, *The Ministry in its Relation to the Christian Church* [adopted 1973], 12); and

WHEREAS, “A distinction must be made between ‘office’ and ‘function.’ Failure to make this distinction results in confusion. For instance, when a congregation is temporarily without a man to fill the office of the public ministry in its midst, it may ask a properly supervised teacher or a lay leader to perform some functions of the office of the public ministry. This is done in an emergency situation and not as a mere convenience. However, performing such functions does not make those who do them holders of the office of the public ministry. Even in such emergency situations a congregation properly requests a man who does hold the office of the public ministry and is serving as pastor in a neighboring congregation to assume that office for them as ‘vacancy pastor’ or ‘interim overseer.’ Thus the oversight and accountability remain with one whom the church has called and designated as a pastor and who supervises those who temporarily perform some pastoral functions. Such practices are common and reveal a ‘folk’ understanding of the ministry even if the root of such practices is not consciously analyzed” (LCMS CTR, *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature* [adopted 1981], 16); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to the Lord of the Church for using the entire priesthood of all believers, especially the laity, in fulfilling His mission to seek and save the lost; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to those members of the laity who serve in positions that aid in carrying out the functions of the public ministry as needs arise within the context of a local congregation; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention affirm and encourage the laity as they exercise their gifts in service to the local congregation, recognizing that such service does not obscure or confuse the Office of the Public Ministry but aids and supports the work of the public ministry and that carrying out specific functions of the ministry does not put them into the office; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention affirm each congregation’s right to utilize the laity in accord with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

Southeastern District

Ov. 6-88

To Affirm That Functions of Pastoral Office Belong to That Office

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions state that no one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the Sacraments without a rightly ordered public call (AC XIV); and

WHEREAS, The regular services of the Church publicly gathered are the primary forum for that public teaching, preaching, and administering of the Sacraments; and

WHEREAS, Rare emergency situations, which at times may in a sinful and fallen world necessitate that an exception be made, are

not justification for the alteration or revocation of biblical and confessional doctrine or practice; and

WHEREAS, It has become normalized among us even in the Church to justify the altering of theology and practice by appealing to emergency, perceived present reality, or other non-biblical, non-confessional bases; therefore be it

Resolved, That Synod in convention condemn the use of those not rightly called into the Office of the Public Ministry to perform the principal duties of that office in our congregations, recognizing that the assistance of laymen in congregational services is not hereby excluded when such occurs under the direction of the pastor(s) called to that particular altar (e.g., an elder assisting the pastor in the distribution of Holy Communion, the use of acolytes in the service, and the like) and under the personally present direction of the pastor(s) in the case of the Chief Divine Service; and be it further

Resolved, That circuit visitors and district presidents give special attention to this matter in their advisory and disciplinary roles.

Circuit 14 (Austin)
Minnesota South District

7. University Education

REPORTS

R1, R2.2, R5, R5.2, R14–R14.5, R55, R62.7

OVERTURES

Ov. 7-01

To Amend Bylaws to Convert Concordia University System, the Synodwide Corporate Entity, into Commission for University Education

Rationale

2023 Resolution 7-04B implemented certain changes proposed by the committee established by 2019 Res. 7-03 to “review the overall governance of the Concordia University System (CUS) and the boards of regents of the CUS institutions.” The committee initially proposed—since the business functions of CUS would cease in the new model, while the ecclesiastical visitation aspect would continue and be strengthened—a Synod commission would serve more efficiently to connect the Synod with its universities than would the present synodwide corporate entity, having as it does all the overhead of operating a distinct corporation (2023 Report R61, “2019 Res. 7-03 Committee to Propose a New Governance Plan for the Colleges and Universities of the Synod,” *Workbook*, 141–44). This new commission was to be named the “Commission for University Education” (CUE).

Reasons for this change include the following:

- In the new model, as proposed and adopted, CUS no longer carries out business or line-of-credit management functions on behalf of the universities, resulting in there being no need for a separate corporation.
- Bylaws have made explicit allowance for universities to create new entities to provide collaborative and consolidative efforts (Bylaws 3.10.6.7–3.10.6.7.1), for which CUS is to assume no “operational or financial responsibility” (Bylaw 3.6.6.1 [j])—eliminating another reason for CUS to exist as a distinct corporation.
- CUS has no sources of funding other than the corporate Synod subsidy and a small amount of direct giving that could be accommodated more efficiently and effectively through corporate Synod, and its budget could be managed more effectively and with less overhead by eliminating the corporate, accounting, and audit overhead.
- CUS is served by corporate Synod accounting and audit functions already, making its operations easily assimilable.
- Provisions exist for commissions (such as the Commission on Theology and Church Relations) to be staffed with executive staff to the same extent as CUS had as a synodwide corporate entity, but these (today, entirely subsidized by corporate Synod anyway) would be fully integrated into corporate Synod budgetary processes and human resources management.
- The “Concordia University System” name and brand can be retained and used by the Synod for the universities operating together in concert with the Synod, even if the corporation operating under that name is dissolved.

By the time the proposal was presented in resolution form (2023 Res. 7-04, 2023 *Today’s Business* 1:143–48), however, this aspect of the new governance plan was scaled back to “refocus” CUS as “ecclesiastical visitor” but not to convert the synodwide corporate entity into a commission. One key reason for this change, despite the above benefits of the alternative, was that at the time, corporate Synod and CUS were involved in very significant litigation related to the closure of Concordia University, Portland, litigation that has now been resolved. With that matter resolved, the Board of Directors proposes the completion of this aspect of the original design of the new governance model, to convert CUS into a commission, the Commission for University Education, with equivalent function but with lower overhead. The name, concept, and brand of “Concordia University System” would be retained and used by the Synod as the collective name for the universities operating in concert with one another and with the Synod.

Therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw subsection 3.6.6 be amended, renamed, and relocated as follows, to convert the Concordia University System (CUS) into the Commission for University Education (CUE), with references elsewhere in the Bylaws adjusted accordingly:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

~~Concordia University System~~ Commission for University Education

3.6.6 ~~Concordia University System, as a nonprofit corporation under the laws of the State of Missouri, is incorporated as provided in its Articles of Incorporation and corporate Bylaws to facilitate~~ The Commission for University Education facilitates ecclesiastical visitation and affirmation of the Synod’s colleges and universities (Bylaw 3.10.6 and following), collectively known as the “Concordia University System,” and ~~to assist~~ assists with their cooperation and coordination. It shall seek to assist them with effective and accountable:

- preparation of commissioned ministers for service in the Synod and of pre-seminary students for study at a Synod seminary;
- raising up of Lutheran laypersons for lifelong, faithful service to Christ and the neighbor; and
- robust, intentional engagement of all students with the faith taught and practiced, with application to their vocations in family, church, and state.

3.6.6.1 ~~The Concordia University System Board of Directors~~ Commission for University Education shall:

(a) define, after input from the Institution Advisory Council, and adopt the Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcomes Standards (“Standards,” Bylaw 3.6.9.6.4), which shall be the basis of Synod visitation of Synod colleges and universities, including each of their church worker preparation programs; and maintain policies governing, and supervise the performance of, such Synod visitation (Bylaws 3.6.9.6.4 and following), which shall focus on support and accountability for maintaining and strengthening Lutheran identity. Consistent with the Standards, the ~~Concordia University System~~ Commission for University Education shall ensure that each institution receives:

- (1) regular ecclesiastical and fraternal counsel and encouragement through annual, informal visitation that involves free exchange among peers;
- (2) in-depth ecclesiastical formal visitation and reporting (including affirmation, commendations, cautions, and recommendations for improvement; Bylaw 3.6.9.6.4) at least once every three years;

(b) review and approve new implementations of and discontinuance, whether actual or constructive, of programs of study leading to professional church work in the interest of the institution(s) and the Synod;

(c) facilitate, together with respective boards of regents, the processes of president selection (Bylaw 3.10.6.8.2) and prior approval for appointments to theology faculties of Synod colleges and universities (Bylaw 3.10.6.9.2);

(d) create and maintain a *Model Operating Procedures Manual for Faculty and Administration Complaints and Appeal of Termination: Colleges and Universities*, subject to approval by the Commission on Constitutional Matters, regarding the handling of faculty and staff complaints and dispute resolution by college/university boards of regents, to include notification of any relevant ecclesiastical supervisor, and monitor compliance with such;

(e) monitor, inquire into, and report to the President of the Synod regarding the ongoing faithfulness of Synod's colleges and universities to the doctrine, practice, and objectives of the Constitution of the Synod (Const. Art. II and III);

(f) monitor—after input from the Office of National Mission; the Department of Rosters, Statistics, and Research Services; the Council of Presidents; and the Synod's seminaries—and report to the Synod on the enrollment, graduation, placement, and retention rates in programs leading to candidacy for commissioned ministry or to seminary enrollment and advise the schools on the Synod's worker needs and opportunities for coordination;

(g) receive, revise, and recommend to conventions of the Synod for approval any proposals for creating, essentially revising, or renaming programs of study and certification for commissioned ministry;

(h) in addition to providing its own report, review and respond in each Synod convention *Workbook* to a detailed triennial strategic report prepared by the Institution Advisory Council, summarizing the state of and outlook for church worker preparation and confessional Lutheran lay education, campus, and ethos;

Assistive and coordinative roles:

(i) assist the Synod and its colleges and universities in articulating and advancing the schools' unified public confession and application of the church's doctrine and practice, and, in coordination with the Board of Directors of the Synod, assist in advancing the common defense of their rights to the free exercise of our confession under the Constitution of the United States and other applicable laws;

(j) develop and administer, on behalf of the Synod and subject to policies of the Board of Directors of the Synod, financial resources designated to assist the schools in their pursuit of the Standards, in strengthening of churchly identity, and in their achievement of mission outcomes;

(k) regularly convene the college and university presidents and, as needed, other leadership to facilitate the schools' coordination, cooperation, and consolidation of operations, in part or in whole, wherever prudent and practically feasible, while not itself assuming any operational or financial responsibility for such efforts;

(l) after input from the President and Secretary of the Synod, the Institution Advisory Council, and the boards of regents of Synod colleges and universities, serve as a resource for the recruitment of highly and variously qualified potential regents, offering in nomination (e.g., as in Bylaw 3.12.3.4 [c]) and suggesting for appointment those suitably qualified;

(m) serve as a resource for regents' development of and mandatory training in governance skills, especially as they relate

to the carrying out of the mission of the Synod's colleges and universities within the mission of the church, and foster regents' growth in aspects of governance related to the expectations of the Standards;

(n) serve as a resource for the development of lists of potential teaching and administrative personnel;

(o) together with districts, congregations, local boards of regents, and national efforts, promote student recruitment for both professional church work and lay higher education; and

(p) participate with the Board of Directors, Council of Presidents, and respective board(s) of regents in determinations to consolidate, relocate, separate, or divest a college or university (Bylaw 3.10.6.5–3.10.6.5.2).

3.69.6.2 The ~~Board of Directors of Concordia University System~~ Commission for University Education shall be composed of ten voting members and six nonvoting members (no more than two members elected by the Synod shall be from the same district, and no voting member shall be a regent, executive, faculty, or staff member, as defined in Bylaw 1.5.1.1 of a Synod college or university):

Voting Members:

1. Two ministers of religion—ordained elected by the Synod
2. One minister of religion—commissioned elected by the Synod
3. Two laypersons elected by the Synod
4. Four laypersons appointed by the elected members listed above, after consultation with the President of the Synod and the Institution Advisory Council; at least two of the four must have background experience in higher education administration or accreditation
5. The President of the Synod or his representative

Nonvoting Advisory Members:

1. One district president appointed by the Council of Presidents
2. One representative designated by the Board of Directors of the Synod
3. One representative designated by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations
4. The Chief Mission Officer of the Synod or his representative
5. One university president who is designated by, and is a member of, the Institution Advisory Council, and whose institution is in good standing, as defined in Bylaw 3.69.6.4.1 (e)
6. One university board of regents chair who is designated by the Institution Advisory Council and whose institution is a college or university presently in good standing, as defined in Bylaw 3.6.6.4.1 (e).

The advisory university president and university board of regents chair shall be drawn from different institutions. Neither the advisory university president nor the advisory board of regents chair shall participate in the work or the sessions of the board as they relate to the ecclesiastical visitation of any individual college or university.

3.69.6.2.1 Persons elected or appointed to the ~~Concordia University System Board of Directors~~ Commission for University Education should have demonstrated familiarity with and support of Synod colleges and universities, shall strongly and demonstrably articulate and support the confession and doctrinal positions of the Synod, and shall have demonstrated a high degree of two or more of the following qualifications or background experiences: theological acumen, an advanced degree, higher education administration, higher education accreditation, professional church worker education, administration of or legal counsel to complex organizations, religious nonprofit law, higher education law, or the strengthening of the mission of the Synod's congregations and schools. The President of the Synod (or a designee) and the Secretary

of the Synod (or a designee) shall review and verify that nominees are qualified to serve as stated above.

- 3.69.6.3 The presidents (including interim presidents) of Synod's colleges and universities in good standing shall, along with two nonvoting members designated by the ~~Concordia University System Board of Directors~~ Commission for University Education, comprise the Concordia University System Institution Advisory Council. The Institution Advisory Council shall, as specified elsewhere in these bylaws and upon request, provide advice, consultation, and access to information as necessary to facilitate ~~Concordia University System Commission for University Education~~ ecclesiastical review, on the Synod's behalf, of the schools' Lutheran identity and mission outcomes under the Standards (Bylaw 3.69.6.1 [a] and 3.69.6.4). It shall also, as bylaws elsewhere specify and upon request, advise ~~Concordia University System~~ the Commission for University Education in its responsibilities as they relate to programs leading to candidacy for commissioned ministry and to seminary enrollment.

Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcomes Standards, Ecclesiastical Visitation

- 3.69.6.4 The ~~Concordia University System Board of Directors~~ Commission for University Education shall, after input from its Institution Advisory Council, define and adopt the Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcomes Standards ("Standards"), a regularly published policy document containing standards for ecclesiastical visitation and affirmation of institutions and of programs leading to candidacy for commissioned ministry or to preparedness for seminary study.

(a) The Standards shall express the Synod's expectations for its college or university, including fidelity of campus curriculum and culture intended to propagate the faith, strong theology and campus ministry programs having positive and intentional interaction with the entire faculty and student population and with all curricular programs, and success in preparation of church workers for the Synod and of Lutheran laypeople for distinctively faithful lives of service to church and neighbor and in conveying to all students a clear understanding of the essentials of the faith, generally and in specific relation to their particular vocations.

(b) The Standards shall be elaborated to support both formative and summative functions. They shall engender local development and provide for outside monitoring of formative processes, engaging all institutions fully in intentional and measurable programs intended to advance their expression of Lutheran identity and accomplishment of mission outcomes. They shall also enable the drawing of summative conclusions, concretely identifying strengths and weaknesses in institutions and programs, ultimately to provide clear rationale for decisions about continuation or termination of affirmation.

(c) In addition to the standards with institution-wide applicability, the ~~Concordia University System~~ Commission for University Education shall develop and maintain supplemental program standards specific to each type of program intended to result in candidacy for one of the Synod's categories of commissioned ministry or in preparedness for seminary study. Such program standards shall specify, for example, the instructional and practical curricular requirements expected to be satisfactorily completed prior to qualification for first call or for granting of credit by a seminary for pre-seminary studies. The ~~Concordia University System~~ commission shall develop pre-seminary curricular standards after input from the seminaries of the Synod.

(d) The Standards shall be made publicly available on the Synod's website and as otherwise determined by ~~Concordia University System~~ Commission for University Education.

- 3.69.6.4.1 Synod colleges and universities shall undergo Synod visitation with respect to the Lutheran Identity and Mission

Outcomes Standards, both comprehensively as institutions and with regard to the specific requirements of each implemented program intended to result in candidacy for one of the Synod's categories of commissioned ministry or in preparedness for seminary study.

(a) Ordinarily each college or university shall receive a formal institutional and program visitation at least once in each Synod national convention cycle. These regular, formal visitations shall attend to both formative and summative elements, evaluating present performance relative to the Standards but also fostering, monitoring, and advancing initiatives in pursuit of the Standards. A focused review of a specific alleged breach of the Standards, however, may be initiated by ~~Concordia University System~~ the Commission for University Education at any time.

(b) ~~Concordia University System~~ The commission may, if a regular or focused review finds that an institution or program is at risk of not fulfilling the Standards, place the institution or program under a notice of concern, which may, at ~~Concordia University System~~ the commission's option, be made public. ~~Concordia University System~~ The commission may lift the notice at any time it determines the risk has been satisfactorily addressed.

(c) ~~Concordia University System~~ The commission may, upon finding an institution to be in breach of the Standards, either on the basis of a regular visitation report or a focused review, place the institution on probation for up to a two-year period. If ~~Concordia University System~~ the commission determines that substantial progress has been made and that verifiable plans and resources are in place to bring the institution into compliance, then ~~Concordia University System~~ the commission may extend probation once for one year, but to no more than three years total. ~~Concordia University System~~ The commission may lift the probation earlier if the institution is brought into compliance. An institution not in compliance at the conclusion of the probationary period is no longer affirmed by the Synod, can no longer declare graduates qualified for placement, and is no longer commended by ~~Concordia University System~~ the commission to the church.

(d) ~~Concordia University System~~ The commission may, upon finding a church work preparation program to be in breach of the Standards, either on the basis of a regular visitation report or of a focused review, place the program on probation for up to a one-year period. If ~~Concordia University System~~ the commission determines that substantial progress has been made and that verifiable plans and resources are in place to bring the program into compliance, then ~~Concordia University System~~ the commission may extend probation once for up to one year, but to no more than two years total. ~~Concordia University System~~ The commission may lift probation earlier if the program is brought into compliance. A program not in compliance at the conclusion of the probationary period is no longer affirmed by the Synod and therefore its graduates cannot be declared as qualified for initial placement and the program cannot be commended or acknowledged as a suitable program of pre-seminary preparation.

(e) An institution or program under probation has not lost affirmation but is not "in good standing with the Synod" for purposes of these Bylaws.

- 3.69.6.4.2 After input from its Institution Advisory Council, the ~~Concordia University System Board of Directors~~ Commission for University Education shall implement and maintain policies governing, and shall supervise, the process of formal visitation for the Synod's colleges and universities on the basis of the Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcomes Standards.

(a) In preparation for visitation and affirmation review, each institution and church work program shall provide, on the basis of a thorough self-study, a written report evidencing compliance with the criteria and core components of the Standards, as evaluated by the stated measurable factors, as well as indicating

any relevant explanatory factors and initiated or planned efforts to improve specific aspects of performance relative to the Standards. It shall especially address any issues noted in previous reviews or specifically requested by ~~Concordia University System~~ the commission. The self-study shall be delivered to and reviewed by ~~Concordia University System~~ the commission.

(b) A visitation team, assembled by ~~Concordia University System~~ the commission upon review of the self-study report or recommendation of its Institution Advisory Council, shall itself review the self-study report and then visit the institution, interacting with its board of regents, administration, faculty, campus ministry staff, and students. An effective visitation, with broad and unimpeded access to campus program information, policies, and personnel, shall be facilitated by the institution. Each implemented or proposed church work and pre-seminary program shall receive specific attention.

(c) The visitation team shall prepare a report of its visit and associated findings, which it shall provide to ~~Concordia University System~~ the commission and the institution within 60 days of the conclusion of the visit. After allowing 60 days for the institution to respond in writing to the team's report, ~~Concordia University System~~ the commission shall, with regard to the institution and each of its implemented or proposed church work programs: (1) affirm without concerns; or (2) affirm with concerns (notice); or (3) place the institution or program on probation; or (4) disaffirm, in the case of an initial application, or initiate withdrawal of affirmation; or (5) initiate further investigation, with the same or a new visitation team.

(d) The institution reviewed may within 30 days of being notified of ~~Concordia University System~~ the commission's visitation determination(s) submit a written appeal and/or response to ~~Concordia University System~~ the commission's determination. Once ~~Concordia University System~~ the commission has, within 30 days of its receipt, considered and acted upon any such appeal, its determination is final and not subject to further appeal.

(e) Within the above 30-day period for request of an appeal or within seven days of receipt of ~~Concordia University System~~ the commission's negative action on a requested appeal, an institution may state a corrective action plan and request ~~Concordia University System~~ the commission, acting in its sole discretion, to grant a delay of up to six months in the publication of a negative visitation result to allow initiation of the plan. ~~Concordia University System~~ The commission may at its option require a summary of the action plan, composed by the institution and approved by ~~Concordia University System~~ the commission, to be published with any revised visitation outcome.

(f) At the conclusion of the above, the visitation status of each institution and its programs, together with summary reports of visitation reviews, any imposition(s) of notice or probation, and any withdrawal(s) of affirmation, shall be timely made available to the Synod through a publicly accessible website. The information presented shall be of a depth and character that would allow members of the Synod to evaluate the churchly character, relative value, and mission effectiveness of each institution and program, and to understand concretely the steps being taken to improve the same.

(g) Visitation teams, composed of members of member congregations of the Synod and assembled and organized by ~~Concordia University System~~ the commission, shall include representation from peer boards of regents, administrations, and faculties, and a district president having ecclesiastical supervision of peer institution faculty, all with demonstrated excellence in advancing and achieving the Standards. They shall also include representation drawn from the member congregations and ministerium of the Synod and representative

of their interests in the institutions. The Institution Advisory Council, the Council of Presidents, the Board for National Mission, the Synod Board of Directors, members of the ~~Concordia University System Board of Directors~~ commission, and President of the Synod may nominate visitors. Each visitation team will be constituted of not less than four members and not more than seven members.

(h) An institution receiving a visitation team shall be notified in advance of the membership of the team. Either the institution or any member of such a team may challenge the participation of any member on the basis of actual partiality or the appearance thereof. ~~Concordia University System~~ The commission shall have in place a procedure for responding to any such challenge within 30 days. A finding by ~~Concordia University System~~ the commission of actual partiality or the appearance thereof shall disqualify the member from participating in the visitation. ~~Concordia University System~~ The commission may at its option replace any member so disqualified or continue with the reduced visitation team.

(i) ~~Concordia University System~~ The commission, with the assistance of its Institution Advisory Council, shall provide training for members of visitation teams, according to policies established by ~~Concordia University System~~ the commission.

(j) Direct costs of the visitation process shall be borne by the institution visited, regulated according to a schedule devised, after input from the Institution Advisory Council, and published triennially by ~~Concordia University System~~ the commission.

Staff

3.9.6.5 The Commission for University Education shall operate under the human resources policies of the Synod as provided by the Board of Directors of the Synod, in accordance with Bylaw 3.3.4.3.

3.9.6.5.1 The commission may create an executive director position and fill it in accordance with the Bylaws of the Synod and the human resources policies of corporate Synod.

(a) The executive director shall serve at the pleasure of the commission.

(1) The slate of candidates for the initial appointment of the executive director shall be selected by the commission in consultation with and with the mutual concurrence of the President of the Synod.

(2) In the event of a vacancy, the commission and the President of the Synod shall act expeditiously to fill the vacancy. This commission shall present its list of candidates to the President.

(3) The commission shall conduct an annual review of its executive director and, before the expiration of five years, conduct a comprehensive review.

(4) At the conclusion of each five-year period, the appointment shall terminate unless the commission takes specific action to continue the person in the office, each subsequent term not to exceed five years.

(b) Any interim executive director appointment by the commission shall follow a process similar to the initial appointment of the executive director.

(1) Such interim appointee must be approved by the President of the Synod and may not serve more than 18 months without the concurrence of the President of the Synod.

(2) Such interim appointee shall be ineligible to serve on a permanent basis without the concurrence of the President of the Synod.

(c) The executive director of the commission shall normally attend all meetings of the commission except when his own position is being considered.

(d) The commission may create and fill other staff positions in accordance with the human resources policies of corporate Synod adopted pursuant to Bylaw 1.5.5. Such staff may attend meetings of the commission upon request of the commission.

and be it further

Resolved, That, with thanks given to God and to those who have served ably in various related capacities in the interest of furthering the Synod's mission through her colleges and universities, and for the good the Lord has done through such service, CUS, a synodwide corporate entity, be dissolved, such dissolution to be effected by the board of directors of CUS and the board of directors of the Synod when appropriate, taking into consideration CUS' remaining left-hand kingdom obligations, if any, and transferring any continuing common enterprises of the several colleges and universities, as presently conducted through CUS, to the several colleges and universities, to an entity or entities created by the schools to further their common endeavors (Bylaws 3.10.6.7–3.10.6.7.1), or to other service providers; and be it further

Resolved, That the references to CUS and/or its board of directors in Bylaws 1.2.1 (w); 3.2.2; and 3.6.1 be removed; that the reference to the CUS or its board of directors in Bylaws 1.5.7.1 (f) (except the first), 2.7.3–2.7.3.1, 3.3.1.1.1 (c)(1), 3.3.1.2 (a)(1), 3.3.4.6 (d), 3.4.1.3 (e), 3.10.3.1–2, 3.10.6.1 (j, m), 3.10.6.2.1–3.10.6.6, 3.10.6.7.1, 3.10.6.8.1 (c)(1), 3.10.6.8.2–3, 3.10.6.9.2, 3.12.3.5 (e–f), and 3.12.3.7 (e) be revised to refer instead to the CUE; that references to the CUS president in Bylaws 3.10.3.1, 3.10.6.8.2, and 3.10.6.9.2 be replaced with a reference to its executive director; and that references to the CUE be added to Bylaws 1.2.1 (c), 3.2.3.1, and 3.9.1; and be it finally

Resolved, That the current CUS president be regarded as now incumbent as the executive director of CUE, to be understood as continuing in his first five-year appointment, with time served counted, and that other staff be transferred also to the commission, subject to the above bylaws.

LCMS Board of Directors

Ov. 7-02

To Affirm and Sustain Concordia University System as Synodwide Corporate Entity

WHEREAS, The Concordia University System (CUS) was established by the 1992 Synod convention (1992 Res. 6-04, "To Establish Concordia University System, Inc.," *Proceedings*, 160–61), replacing the Board for Higher Education Services, to unify the universities of the Synod around the central mission to educate students for Godly vocations in the Church and the world with a biblical foundation and the Lutheran confession of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; and

WHEREAS, 2023 Resolution 7-04B, "To Revise Bylaws to Revisit and Renew Relationship of Colleges and Universities with the Synod" (*Proc.*, 170–90), narrowed the role of CUS by relieving it of operational responsibilities, allowing it to focus on our universities' Lutheran identity and mission; and

WHEREAS, CUS, under the leadership of its Board of Directors (BOD) and new staff, has taken up the challenge of this mission and made great strides toward an established, lasting approach that implements the Synod's convention decisions while honoring the necessary academic freedom and autonomy of our institutions; and

WHEREAS, CUS, a synodwide corporate entity, provides a degree of separation between corporate Synod and its five universities,

implementing the directions of the Synod's conventions while maintaining the distinction required by national accrediting boards for our institutions; and

WHEREAS, CUS provides a legal buffer between corporate Synod and our universities, as attested by its not being involved in any legal disputes; and

WHEREAS, The presence of CUS staff and visitation teams on our campuses has produced significant positive results in relationship building and the growth of trust; and

WHEREAS, CUS, as a synodwide corporate entity, through the visitation process has produced positive improvements in the focus on Lutheran identity and mission on our campuses as attested to by the formal visitation team reports and letters of determination; and

WHEREAS, The Concordia University System Education Network (CUEnet) provides the online program for teacher colloquy, the first six courses for colloquy for the other commissioned ministry categories, and other resources as a common enterprise of the several universities through the CUS as a synodwide corporate entity; and

WHEREAS, CUS has been endowed by private donors with a substantial foundation consisting of many restricted funds for student scholarships and institutional support that is the sole property of CUS; and

WHEREAS, The floor committee overseeing the drafting and adoption of 2023 Res. 7-04B never considered changing the status of CUS as a synodwide corporate entity; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention affirm and sustain CUS as a synodwide corporate entity; and be it further

Resolved, That the endowments entrusted to CUS remain solely under its ownership and stewardship; and be it further

Resolved, That the implementation of 2023 Res. 7-04B continue unabated; and be it further

Resolved, That the effective implementation of 2023 Res. 7-04B by CUS be evaluated by an independent task force to be formed by the 2032 Synod convention to bring recommendations and/or resolutions for consideration to the 2035 Synod convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the CUS BOD and staff be commended for their work so far; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for the work of the CUS and our universities in carrying out their mission, pledging continued prayer, financial support, and encouragement.

Board of Directors
Concordia University System

Ov. 7-03

To Affirm and Sustain Concordia University System as Synodwide Corporate Entity

WHEREAS, The Concordia University System (CUS) was established by the 1992 Synod convention (1992 Res. 6-04; "To Establish Concordia University System, Inc.," *Proceedings*, 160–161), replacing the Board for Higher Education Services, to unify the universities of the Synod around the central mission to educate students for Godly vocations in the Church and the world with a biblical foundation and the Lutheran confession of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; and

WHEREAS, 2023 Resolution 7-04B, “To Revise Bylaws to Revisit and Renew Relationship of Colleges and Universities with the Synod” (*Proc.*, 170–90), narrowed the role of CUS by relieving it of operational responsibilities, allowing it to focus on our universities’ Lutheran identity and mission; and

WHEREAS, CUS, under the leadership of its Board of Directors (BOD) and new staff, has taken up the challenge of this mission and made great strides toward an established, lasting approach that implements the Synod’s convention decisions while honoring the necessary academic freedom and autonomy of our institutions; and

WHEREAS, CUS, a synodwide corporate entity, serves as a buffer between corporate Synod and its five universities, implementing the directions of the Synod’s conventions while maintaining the degree of separation required by national accrediting boards for our institutions; and

WHEREAS, CUS provides a legal buffer between corporate Synod and our universities, as attested by its not being involved in any legal disputes; and

WHEREAS, The presence of CUS staff and visitation teams on our campuses has produced significant positive results in relationship building and the growth of trust; and

WHEREAS, CUS, as a synodwide corporate entity, through the visitation process has produced positive improvements in the focus on Lutheran identity and mission on our campuses as attested to by the formal visitation team reports and letters of determination; and

WHEREAS, The Concordia University System Education Network (CUEnet) provides the online program for teacher colloquy, the first six courses for colloquy for the other commissioned ministry categories, and other resources as a common enterprise of the several universities through the CUS as a synodwide corporate entity; and

WHEREAS, CUS has been endowed by private donors with a substantial foundation consisting of many restricted funds for student scholarships and institutional support that is the sole property of CUS; and

WHEREAS, The floor committee overseeing the drafting and adoption of 2023 Res. 7-04B never considered changing the status of CUS as a synodwide corporate entity; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention affirm and sustain CUS as a synodwide corporate entity in perpetuity; and be it further

Resolved, That the endowments entrusted to CUS remain solely under its ownership and stewardship; and be it further

Resolved, That the implementation of 2023 Res. 7-04B continue unabated; and be it further

Resolved, That the effective implementation of 2023 Res. 7-04B by CUS be evaluated by an independent task force to be formed by the 2032 Synod convention to bring recommendations and/or resolutions for consideration to the 2035 Synod convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the CUS BOD and staff be commended for their work so far; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for the work of the CUS and our universities in carrying out their mission, pledging continued prayer, financial support, and encouragement.

St. John
Springfield, PA

Ov. 7-04

To Define and Affirm *Lutheran Identity*

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod states in Article II of its Constitution:

The Synod, and every member of the Synod, accepts without reservation:

1. The Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice;
2. All the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God, to wit: the three Ecumenical Creeds (the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed), the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Large Catechism of Luther, the Small Catechism of Luther, and the Formula of Concord.

therefore be it

Resolved, That the term *Lutheran identity* be defined solely by the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions; and be it further

Resolved, That the term *Lutheran identity* be defined first and foremost according to Article IV of the Augsburg Confession: “Our churches teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or words. People are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in His sight (Romans 3 and 4 [3:21–26; 4:5]),” and not in a manner that adds moral, ethical, cultural, legal, or political requirements or preferences to the Evangelical Lutheran confession; and be it further

Resolved, That the term *Lutheran identity* be affirmed as adherence to the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions alone, understanding that “the churches will not condemn one another because of differences in ceremonies when, in Christian liberty, one has less or more of them” (FC SD X 31), and rejoicing in the Evangelical Lutheran foundation of grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone, and Christ alone as the foundation of the Lutheran Confessions; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Pacific Southwest District in convention memorialize the Synod in convention to ensure the existing “Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcome Standards” (LIMOS) (cus.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/LIMOS-Evaluation-Tool.pdf) used in the visitation of our Concordia Universities are in alignment with this definition of Lutheran identity.

Pacific Southwest District

Ov. 7-05

To Define and Affirm *Lutheran Identity*

WHEREAS, The term *Lutheran identity* is used without having a clear definition, nor having scriptural or confessional references; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod states in Article II of its Constitution:

The Synod, and every member of the Synod, accepts without reservation:

1. The Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice;
2. All the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of

God, to wit: the three Ecumenical Creeds (the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed), the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Large Catechism of Luther, the Small Catechism of Luther, and the Formula of Concord.

WHEREAS, Article VII of the Augsburg Confession (AC) declares, "it is enough to agree about the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies instituted by men, should be the same everywhere. As Paul says, 'One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all' (Ephesians 4:5-6)" (2-4); and

WHEREAS, According to AC XXVIII: "It is necessary that the doctrine of Christian freedom be preserved in the churches. In other words, the bondage of the Law is not necessary in order to be justified, as it is written in the Epistle to the Galatians, 'do not submit again to a yoke of slavery' (5:1). It is necessary for the chief article of the Gospel to be preserved, namely that we obtain grace freely by faith in Christ, and not by certain observances or acts of worship devised by people. ... It is proper to keep such ordinances just so long as consciences are not burdened to think that they are necessary to salvation, or to regard it as sin if they are changed without offending others" (51-52, 56); and

WHEREAS, According to Article X of the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration: "As soon as Christian freedom is weakened and human traditions are forced on the Church with coercion, as though it were wrong and a sin to omit them, the way is already prepared for idolatry. In this way, human traditions are multiplied and regarded as divine worship, not only equal to God's ordinances, but even placed above them" (15); and

WHEREAS, There is great benefit in common traditions, rites, and ceremonies, as stated in AC XXIV, "Our churches are falsely accused of abolishing the Mass. The Mass is held among us and celebrated with the highest reverence. Nearly all the usual ceremonies are also preserved, except that the parts sung in Latin are interspersed here and there with German hymns. These have been added to teach the people" (1-2), and stated in 2016 Resolution 4-04A, "To Appeal to the LCMS Congregations, Workers, and Institutions within Christian Freedom and for Love's Sake to Retain a Common Order of Service for the Lord's Supper," although they do not form the basis of our unity or identity, but are useful for teaching the faith; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention reaffirm the definition of *Lutheran identity* as already listed in the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the Synod Constitution, namely that:

1. Lutheran identity is found in the right teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, not in the uniformity of human rites, ceremonies, or traditions instituted by men.
2. Lutheran identity is found in the acceptance of the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written, inerrant Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice.
3. Lutheran identity is found in the acceptance of all the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God;

and be it further

Resolved, That all policies and Bylaws of the Synod regarding Lutheran identity be examined and brought into conformity with the Scriptures and the Confessions mentioned above.

Michigan District

Ov. 7-06

To Encourage University Worship Practices Faithful to Scriptures and Confessions and Reflecting Breadth of Worship in the Synod

WHEREAS, The Synod holds worship as central to the life and faith of its congregations, universities, and seminaries, reflecting the church's commitment to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions; and

WHEREAS, The Synod encourages congregations "to strive for uniformity in church practice, but also to develop an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith" (Const. Art. III 7); and

WHEREAS, Member congregations of the Synod are permitted to have a variety of worship practices, provided such practices are faithful to scriptural teachings and the Lutheran Confessions; and

WHEREAS, The universities of the Synod play a crucial role in preparing graduates for membership and service within the Synod and, as such, should reflect the breadth of worship practices found in member congregations of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, The Synod in convention (2023 Res. 7-04B, "To revise Bylaws to Revisit and Renew relationship of colleges and Universities with the Synod") revised Bylaw subsection 3.6.6 to direct the Concordia University System (CUS) Board of Directors to develop and adopt Lutheran Identity Mission Outcome Standards (LIMOS), which were adopted in February, 2024, including Identity Standard 2.1, that states, "The ecclesiastical mission and goals are clearly and consciously pursued in the design and delivery of campus worship;" and Item 2.1.5 of the LIMOS Evaluation Tool asks, "How is commitment to the church's heritage and unity reflected in the use of liturgies, hymnals, and hymnody?" and "Describe the regular pattern of chapel services noting liturgies and hymnals used and those who serve as preacher and liturgists" (CUS, *Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcome Standards with Evaluation Tool* [adopted 2024], 1, 5); and

WHEREAS, Formal visitations were conducted with each of the universities of the Synod in 2025, during which the following observations were made regarding campus worship:

- "Chapel services provide a range of Christian worship styles and liturgies" (CUS, *Concordia University Irvine Formal Visitation Letter of Determination and Report*, Mar. 9, 2025, p. 2).
- "Documented examples and direct observation show the regular pattern of leadership by ordained clergy and regular use of LSB liturgies and hymnody. Vestments are regularly used," and "Wednesday worship uses LBS [sic] Responsive Prayer combined with contemporary hymnody and instrumentation." (CUS, *Concordia University Wisconsin and Ann Arbor Formal Visitation Letter of Determination and Report*, Feb. 9, 2026, p. 3)
- "Chapel is offered daily Monday through Friday, and uses the church's liturgy and hymnody" (CUS, *Concordia University Chicago Formal Visitation Letter of Determination and Report*, Jan. 30, 2026, p. 3).

- “Worship life is central to CSP’s identity, offering a variety of services—morning and evening, diverse in style—tailored to the developmental needs of undergraduates yet always grounded in God’s Word,” and “Lutheran Service Book is utilized in most worship settings, as well as other worship resources which have gone through LCMS doctrinal review.” (CUS, *Concordia University St. Paul Formal Visitation Letter of Determination and Report*, Nov. 21, 2025, p. 3–4)
- “[CUNE] has woven its ecclesiastical mission and goals into the fabric of campus life. It examines how faith is expressed and nurtured through campus worship, ensuring alignment with Lutheran theology and practice. This includes assessing the content of chapel services, the use of hymns and liturgy, and the approach to sacraments like communion. After discussion with the visitation team, CUNE will continue to evaluate and connect daily chapel services to the expectations of the LCMS and the LIMOS.” (CUS, *Concordia University Nebraska Formal Visitation Letter of Determination and Report*, Apr. 25, 2025, p. 3)

and

WHEREAS, Fostering a consistent approach to worship practices across the congregations, universities, and seminaries of the Synod strengthens the unity of the Synod and provides a coherent witness to students, congregations, and the broader community; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention affirm that the universities of the Synod should uphold worship practices that reflect the breadth of practices permitted and practiced in member congregations of the Synod, preparing their graduates to serve and participate faithfully in various worship settings; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention encourage its universities to foster worship practices that are scripturally faithful, reflective of the confessional unity of the Synod, and support the variety of worship practices and customs within the Synod in order to best prepare graduates for service within all member congregations of the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That all visitations and Synod reports regarding worship practices in universities of the Synod shall not advocate for any particular worship practice on the basis of heritage or custom as preferred within the Synod, ensuring that the universities remain committed and prepared to serve and support all member congregations of the Synod; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod provide guidance and support to assist the universities of the Synod in implementing on their campuses worship practices that align with Const. Art. III 7, promoting mutual respect and understanding for the breadth of worship practices used by member congregations within the Synod.

St. John
Seward, NE

Ov. 7-07

To Pause and Correct Deficiencies in Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcomes Standards

WHEREAS, The purpose of the Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcomes Standards (“Standards”) was to find Lutheran identity for accreditation in mission and outreach; and

WHEREAS, Those involved diligently and with great expenditure of their time developed the Standards to improve the mission and outreach of our universities; and

WHEREAS, We do not want those efforts to go to waste and have the Standards fall short of reaching its purpose; and

WHEREAS, There are deficiencies with various questions, which result in the following problems:

- *Lutheran identity* is presented as a doctrinal category but not defined, allowing the interviewer and interviewee to define it subjectively and how they believe it should be applied.
- The absence of a definition of Lutheran identity could lead our congregations, our schools, and our associations to be confused about what it means to be Lutheran.
- An unclear definition of Lutheran identity could be used inappropriately, unethically, unjustly, and unlovingly.
- The use of technical language without definition (e.g., high Christology; Lutheran values).
- The use of yes-or-no questions and the overuse of the word *explain* as a catch-all.

and

WHEREAS, These problems and deficiencies have caused a lack of trust in how the Standards have been used; therefore be it

Resolved, That, because of the problems in the Standards, their use should be paused until these issues are addressed; and be it further

Resolved, That the 2026 Synod convention adopt this resolution and form a new task force, which includes but is not limited to Concordia University System representatives and all Concordia University presidents, to improve and remedy the issues in the Standards stated above; and be it finally

Resolved, That the review and corrections be made fully transparent to the members of the Synod.

Michigan District

Ov. 7-08

To Encourage Congregations to Include in Annual Mission Budgets Support for Regional University of Concordia University System

WHEREAS, Congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are *Synod*, and together pray to the Lord for our Synod and that it would be supported nationally, regionally, and locally; and

WHEREAS, Our Synod is blessed with the “jewels” of two fine seminaries and several regional universities; and

WHEREAS, Many congregations of our Synod give at least some financial support for our seminaries; and

WHEREAS, The well-being of the Synod’s schools of higher learning, particularly our regional universities of the Concordia University System (CUS), is the concern of each congregation, pastor, professional church worker, and parochial school; and

WHEREAS, Over a half century ago the Synod recognized the need for districts, regional Concordias, seminaries, and other entities of the Synod to develop their own advancement departments for fundraising, and encouraged them to do so, even though this did not always translate into financial support for our colleges and universities in particular until long after some of them

were in severe financial straits and could not rely solely on student tuition and large endowments for support; and

WHEREAS, There is a necessity for our congregations in particular to consider giving faithful support to the Concordia universities in their region; therefore be it

Resolved, That the English District memorialize the Synod to encourage its congregations to give prayerful consideration and financial support to our various Concordia universities; and be it further

Resolved, That pastors in shepherding their congregations encourage the financial, prayer, and “presence support” for and to a CUS school of their choosing; and be it further

Resolved, That the district memorialize the Synod in convention to direct the CUS Board of Directors to send an annual letter of encouragement to pastors and congregations to give financial support, as well as prayer support, and encouragement of youth to consider attending a Concordia university, especially for professional church work; and be it finally

Resolved, That each congregation of Synod be encouraged to put a CUS school into its annual budget and/or mission budget, marking it a blessing of God to render such support for the furtherance of Christ’s kingdom of grace, His church on earth.

English District

Ov. 7-09

To Amend Bylaw 3.6.6.1

WHEREAS, Bylaw 3.6.6 states that the Concordia University System (CUS) Board of Directors (BOD) is to assist with the cooperation and coordination of the Synod’s colleges and universities in the “preparation of commissioned ministers for service in the Synod and of pre-seminary students for study at a Synod seminary”; and

WHEREAS, The CUS BOD wishes to carry out this purpose in a timely fashion for the benefit of the Synod, her colleges and universities, and our students; and

WHEREAS, Bylaw 3.6.6.1 (b) states that the CUS BOD shall “review and approve new implementations of and discontinuance, whether actual or constructive, of programs of study leading to professional church work in the interest of the institution(s) and the Synod”; and

WHEREAS, Bylaw 3.6.6.1 (g) directs the CUS BOD to “receive, revise, and recommend to conventions of the Synod for approval any proposals for creating, essentially revising, or renaming programs of study and certification for commissioned ministry”; and

WHEREAS, Bylaw 3.6.6.1 (b) places approval of programs of study leading to church work with the CUS BOD, and Bylaw 3.6.6.1 (g) places this approval with the conventions of the Synod, these two placements conflict with one another; and

WHEREAS, The triennial cycle of convention of the Synod leaves the alteration of programs of study in any way according to Bylaw 3.6.6.1 (g) in a timely manner impossible; therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.6.6.1 (g) be struck as follows:

~~PRESENT~~/PROPOSED WORDING

3.6.6.1 The Concordia University System Board of Directors shall:

...

~~(g) receive, revise, and recommend to conventions of the Synod for approval any proposals for creating, essentially revising, or renaming programs of study and certification for commissioned ministry;~~

~~(hg) ...~~

and be it further

Resolved, That the delegates gathered in convention exhort the CUS BOD to enact the work of Bylaw 3.6.6.1 (b) promptly when called upon to do so by a university; and be it further

Resolved, That the CUS BOD include any such actions in their triennial report for the *Workbook*; and be it finally

Resolved, That the CUS BOD’s work be commended to the care and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Board of Directors
Concordia University System

Ov. 7-10

To Amend Bylaw 3.10.6.2.2

WHEREAS, The 2023 Synod convention adopted Resolution 7-04B, “To Revise Bylaws to Revisit and Renew Relationship of Colleges and Universities with the Synod”; and

WHEREAS, 2023 Res. 7-04B significantly changed the way that the Synod relates to the universities of the Concordia University System (CUS); and

WHEREAS, Part of 2023 Res. 7-04B establishes mandatory training for the regents of the universities of the CUS; and

WHEREAS, That training is now codified in Bylaw 3.10.6.2.2, its subparagraphs (a–d) further describing such training; and

WHEREAS, The required training has been initiated and is ongoing; and

WHEREAS, Bylaw 3.10.6.2.2 (d) has been subject to several interpretations and has caused some confusion regarding the training required of regents appointed or elected between conventions of the Synod; therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.10.6.2.2 (d) be amended as follows:

~~PRESENT~~/PROPOSED WORDING

F. Concordia University System Boards of Regents

3.10.6.2.2 Persons elected or appointed to a board of regents shall undergo training for such service.

...

~~(d) A regent must complete the Synod New Regent Orientation within one year of the Orientation being offered or within one year of being elected or appointed—whichever period is longer. Failure to complete the initial trainingSynod New Regent Orientation within the first year after the first Synod convention after a regent is elected or appointed renders the regent ineligible to continue in office that timeframe will result in a loss of eligibility to continue serving. Upon such failureIn such cases, the respective~~

Board of Directors
Concordia University System

Ov. 7-11

To Strengthen Our Process for Supporting Our Concordias

WHEREAS, At the 2022 Michigan District convention, Resolution 2-05a was considered, reading (as amended before it was voted on):

WHEREAS, Our Concordia Universities have long been beloved and treasured by the members and member congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and a vital part of the communities in which they are located; and

WHEREAS, Our Concordia Universities have historically been at the very heart of our Synod's stated identity and purpose (Synodical Constitution, Article III Objectives (3) Recruit and train pastors, teachers and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continued growth; and (5) Aid congregations to develop processes of thorough Christian education and nurture and to establish agencies of Christian education such as elementary and secondary schools and to support synodical colleges, universities, and seminaries); and

WHEREAS, Our Concordia Universities not only exist to train professional church workers but also to train Christian laymen and laywomen who will be godly and influential leaders in their workplaces, communities, churches, and families; and

WHEREAS, Our Lord Jesus Christ calls His followers to be salt and light in the world at large and not only in safe, homogeneous communities (Matthew 5:13–16); and

WHEREAS, Our six remaining Concordia Universities (on seven residential campuses) give our Synod a valuable foothold in increasingly diverse, multicultural, and urban settings where the Church's presence is in many cases not especially prominent in the 21st century; and

WHEREAS, Our Concordia Universities, by their very existence, have the potential to bring the mission field to our Synod's doorstep and to provide safe places for difficult theological and cultural issues to be openly and honestly engaged; and

WHEREAS, Three of our Concordia Colleges and Universities have unfortunately closed their doors in recent years (Selma in 2018, Portland in 2020, and Bronxville in 2021); and

WHEREAS, Our Synod is filled with many generous givers and donors with the means and/or the desire to lend needed financial support to our Concordia Universities if called upon to do so; and

WHEREAS, Our God Himself is "able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20), even though we may not always be immediately able to identify a viable solution; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Michigan District investigate opportunities for how it can provide support (prayer, church worker and other student recruitment, financial, etc.) to help ensure the continuation of the residential campus of Concordia University Ann Arbor (CUAA) located within its own District; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Michigan District memorialize to the 2023 Synodical Convention the previous Whereases and the following resolves:

Resolved, To affirm our commitment, as far as humanly possible, not to allow any more of our remaining Concordia

Universities to close their doors before first exploring all possible avenues to assist them to remain open and to continue to fulfill their missions; and be it further

Resolved, To instruct synodical leadership to refuse to take any future action(s) with respect to our six remaining Concordia Universities without being fully transparent with the professional church workers and the lay membership of the entire Synod's congregations, namely, regarding any course of action being considered, prior to any such course of action being carried out, and without first giving the members and member congregations of the Synod every opportunity to respond to such a potential course of action in generosity and/or with creativity; and be it finally

Resolved, To be encouraged to further unite behind a renewed commitment to keep the doors of our six remaining Concordia Universities open as long as our gracious God sees fit, to His glory, honor, and praise.

(2022 Michigan District Proc., Res. 2-05a)

and

WHEREAS, District Res. 2-05a was addressed by the Synod President as "canned, it has been going around to a number of districts ... is false, contains material error" (*Ibid.*, 43); and

WHEREAS, District Res. 2-05a was subsequently defeated by the convention; then, sadly, eighteen months later, the majority of the Concordia University Wisconsin Ann Arbor (CUWAA) Board of Regents (BOR) undertook the "reimagining" of CUWAA; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention recognize that the actions of the majority of the CUWAA BOR showed the need for district Res. 2-05a; and be it further

Resolved, That the whereas statements listed in district Res. 2-05a be memorialized to the 2026 Synod convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention direct Synod leadership, the Concordia University System (CUS), and each university's board of regents to be fully transparent with the professional church workers and the lay membership of the entire Synod's congregations regarding any course of action being considered prior to any such course of action being carried out; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention affirm our commitment, as far as humanly possible, not to allow any more of our remaining Concordia universities to close their doors or significantly reduce operations on a campus before first exploring all possible avenues with members and member congregations of the Synod to assist them to remain open and to continue to fulfill their missions; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention instruct the administrations of CUS schools not to ask newly elected board of regents members to undertake significant actions—such as we saw the CUWAA administration undertake in regards to CUWAA—until the regents have been trained as required under Bylaw 3.10.6.2.1 (d).

Michigan District

Ov. 7-12

**To Encourage Licensed Counselors
Serving Recognized Service Organizations
to Complete Director of Family Life Ministry
Colloquy Program**

Preamble

This overture encourages Licensed Mental Health Counselors (LMHCs) and Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs) serving in recognized service organizations (RSOs) of the Synod to complete the Director of Family Life Ministry (DFLM) colloquy program, so that they may be called and rostered as distinctly Lutheran counselors, uniting professional licensure with ecclesial recognition and providing biblically sound, Christ-centered counseling care.

WHEREAS, RSOs of the Synod are called to extend the mercy of Christ through faithful service, and counseling ministries are a vital means by which the church bears witness to the Gospel in word and deed; and

WHEREAS, LMHCs and LCSWs serving within RSOs provide care to individuals and families who are often burdened by grief, trauma, relational conflict, and emotional distress, and are at times asked to address doctrinal issues related to faith and life; and

WHEREAS, The integration of biblical truth with clinical excellence ensures that counseling services offered in RSOs are both Christ-centered and professionally effective, pointing clients to the comfort, peace, and hope found in Jesus Christ; and

WHEREAS, The DFLM colloquy program equips candidates with theological formation rooted in the Lutheran Confessions, preparing them to serve as rostered workers who embody a distinctly Lutheran identity in their vocation; and

WHEREAS, Never before in the history of the Synod has there been an opportunity for licensed Lutheran counselors to be formally called and rostered to serve within the Synod; and

WHEREAS, This unprecedented opportunity is now available, opening the way for counselors to serve the church in a distinctly Lutheran capacity, uniting professional licensure with ecclesial recognition; and

WHEREAS, Encouraging LMHCs and LCSWs to complete the DFLM colloquy program strengthens the church's witness by raising up counselors who are not only clinically licensed but also ecclesially recognized, thereby uniting professional practice with confessional fidelity; and

WHEREAS, Such preparation ensures that counseling ministries within RSOs remain accountable to the doctrine and mission of the church, while also meeting the highest standards of Christ-centered and distinctly Lutheran counseling care; and

WHEREAS, In September 2025, the Concordia University System approved that LMHCs and LCSWs meet the prerequisite requirements for admission to the DFLM colloquy program at Concordia University Wisconsin and Concordia University Nebraska; and

WHEREAS, RSOs of the Synod are required and expected to align in doctrine and practice with the Synod, ensuring that their programs and activities are in harmony with the mission and ministry of the church; and

WHEREAS, RSOs, while structurally independent, must agree to respect and not act contrary to the doctrine and practice of the

Synod, fostering the mission and ministry of the church through their service; and

WHEREAS, The granting of RSO status signifies that an organization, though self-governed, extends the mission and ministry of the Synod, operates in accordance with Synod Bylaws and policies, and remains accountable to the theological and missional integrity of the Synod; therefore be it

Resolved, That LMHCs and LCSWs serving in RSOs be highly encouraged to complete the DFLM colloquy program, so that they may be called and rostered to serve as distinctly Lutheran counselors, providing biblically sound and clinically effective Christ-centered counseling services to the glory of God and the blessing of His people.

Board of Regents
Concordia University Wisconsin and Ann Arbor

Ov. 7-13

**To Ask That Concordia University Nebraska
Local Regents Be Appointed**

Preamble

In its governing documents, Concordia University, Nebraska (CUNE) is required to have university regents who reside in Seward County, Nebraska. Elections for such local regents took place at previous Synod conventions. However, this meant that those nominating individuals for the CUNE regents were only able to recommend a very small number of nominees. This overture asks that the elected CUNE regents appoint those local regents instead of having them be elected at Synod or Nebraska District conventions.

WHEREAS, 1 Corinthians 14:40 states that "all things should be done decently and in order"; and

WHEREAS, Bylaw 3.10.6.2 (2) reads "If any board is required by its governing documents to include one or more persons holding residence or church membership in a specific locality, the institution is responsible for ensuring (including by appointment, if necessary) that individual(s) meeting such requirements are included among those persons serving on such board, and no such geographic restriction shall apply to Synod-elected regents"; and

WHEREAS, CUNE's governing documents require a certain number of university regents to reside in Seward County, Nebraska; and

WHEREAS, Elections for these local CUNE regents have taken place at several previous Synod conventions; and

WHEREAS, Electing local regents at either Synod or Nebraska District conventions would limit the number of potential nominees to a very small number; and

WHEREAS, Others in the Synod might be willing to serve as CUNE regents who have previously been unable to do so due to not residing in Seward County, Nebraska; and

WHEREAS, Local regents for Synod universities can be appointed by the university's board of regents according to Bylaw 3.10.6.2 (3); therefore be it

Resolved, That CUNE no longer have elections for regents living in Seward County at Synod conventions in accordance with Bylaw 3.10.6.2 (2), so that "no such geographic restriction ... apply to Synod-elected regents"; and be it further

Resolved, That CUNE should be asked that they likewise do not insist on elections for local regents at future Nebraska District conventions; and be it further

Resolved, That from now on, the elected regents of CUNE be asked to appoint the number of local regents required by the university's governing documents, following the procedures listed in Bylaw 3.10.6.2 (3); and be it finally

Resolved, That the CUNE Board of Regents make any bylaw changes as needed to enact this resolution.

Immanuel, Beemer, NE; Zion-St. John, Wisner, NE

Ov. 7-14

To Support and Clarify Prior Approval Process

Preamble

Since the 2013 Synod convention, appointments to theological faculties at all universities and seminaries, as well as all college, university, and seminary presidential appointments, have been subject to the prior approval process. While the 2013 Synod convention amended the Bylaws to delegate the responsibility for prior approval to specific groups (as referenced below) the Bylaws did not, and still do not, stipulate how the process of prior approval should be carried out. Over time this has led to questions as to the standards used to evaluate candidates as well as the process used by the prior approval panels. In the hopes of building trust and relieving any undue criticism of the panels and the process, the following overture aims to increase transparency for the process and standards used by the panels as well as ensuring clear communication between the panels, the candidates, and the Synod.

WHEREAS, One of the expressed purposes of the Synod is to "recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth" (Const. Art. III 3); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has the responsibility to oversee that training; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has designated that responsibility to the prior approval panels outlined in various bylaws (Bylaws 3.6.6.1; 3.10.5.7.3; 3.10.6.8.2; 3.10.6.9.2); and

WHEREAS, Those panels not only have responsibility to work on behalf of the Synod but are also responsible to the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Those under consideration for theological professorships and other positions requiring prior approval have ordinarily been ordained into the Office of the Holy Ministry or have been commissioned and/or consecrated into an auxiliary office of the Church; and

WHEREAS, Those under consideration for aforementioned positions have also been examined and approved for service on the roster of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Those individual members of the Synod have, by virtue of their membership in the Synod, agreed to the confessional basis as outlined in Constitution Article II, as well as recognized and affirmed the validity of Bylaw sections 1.6–1.8; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to the Lord of the Church for using the Synod and its agencies to preserve and enlarge the workers of the harvest; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to those engaged in the various prior approval processes for being engaged in difficult and important work; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention require that the process, used by the various panels to carry out the responsibility entrusted to them by the Synod be made transparent and publicly available; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention stipulate that, unless those under consideration by the prior approval panels are found to be in violation of their ordination, commissioning, consecration, or installation vows, their approval be assumed; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention stipulate that, should one under consideration be thought to be in violation, the candidate be given every opportunity to clarify their position to the panel; and be it finally

Resolved, That Synod in convention stipulate that, if such a violation be found, the panel would, with the appropriate district president as that individual's ecclesiastical supervisor, engage in the appropriate processes to restore the erring brother or sister so that one deemed unworthy to teach at one of the Synod's institutions would not be permitted to remain on the roster or serve a congregation and thus lead that congregation to err or become out of step with the Synod.

Pacific Southwest District; Circuit 1, Northern Illinois District

Ov. 7-15

To Clarify Prior Approval Process and Provide Appropriate Transparency

Preamble

Since the 2013 Synod convention, appointments to theological faculties at all universities and seminaries, as well as all college, university, and seminary presidential appointments, have been subject to the prior approval process. While the 2013 Synod convention amended the Bylaws to delegate the responsibility for prior approval to specific groups (as referenced below) the Bylaws did not, and still do not, stipulate how the process of prior approval should be carried out. Over time this has led to questions as to the standards used to evaluate candidates as well as the process used by the prior approval panels. In the hopes of building trust and relieving any undue criticism of the panels and the process, the following overture aims to increase transparency for the process and standards used by the panels as well as ensuring clear communication between the panels, the candidates, and the Synod.

WHEREAS, One of the expressed purposes of the Synod is to "recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth" (Const. Art. III 3); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has the responsibility to oversee that training; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has designated that responsibility to the prior approval panels outlined in various bylaws (Bylaws 3.6.6.1; 3.10.5.7.3; 3.10.6.8.2; 3.10.6.9.2); and

WHEREAS, Those panels not only have responsibility to work on behalf of the Synod but are also responsible to the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Those under consideration for theological professorships and other positions requiring prior approval have ordinarily been ordained into the Office of the Holy Ministry or have been commissioned and/or consecrated into an auxiliary office of the Church; and

WHEREAS, Those under consideration for aforementioned positions have also been examined and approved for service on the roster of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Those individual members of the Synod have, by virtue of their membership in the Synod, agreed to the confessional basis as outlined in Constitution Article II, as well as recognized and affirmed the validity of Bylaw sections 1.6–1.8; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to the Lord of the Church for using the Synod and its agencies to preserve and enlarge the workers of the harvest, and for those involved in the various prior approval processes for being engaged in difficult and important work; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention require that the process used by the various panels to carry out the responsibility entrusted to them by the Synod be made transparent and publicly available; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention stipulate that, unless those under consideration by the prior approval panels are found to be in violation of their ordination, commissioning, consecration, or installation vows, their approval be assumed; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention stipulate that, should one under consideration be thought to be in violation, the candidate be given every opportunity to clarify their position to the panel; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention stipulate that, if such a violation be found, the panel would, with the appropriate district president as that individual's ecclesiastical supervisor, engage in the appropriate processes to restore the erring brother or sister so that one deemed unworthy to teach at one of the Synod's institutions would not be permitted to remain on the roster or serve a congregation and thus lead that congregation to err or become out of step with the Synod.

Michigan District

Ov. 7-16

To Support and Clarify Prior Approval Process

WHEREAS, One of the expressed purposes of the Synod is to “recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth” (Const. Art. III 3); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has the responsibility to oversee that training; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has designated that responsibility to the prior approval panels outlined in various bylaws (Bylaws 3.6.6.1; 3.10.5.7.3; 3.10.6.8.2; 3.10.6.9.2); and

WHEREAS, Those panels not only have a responsibility to work on behalf of the Synod but are also responsible to the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Those under consideration for theological professorships and other positions requiring prior approval have ordinarily been ordained into the Office of the Holy Ministry or have been commissioned and/or consecrated into an auxiliary office of the Church; and

WHEREAS, Those under consideration for the aforementioned positions have also been examined and approved for service on the roster of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Those individual members of the Synod have, by virtue of their membership in the Synod, agreed to the confessional

basis as outlined in Constitution Article II, as well as recognized and affirmed the validity of Bylaw sections 1.6–1.8; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to the Lord of the Church for using the Synod and its agencies to preserve and enlarge the workers of the harvest; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to those engaged in the various prior approval processes for being engaged in difficult and important work; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention require that the process used by the various panels to carry out the responsibility entrusted to it by the Synod be made transparent and available to the candidate, the calling entity, and ecclesiastical supervisor; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention stipulate that unless those under consideration by the prior approval panels are found to be in violation of their ordination, commissioning, consecration, or installation vows that their approval be assumed; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention stipulate that, should one under consideration be thought to be in violation, the candidate be given every opportunity to clarify their position to the panel; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention stipulate that, if such a violation be found, the panel would, with the appropriate district president as that individual's ecclesiastical supervisor, engage in the appropriate processes to restore the erring brother or sister so that one deemed unworthy to teach at one of the Synod's institutions would not be permitted to remain on the roster or serve a congregation and thus lead that congregation to err or become out of step with the Synod.

Florida-Georgia District

Ov. 7-17

To Amend Bylaws to Support and Clarify Prior Approval Process

Preamble

Since the 2013 Synod convention, appointments to theological faculties at all universities and seminaries, as well as all college, university, and seminary presidential appointments, have been subject to the prior approval process. While the 2013 Synod convention amended the Bylaws to delegate the responsibility for prior approval to specific groups (as referenced below) the Bylaws did not, and still do not, stipulate how the process of prior approval should be carried out. Over time there has been growing desire to understand how candidates are being evaluated by the prior approval panels. In the hopes of building trust and reducing undue criticism of the panels and the process, the following overture aims to increase transparency for the process and guidelines used by the panels, as well as ensuring clear communication between the panels, the candidates, the institutions, and the broader Synod.

WHEREAS, One of the expressed purposes of the Synod is to “recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth” (Const. Art. III 3); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has the responsibility to oversee that training; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has designated that responsibility to the prior approval panels outlined in various Bylaws (Bylaws 3.6.6.1; 3.10.5.7.3; 3.10.6.8.2; 3.10.6.9.2); and

WHEREAS, Those panels not only have responsibility to work on behalf of the Synod but are also responsible to the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Those under consideration for theological professorships and other positions requiring prior approval have ordinarily been ordained into the Office of the Holy Ministry or have been commissioned into an auxiliary office of the Church; and

WHEREAS, Those under consideration for aforementioned positions have also been examined, approved, and certified for service on the roster of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Those individual members of the Synod have, by virtue of their membership in the Synod, agreed to the confessional basis as outlined in Constitution Article II, namely that “every member of the Synod accepts without reservation: 1. The Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice; 2. All the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God, to wit: the three Ecumenical Creeds (the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed), the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Large Catechism of Luther, the Small Catechism of Luther, and the Formula of Concord;” and

WHEREAS, Those individual members also abide by Bylaw 1.6, concerning the confessional position of the Synod; Bylaw 1.7, concerning agreements; and Bylaw 1.8, concerning dissent; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to the Lord of the Church for using the Synod and its agencies to prepare workers for the harvest; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to those engaged in the various prior approval processes for their difficult and important work; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention stipulate that, unless those under consideration by the prior approval panels are found, on the basis of clear and substantiated evidence, to be in violation of their ordination, commissioning, or installation vows or of the confessional subscription required by Constitution Article II and applicable Bylaws, their approval be assumed; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention require that the processes and guidelines used by the various panels to carry out the responsibility entrusted to them by the Synod be made transparent and available to all members of the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention stipulate that, should one under consideration be thought to fall short of the guidelines, the candidate be given ample opportunity to clarify the candidate’s position to the panel in consultation with the appropriate district president as that candidate’s immediate ecclesiastical supervisor; and be it finally

Resolved, That a new subsection be added to Bylaw 3.10:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

H. Prior Approval Standards and Procedures

3.10.8 Prior approval panels established under this section and related bylaws (including but not limited to Bylaws 3.6.6.1 [c]; 3.10.5.7.3 [a]; 3.10.6.8.2; and 3.10.6.9.2) act on behalf of and are responsible to the Synod.

(a) Unless, on the basis of clear and substantiated evidence, a candidate for a position subject to prior approval is found to be in violation of the candidate’s ordination, commissioning, or installation vows or of the confessional subscription required by Article II of the Constitution and applicable bylaws, approval shall be granted and shall not be withheld.

(b) Each prior approval panel shall adopt written guidelines that specify the standards applied and the ordinary process and timelines used in evaluating candidates. These guidelines shall be made reasonably available to the members of the Synod.

(c) When a prior approval panel believes that a candidate may fall short of the guidelines, the panel shall (1) clearly identify its concerns to the candidate in writing and (2) give the candidate ample opportunity to clarify the candidate’s position to the panel, in consultation with the appropriate district president as the candidate’s immediate ecclesiastical supervisor.

Southeastern District

Ov. 7-18

To Reexamine Prior Approval Process

WHEREAS, One of the expressed purposes of the Synod is to “recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth” (Const. Art. III 3); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has the responsibility to oversee that training, and has done so in various forms throughout its history; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has delegated a portion of that responsibility to the prior approval panels outlined in various bylaws (Bylaws 3.6.6.1; 3.10.5.7.3; 3.10.6.8.2; 3.10.6.9.2); and

WHEREAS, The restructuring of the Synod by the 2010 Synod convention eliminated existing agencies tasked with prior approval for seminary faculty members (namely, the Board for Pastoral Education) (2010 Res. 8-08A, “To Realign the National Synod Ministries around Two Mission Boards”); and

WHEREAS, The 2013 Synod convention passed Resolution 5-11B, “To Amend Bylaw 3.10.4.7.3 re Appointment of Seminary Faculty,” which amended what is now Bylaw 3.10.5.7.3 (a) to establish a three-person prior approval panel for the appointment of full-time seminary faculty members, to be comprised of three ordained members, including “the President of the Synod (or his designee), the chairman of the Council of Presidents (or his designee), and the chairman of the Board for National Mission (or his designee)”;

WHEREAS, The Synod in convention subsequently passed 2016 Res. 7-06B, “To Assist Our CUS Institutions in Demonstrating Our Common Confession,” which added what is now Bylaw 3.10.6.9.2 to establish a three-person prior approval panel for the appointment of those teaching theology classes at a Concordia University System (CUS) institution, to be comprised of three ordained members, including “the President of Synod (or his designee), the chairman of the Council of Presidents (or his designee), and a member of the Concordia University System board selected by the chair”;

WHEREAS, Those panels not only have responsibility to work on behalf of the Synod but are also accountable to the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Some questions have arisen in recent years regarding the transparency of the process, the standards by which the approval is determined, and the exact composition—and appropriateness thereof—of the panels themselves; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to the Lord of the Church for using the Synod and its agencies to preserve and enlarge the workers of the harvest (Matt. 9:35–38); and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod reexamine the composition and processes of prior approval panels, especially those involved in the appointment of full-time seminary faculty members and those teaching theology classes at a CUS institution; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod expand the composition of those two panels to include a total of five voters each, possibly drawing from other boards, commissions, and entities of Synod charged with oversight or guidance of doctrine and practice (including representatives from LCMS Board of Directors, Commission on Doctrinal Review, Commission on Theology and Church Relations, respective seminary boards, and faculties); and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod establish bylaws to guide the members of the prior approval panel in assessing candidates and providing rationale for the decisions they make to the candidates themselves and to their calling institutions, taking into account all due privacy concerns and laws; and be it finally

Resolved, That amended bylaws be proposed to the 2029 Synod convention.

Christ, La Mesa, CA; Circuit 9 (Decatur), Indiana District

Ov. 7-19

To Review and Clarify Prior Approval

WHEREAS, One of the expressed purposes of the Synod is to “recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth” (Const. Art. III 3); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has the responsibility to oversee that training, and has done so in various forms throughout its history; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has delegated a portion of that responsibility to the prior approval panels outlined in various bylaws (Bylaws 3.6.6.1; 3.10.5.7.3; 3.10.6.8.2; 3.10.6.9.2); and

WHEREAS, The restructuring of the Synod by the 2010 Synod convention eliminated existing agencies tasked with prior approval for seminary faculty members (namely, the Board for Pastoral Education; 2010 Res. 8-08A, “To Realign the National Synod Ministries around Two Mission Boards”); and

WHEREAS, The Synod in convention adopted 2013 Resolution 5-11B, “To Amend Bylaw 3.10.4.7.3 re Appointment of Seminary Faculty” (the noted bylaw being subsequently renumbered to 3.10.5.7.3), which established a three-person prior approval panel for the appointment of full-time seminary faculty members, to be comprised of three ordained members, including “the President of Synod (or his designee), the chairman of the Council of Presidents (or his designee), and the chairman of the Board for National Mission (or his designee)” (Bylaw 3.10.5.7.3 [a]); and

WHEREAS, The Synod in convention subsequently adopted 2016 Res. 7-06B, “To Assist Our CUS Institutions in Demonstrating Our Common Confession,” which established a three-person prior approval panel for the appointment of those teaching theology classes at a Concordia University System institution, to be comprised of three ordained members, including “the President of Synod (or his designee), the chairman of the Council of Presidents

(or his designee), and a member of the Concordia University System (CUS) board selected by the chair” (Bylaw 3.10.6.9.2); and

WHEREAS, Those panels not only have responsibility to work on behalf of the Synod but also are responsible to the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Some questions have arisen in recent years regarding the transparency of the process, the standards by which approval is determined, and the exact composition—and appropriateness thereof—of the panels themselves; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to the Lord of the Church for using the Synod and its agencies to preserve and enlarge the workers of the harvest (Matt. 9:35–38); and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to those engaged in the various prior approval processes for being engaged in difficult and important work; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod reexamine the composition and processes of prior approval panels, especially those involved in the appointment of full-time seminary faculty members and those teaching theology classes at a CUS System institution; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod expand the composition of those two panels to include a total of five voters each, possibly drawing from other boards, commissions, and entities of the Synod charged with oversight or guidance of doctrine and practice (including, for example, representatives from the Commission on Doctrinal Review or the Commission on Theology and Church Relations); and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod establish bylaws that might guide the members of the prior approval panel in assessing candidates and providing rationale for the decisions they make to the candidates themselves and to their calling institutions, taking into account all due privacy concerns and laws; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention propose amended bylaws no later than the 2029 Synod convention.

Missouri District

Ov. 7-20

To Support and Clarify Prior Approval Process for Theological Faculty and Presidential Candidates for Concordia University System

Preamble

Since the 2013 Synod convention, appointments to theological faculties at all universities and seminaries, as well as all college, university, and seminary presidential appointments, have been subject to the prior approval process. While the 2013 Synod convention amended the Bylaws to delegate the responsibility for prior approval to specific groups (as referenced below) the Bylaws did not, and still do not, stipulate how the process of prior approval should be carried out. Over time this has led to questions as to the standards used to evaluate candidates as well as the process utilized by the prior approval panels. In the hopes of building trust and relieving any undue criticism of the panels and the process, the following overture aims to increase feedback for the process and standards used by the panels as well as ensuring clear communication between the panels, the candidates, their ecclesiastical supervisors, and the Synod.

WHEREAS, One of the expressed purposes of the Synod is to “recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church

workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth” (Const. Art. III 3); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has the responsibility to oversee that training, and has done so in various forms throughout its history; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has delegated a portion of that responsibility to the prior approval panels outlined in various bylaws (Bylaws 3.6.6.1; 3.10.5.7.3; 3.10.6.8.2; 3.10.6.9.2); and

WHEREAS, The restructuring of the Synod by the 2010 Synod convention eliminated existing agencies tasked with prior approval for seminary faculty members (namely, the Board for Pastoral Education; 2010 Res. 8-08A, “To Realign the National Synod Ministries around Two Mission Boards”); and

WHEREAS, The Synod in convention adopted 2013 Resolution 5-11B, “To Amend Bylaw 3.10.4.7.3 re Appointment of Seminary Faculty” (the noted bylaw being subsequently renumbered to 3.10.5.7.3), which established a three-person prior approval panel for the appointment of full-time seminary faculty members, to be comprised of three ordained members, including “the President of Synod (or his designee), the chairman of the Council of Presidents (or his designee), and the chairman of the Board for National Mission (or his designee)” (Bylaw 3.10.5.7.3 [a]); and

WHEREAS, The Synod in convention subsequently adopted 2016 Res. 7-06B, “To Assist Our CUS Institutions in Demonstrating Our Common Confession,” which established a three-person prior approval panel for the appointment of those teaching theology classes at a Concordia University System institution, to be comprised of three ordained members, including “the President of Synod (or his designee), the chairman of the Council of Presidents (or his designee), and a member of the Concordia University System (CUS) board selected by the chair” (Bylaw 3.10.6.9.2); and

WHEREAS, Those panels not only have responsibility to work on behalf of the Synod but are also responsible to the Synod; and

WHEREAS, There has been confusion about the prior approval process by candidates under consideration, their ecclesiastical supervisors, boards of regents, and others throughout the Synod; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Minnesota South District in convention give thanks to the Lord of the Church for using the Synod and its agencies to preserve and enlarge the workers of the harvest (Matt. 9:35–38); and be it further

Resolved, That the district in convention express thanks and appreciation to the CUS Board of Directors for developing and making public their criteria for evaluating theology faculty candidates during their prior approval process (cus.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Prior-Approval-Protocol-for-Theology-Faculty.pdf); and be it further

Resolved, That the district in convention memorialize the Synod to further clarify and communicate the prior approval process for seminary faculty and seminary and university presidents; and be it finally

Resolved, That the district in convention memorialize the Synod in convention to encourage fraternal and confidential communications through appropriate channels with candidates not approved by a prior approval panel, along with their ecclesiastical supervisor, taking into account privacy laws, to enable them to provide correction where necessary and encouragement to continue their service and ministry to the Church with confidence and joy.

Minnesota South District

Ov. 7-21

To Support and Clarify Prior Approval Process

Preamble

Since the 2013 Synod convention, appointments to theological faculties at all universities and seminaries, as well as all college, university, and seminary presidential appointments, have been subject to the prior approval process. While the 2013 Synod convention amended the Bylaws to delegate the responsibility for prior approval to specific groups (as referenced below) the Bylaws did not, and still do not, stipulate how the process of prior approval should be carried out. Over time this has led to questions as to the standards used to evaluate candidates as well as the process used by the prior approval panels. In the hopes of building trust and relieving any undue criticism of the panels and the process, the following overture aims to increase transparency for the process and standards used by the panels as well as ensuring clear communication between the panels, the candidates, and the Synod.

WHEREAS, One of the expressed purposes of the Synod is to “recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth” (Const. Art. III 3); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has the responsibility to oversee that training; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has designated that responsibility to the prior approval panels outlined in various bylaws (Bylaws 3.6.6.1; 3.10.5.7.3; 3.10.6.8.2; 3.10.6.9.2); and

WHEREAS, Those panels not only have responsibility to work on behalf of the Synod but are also responsible to the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Those under consideration for theological professorships and other positions requiring prior approval have ordinarily been ordained into the Office of the Holy Ministry or have been commissioned and/or consecrated into an auxiliary office of the Church; and

WHEREAS, Those under consideration for aforementioned positions have also been examined and approved for service on the roster of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Those individual members of the Synod have, by virtue of their membership in the Synod, agreed to the confessional basis as outlined in Constitution Article II, as well as recognized and affirmed the validity of Bylaw sections 1.6–1.8; and

WHEREAS, There are members in good standing who at times do not pass prior approval and receive no follow-up or counsel, yet remain in good standing; therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to the Lord of the Church for using the Synod and its agencies to preserve and enlarge the workers of the harvest; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to those engaged in the various prior approval processes for being engaged in difficult and important work; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention require that all criteria used by the various panels to carry out the responsibility entrusted to them by the Synod be made transparent and publicly available on demand; and be it finally

Resolved, That those considered but not approved by an approval panel be given the reasoning upon request and every opportunity to clarify their position to the panel.

Northwest District

Ov. 7-22

To Clarify Prior Approval Process for Theological Faculties and Concordia University Presidents and Selection Process for Seminary Presidents

WHEREAS, Appointments to theological faculties at all universities and seminaries of the Synod are subject to the prior approval process (Bylaws 3.10.5.7.3; 3.10.6.9.2); and

WHEREAS, All college/university president appointments are subject to the prior approval process (Bylaw 3.10.6.8.2); and

WHEREAS, All seminary presidential appointments are subject to a selection process (Bylaw 3.10.5.6.2); and

WHEREAS, These bylaws delegate the responsibility for prior approval to specific groups; and

WHEREAS, Bylaws related to theological faculty (Bylaws 3.10.5.7.3; 3.10.6.9.2) include the phrase “and shall include a thorough theological review”; and

WHEREAS, The lack of a comprehensive definition of the scope of the prior approval process, beyond a “thorough theological review,” has led to questions among members of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Trust among brothers and sisters could increase through a more well-understood process, relieving any undue criticism of the process and those who carry it out on our behalf; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Northern Illinois District in convention memorialize the 2026 Synod convention to request Synod leadership publish articles in both *The Lutheran Witness* and *Reporter* to clarify what the prior approval process is and how it is being carried out.

Northern Illinois District

Ov. 7-23

To Support and Clarify Prior Approval Process Rationale

Preamble

Since the 2013 Synod convention, appointments to theological faculties at all universities and seminaries, as well as all college, university, and seminary presidential appointments, have been subject to the prior approval process. While the 2013 Synod convention amended the Bylaws to delegate the responsibility for prior approval to specific groups (as referenced below) the Bylaws did not, and still do not, stipulate how the process of prior approval should be carried out. Over time, this has led to questions as to the standards used to evaluate candidates as well as the process used by the prior approval panels. In the hopes of building trust and relieving any undue criticism of the panels and the process, the following overture aims to increase transparency for the process and standards used by the panels as well as ensuring clear communication between the panels, the candidates, and the Synod.

WHEREAS, One of the expressed purposes of the Synod is to “recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church

workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth” (Const. Art. III 3); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has the responsibility to oversee that training; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has designated that responsibility to the prior approval panels outlined in various bylaws (Bylaws 3.6.6.1; 3.10.5.7.3; 3.10.6.8.2; 3.10.6.9.2); and

WHEREAS, Those panels not only have responsibility to work on behalf of the Synod but are also responsible to the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Those under consideration for theological professorships and other positions requiring prior approval have ordinarily been ordained into the Office of the Holy Ministry or have been commissioned and/or consecrated into an auxiliary office of the Church; and

WHEREAS, Those under consideration for aforementioned positions have also been examined and approved for service on the roster of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Those individual members of the Synod have, by virtue of their membership in the Synod, agreed to the confessional basis as outlined in Constitution Article II, as well as recognized and affirmed the validity of Bylaw sections 1.6–1.8; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to the Lord of the Church for using the Synod and its agencies to preserve and enlarge the workers of the harvest; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to those engaged in the various prior approval processes for being engaged in difficult and important work; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention require that the process, used by the various panels to carry out the responsibility entrusted to them by the Synod, be made transparent and publicly available; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Concordia University System web page (cus.edu/protocols-and-procedures), which includes the *Protocol for Pre-Approval of Concordia University Regents*, *Prior Approval of Theology Faculty at the Concordia Universities*, and *Process for the Selection of a College or University President*, be expanded to include protocols for the seminaries.

California-Nevada-Hawaii District

Ov. 7-24

To Encourage Greater Transparency in Prior Approval Process

WHEREAS, There is a prior approval process for many activities, positions, and tasks of Synod leadership; and

WHEREAS, This process requires and allows no feedback to those members of the Synod who are not approved; therefore be it

Resolved, That this process be reviewed within one year following the 2026 Synod convention, and protocols created and enacted as a responsibility for persons making judgements to provide feedback to foster greater transparency to those going through the process for the good and welfare of all.

Atlantic District

Ov. 7-25

To Appeal for Recognized Ecclesiastical Relationship with Luther Classical College

Preamble

The classical Lutheran education movement in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) began in the late 1990s with a few schools and the gathering of a small number of educators in what has become the Consortium for Classical Lutheran Education (CCLE, a recognized service organization [RSO]). As the classical education movement gained momentum nationally, LCMS Lutherans sought to develop a uniquely Lutheran curriculum and educational philosophy, distinct from the many Reformed, Roman Catholic, Baptist, and secular versions of the classical liberal arts. In the LCMS, Lutherans discovered that the Western Christian educational tradition had already been richly and thoroughly adapted by Lutheran leaders (e.g. Luther and Melancthon) in the Lutheran Reformation and again in the United States of America at the beginning of the LCMS under C.F.W. Walther's leadership. Current classical Lutheran educators have sought to build on this tradition.

Today, this movement in the LCMS continues to grow rapidly among Lutheran schools and homeschools. In the LCMS this movement is supported by new classical offerings in our Concordia University System (CUS) schools, by the biennial "Lutheranism and the Classics" conference hosted by Concordia Theological Seminary and by the CCLE. Recent CCLE conferences have been attended by over 500 participants. The number of CCLE accredited schools surpassed 20 schools in 2024. Numerous homeschools throughout Synod have embraced the Western tradition of classical education.

From the beginning, schools in the classical Lutheran education movement throughout the Synod have sought to find and recruit pastors, teachers, and headmasters who have received an education that combines a thorough knowledge of Scriptures and the Confessions of the Lutheran church with the skills and knowledge appropriate to the Western Christian liberal arts tradition. For the past quarter-century Lutheran schools and Lutheran parents have contemplated the need for a Lutheran classical college in which sound Christian doctrine, philosophy, history, literature, the classical languages, and the mathematical arts are thoroughly integrated and incorporated into the life of the home, church, and community. Classical Lutheran leaders who attempted to start such a college in the early years discovered that the time was not right. The right time has now come.

In 2020, pastors, laymen, and congregations of the Wyoming District and across the LCMS organized a board of regents for the new Luther Classical College (LCC). In 2025, LCC held classes for its first cohort of students.

The college has been hosted and sponsored in various ways by two district congregations in Casper, Wyo. (Mount Hope and Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Churches). Each congregation provides regents to the LCC Board of Regents (BOR), calls for rostered church workers, and has a role in the nomination of regents.

The district president is a member of the BOR; he advises the LCC president, BOR, Mount Hope, and Trinity in the appointment and election of faculty; and he provides ecclesiastical oversight, encouragement, and counsel to LCC through its president and BOR.

As of January 2025, LCC has been sponsored and funded by hundreds of supporting LCMS congregations nationwide and more than a thousand individual LCMS donors. LCMS families are sending their young men and women to LCC to receive a robust classical Lutheran education. All the faculty and staff are members of LCMS congregations. The pastors and commissioned teachers on the faculty and staff are members of the district and are under the ecclesiastical supervision and care of the district president.

LCC is a congregational college, that is, a college organized by, supported by, and supporting the congregations of the LCMS. In its doctrinal commitments and Lutheran culture, it complements the Synod's Concordia universities, but it is not a member or part of the CUS. LCC is not governed by the LCMS and has no legal or financial connection to the Synod. From the time of its organization, however, LCC has been seeking a formal ecclesiastical relationship with Synod. Its mission fully supports and advances the divinely instituted objectives of the LCMS.

LCC is bound to the Holy Scriptures as the inerrant, inspired Word of God and to the Lutheran Confessions as a true exposition of Holy Scriptures and a correct exhibition of the doctrine of the Lutheran church. LCC is guided by these commitments:

Luther Classical College educates Lutherans in the classical, Lutheran tradition and prepares them for godly vocations within family, church, and society, fostering Christian culture through study of the best of our Western heritage. (LCC Mission Statement; lutherclassical.org/about/mission)

The college will provide a conservative, classical Lutheran education to Lutheran students. Paramount will be the promotion of Christian culture, a stress on the priority of Christian marriage, family, and piety, and a cultivation of confessional Lutheran theology, liturgy, hymnody, and identity. With courses using the "great books" of the past for the core curriculum, the college will offer Latin, history, theology, literature, logic, rhetoric, music, geometry, biology, and mathematics, all within a purposefully Christian and Lutheran framework.

WHEREAS, Our LCC is a thoroughly Lutheran micro-college with joyful commitments to Holy Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the doctrine of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, LCC fulfills the divine commandment to teach Lutheran young people the pure doctrine of Holy Scriptures and a pious Christian life in devotion and vocation (Matt. 28:19–20; Eph. 6:1–4; Deut. 6:4–9; Psalm 78:1–8); and

WHEREAS, LCC not only conforms to the confession of the Synod (Const. Art. II) but also advances the objectives of the LCMS to "aid congregations to develop processes of thorough Christian education and nurture and to establish agencies of Christian education such as elementary and secondary schools and to support synodical colleges, universities, and seminaries" (Const. Art. III 5); and

WHEREAS, LCC is sponsored by LCMS congregations, governed by LCMS regents, located in LCMS congregations of the Wyoming District, visited diligently by the district president for the maintenance of true ecclesiastical concord (Preface to The Book of Concord, 24), and serves the congregations of the LCMS by teaching her students and returning them for life and service to the congregations of the Synod; therefore be it

Resolved, That the district in convention petition the Synod President and Secretary to work with the Commission on

Constitutional Matters to write a proposed amendment to the Bylaws of Synod that creates a regular process for establishing formal ecclesiastical relations between a micro-college sponsored by LCMS congregations and the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod President and Secretary consider proposing limitations in these bylaw amendments that include the following:

- that the micro-college be an undergraduate school restricted to a student population of 400 or less;
- that the micro-college offer instruction primarily through in-person classes;
- that the entire faculty and administration of the micro-college be members of the LCMS or members in good standing of LCMS congregations;
- that the micro-college receive regular ecclesiastical visitation with a visitation team to include, in addition to the district president of the LCMS district in which the micro-college resides, one representative each from the President of Synod, the president of the CUS, a Concordia University president or member of the theology faculty, and a seminary faculty member;
- that the doctrine and practice of the micro-college in all its faculty, teaching and preaching, worship practices, and campus culture be thoroughly Lutheran in accord with LCMS doctrinal commitments;
- that the micro-college be clearly separate from Synod legally and financially in a way similar to the requirements established for RSOs; and
- that the micro-college not prepare or posture itself to prepare pastors for ordination or laymen to carry out the functions of the pastoral office, nor certify for membership on the roster of Synod teachers and other church workers;

and be it finally

Resolved, That this resolution be sent as an overture to the 2026 Synod convention as the record of the Wyoming District's appeal regarding LCC's ecclesiastical relationship with the Synod.

Wyoming District

Ov. 7-26

To Give Thanks for Board of Regents of Concordia College—New York

WHEREAS, Concordia College—New York (CCNY) was founded in 1881 and served faithfully as an educational institution of the church until it ceased academic operations on December 31, 2022; and

WHEREAS, The work of closing a college may continue for years after the vote for closure and the cessation of academic operations; and

WHEREAS, The CCNY Board of Regents served diligently and faithfully to ensure an orderly closure of the college through March 2025; and

WHEREAS, The orderly work of the board has been to the benefit of the Atlantic District and the Synod; therefore be it

Resolved, That the district in convention gives thanks to Almighty God for the members of the CCNY Board of Regents for their diligent, fair, and faithful work; and be it further

Resolved, That the district in convention memorialize this resolution to the 2026 Synod convention so that the board may be recognized for their work by the Synod.

Atlantic District

Ov. 7-27

To Give Thanks for Leaders Who Developed Concordia University Wisconsin / Ann Arbor Partnership

WHEREAS, The congregations and people of the Michigan District have treasured a close relationship with Concordia University Ann Arbor (CUAA) since its founding in 1963; and

WHEREAS, In July 2013, a strategic partnership between CUAA and Concordia University Wisconsin (CUW) became official; and

WHEREAS, For over a decade this merger resulted in the flourishing of the Ann Arbor campus, with an expansion of programs and facilities, record growth in enrollment, a greater community impact, and, most importantly, the spiritual development of students in the Christian faith, resulting in numerous students being converted and baptized through the work of the Holy Spirit, choosing church work careers, and having a greater desire to embrace the Christian faith and our Lutheran confession; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to God for the mission and ministry of CUAA since its founding in 1963, and especially for the years of the campus's flourishing as a result of the merger with CUW; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention commend all leaders, past and present, of Concordia University Wisconsin and Ann Arbor (CUWAA) and the district for their support of the mission and ministry of CUAA since its founding in 1963 and their remarkable efforts to see the campus flourish as part of CUWAA for the last decade, for their communication of the vision, and their encouragement and support of the many faculty and staff who helped the merger take place, to the glory of God; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention, with united hearts and voices, give thanks and praise to God for the blessings He has bestowed upon the kingdom at large through the work of His Holy Spirit and the ministry fulfilled in Ann Arbor, specifically, and as a whole through all our Concordia universities; and be it finally

Resolved, That the assembly rise and join in singing the common doxology as an expression of thanksgiving.

Michigan District

Ov. 7-28

To Conduct a Project Postmortem Examination of Concordia University Ann Arbor

WHEREAS, It is desirable to enhance the level of trust and support in the Concordia University System (CUS), and the respective Concordia institutions contained therein, regarding processes and decisions that lead to any substantial and material downsizing or elimination of any university; and

WHEREAS, There has not been an independent analysis of the actions taken by the Concordia University Wisconsin and Ann Arbor Board of Regents regarding the contractual framework and

resulting decisions leading to the substantial and material reduction of operations of the Ann Arbor campus; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention direct that an independent committee be established, under the oversight of the Board of Directors, to conduct a project postmortem analysis of the contractual agreements involved in the acquisition of Concordia University Ann Arbor (CUAA) by Concordia University Wisconsin, audited financial statements, and the processes involved in decisions pertaining to the acquisition and subsequent downsizing of the Ann Arbor campus and its programs; and be it further

Resolved, That the independent committee's membership include, at a minimum, those district presidents representing all former and current Concordia universities, excluding those districts associated with a Concordia university involved in any current litigation with the Synod; and be it finally

Resolved, That the findings of this committee be made available to the Synod and to all district presidents.

Michigan District

Ov. 7-29

To Request Transparency from Concordia University Wisconsin—Ann Arbor

WHEREAS, The common goal of the Concordia University System (CUS) is to develop Christian leaders for the church, community, and the world; and

WHEREAS, Concordia University Wisconsin—Ann Arbor (CUWAA) has been developing Christian leaders for the church, community, and the world since 1963; and

WHEREAS, In a report dated Feb. 1, 2024, CFO Colleague, a financial consultancy for higher education institutions, analyzed recent financial performance for the university and concluded:

The structural deficit for the combined entity of CUW and CUAA requires immediate and substantial attention. ... It is difficult to see a way forward for CUAA, given its enormous deferred maintenance needs, inadequate [net tuition revenue] per student and the use of net tuition to fund athletic costs. ... The time is now to craft a multi-year plan that addresses these clear challenges. (*CUAA Task Force Report*, May 31, 2024, 6–7)

and

WHEREAS, Synod Bylaw 1.5.3.4 states, “All mission boards, commissions, and governing boards may appoint standing committees of specialists to provide professional or technical assistance to the board or commission and may delegate certain responsibilities to such committees while retaining supervision. Standing committees may be made up of or include non-board or commission members. The creation of standing committees shall be reported to the President and the Board of Directors of the Synod”; and

WHEREAS, In response to the CFO Colleague Report, the CUWAA Board of Regents, on Feb. 29, 2024, adopted a resolution for “a special subcommittee to explore the possibility of the Ann Arbor campus applying for self-governance within the Concordia University System” (*CUAA Task Force Report*, May 31, 2024, 7); and

WHEREAS, Members of the special subcommittee reported that their work veered outside of the scope of the board's resolution; and

WHEREAS, Members of the subcommittee were either required to sign non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) or were removed from the special subcommittee; and

WHEREAS, Synod Bylaw 1.5.3.5 states, “All agencies of the Synod shall develop policies and procedures for making available official minutes of their meetings. All mission boards and commissions shall develop policies and procedures to make available upon request and at a reasonable price a verbatim copy of the official minutes of their meetings except for executive sessions. Any member of the Synod may request a copy of any official minutes of mission boards or commissions by submitting a written or electronic (via email) request to the Secretary of the Synod, who shall provide such minutes according to the policy of the Board of Directors”; and

WHEREAS, Synod Bylaw 3.10.6.1 (o) states, “In fulfilling its commonly understood fiduciary duties owed to the institution, and its governance responsibilities, the board of regents shall: maintain effective internal controls and operate with financial transparency, annually reviewing and approving the institutional budget and providing, within 30 days of board acceptance and final issuance of the institutional audit, audited financial statements and other information as specified in the policies of the Synod Board of Directors and to congregations of the Synod upon request”; and

WHEREAS, Congregations of the Michigan District have requested these financial statements and have not received them from the CUWAA board; and

WHEREAS, The congregations of the district desire to bear with CUWAA in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:1–5); and

WHEREAS, The congregations of the district desire to walk as children of light and expose things done in secret to the light so that Christ would shine on all things (Eph. 5:8b–14); and

WHEREAS, The 2025 Michigan District convention directed formal requests to the CUWAA board to:

- rescind the NDAs signed by the special subcommittee members as a sign of good faith and to restore the sacred trust and confidence in the process;
- make available the verbatim copies of the official minutes and the video recordings of the meetings of the special subcommittee to the district presidents for the benefit of building national consensus on this issue; and
- respond to the previous and all subsequent congregational requests for audited financial statements;

therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention encourage transparency in the financial states of the CUS schools and the Synod at large.

Michigan District

8. Finance

REPORTS

R1, R1.2–R1.2.2, R1.2.4–R1.3, R5–R8, R15–R57

OVERTURES

Ov. 8-01

To Amend Bylaw Section 3.7 to Clarify Additional Assigned Responsibilities and Provisions on the Board of Trustees—Concordia Plans / Board of Directors—Concordia Plan Services

Rationale

Bylaw 3.7 currently describes the responsibilities of Concordia Plan Services (CPS) and those it serves in terms that no longer fully reflect its present scope of responsibilities and service. For example, this year the Board of Directors (BOD) of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod approved the formation of a captive insurance company by CPS, to serve ministries of the Synod, but that is not reflected in Bylaw 3.7.

The Commission on Constitutional Matters found, in Opinion 24-3043 (minutes of Feb. 3, 2025), that the formation and operation of a captive insurance company was not within the predefined Bylaw scope of any existing agency or entity, but that it could be assigned to CPS by the Synod BOD. Opinion 24-3043 suggested that “if the [Synod] Board [of Directors] determines to undertake this activity and to assign it to CPS or a subagency thereof, it would be best for the Synod Bylaw description of the work of CPS to be amended by the next convention to include this new activity, even if already entered into.” The proposed amendments are intended to accomplish what was suggested by Opinion 24-3043 by expanding the permissible scope of additional responsibilities of CPS to include those that have been or may be assigned to it by the BOD of the Synod. The scope includes CPS’ oversight of both Concordia Risk Solutions, a captive insurance company established to serve ministries affiliated with the Synod, and the CPS Ancillary Program Agency, which was approved by the Synod BOD in 2015, and which offers Medicare Supplement and Medicare Advantage products, among other voluntary insurance products.

The amendments also are intended to clarify and expand the scope of those who may be served by CPS within the Synod. The current Bylaw refers to “member organizations,” and CPS’ only member is Corporate Synod. While CPS remains dedicated to serving Corporate Synod, it has served and wants to continue to serve other entities and individuals in the Synod.

Finally, the proposed amendments would update board composition and qualification requirements to reflect the expertise necessary for overseeing benefit, investment, and captive insurance company operations, and to otherwise align with the operations and requirements of the Board of Trustees—Concordia Plans/Board of Directors—Concordia Plan Services.

Therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.7 be amended to clarify additional assigned responsibilities for CPS, to clarify and expand the ministries and individuals in the Synod who may be served by CPS, and to update provisions on the Board of Trustees—Concordia

Plans/Board of Directors—Concordia Plan Services in accordance with assigned responsibilities; and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.7.1 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

The Concordia Plans

...

3.7.1.2 Concordia Plan Services ~~is also responsible~~ has been and may be assigned additional responsibility for managing other ancillary programs, including but not limited to various ~~supplemental~~ insurance, risk management, human resources, employer and employee support, compliance, and administration services programs and the Support Program.

(a) Assignment of additional responsibility shall be by the Synod in convention or the Board of Directors of the Synod, and at the request of Concordia Plan Services.

(b) Concordia Plan Services may, subject to the provisions of Bylaw section 1.5, form subsidiary entities to carry out such additional responsibilities. These include:

- The CPS Ancillary Program Agency, which provides, manages, and arranges for products and services that are ancillary to the products and services provided for or managed by Concordia Plan Services.
- Concordia Risk Solutions, which serves as a captive insurance company to insure and/or reinsure risks of member congregations and their schools, Corporate Synod, and agencies, auxiliaries and recognized service organizations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

(c) Ancillary services may be offered to organizations affiliated with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and their employees, and/or to members of member congregations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

(d) The ancillary programs are not trusts and will be under the supervision of the Board of Directors—Concordia Plan Services.

~~(e)~~ (e) The Support Program of the Synod is not a trust but rather a program of financial assistance to those eligible ordained and commissioned ministers and their eligible dependents who are in financial need. This aid is in the form of a gift from the budgeted funds of the Synod. Eligibility standards shall be determined by the Board of Directors—Concordia Plan Services.

~~(b) There exists and may be added in the future various ancillary supplemental insurance and administration services that will be made available to member organizations and their employees. These programs are not trusts and will be under the supervision of the Board of Directors—Concordia Plan Services.~~

3.7.1.3 The Board of Trustees of Concordia Plans and the Board of Directors of Concordia Plan Services shall consist of ~~46~~18 members. The ~~45~~17 voting members shall be appointed by the Board of Directors of the Synod. All newly appointed members shall begin service on the September 1 following appointment, except with an appointment to fill a vacancy, when service shall begin on the first day of the month in which the next regular meeting of members occurs after appointment. The representative designated by the Board of Directors of the Synod shall be the nonvoting member. Voting members shall be appointed to three-year terms, which shall not exceed four terms in a successive period. The ~~45~~17 voting members shall include:

1. Two ministers of religion—ordained
2. One minister of religion—commissioned
3. ~~Twelve~~Fourteen laypersons, at least five of whom shall be experienced in the design of employee benefit plans, at least five of whom shall be experienced in the management of large benefit plan or institutional investments, at least two of whom shall be experienced in property and casualty insurance, and at least

~~one~~two of whom shall have significant financial/audit experience.

3.7.1.4 The Board of Trustees—Concordia Plans and the Board of Directors—Concordia Plan Services shall have all general and incidental powers and duties appropriate for the performance of their functions. ~~In addition, the Board of Trustees—Concordia Plans and~~ will have the powers and duties set forth in the respective plans, as amended from time to time. ~~The Board of Trustees—Concordia Plans/Board of Directors—Concordia Plan Services~~ may create or amend any plan within limits established by the Board of Directors of the Synod so long as such changes are reported to the Synod's Board of Directors, since such power is finally vested in the Synod's Board of Directors.

(a) When the Board of Trustees—Concordia Plans is carrying out its functions with respect to any such separate plan, it may be designated as the board of trustees of such separate plan.

(b) When the board is carrying out its functions generally, it may be designated as the “Board of Trustees—Concordia Plans of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.”

(c) The board may, at its own discretion, make investment decisions or select and utilize investment counsel and select agents and actuaries.

(d) ~~The Board of Trustees—Concordia Plans/Board of Directors—Concordia Plan Services~~ shall design for the Board of Directors of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's approval benefit plans which compare favorably with other similar plans while meeting unique needs of the full-time church workers in the Synod.

(e) ~~The boards~~ shall provide copies of all audit reports to the Board of Directors of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod for information, advice, and counsel.

(f) ~~The boards~~ shall settle disputes which arise in enrollment in the plans and the payment of claims and benefits.

(g) The boards shall organize themselves as to chair, vice chair, secretary, and other committees at least triennially but need not do so more frequently, unless the membership of the boards changes or if required by the boards' policy.

3.7.1.5 The position of chief executive shall be filled according to the process outlined in Bylaw 3.6.1.5.

Board of Trustees/Directors
Concordia Plans / Concordia Plan Services

Ov. 8-02

To Amend Bylaw Section 3.7 to Include Management of Concordia Risk Solutions in Assigned Activity of Concordia Plan Services

WHEREAS, The Synod's Board of Directors (BOD) has authorized formation of an entity, Concordia Risk Solutions, a captive insurance company, to provide for property and casualty insurance and reinsurance within the Synod (minutes of the BOD, May 23–24, 2026, item 199 [M]); and

WHEREAS, The BOD has assigned this activity to Concordia Plan Services (CPS) (ibid.), consistent with Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) Opinion 24-3043; and

WHEREAS, CCM Op. 24-3043 recommended “the Synod Bylaw description of the work of CPS to be amended by the next convention to include this new activity, even if already entered into”; therefore be it

Resolved, That a new Bylaw 3.7.1.2 be inserted as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

3.7 Synodwide Trust Entities

3.7.1 The synodwide trust entities of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are collectively known as the Concordia Plans.

The Concordia Plans

3.7.1.1 Concordia Plan Services is responsible for managing the benefit plans/trusts of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, including the Concordia Retirement Plan, Concordia Disability and Survivor Plan, Concordia Health Plan, and Concordia Retirement Savings Plan, each of which is a separate trust operated under trust laws but collectively known as the Concordia Plans.

...

3.7.1.2 Concordia Plan Services also is responsible for managing Concordia Risk Solutions, subject to the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod, and subject to policies of, agreements with, and further action of the Board of Directors of the Synod.

3.7.1.23 ...

LCMS Board of Directors

Ov. 8-03

To Affirm Concordia Plans and To Amend Bylaws to Require Annual ERISA-Comparable Transparency to Participants

WHEREAS, “The synodwide trust entities of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are collectively known as the Concordia Plans” (Bylaw 3.7.1) and provide essential retirement, health, disability, and related benefits for church workers and retirees; and

WHEREAS, “Concordia Plan Services is a controlled entity of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod created to manage the Concordia Plans,” and “the Concordia Plans, while operating under the supervision of the Synod Board of Directors, are trust agencies whose assets are not the property of corporate Synod” (Bylaw 1.2.1[d–e]); and

WHEREAS, The Synod's Bylaws establish an expectation of transparency to member congregations, stating: “The Synod and each of its agencies shall fully disclose their financial books and records to any member congregation of the Synod” (Bylaw 1.5.4); and

WHEREAS, Church plans are generally exempt from many Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA) reporting and disclosure requirements, and therefore participants may not automatically receive standardized, year-to-year comparable disclosures that are common in ERISA-governed plans; and

WHEREAS, Church workers, retirees, and congregations benefit from clear, consistent disclosures so they may understand promised benefits and plan changes, plan responsibly, and maintain confidence through transparent communication; and

WHEREAS, As Christ's church, we should not aim to have less transparency than secular institutions when stewarding promised benefits for those who serve the Gospel, but rather seek standards that meet or exceed widely recognized best practices; therefore be it

Resolved, That Synod in convention thank God for the hard work and dedication of the board members and staff of Concordia Plan Services (CPS) for the proper management of the plans; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention establish a new bylaw requiring an annual Concordia Plans Transparency Report and participant disclosures using standards equal to or greater than ERISA-style transparency and make the necessary adjustments to enact it; and be it further

Resolved, That a new Bylaw 3.7.1.6 be created as follows:

~~PRESENT~~/PROPOSED WORDING

The Concordia Plans

...

3.7.1.6 The Board of Trustees—Concordia Plans and the Board of Directors—Concordia Plan Services shall prepare and publish an annual Concordia Plans Transparency Report for plan participants and the Synod Board of Directors, written for non-specialists and including a one-page plain language participants summary. ERISA-comparable disclosures will be provided yearly to participants for full transparency, not from government obligation. Concordia Plans will provide to participants and make readily accessible the following disclosures, in ERISA-equivalent form, even when not required by federal law, in keeping with the Synod's commitment to full financial disclosure (Bylaw 1.5.4):

1. Form 5500-equivalent annual financial/actuarial report (standardized content comparable in substance and year-to-year comparability to form 5500 and relevant schedules);
2. Summary Plan Description (SPD);
3. Summary Annual Report (SAR);
4. Summary of Material Modification (SMM) (timely notice of significant changes);
5. Summary of Benefits and Coverage (SBC) for health benefits; and
6. Individual Benefit Statement (periodic statement of accrued and vested benefits, as applicable).

The report shall conform to the following requirements:

(a) Standard: The level of disclosure provided shall be equal to or greater than ERISA-style disclosure principles in clarity, completeness, and year-to-year comparability. This does not assert that ERISA governs the Concordia Plans.

(b) Publication and access: The report and disclosures shall be posted prominently on the Concordia Plan Services website, accessible through the Synod's website, and participants shall be notified annually of availability.

(c) Timeline: The first annual report shall be published within twelve months following the close of the 2026 Synod convention and annually thereafter.

and be it further

Resolved, That the costs associated with such reporting be absorbed within existing administrative functions of CPS; and be it finally

Resolved, That the 2026 Synod convention affirm the ongoing value and necessity of the Concordia Plans as synodwide trust entities serving church workers and retirees.

Resurrection
Spring, TX

Ov. 8-04

**To Amend Bylaws to Ensure Sustainability
of Concordia Plan Services
by Its Working with Other Church Bodies**

WHEREAS, Concordia Plan Services (CPS) provides significant blessings to workers enrolled in their health, retirement, and disability plans; and

WHEREAS, The cost of the Concordia Health Plan (CHP), Concordia Retirement Plan (CRP), and Concordia Disability and Survivor Plan (CDSP) offered by CPS is a substantial expense borne by congregations, schools, and other ministries of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, The pool of workers available to enroll in the CPS benefit plans is relatively small; and

WHEREAS, A larger pool of workers contributing to the CHP, CRP, and CDSP would provide the opportunity to spread expenses over a larger membership base and would increase the ability of CPS to negotiate with vendors; and

WHEREAS, There are other church bodies with whom we agree in biblical morality and medical ethics; and

WHEREAS, Our doctrine permits us to cooperate in externals with other church bodies in non-doctrinal matters; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod's Bylaws be amended so that CPS can serve a wider population by working with other church bodies to increase collective worker enrollment in order to stabilize the overall cost of the benefits offered by CPS.

Michigan District

Ov. 8-05

**To Stabilize the Cost of Benefits Offered
by Concordia Plan Services**

WHEREAS, Concordia Plan Services (CPS) provides significant blessings to workers enrolled in their health, retirement, and disability plans; and

WHEREAS, The cost of the Concordia Health Plan (CHP), Concordia Retirement Plan (CRP), and the Concordia Disability and Survivor Plan (CDSP) offered by CPS is a substantial expense borne by congregations, schools, and other ministries of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, The pool of workers available to enroll in the CPS benefit plans is relatively small; and

WHEREAS, A larger pool of workers contributing to the CHP, CRP, and the CDSP would provide the opportunity to spread expenses over a larger membership base and would increase the ability of CPS to negotiate with vendors; and

WHEREAS, There are other church bodies with whom we agree in biblical morality and medical ethics; and

WHEREAS, Our doctrine permits us to cooperate in externals with other church bodies in non-doctrinal matters; therefore be it

Resolved, That the 2026 Synod convention amend the Synod's Bylaws so that CPS can serve a wider population, by working with other church bodies to increase collective worker enrollment in order to stabilize the overall cost of the benefits offered by CPS.

South Dakota District

Ov. 8-06**To Direct Concordia Publishing House to Eliminate Shipping Charges**

WHEREAS, Concordia Publishing House (CPH) serves as the official publishing arm of the Synod, providing essential Lutheran resources, books, curricula, and materials to support the faith, teaching, and mission of congregations, church workers, and individual members; and

WHEREAS, CPH currently charges shipping fees on most orders, with limited exceptions such as free shipping for rostered church workers on orders over \$49, which can create financial barriers for smaller purchases by individuals, small congregations, or those in remote areas, potentially limiting access to vital confessional Lutheran materials; and

WHEREAS, In today's competitive online retail market, many general book retailers offer free shipping to encourage customer loyalty and accessibility, demonstrating that low or no-cost shipping thresholds are standard practices that reduce friction in purchasing and boost overall sales volume; and

WHEREAS, Numerous Christian publishers and retailers have adopted similar shipping policies to CPH, such as Moody Publishers (free economy shipping on orders over \$35, moodypublishers.com/faqs), Lifeway (free standard shipping on qualifying orders over \$100, lifeway.com/en/about/shipping-information), Hendrickson Publishers (free shipping on orders over \$50, hendricksonpublishers.com/faq), Tyndale House Publishers (free shipping on orders over \$50, tyndale.com/faq), and Christianbook (free shipping on orders over \$50 with code, christianbook.com), aligning their operations with market expectations to better serve their religious communities; and

WHEREAS, Eliminating shipping charges would position CPH as a leader among faith-based publishers by removing cost barriers entirely, making it more competitive than other Christian publishers and retailers, and encouraging broader dissemination of Synod-approved materials to foster evangelism, catechesis, and doctrinal unity, in keeping with the Synod's mission to "vigorously make known the love of Christ by word and deed" (1998 Res. 1-01A, "To Adopt a Mission Statement for the Synod," *Proc.*, 101); and

WHEREAS, Past Synod conventions have successfully passed resolutions directing Synod-related entities to adjust operational practices for the benefit of the church body, such as resolutions on national witness, reaffirming evangelism resources and supporting small congregations (2019 Res. 1-01A, "To Encourage God's People to Engage in Active Witness" and Res. 1-03, "To Study Shared Ministry among Small Congregations") and resolutions on structure and administration, streamlining governance for efficiency (2023 Res. 9-01, "To Amend Bylaws to Provide Clarity for Cross-Circuit and Cross-District Multi-Congregation Parishes" and Res. 9-08A, "To Strengthen Nonvoting Advisory Delegate Participation at Conventions"), providing precedent for guiding CPH toward policies that enhance accessibility and affordability; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention direct the CPH Board of Directors to implement a policy eliminating all shipping charges on domestic orders, regardless of order size, effective no later than Jan. 1, 2027; and be it further

Resolved, That CPH be encouraged to explore cost-recovery measures, such as modest price adjustments on high-volume items,

if necessary, while maintaining overall affordability to ensure the long-term sustainability of this policy in service to the Synod's members and mission.

Christ
Milford, MI

Ov. 8-07**To Use Only Sustainable Bible Translations**

WHEREAS, We accept without reservation that the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament are "the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice" (Const. Art. II); and

WHEREAS, Passages of Holy Scripture are used throughout the hymnals, catechisms, and other printed resources of the Synod: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16 KJV); translations should be both consistent (for memorization and instruction) and faithful; and

WHEREAS, As Luther writes in the Small Catechism Preface (9), "Choose, therefore, the form of words which best pleases you, and adhere to it perpetually" (H.E. Jacobs ed., *Book of Concord*, [Philadelphia: General Council, 1908], 360); and

WHEREAS, Our printed resources must use accurate and consistent translations of Holy Scripture from the original biblical languages into the language of the people: "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." (Rev. 22:18–19 KJV); and

WHEREAS, The copyright for the English Standard Version (ESV) is not controlled by the Synod but is owned by Crossway, a pan-Reformed entity that does not subscribe to a Lutheran understanding of the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper (see crossway.org/statement-of-faith); and

WHEREAS, Crossway retains the right to change the text of the ESV and has done so on multiple occasions making hundreds of changes (see bible-researcher.com/esv2011changes.pdf), with the result that the prior versions are no longer licensed, similar to the situation that occurred when the 1984 New International Version of the Bible (at one time, a primary translation used by the Synod) was withdrawn by its copyright owners, forcing the Synod to change translations after only 25 years; and

WHEREAS, This creates an untenable situation with respect to printed materials of the Synod, because although Concordia Publishing House (CPH) asserts that it has the right to use the prior translation to reprint existing materials, Crossway is not obligated to allow CPH to issue newly published written resources of the Synod that use the original versions of the ESV and moreover, if one buys a non-CPH ESV Bible today, it will differ from what CPH produces; and

WHEREAS, Contemporary or political considerations should not impact the faithful translation of God's Word, yet the ESV has chosen to replace the word "slave" in its original translation with the word "bondservant" in many verses because, according to the ESV editors, "the word 'slave' currently carries associations with the often brutal and dehumanizing institution of slavery particularly in nineteenth-century America" (esv.org/preface) as though we

should be ashamed to be called “a slave of Christ” (1 Cor. 7:22 ESV pre-2011); and

WHEREAS, Such continuing changes in translation create a sort of “plastic text” which hinders the commonality of text necessary for memorization, and undermines confidence in the translation as a whole; therefore be it

Resolved, That in order for the Synod to discern for itself the preferred translation of Holy Scripture, the Synod, CPH, and agencies of the Synod be directed to use—for Scripture quotations in their printed materials used for public worship and teaching (i.e., hymnals and catechisms)—only sustainable translations of Holy Scripture, meaning translations that either are in the public domain, or have a copyright license that allows the Synod, in its sole discretion, to continue to use and republish such translations and make new derivative works thereof in the future from the consistent translations, without being subject to the veto power or permissive rights of any outside body.

St. Paul
Brookfield, IL

Ov. 8-08

To Request Additional Resources using New King James Version

WHEREAS, God is a God of order (1 Cor. 14:33) and *repetitio est mater studiorum* (repetition is the mother of learning); and

WHEREAS, Having a good stable text that does not change is helpful for hearing, reading, marking, learning, and inwardly digesting the Word; and

WHEREAS, The English Standard Version (ESV) was published by Crossway in 2001 and has since that time undergone revisions in 2002, 2007, 2011, and 2016, along with a standing desire for ongoing revisions (Crossway, “Crossway Statement on the ESV Bible Text,” www.crossway.org/articles/crossway-statement-on-the-esv-bible-text/, Sept. 28, 2016); and

WHEREAS, The New King James Version (NKJV), published by Thomas Nelson, is also a clear, faithful, beautiful, and true translation, quoted by Synod’s *Lutheran Service Book: Agenda*, including the Rites of Holy Baptism (Mark 10:13–16), Ordination (Matt. 28:18–20; John 20:21–23; Eph. 4:11–12; Acts 20:28; 2 Tim. 3:14–17), and Committal (Job 19:23–27); and the NKJV has not been revised since 1982; and

WHEREAS, The NKJV is used in faithful catechetical material including resources by Concordia Catechetical Academy (*Lutheran Catechesis*), Kloria Publishing, and Ad Crucem (*The Family Bible Commentary*, Vol. 1–5), and has seen increased usage throughout our Synod; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention ask Concordia Publishing House to produce additional resources to include at least Bibles, commentaries, and devotionals using the NKJV.

South Wisconsin District

Ov. 8-09

To Open Access to Lutheran Confessions

WHEREAS, The primary objectives of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, as stated in Constitution Article III, are to: “conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3–6; 1 Cor. 1:10), work through its official structure toward fellowship with

other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom. 16:17), and heresy”; and to “strengthen congregations and their members in giving bold witness by word and deed to the love and work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and extend that Gospel witness into all the world”; and

WHEREAS, We pray in the collect for the Church that “Thy Word, as becometh it, may not be bound, but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ’s holy people” (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 14); and

WHEREAS, The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Lutheran Confessions), as listed in Constitution Article II “as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God,” are an indispensable resource for achieving the primary objectives of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Concordia Publishing House (CPH) is the official publishing house of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, CPH in 2006 published the Lutheran Confessions under the title: *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions—A Reader’s Edition of the Book of Concord*, 2nd edition (*Reader’s Edition*); and

WHEREAS, The *Reader’s Edition*, with its historical introductions and other included materials, presents the Lutheran Confessions most intelligibly and clearly, is the generally preferred English translation among native and non-native English speakers alike, and is the preferred source for most derivative translations into other languages; and

WHEREAS, The *Reader’s Edition* is currently restricted by copyright and licensing, so that the full text is not accessible on the Synod’s website nor anywhere else online; nor is the print publication available in most countries; nor is any derivative translation permitted to be made and published in print or online without prior permission; and

WHEREAS, Removing the current restrictions of the *Reader’s Edition* would greatly assist the Synod in achieving her primary objectives, by enabling a wider distribution and accessibility of the Lutheran Confessions; therefore be it

Resolved, That the text of the *Reader’s Edition* be released into the public domain.

Rocky Mountain District

Ov. 8-10

To Open Access to Lutheran Confessions

WHEREAS, The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Lutheran Confessions), as listed in Constitution Article II “as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God,” are an indispensable resource for achieving the primary objectives of the Synod as stated in Article III of the Synod Constitution; and

WHEREAS, The members of the Synod are bound by the Lutheran Confessions to regard Holy Scripture as teaching of the Holy Supper of our Lord, Jesus Christ: that His body and blood are truly and substantially present, distributed, and received in, with, and under the elements of the bread and wine (AC X); that these are received by both the believing and unbelieving participants, by those who eat in repentance and faith, to “forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation,” and by those who eat in unrepentance or unbelief, to judgment (SC VI; Ap XXIV; FC Ep, SD VII); and that so that we may obtain the faith that counts as righteousness in God’s sight, the

preaching office is instituted by our Lord to administer Gospel and Sacraments (AC V), with those filling it thus having grave responsibility for the souls in their care; and

WHEREAS, Concordia Publishing House (CPH), the official publishing house of the Synod, in 2006 published the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church under the title: *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions—A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord*, 2nd edition (*Reader's Edition*); and

WHEREAS, The *Reader's Edition* is currently restricted by copyright and licensing; removing the current restrictions would greatly assist the Synod in achieving its primary objectives; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention encourage CPH to grant general license to any and all interested parties to publish, with appropriate attribution, the text of the *Reader's Edition* online, in whole or in part; and to grant license to any and all interested parties to publish the text of the *Reader's Edition* in print globally, in whole or in part; and to grant license to any and all interested parties to produce and publish, in print and online, derivative translations of the *Reader's Edition* without restriction.

Minnesota North District

Ov. 8-11

To Open Access to Lutheran Confessions

WHEREAS, The primary objectives of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, as stated in Constitution Article III, are to: “conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3–6; 1 Cor. 1:10), work through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom. 16:17), and heresy”; and to “strengthen congregations and their members in giving bold witness by word and deed to the love and work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and extend that Gospel witness into all the world”; and

WHEREAS, We pray in the collect for the church that “Thy Word, as becometh it, may not be bound, but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ’s holy people,” (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 14); and

WHEREAS, The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Lutheran Confessions), as listed in Constitution Article II “as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God,” are an indispensable resource for achieving the primary objectives of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Concordia Publishing House (CPH) is the official publishing house of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, CPH in 2006 published the Lutheran Confessions under the title: *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions—A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord*, 2nd edition (*Reader's Edition*); and

WHEREAS, The *Reader's Edition*, with its historical introductions and other included materials, presents the Lutheran Confessions most intelligibly and clearly; and is the generally preferred English translation among native and non-native English speakers alike; and is the preferred source for most derivative translations into other languages; and

WHEREAS, The *Reader's Edition* is currently restricted by copyright and licensing, so that the full text is not accessible on the Synod’s website nor anywhere else online; nor is the print publication available in most countries; nor is any derivative

translation permitted to be made and published in print or online without prior permission; and

WHEREAS, Removing the current restrictions of the *Reader's Edition* would greatly assist the Synod in achieving her primary objectives, by enabling a wider distribution and accessibility of the Lutheran Confessions; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod further its goals and expand the reach of *Reader's Edition* by directing CPH to grant general license to any and all interested parties to publish, with appropriate attribution, the text of *Reader's Edition* online, in whole or in part; and to grant license to any and all interested parties to publish the text of *Reader's Edition* in print globally, in whole or in part; and to grant license to any and all interested parties to produce and publish, in print and online, derivative translations of *Reader's Edition* without restriction; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for the diligent work of Rev. Paul T. McCain and all the faithful laborers at CPH who have made *Reader's Edition* and other fine works available; and be it finally

Resolved, That if CPH should desire remuneration in compensation for anticipated loss of revenue because of this action, Synod should pay CPH a sum that is mutually agreeable to the Synod and to CPH.

Minnesota South District

Ov. 8-12

To Study Granting of *Book of Concord* Copyright Permissions by Concordia Publishing House

WHEREAS, The 2025 Minnesota South District (MNS) convention passed Resolution 1-03, “To Open Access to the Lutheran Confessions” [Yes: 136; No: 89]; and

WHEREAS, That same resolution states:

WHEREAS, The primary objectives of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), as stated in Article III of the Constitution of the LCMS, are: “Conserve and promote the unity of the true faith, work through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism, and heresy”; and “Strengthen congregations and their members in giving bold witness by word and deed to the love and work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and extend that Gospel witness into all the world”; and

WHEREAS, We pray in the collect for the Church that “Thy Word, as becometh it, may not be bound, but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ’s holy people,” and

WHEREAS, The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Lutheran Confessions), as listed in Article II of the Constitution of the LCMS, as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God, are an indispensable resource for achieving the primary objectives of the LCMS; and

WHEREAS, Concordia Publishing House (CPH) is the official publishing house of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod; and

WHEREAS, CPH in 2006 published the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church under the title: *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions—A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord*, 2nd edition; and

WHEREAS, The said publication, with its historical introductions and other included materials, presents the Lutheran Confessions most intelligibly and clearly; and is the generally preferred English translation among native and non-native English speakers alike; and is the preferred source for most derivative translations into other languages; and

WHEREAS, The said publication is currently restricted by Copyright and licensing, so that the full text is not accessible on the LCMS website nor anywhere else online; nor is the print publication available in most countries; nor is any derivative translation permitted to be made and published in print or online without prior permission; and

WHEREAS, Removing the current restrictions of the said publication would greatly assist the LCMS in achieving her primary objectives, by enabling a wider distribution and accessibility of the Lutheran Confessions; therefore be it

Resolved, That the LCMS further its goals and expand the reach of Concordia by directing CPH to grant general license to any and all interested parties to publish, with appropriate attribution, the text of Concordia online, in whole or in part; and to grant license to any and all interested parties to publish the text of Concordia in print globally, in whole or in part; and to grant license to any and all interested parties to produce and publish, in print and online, derivative translations of Concordia without restriction; and be it further

Resolved, That the LCMS give thanks to God for the diligent work of Rev. Paul T. McCain and all of the faithful laborers at CPH who have made Concordia and other fine works available;

Resolved, If Concordia Publishing House should desire remuneration in compensation for anticipated loss of revenue because of this action that the LCMS should pay to CPH a sum that is mutually agreeable to the LCMS and CPH.

and

WHEREAS, The district convention does not have the authority to authorize the action of this resolution by itself but the Synod in convention does; and

WHEREAS, The stated intent of the district resolution is to widen the distribution of *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions—A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord*, 2nd ed. (CPH, 2007) by opening its copyright for public distribution; and

WHEREAS, The increased availability of this fresh translation could aid the congregations of the Synod in carrying out the objectives stated in the Constitution, namely, “Conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3–6; 1 Cor. 1:10), work through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom. 16:17), and heresy” (Const. Art. III 1); and “Strengthen congregations and their members in giving bold witness by word and deed to the love and work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and extend that Gospel witness into all the world” (Const. Art. III 2); and

WHEREAS, It is common in our context for people to research information on the internet; and

WHEREAS, Concerns exist regarding releasing the copyright and putting the text in the public domain that are not related to profit or financial concerns and compensation, concerns that are not addressed in the aforementioned resolution; and

WHEREAS, The Minneapolis Metro Circuit passed a resolution with three resolves, one of which memorialized the Synod in convention “to create and maintain a publicly accessible and open website with the text of the Book of Concord as translated in the aforementioned translation”; and

WHEREAS, CPH has recently made public the website *bookofconcord.cph.org* that contains the confessional text of the *Reader's Edition* (2nd) as was sought by the aforementioned resolutions but, as of yet, the website does not include any of the notes or annotations; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention thank those at CPH and elsewhere who worked on this website and made it possible; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod communicate the availability of this resource to its members and sister churches so that these churches and pastors may make use of this resource and link to it; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention create and authorize a task force to study and report the implications and various options of instructing CPH “to grant license to any and all interested parties to produce and publish, in print and online, derivative translations of [the *Reader's Edition* (2nd)] without restriction” (MNS 2025 Res. 1-03) and also to make any recommendations for actions based on said study that would aid in promoting unity, fidelity, evangelism, and continued similar work and future publications, so that such recommendations could be considered at the next convention; and be it finally

Resolved, That the aforementioned task force also explore with CPH the feasibility and cost of adding the helpful notes and annotations from the *Reader's Edition* (2nd ed.) to its online publication at *bookofconcord.cph.org* and likewise include that as part of its report to the next convention of the Synod.

Mt. Calvary
Richfield, MN

Ov. 8-13

To Direct Concordia Publishing House to Prioritize Mission and Distribution

WHEREAS, Concordia Publishing House (CPH) was established in 1869 to serve the congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod by publishing materials that are useful to the Church and faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions; and

WHEREAS, The mission statement of CPH further states that it “will develop, produce, market, and distribute products and services that are faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions and which will effectively serve such proclamation to people throughout the world. All to the Glory of God” (CPH, “Who We Are,” *about.cph.org/who-we-are.html*, accessed Feb. 25, 2026); and

WHEREAS, The vision statement of CPH states that they will “strive to be the premier publisher and provider of choice for products and services that are faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions” (*ibid.*), but does not envision a role in the Great Commission purpose of the Church (Matt. 28:16–20); and

WHEREAS, CPH is well known for producing materials that serve well in North American congregations that can afford them, but that may be too expensive for our mission partners in other nations; and

WHEREAS, CPH, which holds net assets of over \$50 million, generously offers discounts to our Synod missionaries for their personal books, but does not offer such assistance for bulk distribution of helpful teaching materials that can be used to extend the kingdom of God in the world; and

WHEREAS, Northwestern Publishing House provides us with a praiseworthy example of support for the mission of the church by providing publications to Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod missionaries for free or for a steep discount (see online.nph.net/multi-language-productions); and

WHEREAS, The protection of copyrights has discouraged our missionaries from translating useful materials into the languages of their mission field by making them prohibitively expensive, and has hampered our missionaries in their task of reaching the lost with the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ; and

WHEREAS, Even our confessional documents and catechisms are protected by copyright from wide distribution in the mission field (e.g., CPH sells the *Book of Concord* in Spanish for \$34.99, cph.org/libro-de-concordia-the-book-of-concord); therefore be it

Resolved, That CPH, in addition to its mission to provide products that are faithful to the Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, be directed to prioritize the Great Commission and seek every way to provide free or low-cost materials for use by Synod missionaries and congregations in their contexts and communities; and be it further

Resolved, That CPH be directed to make available to any member of the Synod a royalty-free license to duplicate, translate, excerpt, and distribute any edition of the Lutheran confessional writings controlled by CPH, or of *The Lutheran Hymnal* and *Lutheran Worship* and their related liturgical resources, without charge; and be it finally

Resolved, That the laborers and congregations of the Synod give thanks to God for the faithful authors, hymnwriters, and others who often work in obscurity to provide useful teaching material to the Church and pray God bless the wide distribution of their labors to the glory of God and the coming of His kingdom.

St. Paul
Brookfield, IL

Ov. 8-14

To Direct Concordia Publishing House to Prioritize Mission and Distribution

WHEREAS, Concordia Publishing House (CPH) was established in 1869 to serve the congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod by publishing materials that are useful to the church and faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions; and

WHEREAS, The mission statement of CPH further states that it “will develop, produce, market, and distribute products and services that are faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions and which will effectively serve such proclamation to people throughout the world. All to the Glory of God” (“Who We Are,” Concordia Publishing House, accessed Feb. 25, 2026, www.about.cph.org/who-we-are.html); and

WHEREAS, The vision statement of CPH states that they will “strive to be the premier publisher and provider of choice for products and services that are faithful to the Scriptures and the

Lutheran Confessions,” (ibid.) but does not envision a role in the Great Commission purpose of the Church (Matt. 28:16–20); and

WHEREAS, CPH is well known for producing high quality and durable materials that serve well in North American congregations that can afford them, but that may be too expensive for our mission partners in other nations; and

WHEREAS, CPH generously offers discounts to our Synod missionaries for their personal books, but does not offer such assistance for bulk distribution of helpful teaching materials that can be used to extend the kingdom of God in the world; and

WHEREAS, Northwestern Publishing House provides us with a praiseworthy example of support for the mission of the Church by providing publications to Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod missionaries for free or for a steep discount (see www.nph.net/multi-language-productions); and

WHEREAS, The protection of copyrights has discouraged our missionaries from translating useful materials into the languages of their mission field by making them prohibitively expensive, and has hampered our missionaries in their task of reaching the lost with the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ; and

WHEREAS, Even our confessional documents and catechisms are protected by copyright from wide distribution in the mission field (for example, CPH sells the *Book of Concord* in Spanish for \$34.99, cph.org/libro-de-concordia-the-book-of-concord); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to God for CPH and its faithfulness to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions in providing materials to churches and church workers for 156 years; and be it further

Resolved, That CPH, in addition to its mission to provide products that are faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, be directed to prioritize the Great Commission and seek every way to provide free or low-cost materials for use by Synod missionaries in their congregations and communities; and be it further

Resolved, That CPH be directed by the Synod in convention to work in cooperation with Synod missionaries in the field to identify and remove obstacles to providing affordable resources to the work of missions, including possible alternatives to the current copyright agreements; and be it finally

Resolved, That the laborers and congregations of the Synod give thanks to God for the faithful authors, hymnwriters, and others who often work in obscurity to provide useful teaching material to the Church and pray God bless the wide distribution of their labors to the glory of God and the coming of His kingdom.

Michigan District

Ov. 8-15

To Commit the Synod to Fully Funding Her Seminaries as a Primary Responsibility of Corporate Synod

WHEREAS, The Synod has established and maintains Concordia Seminary (CSL) and Concordia Theological Seminary (CTSF) to form pastors for faithful Word and Sacrament ministry in the Church and her mission; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has repeatedly affirmed residential seminary formation as the preferred and normative route for

preparation for the pastoral office (2019 Res. 6-02; 2023 Res. 6-02A); and

WHEREAS, CTSFW reported an audited 2024 annual operating budget of \$17,310,173, of which approximately two percent was provided through direct corporate Synod funding, with the remainder supplied through gifts, endowment distributions, and tuition (Jon Bruss, “Rise Again, Ye Lion-hearted! Strategic Plan 2024–2029,” *For the Life of the World*, Vol. 29, no. 1 [Spring 2025]: 4–6); and

WHEREAS, Seminary leadership has publicly acknowledged that corporate Synod once underwrote a substantially greater proportion of seminary operating expenses than is presently the case; and

WHEREAS, The formation of pastors who rightly teach, administer the Sacraments, and shepherd Christ’s flock is foundational to every other work of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Faithful stewardship requires that corporate Synod funding priorities reflect the Church’s primary responsibility to form ministers of the Gospel; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention declare the full operational funding of CSL and CTSFW to be a primary responsibility of corporate Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct the Board of Directors (BOD), in consultation with the President of the Synod, the Chief Financial Officer of the Synod, and the presidents of both seminaries, to develop and implement a multi-year plan that begins with an increased appropriation for both seminaries in the Synod’s fiscal year 2027 (FY27) corporate budget (July 1, 2026–June 30, 2027), with the stated objective of moving toward full operational funding; and be it further

Resolved, That the FY27 corporate Synod budget shall include a measurable increase in direct corporate Synod funding for each seminary, the amount of which shall be publicly reported and shall represent a material step toward full operational funding; and be it further

Resolved, That the FY27 increase be achieved through the reallocation and prioritization of unrestricted corporate Synod funds, as determined by the BOD in the course of normal budget development, while explicitly preserving donor-restricted gifts and designated funding; and be it further

Resolved, That the BOD report to the Synod no later than Dec. 31, 2026, the specific FY27 dollar amounts appropriated to each seminary, the budget lines affected, and the projected increases for subsequent fiscal years; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for the faithful generosity of His people and pray for wise stewardship that strengthens both the Church’s mission and the formation of her pastors.

Trinity (Decatur Rd)
Fort Wayne, IN

Ov. 8-16

To Encourage Synod Transparency and Unity regarding Concluded *HotChalk* Litigation

WHEREAS, The Synod gives thanks to God for His mercy in Christ and prays for a life together marked by humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another in love, as we seek to

maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:2–3); and

WHEREAS, The structure of the Synod orders and supports our life together in the proclamation of Christ and Him crucified, such that decisions made at the Synod level regarding shared ministries, including Lutheran higher education and institutional closures, have real and lasting effects on congregations and the people they serve; and

WHEREAS, The Synod Board of Directors (BOD) has publicly stated that mediation has concluded litigation brought by HotChalk, Inc., relating to the closure of Concordia University, Portland, and that a financial settlement has been reached; and

WHEREAS, The BOD “is the legal representative of the Synod and the custodian of all the property of the Synod” and “shall be accountable to the Synod in convention for the discharge of its duties” (Bylaw 3.3.4); and

WHEREAS, Under Bylaw subsection, “Full Financial Disclosure,” “The Synod and each of its agencies shall fully disclose their financial books and records to any member congregation of the Synod,” while also recognizing stated limits and requiring written explanation where information is declined or limited (Bylaw 1.5.4); and

WHEREAS, Transparent communication regarding significant legal settlements involving Synod resources supports faithful stewardship, promotes trust among congregations, reduces rumor and confusion, and strengthens the Synod’s ability to proceed together with clarity in an uncertain season; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give thanks to God for His continued work through the Synod even amid hardship and legal challenge, and exhort all members to continue in charity, patience, and confidence in Christ as we walk together in our common mission; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention respectfully request that the appropriate Synod officers and/or the BOD disclose to the Synod the total amount paid by or on behalf of the Synod in settlement of the concluded *HotChalk* litigation, to the fullest extent permitted by law and any binding settlement terms, and that such disclosure be made available to member congregations in a readily accessible manner; and be it finally

Resolved, That if the settlement amount, or any portion thereof, cannot be disclosed, the Synod officers and/or the BOD provide a written explanation describing the general nature of the restriction or restrictions and the reason or reasons disclosure is not possible, consistent with the Synod’s commitments to financial disclosure and clear communication.

Circuit 27 (Livonia)
Michigan District

Ov. 8-17

To Encourage Transparency and Accountability in Legal Judgments and Settlements

WHEREAS, Constitution Articles VII and XI establish the Synod as a voluntary association acting on behalf of its member congregations and vest final human authority in the Synod in convention; and

WHEREAS, The Bylaws of the Synod charge the Board of Directors (BOD) with fiduciary responsibility for the Synod’s

business and financial affairs (Bylaw 3.3.4.4–5) and require reporting to the Synod in convention concerning the administration of those affairs (Bylaw 3.3.4); and

WHEREAS, These and other Bylaws of the Synod establish an accountability structure that depends upon the keeping and reporting of official records and financial information for the governance of the Synod, while permitting appropriate confidentiality through executive session, personal privacy, and legal privilege; and

WHEREAS, When legal judgments or settlements impose closed-door processes, sealed statements, or broad nondisclosure obligations, the Synod's ability to exercise that accountability is materially diminished; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod affirms a presumption of transparency in the negotiation and approval of legal judgments and settlements entered into by or on behalf of the Synod, such that material information concerning the nature and resolution of matters is not unnecessarily concealed from congregations of the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That this presumption of transparency shall be exercised with Christian care and prudence, permitting confidentiality as necessary to protect personal privacy, especially of victims or minors, pastoral or medical information, and privileged legal communications; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod shall not enter into legal judgments and settlements that prevent those charged with ecclesiastical governance and supervision from receiving the information reasonably necessary to carry out their responsibilities on behalf of the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That the financial terms of legal judgments and settlements entered into by the Synod shall ordinarily be subject to disclosure to the Synod, except where limited confidentiality is necessary to protect personal privacy or required by law; and be it further

Resolved, That the BOD provide a regular, appropriately redacted summary report to the Synod in convention of all legal judgments and settlements entered during the preceding triennium, sufficient to inform the Synod of their general nature, scope, and financial impact, without imposing undue administrative burden; and be it finally

Resolved, That for the purposes of this resolution, "sealed" or "concealed" information shall include legal judgments and settlement provisions that prohibit the retention of records necessary for governance and supervision, broadly restrict disclosure of material facts to congregations of the Synod, or impose nondisclosure obligations that effectively prevent meaningful reporting, while not including narrowly tailored confidentiality necessary for the protections named above.

Circuit 27 (Livonia)
Michigan District

Ov. 8-18

To Direct Board of Directors to Review and Publish Comprehensive Accounting of LCMS Monies Spent on HotChalk, Concordia University Texas, and Hong Kong International School Association Limited Litigation

WHEREAS, The delegate convention of the Synod is the legislative assembly that ultimately legislates policy, program, and financial direction for the Synod's work and "reserves to itself the right to give direction to all officers and agencies of the Synod," who are accountable to the Synod for their actions (Bylaw 1.4.1); and

WHEREAS, Bylaw 1.5.4 provides for full financial disclosure of the Synod's and its agencies' books and records to any member congregation, while recognizing specified, limited exceptions for donor and personnel confidentiality, in-process negotiations, information whose disclosure would breach a legal obligation or affect pending litigation, and preliminary or nonfinal information; and

WHEREAS, The Board of Directors (BOD) serves as the Synod's legal representative with general management and supervision of the Synod's business and legal affairs and receives copies of legal opinions and related written counsel (Bylaw 3.3.4.4); and

WHEREAS, Litigation related to HotChalk and Concordia University, Portland, concluded in mediation with a confidential settlement announced on September 23, 2025, just prior to trial, and the Synod has stated it denies HotChalk's allegations while welcoming resolution; and

WHEREAS, On September 10, 2025, the Synod announced it had filed legal action in Hong Kong against Hong Kong International School Association Limited (HKISAL) concerning administration of HKISAL under the operating agreement, indicating potential additional legal expenditures and obligations; and

WHEREAS, Clarity about legal expenditures, reimbursements, and net financial impact strengthens stewardship, accountability, and trust across the Synod; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention direct the BOD, assisted by the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and the Office of the Secretary, to conduct and publish a comprehensive accounting and analysis of Synod monies expended on legal matters related to the HotChalk matter, litigation with or relating to Concordia University Texas, and the legal action involving HKISAL, from inception of such matters through the date of publication, to include at minimum: total legal and professional fees, settlement or judgment amounts (reported to the extent permitted by law and the settlement agreement announced Sept. 23, 2025), insurance reimbursements, third-party cost recoveries, grants or transfers to related entities for these purposes, and the net impact on restricted and unrestricted Synod funds; and be it further

Resolved, That the report include a clear statement of the net financial effect of the settlement and related litigation, as well as the Hong Kong legal action, on the Synod's mission and ministry, identifying impacts on triennial budgets, mission grants, domestic and international mission work, pastoral formation, university support, use of reserves, insurance reimbursements, and any ongoing obligations, presented in plain language; and be it further

Resolved, That this accounting be prepared in consultation with legal counsel and published in a form that honors Bylaw 1.5.4 and any confidentiality obligations arising from the settlement, while still providing maximum feasible transparency through aggregated and categorized totals, and that any specific items withheld be identified by category with the reason for withholding and, where applicable, a projected date when disclosure may occur; and be it further

Resolved, That the findings be published for the church at large in an official periodical and on the Synod's website, and that a printable summary be provided to congregations for congregational reports and voters' meetings; and be it further

Resolved, That the CFO be designated as the responsible officer to compile, publish, and maintain the report and any supplementary appendices, coordinating with the Office of the Secretary for archival purposes but publishing the report on the Synod's website and, as appropriate, in an official periodical of the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That the BOD provide and publish this report no later than 180 days before the opening of the 2029 convention, so that congregations and newly elected delegates may have at least 90 days to review, respond, and, as needed, prepare overtures in advance of the next submission deadlines; and be it further

Resolved, That the BOD include in the report a plain-language narrative explaining methodology, scope, and constraints, together with an executive summary suitable for congregational distribution; and be it finally

Resolved, That the costs of compiling and publishing this report, anticipated to be nominal staff time and ordinary publication costs, be covered within existing budgeted funds, satisfying the bylaw requirement for cost projections to the extent feasible.

Christ Greenfield, Gilbert, AZ; Circuit 16 (Faribault),
Minnesota South District; Circuit 28, Pacific Southwest District

9. Structure and Administration

REPORTS

**R1, R1.2, R1.2.2, R1.2.4–R1.2.5, R2, R3–R11,
R14, R15–R19, R21–R55, R59, R61**

OVERTURES

Ov. 9-01

To Amend Bylaws 1.5.3.2–4 and Add Bylaw 4.7.6 regarding Regulations for Committees

Rationale

The Commission on Constitutional Matters, noting frequent issues encountered in applying Bylaw section 1.5 to the committees of districts, universities, and other agencies of the Synod, referred the language to the Commission on Handbook for study and potential revision. The following is the proposal of the latter commission, intended to clarify the bylaw language dealing with regulations for committees. It was designed in light of the standard language used in *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, 12th edition, especially chapters 49–50 (Ed. Sarah Corbin Robert, Henry M. Robert III, William J. Evans, Daneil H. Honemann, Thomas J. Balch, Daniel E. Seabold, Shmuel Gerber [New York: PublicAffairs, 2020]), for various types of committees and to address concerns about committee constitution and authority across the board, rather than (as the present bylaws do) allowing certain narrow structural categories while remaining silent on others. The new bylaws focus on types of committees (Bylaw 1.5.3.2), the authority and responsibility of committees (1.5.3.3), and the constitution of committees (1.5.3.4). Finally, language is added to Bylaw section 4.7 to account for district committees that are established by district bylaw or district convention resolution, so that it will be clear that such committees are not subject to the requirements imposed by Bylaws 1.5.3.2–4 on committees of a board or commission. These revisions will provide significantly improved clarity and appropriate levels of both flexibility and regulation for corporate Synod and the agencies of the Synod with regard to their committee needs.

Therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaws 1.5.3.1–1.5.3.4 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Organization

1.5.3 Every agency of the Synod shall meet at least quarterly unless otherwise stipulated in the Bylaws. Exceptions require the approval at least annually of the President of the Synod. All agencies shall announce their upcoming meetings. Unless otherwise specified in the Bylaws, each agency is free to select a manner of meeting, consistent with Board of Directors policy, that best enhances its ability to accomplish its mission, taking into consideration fostering the open exchange of ideas, availability of technology to all members, stewardship of resources, perception of fairness, controversial nature of agenda items, and whether secret ballots might be used.

1.5.3.1 ~~At~~ Unless otherwise stipulated in these Bylaws, at the initial meeting after members take office under new terms filled by regular election or appointment (including the regular election or appointment of any fraction of the members), all mission boards,

commissions, and governing boards shall organize themselves as to chair, vice-chair, secretary, and other standing committees and positions as necessary or mandated by these Bylaws and shall conduct business in accordance with accepted parliamentary rules.

~~1.5.3.2 All mission boards, commissions, and governing boards may make use of executive committees to act in times of emergency between plenary meetings, to act on delegated assignments, and to act as specified elsewhere in these Bylaws.~~

~~(a) Executive committees may not perform acts specifically required by statute or by legislation or the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod to be performed by the agency, nor may they overturn actions of the agency.~~

~~(b) All executive committee actions shall be reported to plenary sessions of the agency.~~

~~1.5.3.3 All mission boards, commissions, and governing boards may also delegate a specific assignment for a limited time to a committee composed of its own members.~~

~~1.5.3.4 All mission boards, commissions, and governing boards may appoint standing committees of specialists to provide professional or technical assistance to the board or commission and may delegate certain responsibilities to such committees while retaining supervision. Standing committees may be made up of or include non-board or commission members. The creation of standing committees shall be reported to the President and the Board of Directors of the Synod.~~

1.5.3.2 All mission boards, commissions, and governing boards ("plenaries") may establish and appoint committees as follows:

(a) A *standing committee* is established explicitly in bylaws or plenary resolution or policies to perform a specified, continuing function. The creation of a standing committee shall be reported to the President and Board of Directors of the Synod.

(b) An *ad hoc committee* is established by resolution of the plenary to accomplish a specified task of limited duration, upon the completion of which it is automatically discharged.

(c) The *executive committee*, a specific type of standing committee composed of board or commission members only, may act with the authority of the plenary (i) in times of emergency between plenary meetings and/or (ii) on assignments specifically delegated by the plenary. It may also be assigned additional functions, as described below.

(d) The *audit committee*, another specific type of standing committee, is comprised of financially literate and independent directors, oversees for the plenary the related incorporated organization's financial reporting process, selects an independent auditor, and receives the audit.

1.5.3.3 The authority and responsibility of a committee of a mission board, commission, or governing board, as well as any special rules applicable to such, are to be specifically set forth in the establishing bylaw, policy, or resolution, subject to the following:

(a) Committees may not perform acts specifically required by statute or the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod to be performed exclusively by the plenary, nor may they overturn actions of the plenary.

(b) Except for executive committees acting in emergencies, any committee charged "with power" to do more than report findings or recommendations to the plenary shall be empowered to act only (i) upon specific instructions of the plenary or (ii) under standing powers clearly delineated in bylaws or policies.

(c) The granting of standing authority to a committee to act for the plenary in any area without specific instructions, or the designation of any business to be automatically referred to a committee, or the impact in any other way of the parliamentary procedure of the plenary by a committee shall: (i) require, if not effected by bylaw, a two-thirds vote of the plenary; (ii) be reported to the President and Board of Directors of the Synod;

and (iii) require the submission of any related policies, upon adoption or subsequent amendment, to the Commission on Constitutional Matters for review.

(d) The plenary shall retain supervision of any responsibilities delegated to committees, receiving and regularly reviewing their minutes, except for such executive sessions of committees as have been authorized by the plenary.

(e) Each standing committee shall report to each regular plenary session.

(f) Any action of a committee taken upon authority delegated by the plenary (including emergency actions of an executive committee) shall be reported to the members of the plenary within two weeks or at the next regular meeting, whichever is sooner.

1.5.3.4 Except as otherwise provided by these bylaws, a committee of a mission board, commission, or governing board shall be constituted as follows:

(a) A standing or executive committee shall comprise members appointed by ballot election of the plenary or as *ex officio*.

(b) An ad hoc committee may be comprised of members appointed by ballot of the plenary, by nomination by the plenary members or chair, or by appointment by the chair, as designated by the plenary.

(c) Unless otherwise specified in bylaws or plenary policies, service in a committee appointment is at the pleasure of the plenary. Any potential committee member conflicts of interest shall be disclosed to the plenary, under Bylaw 1.5.2.

(d) The plenary may appoint as members of a committee, other than its executive committee, individuals who are not members of the plenary, provided that: (i) that they provide necessary professional or technical expertise; (ii) such appointment is reported to the President and Board of Directors of the Synod; and (iii) such appointees do not vote on any action taken by the committee with authority delegated by the plenary, except where the committee acts upon specific instructions of the plenary.

(e) Committees may form subcommittees of their own members or others, including others only as specifically authorized in their constituting bylaws, policies, or resolution, as applicable, and subject to the same requirements stated in (d).

and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 4.7.6 be added as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

4.7 District Nominations, Elections, and Appointments

4.7.6 A district convention may, by bylaw or resolution, create standing or ad hoc committees responsible to the district. These shall act on specific assignments or within authority delegated and shall conduct business in accordance with accepted parliamentary rules. Unless these are committees of the board of directors of the district, the provisions of Bylaws 1.5.3.2–4 do not apply to them.

Commission on Handbook

Ov. 9-02

To Amend Bylaws 1.5.1.2–1.5.2 to Clarify Service Expectations and Handling of Conflicts of Interest

Rationale

Bylaw section 1.5 provides regulations applicable to all agencies of the Synod, including provisions dealing with ethical standards, conflicts of interest, and removal from office. These date, at least in their modern form, to a Commission on Structure project that culminated in 2007 Res. 7-07A, “To Revise Bylaw Section 1.5 and to Add Definitions to *Handbook*,” itself an outgrowth of the 2004 revision of the *Handbook*’s revision of agency-related language.

The original statement of the conflict-of-interest policy dates to 1995 (Res. 4-05A, “To Replace Present Bylaws on Conflict of Interest”). (Bylaw 1.5.1.3 is part of the former “general regulations” and not properly part of the conflict-of-interest policy, but relevant to it.)

The Secretary noted to the Commission on Handbook three aspects of the present language requiring attention: (1) While potential conflicts should be identified to the extent possible in advance, the determination of whether there is an “inappropriate interest” being acted upon (Bylaw 1.5.2 [a][4]) depends on a situation arising in the work of the potentially conflicted individual (or the board or commission of which the individual is a part) to which the potential conflict is material. It is at that time the conflict would need to be processed by the board, but this timeline aspect is not evident in the present language, leading to confusion in practice. (2) The connection between the determination of Bylaw 1.5.2 (a)(4) that “an inappropriate interest exists” and the practical impact of such determination is unclear. The only apparent consequences are 1.5.2 (b)(3)’s remote and less-than-general “no one shall vote...,” less-than-general because it deals only with the possibility of “direct or indirect financial gain.” It seems obvious that the member having an “inappropriate interest” would be expected to recuse himself with regard to certain matters (or perhaps, if the conflict is sufficiently general, resign), but this is not so plain. (3) Adding to the unclarity is that it is not so apparent how Bylaws 1.5.1.3 and 1.5.2 (b) and (b)(1–2) relate to the standards for removal from office for board or commission members, in Bylaw 1.5.7, or for officers, Bylaw 1.5.8, unless they fall generally under “breach of fiduciary responsibility.”

The commission has proposed a revision which pulls Bylaw 1.5.1.3 into Bylaw 1.5.2, clarifying the relation of this standard to the rest of the provision, addressing the above issues, and further addressing the scope of the provision to clarify that conflicts are not strictly limited to matters of personal financial gain, but can involve other situations where an officer or board or commission member might have or appear to have competing loyalties.

Therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaws 1.5.1.2–1.5.2 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

1.5 Regulations for Corporate Synod and Agencies of the Synod

General

...

1.5.1.2 No one, either in the Synod or a district, or between the Synod and a district, shall hold more than one elective office; or hold more than two offices, although one or both be appointive; or ever hold two offices of which one is directly responsible for the work done by the other. A member of the Board of Directors of Synod may not hold any other elective or appointive office, except as otherwise provided by these Bylaws.

(a) An office shall be regarded as elective only if it is an office filled through election by a national or a district convention, even though a vacancy in such an office may be filled by appointment.

(b) Doubtful cases shall be decided by the President of the Synod.

~~1.5.1.3 Every board or commission member, officer, and all staff of corporate Synod and every agency of the Synod shall be sensitive in their activities to taking or giving offense, giving the appearance~~

~~of impropriety, causing confusion in the Synod, or creating potential liability.~~

Disclosure of Expectations and Conflicts of Interest

1.5.2 Every board or commission member, officer, and all staff of corporate Synod and every agency of the Synod shall carry out responsibilities and avoid, or properly address, conflicts of interest as described in this bylaw.

(a) ~~Corporate Synod and Every~~ every agency shall implement the synodwide conflict-of-interest policy, and that policy shall be applicable to them and all staff operating under them. This policy shall include the following provisions:

(1) Every board or commission member shall on an annual basis and as the need arises disclose to the chairman of the agency and all staff shall disclose to the chief executive or executive director of the agency any potential conflicts of interest. Each chairman or chief executive or executive director shall disclose personal potential conflicts of interest to the appropriate board or commission.

(2) Such disclosures shall include board membership on, a substantial interest in, or employment of the individual or a relative by any organization doing business with corporate Synod or any of the agencies of the Synod.

(3) Every board or commission member, officer, and all staff of corporate Synod and every agency of the Synod who receives honoraria or payments for any sales or services rendered to corporate Synod or any of the agencies of the Synod shall disclose such information.

(4) All such disclosures shall be reported to the respective board or commission to determine, when a relevant situation arises, by a vote of its remaining impartial members whether ~~an inappropriate interest~~ a conflict exists, and such vote shall be recorded in its official minutes. In the case of officers of the Synod regarding non-board, non-commission work, all such disclosures shall be reported to the President of the Synod to determine whether ~~an inappropriate interest~~ a conflict exists. In the case of executive staff, the board of the agency, and in the case of other staff, relevant officers or executive staff shall make this determination.

(5) Any conflict so identified shall be managed by the conflicted member abstaining from any vote or decision involving the matter. Should the responsible board, commission, officer, or executive staff determine that information regarding the matter cannot be shared with the member without detriment to the Synod, the member shall be asked to recuse him or herself from discussion of and receipt of documents concerning the matter; failure to recuse him or herself may be inconsistent with (b)(1–2) below.

(6) Potential conflicts of interest required to be disclosed pursuant to this subsection (a) include situations where the individual or the individual's relative or business:

(i) stands to gain a financial benefit from an action the board, commission, agency, or corporate Synod takes or a transaction into which the board, commission, agency, or corporate Synod enters; or

(ii) has a relationship or another interest that impairs, or could be seen to impair, the independence or objectivity of the individual in discharging his or her fiduciary duty to the board, commission, agency, or corporate Synod.

(7) Potential conflicts of interest are not solely financial but may include situations in which the individual or that individual's relative:

(i) serves on the board of, participates in the management of, or is otherwise employed by or volunteers with any third party that the board, commission, agency, or corporate Synod deals with or is considering dealing with, or

(ii) serves on a board, commission, agency, or corporate Synod, or a third party, that is competing with, or may be affected by a decision of, the board, commission, agency, or corporate Synod.

(b) Responsibilities shall be carried out in a manner reflecting the highest degree of integrity and honesty consistent with the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod, the policies of corporate Synod and the agencies of the Synod, and civil laws.

(1) Activities shall not be entered into which may be detrimental to the interests of the Synod. Any such inappropriate activity shall cease or the position will be vacated may constitute a breach of fiduciary responsibility and a cause for removal under Bylaw 1.5.7 or 1.5.8.

(2) Information acquired in the course of carrying out duties of the Synod shall not knowingly be used in any way that would be detrimental to the welfare of the Synod.

(3) No one shall vote on any transaction in which the individual might receive a direct or indirect financial gain.

(4) The Board of Directors shall establish policy regarding the acceptance of gifts, entertainment, or favors from any individual or outside concern which does or is seeking to do business with corporate Synod or the agencies of the Synod.

(c) Every board or commission member, officer, and all staff of corporate Synod and every agency of the Synod shall be sensitive in their activities to taking or giving offense, giving the appearance of impropriety, causing confusion in the Synod, or creating potential liability.

(ed) Individuals, prior to accepting elected, appointed, or staff positions, shall initially and annually thereafter sign statements stating that they have received, understand, and agree to abide by this bylaw and the Synod's conflict of interest policy.

Commission on Handbook

Ov. 9-03

To Amend Constitution Article XII 15 as to Call of Special District Conventions

Rationale

In its periodic review of various district bylaws, the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM, minutes of April 8–9, 2022) has noted the following:

- Bylaw 1.5.8.1, introduced by 2016 Res. 12-11, "To Establish a Procedure Based on Article XI A 2 for Removal from Office of Officers of the Synod or a District (other than the Synod or a District President)," provides a procedure for removal of such officers, to the noted exclusion of the Synod or district president.
- District bylaws typically contain provisions for a finding of temporary inability of a district president to serve (generally modeled on Bylaw 3.3.1.4) and sometimes attempt to conceive a procedure, in addition to the inapplicable one in Bylaw 1.5.8.1, to handle the removal of a district president from office for cause. Such a proposal necessarily treads on difficult ground, as the limitations on a board of directors' authority (its dealing, generally, with legal and property matters, Bylaw 4.5.1, and not extending to supervision of the district president's ecclesiastical duties) raise questions about whether it would be the appropriate body to act, and on what basis.

- Perhaps the most natural option for *a district* to remove its president from office, without his being removed first from the roster of the Synod under Bylaw section 2.15, would be by the calling of a special convention to deal with the matter, as (Const. Art. XI A 2) “[t]he Synod at all times has the right to call its officers to account and, if circumstances require it, to remove them from office in accordance with Christian procedure” (cited in “CCM Opinion re Removal of District Presidents from Office, Ag. 729, minutes of Feb. 21–22, 1975). At the Synod level, a special session of the convention may be called “by three-fourths of the district presidents without the consent of the President” (Article VIII B 2), but there is no obvious alternative to the district president as “convener” of a special session of a district in Const. Art. XII 15.

This presents something of a conundrum on the district level, should a district find that it needs to call its president to account and directly remove him from office *for cause* in a circumstance where removal *from the roster of the Synod* (which would trigger his removal from office) is not called for.

The CCM referred this matter to the Commission on Handbook (COH) and the two, through the Secretary, initiated discussion of the matter by the Council of Presidents, a discussion that resulted in no proposal. The COH finds it incongruous with the provisions of Const. Art. XI A 1–4 that a district president might be able to prevent the body from convening that might call him urgently to give account of his stewardship. There being no other explicit means (other than the President of the Synod invoking the procedure of Bylaw section 2.15 to remove the district president *from the roster of the Synod* and, thereby, from office) for this to occur, the COH presents the following constitutional amendment, which would allow the congregations of a district, acting through their circuits, to call a special convention of their district in a manner similar to the ability of three-fourths of the district presidents, in a case of urgent necessity, to call a special Synod convention without the consent of the President (Const. Art. VIII B 2), which reads:

Article VIII Synodical Meetings

...

B. Special Sessions of the Synod

...

2. In cases of urgent necessity a special session may be called by the President with the consent of two-thirds of the district presidents or by three-fourths of the district presidents without the consent of the President; however, all congregations and other members of the Synod must be notified 30 days in advance and told for what purpose this extra meeting is being convened.

As this would be a constitutional amendment, subsequent ratification by the congregations is required under Const. Art. XV 4.

Therefore be it

Resolved, That Constitution Article XII 15 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Article XII Districts of the Synod and Their Regulation

...

15. In cases of urgent necessity a special session of the district may be called by the district president ~~is empowered to convene special sessions of his district; he must, however, previously have obtained with the consent of at least a majority of the voting members of the district or by circuit forums in three-fourths of the circuits of the district without the consent of the district president after having informed them; however, all congregations and other members of the district and the President of the Synod must be notified 30 days in advance and told for what of the purpose of the this intended special session extra meeting is being convened.~~

and be it further

Resolved, That the above amendment be submitted, according to Const. Art. XV 4, to the congregations of the Synod for ratification.

Commission on Handbook

Ov. 9-04

To Amend Bylaws regarding Doctrinal Review

Rationale

The Synod has a sweeping basic principle of inclusivity for doctrinal review. It is stated in Bylaw 1.9.1.1 (a): “All official periodicals and journals of the Synod as well as any material with doctrinal content issued publicly by boards, commissions, or other subordinate groups of the Synod except as stipulated in these Bylaws shall be subject to doctrinal review.”

An exception, recognized in the Synod’s Bylaws since 1971, is “study documents and exploratory material plainly designated as such,” as subparagraph (b) continues. In 2023, the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) opined that “boards, commissions, or other subordinate groups of the Synod” (as Bylaw 1.9.1.1 [b] puts it) are constrained to release study materials related to their assignment from the Synod. For example, the CCM itself should not “produce study materials on exegetical [biblical interpretation] or doctrinal topics,” for these fields lie outside the CCM’s purview (CCM Opinion 23-3010). If Concordia Publishing House (CPH) itself were to release study materials, these would necessarily concern the responsibilities with which CPH is charged by the Synod, namely, publishing, marketing, and distribution. The CCM further noted that the vintage of some materials that might be published—dating, for instance, to the sixteenth century or earlier—does not exempt them from the requirement for doctrinal review, although the results of the review must be reported differently than when discussions can be held with living authors.

In 2007 the Synod modified its previous Bylaw from 1971 to provide for public issue of non-reviewed study materials and specified a disclaimer to be carried on or immediately after the publication’s title page, as still found in as Bylaw 1.9.1.1 (b). In principle, the status of the materials as “study documents and exploratory material” remained unaltered. Yet in fact, when tentative materials are disseminated widely, especially in an age of instant communication and internet archiving, this very widespread distribution lends them a “staying power,” wrapping them in a mantle of permanency. Thus is undermined in practice the spirit of the basic principle that doctrinal review is done on all materials with doctrinal content issued publicly by the Synod.

In the proposal below, bylaws concerning doctrinal review are reorganized for clarity. The reorganization places bylaws related to appeal of doctrinal review certification (whether before or after publication) adjacent to those treating its initial determination. This should prevent misunderstanding by allowing more ready comparison and by presenting all doctrinal review material (except for matters strictly involving the related commission) together in one place. A new second sentence is added in Bylaw 1.9.1.1 (b) to memorialize the opinion of the CCM as to the scope of the “study document and exploratory material” exception.

Therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw section 1.9 and subsection 3.9.3 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

1.9 Doctrinal Review

Definition

1.9.1 Doctrinal review is the exercise of the Synod’s responsibility to determine that every doctrinal statement made in its or any of its agencies’ or auxiliaries’ materials is in accord with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

Material Subject to Doctrinal Review

1.9.1.1 The following materials are subject to doctrinal review:

(a) All official periodicals and journals of the Synod as well as any material with doctrinal content issued publicly by boards, commissions, or other subordinate groups of the Synod except as stipulated in these Bylaws shall be subject to doctrinal review.

(b) The right to produce study documents and exploratory material plainly designated as such and published by boards, commissions, or other subordinate groups of the Synod is recognized, and such material is not required to be submitted to the doctrinal review process. The material of such a document shall be within the purview of the respective board, commission, or other subordinate group; its intended distribution shall be limited to those who are competent to evaluate the issue critically; and the document shall serve only as a penultimate document intended to result in a clearer or more correct public presentation of doctrine or practice in subsequent documents or efforts. ~~Publication of~~ When released, such study material that is not submitted for doctrinal review shall always include this notice on or immediately following the title page: “This material is being released for study and discussion purposes, and the author(s) is(are) solely responsible for its contents. It has not been submitted to the process for doctrinal review stipulated in the Bylaws of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and does not necessarily reflect the theology of the Lutheran Confessions or the doctrinal position of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.”

(c) Each district is accountable to the Synod through its respective president and board of directors for the content of all of its published materials.

(d) Each of the Synod’s schools is accountable to the Synod through its respective president and board of regents for the content of its professional journals and all of its published materials that are not the official publications of the Synod (Bylaw 3.4.3.7). The editorial boards of such publications shall serve as their own doctrinal reviewers.

(e) Auxiliary organizations recognized by the Synod shall be held directly accountable for their material. However, in accord with his office as defined in Constitution Art. XI B 1, the President of the Synod shall require doctrinal review.

(f) In the case of broadcasts over the Synod’s radio station by other than staff members, individuals must be held responsible

for their own material since it is not feasible to apply the process of doctrinal review to such broadcasts.

(g) Official reports of the boards, commissions, task forces, and committees of the Synod prepared in response to directives from the Synod shall not be subject to doctrinal review.

Procedure

1.9.2 Before materials stipulated in Bylaw 1.9.1 are published, they shall be submitted to (a) doctrinal reviewer(s). Reviewers shall make a careful evaluation of the doctrinal content of all items submitted. Materials are to be reviewed in a prompt manner and completed in no longer than four weeks. Exceptions shall be arranged by mutual agreement between the reviewer(s) and the originating entity.

(a) The primary responsibility for doctrinal supervision and review lies with the President of the Synod (Constitution Art. XI B 1).

(1) Each board, commission, and other subordinate group of the Synod shall advise the President of the Synod of the number and desired competency of doctrinal reviewers needed by it and may suggest a list of qualified persons. The President shall appoint reviewers for each group according to its needs. They shall be broadly representative of the ministry of the Synod.

(2) Reviewers shall be appointed for renewable three-year terms. An appointment may be terminated prior to the completion of the appointed term if the reviewer is unable or unwilling to carry out the reviewing tasks assigned. In the event of such termination, the President of the Synod shall appoint another reviewer to complete the unexpired term.

(b) Each agency of the Synod, synodwide corporate entity, or auxiliary shall establish procedures that will ensure that its material as specified in Bylaw section 1.9 will be submitted for doctrinal review to one of the reviewers referred to in Bylaw 1.9.2 (a).

(c) Since time requirements vary according to the type of material being reviewed, the procedure in each case shall be worked out to the mutual satisfaction of the sponsoring group and the doctrinal reviewer(s).

(d) The identity of authors and reviewers shall not be disclosed without the approval of the President. Consultation may at times be advisable, however, where clarification is necessary.

(e) The reviewer’s primary concern is that items submitted to him be in agreement in their doctrinal content with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

(f) The reviewer(s) shall also be concerned that the items submitted do not contain statements that are inadequate, misleading, ambiguous, or lacking in doctrinal clarity.

(g) The reviewer(s) shall further be concerned that resolutions of the Synod be honored and upheld and that positions deviating from the doctrinal resolutions of the Synod be clearly identified as such.

(h) When the author is also a reviewer, his material shall be assigned to another reviewer. In order to avoid any conflict of interest, no author shall be involved in any way in the selection or assignment of reviewer(s) for his or her own work.

(i) The reviewer may request that specific material assigned to him also be reviewed by another reviewer.

(j) Where changes appear to be necessary, the reviewer(s) shall submit a thorough and clearly written documented critique that shall be made available to the author, the sponsoring group, and the publisher. The documentation provided by the reviewer(s) shall provide a thorough and detailed explanation, with all appropriate biblical and confessional references used to support the opinion offered.

(k) The author shall consider the critique and make necessary revisions until there is agreement between the author and the reviewer(s).

(l) Should any problem arise between an author, the reviewer(s), the publisher, or any other party involved with respect to the material submitted for review, the sponsoring group shall endeavor to resolve it to the satisfaction of the reviewer(s). If it cannot do so, the problem shall be submitted to the Commission on Doctrinal Review which shall follow the appeals procedure and criteria stated in Bylaw ~~3.9.3.2-1.9.4~~.

1.9.3 After publication, any challenge to material that is subject to doctrinal review, no matter which process is used as listed in Bylaw 1.9.2, shall be handled according to the procedure and criteria specified in Bylaw ~~3.9.3.2-1.9.5~~.

The following are relocated from Bylaw subsection 3.9.3:

Appeals Prior to Publication

~~3.9.3.2-1.9.4~~ Appeals regarding materials not yet published may be initiated by an author, the sponsoring group, or an executive staff member of that group and submitted to the chairman of the Commission on Doctrinal Review (Bylaws 3.9.3-3.9.3.2).

(a) Within seven business days after receipt of an appeal, the chairman of the Commission on Doctrinal Review shall inform all concerned and shall appoint three members of the commission to serve as a review panel and shall designate one as its chairman. A panel member shall disqualify himself on the basis of any kind of personal involvement in the issue.

(b) The review panel shall provide a copy of the appeal to the author and the sponsoring group and invite them to provide a response to the appeal. All parties to the appeal shall be given 14 days to provide their response.

(c) To aid objectivity, the identity of author and review panel shall ordinarily not be disclosed. However, consultation may at times be necessary for clarification.

(d) In making its recommendation, the panel shall decide within 30 days whether the item in question

- (1) is suitable for publication; or
- (2) may be published after alteration; or
- (3) may be published as a study document; or
- (4) shall be denied publication.

(e) The decision of the panel shall be determined by a majority vote and shall be final so far as the Commission on Doctrinal Review is concerned. A report together with the panel's minutes shall be submitted to the chairman of the Commission on Doctrinal Review.

(f) The chairman of the commission shall report the decision within seven business days to the author, the original reviewer(s), the sponsoring group, and the President of the Synod.

Appeals Following Publication

~~3.9.3.2-1.9.5~~ A challenge to the doctrinal review certification of a published item may be initiated by any member of the Synod and shall be submitted in writing via mail or personal delivery to the chairman of the Commission on Doctrinal Review (Bylaws 3.9.3-3.9.3.2).

(a) In order for the Commission on Doctrinal Review to consider a challenge, the challenger is obliged to provide specific references demonstrating how the published item is not in agreement with Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

(b) After receipt of the challenge, the chairman of the commission shall within seven business days inform the President of the Synod, the sponsoring group, and, if applicable, Concordia Publishing House, shall appoint three members of the commission to serve as a review panel, and shall designate one as its chairman.

(c) The chairman of the Commission on Doctrinal Review shall provide a copy of the appeal to the President of the Synod, the sponsoring group, and, if applicable, Concordia Publishing House, and offer them the opportunity to respond to the appeal within 14 days from the date of notification.

(d) To aid in maintaining objectivity, the identity of the challenger and the identity of the panel will ordinarily not be disclosed. There shall be no publicity given to the appeal, nor an effort made to circularize the Synod on a pending appeal.

(e) The panel shall after reviewing the published material declare, within 45 days following the expiry of the 14-day response period provided in Bylaw ~~3.9.3.2-1.9.5~~ (c), whether the doctrinal review certification is affirmed or revoked based on whether the published material is in agreement with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

(f) If the panel revokes the doctrinal review certification, it must identify the part(s) of the item in need of clarification, amplification, and/or deletion in order to bring into agreement with Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, and withdraw the publication until such agreement is reached.

(g) The panel will appoint one of its members to be the doctrinal reviewer for the recycling of the revised material to assure the item's agreement with Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions if republished.

Commission on Doctrinal Review

3.9.3 The Commission on Doctrinal Review exists to assist the President of the Synod in the exercise of his responsibility that all doctrinal content in its or any of its agencies' materials be in accord with the Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

3.9.3.1 The Commission on Doctrinal Review shall consist of five members appointed by the President of the Synod from the total number of doctrinal reviewers.

(a) The commission shall elect its own officers.

(b) The commission shall effect its own organization.

3.9.3.2 The Commission on Doctrinal Review functions in accordance with Bylaw section 1.9, including especially the handling of appeals under Bylaws 1.9.4-5, and shall meet as often as necessary to provide guidelines for the work of doctrinal reviewers and to concern itself with problem areas in the procedures of doctrinal review and appeals.

Commission on Handbook

Ov. 9-05

To Amend Various Bylaws for Purposes of Clarification or Improvement

Preamble

The Commission on Handbook (COH), responding to a variety of observations from officers, agencies, and members of the Synod, has proposed amendments to bylaws that have given opportunity to confusion or required repeated or nonobvious interpretation by the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM). These are presented together for the sake of convention efficiency but each is logically independent of the others:

A. TO AMEND THE BYLAWS TO PROVIDE A MECHANISM FOR HANDLING SECRETARY INCAPACITY

Rationale

In its review (Op. 22-3002) of the Board of Directors (BOD) Policy Manual, the CCM noted that Policy 4.6.3.3, providing that "[t]he

Board shall determine when the Secretary is unable to serve in that capacity because of prolonged illness or disability, with the Board designating an acting secretary until the Board determines that such illness or disability has been removed,” seems to be “without bylaw warrant.” The BOD Governance Committee (BOD Minutes, Nov. 22–23, 2024, #141) referred this matter to the COH, asking that the apparent bylaw lacuna be filled. The COH found this situation to be analogous to the provision provided for the President in Bylaw 3.3.1.4, the only complication being that there is no “Vice-Secretary” permanently in place to step in:

3.3 Elected Officers of the Synod

President

...

Inability to Serve

3.3.1.4 When the President is unable to serve, the duties and responsibilities of the Office of President shall be assumed by the First Vice-President.

(a) The Board of Directors of the Synod shall determine when the President is unable to serve in that capacity because of prolonged illness or disability.

(b) The First Vice-President shall remain as the acting president until that board determines that such illness or disability has been removed.

The COH has proposed the following amendment to provide the BOD a bylaw basis, based on the above, for the procedure expressed in its policy manual.

Therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.3.3.3 be inserted (with renumbering of the following bylaw) as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Secretary

...

Inability to Serve

3.3.3.3 When the Secretary is unable to serve, the duties and responsibilities of the Office of Secretary shall be assumed by an acting secretary appointed by the Board of Directors.

(a) The Board of Directors of the Synod shall determine when the Secretary is unable to serve in that capacity because of prolonged illness or disability.

(b) The acting secretary shall function as such until that board determines that such illness or disability has been removed.

3.3.3.34 In the event of the death, resignation, or permanent incapacity of the Secretary, the Board of Directors of the Synod shall appoint a successor for the unexpired term.

B. TO CLARIFY BYLAW 3.10.6.1 BY REORGANIZATION OF PROVISIONS

Rationale

The Synod's 2023 convention adopted a number of revisions to Bylaws that affect the Synod's colleges and universities, notably Res. 7-04B. Section D of that resolution (2023 *Proceedings*, 182–83) revised Bylaws on the duties of Boards of Regents. In the present overture, the COH offers a reorganization of this list of duties, principally in response to observations from the required regent training (Bylaw 3.10.6.2.2) indicating that this would make the bylaw's requirements more readily understood. In doing so, the commission solicited and received feedback from Concordia University presidents and the Concordia University System. No substantive change has been made, only a logical re-ordering of the

items based in part on comments received from one of the university presidents.

Therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.10.6.1 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

3.10.6.1 In fulfilling its commonly understood fiduciary duties owed to the institution, and its governance responsibilities, the board of regents shall:

(a) serve as the governing body corporate of the institution, vested with all powers its members may exercise either as directors, trustees, or members of the body corporate;

(~~eb~~) as a whole and as individual members, as stewards of the institution on behalf of the congregations of the Synod, embrace and advance with administration, faculty, staff, and students the institution's fundamental purpose as inculcating the faith, as taught in the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions (Constitution Article II), preparing students to live in this faith toward God and by this faith, in their various vocations, in love toward the neighbor;

(~~ec~~) govern the institution with consistent attention to specific ways that the institution is confessing Jesus Christ in full accord with the doctrinal position of the LCMS (Constitution Art. II) and fulfilling His mission in our world as proper to a college or university of the Synod under its objectives (Constitution Art. III), intentionally seeking continual growth as a board in such governance, including that the board shall:

(~~e1~~) ensure that all faculty receive appropriate formal, ongoing training in the doctrines of Holy Scripture as rightly taught in the Lutheran Confessions as they relate to their academic disciplines, to enable faculty to engage in responsible exercise of their academic freedom within the confession of the institution and the Synod (Constitution Art. II);

(~~f2~~) actively encourage and expect curricula and policies for student life and behavior consistent with the doctrine and practice of the Synod, and commit the institution to the principles of Christian discipline, an evangelical manner, and good order;

(~~bd~~) govern the institution at all times according to the commitment of the institution, in its mission and otherwise, to carry out its affairs as part of the Concordia University System and in accordance with the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod, including that the board shall:

(~~j1~~) ensure that its institution and constituent parts strive to excel in the Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcomes Standards, and to cooperate fully with processes for ecclesiastical visitation by the Concordia University System and for appointment of the institution's president;

(~~k2~~) ensure that its institution and constituent parts support the proper authorities of the Synod in their roles of ecclesiastical supervision of called workers, placement of graduates, and doctrinal review status appeals, and submit to the Synod's expectations for handling of faculty complaints and dispute resolution, insofar as they apply;

(~~m3~~) govern transparently, including, without limitation, providing to Concordia University System in a timely manner minutes of board meetings and board and institution policies adopted or modified, and to both Concordia University System and the Synod Board of Directors proposed revisions of institutional governing documents and policies prior to their adoption, and responsively, understanding inquiries and suggestions offered by Concordia University System and the Synod Board of Directors to be offered on behalf of the

congregations of the Synod, to which the board is ultimately responsible;

(~~4~~) ensure that all governing and other legal documents and policies of the institution conform to and are consistent with the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod, and modify institutional governing documents only after proposed modifications have been approved by the Commission on Constitutional Matters and with at least 30 days advance notice to the Synod Board of Directors as custodian of Synod's property;

(~~5~~) duly consider the common confession, mission, interest, and cooperative strength of the Synod, with its congregations, agencies, and other institutions, as it makes decisions with impact beyond its campus, especially as it plans new programs, discontinues existing programs, cooperates and consolidates operations with other Synod schools, operates in a worldwide online marketplace, cooperates with the Synod Board of Directors in the legal defense of the right to the free exercise of our confession, and interacts with the ministries and partner churches of the LCMS, domestically and internationally, in harmony with its programs and consistent with its protocol agreements;

(~~6~~) review and approve academic programs recommended by the administration and faculty, giving due consideration to the Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcomes Standards and coordination with other Synod colleges and universities;

(~~7~~) ensure the communication of board-approved strategic plan documents to the Concordia University System Institution Advisory Council; and

(~~8~~) exercise its exclusive duty of institutional governance in the interest of the Synod without abdicating its authority to, or commingling its authority with, that of others;

(~~9~~) take the leadership in assuring the preservation and improvement of the assets of the institution and see to the acquisition, management, use, and disposal of the properties and equipment of the institution, including that the board shall:-

(~~1~~) maintain effective internal controls and operate with financial transparency, annually reviewing and approving the institutional budget and providing, within 30 days of board acceptance and final issuance of the institutional audit, audited financial statements and other information as specified in the policies of the Synod Board of Directors and to congregations of the Synod upon request;

(~~2~~) safeguard present and future assets of the institution, making every effort to ensure designation of gifts, whether to the university itself or to any associated foundation, so that they will continue to be available to higher education within the Synod in the event of the closure, divestiture, or separation of the institution; and

(~~3~~) maintain and approve an institutional master plan, any modifications to which shall be submitted to the Synod Board of Directors for its approval (Bylaw 3.3.4.5 [e]);

(~~4~~) effectively and intentionally govern the institution and its president so that administration and faculty carry out their management and educational responsibilities in a manner consistent with the foregoing, including that the board shall:- ~~and~~

(~~1~~) develop detailed policies and procedures for governance of the institution, to include policies and procedures compliant

~~(p) maintain policies and procedures for handling faculty complaints and dispute resolution in compliance with Bylaw 3.10.6.9.6 for handling faculty complaints and dispute resolution;~~

(~~2~~) participate fully in the procedures for the selection and regular review of the president of the institution and of the major administrators; approve of the appointment of faculty

members who meet the qualifications of their positions; approve sabbatical and study leaves; and encourage faculty development and research; and

(~~3~~) initiate a performance review of the institution's president upon identification of significant operational deficiencies; and

(~~4~~) effect the removal from office of the institution's president upon a finding, under the procedure of Bylaw 3.10.6.8.3 or Bylaw 3.10.6.8.1 (e) or (f), that he is unfit to serve as the spiritual head of the college or university; and

C. TO AMEND BYLAW 4.2.2 TO ALLOW FOR ELECTRONIC DISTRICT CONVENTION DELEGATE ACCREDITATION

Rationale

At the Synod level, pre-convention processes have made increasing use of electronic methods for official acts, such as reporting of circuit delegate and alternate elections and their certification by the district secretaries, registration of presidential voters, nominations for President and vice-presidents, and the election of the President. Electronic means:

allow more rapid turn-around without the uncertainty of mail delivery and delay.

allow for more targeted reminders when individuals or congregations have not yet submitted, improving participation.

avoid a data entry step involving reading of usually handwritten information, improving the reliability of information gathered.

save mailing cost and inconvenience.

allow increased automation of processes, saving staff time and money and improving service.

The use of electronic means for these processes has been permitted gradually at the Synod level by a number of convention and commission actions, including:

2010 Res. 4-07, which replaced signatures for President/vice-president nominating ballots with "a secure and verifiable method" to be provided by the Secretary of the Synod;

2023 Res. 9-02 [F], which made explicit the CCM's opinion that provision of a "form" and corresponding "signatures" could be done electronically (*Proceedings*, 200-1; see also CCM Op. 20-2930); and

2023 Res. 9-02 [G], which did the same for the nomination ballots for regional vice-president, completing the work, in this regard, of 2010 Res. 4-07 (*Proc.*, 201; see also CCM Op. 20-2930).

The noted CCM opinion observed:

Bylaw 3.12.2.3 (b), as so amended, simply states that the congregation shall present to the Secretary of the Synod "a proper credentials form provided by the Secretary." It does not specify how this form is to be distributed. It could be a paper form mailed to each congregation, or it could be an electronically fillable form accessible on the Synod website.

The bylaw further specifies that this form must be signed by two of the congregation's officers. This could be done via an electronic signature (which has come to be commonly understood—as in the case of Missouri contract law, for example, for fifteen years—not necessarily to require a handwritten mark) before the form is electronically submitted to the Office of the Secretary. ...

Thus, the wording of Bylaw 3.12.2.3 (b) allows the Secretary of the Synod to use a "secure and verifiable method" for the

registration of the voting delegates of each congregation or parish to vote for the president of the Synod so long as it involves the collection by some means of the required “signatures” (i.e., verifiable attestations, by some commonly understood means of physical or electronic signature) of two congregational officers.

This same logic would seem to apply to Bylaw 4.2.2 (except, perhaps, for its use of the term *mailing*). A change should be made to Bylaw 4.2.2 to allow clearly for a secure and verifiable electronic registration method to be implemented by district secretaries. As with similar processes on the district level, the existing, paper-based approach remains an acceptable “secure and verifiable method.”

Therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 4.2.2 (a) be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

4.2.2 The delegates of a voting congregation or multi-congregation parish to a district convention shall be accredited.

(a) ~~To be entitled to vote, delegates shall return the proper credentials provided by the district secretary and signed by two of the congregation's officers, either by mailing them to the district office at a date determined by the district or by presenting them to the district secretary at the opening of the convention. The congregation or parish shall present to the district secretary, via a secure and verifiable method provided by him, the names of the pastor and elected lay delegate to represent it at the district convention, as well as an attestation by two of its officers that these delegates are properly authorized by it to do so. Only those delegates named in such credentials, having been submitted to the district secretary by a date set by the district or presented to him at the convention, shall be entitled to vote.~~

(b) All duly elected voting delegates shall attend all sessions of the convention regularly until the close of the convention.

(c) Should a multi-congregation parish involve congregations having membership in different districts, the pastoral delegate shall be accredited in the convention of the district in which he holds membership and lay delegates, voting and advisory, shall be accredited in the convention of the district in which each delegate's respective congregation holds membership. No multi-congregation parish is entitled to more than one pastoral and one lay voting delegate because of its inclusion of congregations from different districts.

D. TO AMEND BYLAW 3.1.3.2 TO CLARIFY CERTIFICATION OF VOTING AND ADVISORY DELEGATES AND ADVISORY REPRESENTATIVES

Rationale

The LCMS Office of the Secretary has implemented a new system for the collection of information in the processes that gather information on officially elected, appointed, or designated Synod convention voting and advisory delegates and advisory representatives. As part of that work, the office reflected on, and brought to the COH, the following issues of wording in Bylaw 3.1.3.2. The COH now recommends the proposed amendment below for the following reasons:

1. Bylaw 3.1.3.2 uses language of *certification*, which is helpful and should be used for all official convention attendees or potential attendees, such as delegates, representatives, and their alternates. This may be distinguished from the later *registration*, which could then apply exclusively to the later process of arranging for actual attendance, hotel accommodations, etc. There has been confusion in the minds of many over whether *registration* has been completed when the individual is simply named to

participate; accommodations remain, importantly, to be worked out. Using the term *certification* exclusively to refer to the official process of determining and recording *who* is to attend and the term *registration* exclusively to refer to the process of arranging for the actual attendance of such individuals will improve clarity of communication.

2. With regard to the word *forwarded*, there is an implication that there is movement of a document, either hard copy or digital, from one person to another. With the implementation of an electronic forms system, this information is submitted to the Office of the Secretary rather than forwarded. Bylaw 3.12.3.4, which deals with the work related to the Committee for Convention Nominations, uses *submitted* to refer to the information pertaining to nominees, all of which is being collected using an online form system. The same term could be used here.
3. Bylaw 3.1.3.2 appears to be located in the section pertaining to Nonvoting Advisory Delegates and yet refers to all district representation, including voting and nonvoting advisory delegates and representatives and their alternates. The commission recommends introduction of a subsubsection header to clarify the scope of this bylaw without adjusting the section outline.

Therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.1.3.2 be amended and a header be inserted as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Certification of Voting and Advisory Delegates and District Advisory Representatives

3.1.3.2 All district voting and nonvoting advisory delegates and representatives and their alternates shall be certified before attending a convention of the Synod.

(a) The names and addresses of all voting and nonvoting advisory delegates and representatives and their alternates shall be ~~forwarded~~ submitted by the district secretary before the announced ~~registration~~ certification deadline to the Secretary of the Synod on ~~registration~~ certification forms provided by the latter.

(b) This procedure shall constitute certification.

E. TO AMEND BYLAW 3.10.6.9 TO CLARIFY HOW UNIVERSITY FACULTIES MAY VOTE TO SUBMIT OVERTURES

WHEREAS, Questions have arisen as to how university faculties may vote to submit overtures to a convention, as allowed in Bylaw 3.1.6.2; and

WHEREAS, Bylaws provide in other instances for how faculties elect advisory representatives (Bylaw 3.10.6.9 [c]), certify church work students (Bylaw 2.8.2), and deal with their voting in general (Bylaw 3.1.6.2), but do not deal with this specific issue; and

WHEREAS, The submission of an overture to a convention of the Synod is a right afforded only, otherwise, to bodies composed entirely of members of the Synod or of members of Synod member congregations (Bylaw 3.1.6.2); and

WHEREAS, The voting model used for certification of church work students (Bylaw 2.8.2) therefore seems appropriate to this faculty function, as well; therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.10.6.9 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

3.10.6.9 The faculty of each college or university of the Synod shall consist of the president, the full-time faculty, and the part-time faculty.

(a) Part-time or temporary faculty members are distinguished by an appropriate title.

(b) Part-time or temporary faculty members shall hold nonvoting membership on the faculty.

(c) Only the voting or full-time faculty who are in good standing as individual members of the Synod or are members in good standing of a member congregation of the Synod shall participate in faculty decisions regarding the qualification of graduates or colloquy program participants for rostered service

(d) Submission of an overture to a convention of the Synod shall be by majority vote of the full-time faculty who are in good standing as individual members of the Synod or are members in good standing of a member congregation of the Synod.

Commission on Handbook

Ov. 9-06

**To Amend Bylaw Section 1.5, etc., to Unify
in the Bylaws and Revise Corporate Formation
Requirements for Instrumental Entities
of Corporate Synod and Agencies of the Synod**

Rationale

In the triennium now drawing to a close, the Board of Directors (BOD) has identified a number of reasons to address the requirements the Bylaws place on corporate Synod and agencies of the Synod (Bylaw 1.2.1 [a]) when they create or utilize additional corporations to do aspects of their work. Presently, these requirements are stated in part in Bylaw section 1.5 and in part in 1981 Resolution 5-07, “To Provide Guidelines for New Corporations,” aspects of which were not superseded by 2016 Res. 9-02A, “To Assure Uniformity of Relationship and Asset Disposition Language in Governing Documents of Corporate Agencies of the Synod.” Faced with a number of challenges and a few opportunities, as well, the BOD invited input from the Synodwide corporate and trust entities of the Synod, the educational institutions and districts, and the Office of International Mission, and, with the involvement of the Office of the Secretary and legal counsel, through the course of many meetings, developed the following proposal, which attempts to address the following issues in the following ways:

1. *Challenge:* Requirements stated outside the Bylaws, in 1981 Res. 5-07, are often forgotten until review of documents by the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) and/or the BOD, and do not reflect modern business needs or conventional wisdom about corporate formation. *Solution:* All requirements are being integrated into Bylaw section 1.5 and have been reviewed in view of experience with recent test cases, including the LCEF Canada Corporation, Concordia Risk Solutions, and the great variety of foreign mission corporations presently in use and contemplated. Previous requirements not incorporated in the Bylaws (notably, 1981 Res. 5-07) will be retired.
2. *Challenge:* Regulations dating from 1981 or even 2016 have proven in the past triennium not best to serve the needs of the Synod regarding regulation of its agencies. In some cases, the language required to be present in governing documents has either not been included or,

where included, has not been strong enough, in a modern legal situation, to accomplish intended purposes; in other places, requirements are not those that modern prudence would suggest from standpoints of corporate law or business needs. *Solution:* Requirements have been extensively reviewed and revised in light of decades of experience by the BOD and in reviews by the CCM.

3. *Challenge:* Regulations only contemplated corporate Synod and agencies of the Synod forming *more agencies*, all subject in the same respect to non-waivable requirements of Bylaw section 1.5 (except that the BOD could waive or modify requirements about certain statements in agency governing documents, Bylaw 1.5.3.6). Neither LCMS International Mission entities formed overseas for mission purposes, nor modern private equity partnerships fit this model, although both are necessary. Treating only *agencies* in the bylaws allows the possibility of agencies asserting they can create instrumental legal entities that are *not subject* to agency requirements, or creating *as agencies* entities that *should not be agencies*. Finally, relaxing requirements for all agencies to allow certain exceptions would weaken the Synod’s ability to regulate all its parts by its Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions. *Solution:* The proposal develops a richer taxonomy of “instrumental entities,” described below, granting the BOD authority to grant certain exceptions for agencies below the level of synodwide corporates, districts, educational institutions, etc., and to allow formation of certain, specific types of instrumental entities as other than agencies when the agency conventions do not make sense.
4. *Opportunity:* The Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) and certain districts and educational institutions of the Synod have begun to explore the development or redevelopment of real property, in part, for commercial purposes, and in part, to sustain or expand ministry opportunities in locations where they otherwise could not be sustained or in connection with opportunities related to the contemplated developments. Doing so requires the creation of entities that are neither Synod agencies (as there would be involvement of commercial developers and investors) nor purely passive, “detached,” investment vehicles. Because there is no mechanism for formation of these *special-purpose entities* at present, even if there is a very good business and ministry case for such an effort, the BOD has no option to allow it to proceed. *Solution:* The proposal, in the aforementioned taxonomy, allows a category of *special-purpose entity*, presently limited to a narrow scope of initial possibilities, instances of which must be approved by the Synod BOD.

The most important feature of the proposal is the development of a taxonomy of “instrumental entities” (defined below) that may be established, acquired, or entered into by corporate Synod and agencies of the Synod, and a definite set of regulations applicable to each. These may be outlined as follows (compare proposed Bylaw 1.5.1 below):

1. *Agencies of the Synod (existing category):* These are “instrumentalities..., whether or not separately incorporated, which the Synod in convention or its Board of Directors has caused or authorized to be formed to further the Synod’s Objectives (Const. Art. III)” (Bylaw 1.2.1 [a]). Every corporation formed by corporate Synod or an agency of the Synod is expected to be authorized by the BOD or convention (1981 Res. 5-09) and therefore to be,

itself, an agency, meeting the requirements of Bylaw section 1.5. Corporate instrumentalities formed to further the Synod's Objectives will remain agencies. For agencies *other* than those named in Bylaw 1.2.1 (a)(1) (the "Bylaw-Mandated Agencies", such as boards, commissions, councils, seminaries, universities, colleges, and districts), the BOD will have more flexibility to allow waiver or modification of Bylaw section 1.5 requirements due to legal or business needs.

- a. *Governed Agencies (all agencies are presently in this category):* Among many other requirements for agencies are strictures on board membership (Bylaws 1.5.1.1–2) and board member removal (Bylaw 1.5.7.1) which have the effect of ensuring relative independence of agency boards. In most cases, these requirements serve well—and in all but the following cases, they will continue to apply.
 - b. *Managed Agencies (a new category for agencies that do not require the level of independence specified for governed agencies):* Corporate Synod has, especially internationally, subagencies that simply manage property and assets (generally related to international schools and international mission) under direction of corporate Synod. These do not need independent directors and would best be managed simply by a board consisting of designated employees or other designated directors, whom the designating board can replace at will. Present bylaws do not allow for this arrangement. The proposal allows for such "managed" agencies, where authorized by the BOD.
2. *Non-Agency Instrumental Entities (newly acknowledged / defined / specially regulated):*
- a. *Special-Purpose Entities:* Bylaws at present (and 1981 Res. 5-09) do not contemplate a corporate body manifesting a business partnership of a Synod agency with non-Synod partners. This is a new area but one of some importance:
 - i. In the past triennium, this has caused issues for at least one seminary as it contemplated a property development proposal as part of its master plan.
 - ii. LCEF and the Pacific Southwest District have also identified and are hoping in the coming triennium to pursue a number of property redevelopment projects involving external partnerships, in which "excess" property of Synod would be commercially developed while retaining a "ministry footprint." These projects are viewed as unique opportunities to maintain a "ministry foothold" in an area where repurchase at some future date would be prohibitively expensive, or where the ministry opportunity is tied to the development contemplated. The district or other property contributor would become a member of a corporation or corporations holding an interest in the property under development.
 - iii. A university has expressed an interest in developing a holding corporation to facilitate student-run businesses or other entrepreneurial or service ventures not directly part of the mission of the university. This sort of corporate structure would likely be a part of such a plan.

- b. *Passive Investment Entities:* A number of these entities, involving a Synod agency as passive investor and an operating or general partner who managed the investment, already exist, although the Bylaws and 1981 Res. 5-09 do not provide for corporations (other than national inter-Lutheran entities, Bylaw 1.3.8) having as members Synod agencies and non-Synod entities. The creation of this category of acknowledged entities will allow these to be utilized and created under appropriate oversight by the BOD.

It is important to understand that neither the passive investment entities nor the special-purpose entities are allowed to perform the functions of an agency (that is, fulfilling the objectives of the Synod) themselves. They are not doing ministry or calling church workers. The property they hold is not the property of the Synod (though some of it may once have been, and though Synod or its agency may hold an ownership interest in the entity). These are not an "alternative" to agencies for activities that should have the strict governance requirements of agencies. They are an acknowledgement and fitting regulation of activities that are helpful to the Synod but that do not fit properly within the agency model.

The BOD proposes the following as a serviceable, unified but differentiated, model for dealing with the needs of corporate Synod and its agencies for additional corporations (and for the orderly and proper regulation of those that now exist). (The board notes compatible proposals by the Commission on Handbook, to revise the conflict-of-interest language and to revise committee requirements, both also to be found in Bylaw section 1.5; these changes do not conflict with that proposal, but to avoid excessive complexity, no attempt has been made here to account for potential numbering changes resulting from adoption of those proposals.) It fills many acknowledged gaps and allows both the assurances and the flexibility Synod needs today, and will need in years to come, to manage on behalf of its member congregations the large array of corporate entities necessary to fulfill, and to assist in fulfilling, its many objectives.

Therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 1.2.1 be amended to adjust the definition of *agency* to distinguish from other instrumental entity types, to harmonize language with that of other sections, to account for the formation of Concordia Risk Solutions (the assets of which are reserved to meet claims of the insureds), and to clarify that the *property of the Synod* definition covers only the property of corporate Synod and Synod agencies, as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

1.2 Definition of Terms

- 1.2.1 The following definitions are for use in understanding the terms as used in the Bylaws of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod:

(a) **Agency:** An instrumentality ~~other than a congregation or~~ corporate Synod or a Special Purpose or Passive Investment Entity (Bylaw 1.5.1), whether or not separately incorporated, which the Synod in convention or its Board of Directors has caused or authorized to be formed to further the Synod's Objectives (Constitution Art. III).

(1) Agencies include each board, commission, council, seminary, university, college, district, Concordia Plan Services, and each synodwide corporate entity (the "Bylaw-Mandated Agencies").

(2) The term “agency of the Synod” does not describe or imply the existence of principal and agency arrangements as defined under civil law.

(3) Member congregations of the Synod, which are self-governing, are not agencies of the Synod (Const. Art. VII).

...

(e) **Concordia Plans:** The Concordia Plans, while operating under the supervision of the Synod Board of Directors, are trust ~~agencies—entities~~ whose assets are not the property of corporate Synod.

...

(r) **Property of the Synod:** All assets, real or personal, tangible or intangible, whether situated in the United States or elsewhere, titled or held in the name of corporate Synod, its nominee, or an agency of the Synod. “Property of the Synod” does not include any assets held by member congregations, the Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod, or by an agency of the Synod in a fiduciary capacity or as an insurer (including, for purposes of example, the funds managed for the Concordia Plans by Concordia Plan Services, the funds held by Concordia Risk Solutions, and certain funds held by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Foundation, and funds held on behalf of an investor or beneficiary).

The assets of a Special Purpose or Investment Entity (see Bylaw 1.5.1) are not property of the Synod as herein defined. An equity or ownership interest in such an entity that is held by corporate Synod or an agency of the Synod except in a capacity excluded above, however, is property of the Synod as that term is defined in, and to the extent and for the purposes established in, these Bylaws.

and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw section 1.5 be amended, to distinguish different types of instrumental entities, to allow for creation of investment and special purpose entities as described, to integrate and update requirements for corporate documents and governance of instrumental entities, and to allow the Board of Directors to permit certain waivers and modifications, as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

1.5 Regulations for Corporate Synod ~~and~~ Agencies of the Synod, and Other Instrumental Entities

A. General Entity Types, Formation, and Regulation

1.5.1 This section provides regulations for the governance of corporate Synod and for the formation and governance of agencies of the Synod (whether or not incorporated) and other types of Instrumental Entities.

1.5.1.1 An Instrumental Entity is any corporation, limited liability company, partnership, association, or any other form of entity established, acquired, or entered into by corporate Synod and/or an agency or agencies of the Synod (“Participants”). Trusts are not Instrumental Entities.

Corporate Synod and agencies of the Synod may form and use Instrumental Entities of the following types, each subject to regulation as indicated:

(a) A Bylaw-mandated Agency, one of the agencies included by name or class in Bylaw 1.2.1 (a)(1), is subject to regulations in subsection B without the possibility of modification or waiver by the Synod Board of Directors.

(b) Agencies other than those mandated by the Bylaws may be of two types:

(1) A Governed Subagency has board members that are independent (with respect to Bylaws 1.5.2.3.2–3) of its Participant(s) and of other agencies of the Synod. A Governed

Agency is, except as it is granted a modification or waiver by the Synod Board of Directors, subject to regulations in subsection B.

(2) A Managed Subagency is an agency specifically designated as such by the Board of Directors of the Synod. A Managed Subagency has board members that need not be independent of its Participant(s) and other agencies of the Synod. A Managed Subagency is, except as it is granted a modification or waiver by the Synod Board of Directors, subject to regulations in subsection B with the following modifications:

- The board of a Managed Subagency may include (ctr. Bylaw 1.5.2.3.2) board members and/or employees from its Participant(s). These individuals may serve on the Managed Subagency’s board either by virtue of their position (serving *ex officio*) or as designated by the board(s) of the Participant(s), whether directly or through delegated authority.
- Individuals serving on the Managed Subagency’s board in this capacity are not subject to the usual limitations on holding multiple offices, as described in Bylaw 1.5.2.3.3.
- Any such board member may (ctr. Bylaw 1.5.2.10) be removed from office at any time with or without cause, solely at the discretion of the designating board. This removal authority may be exercised directly by the designating board or by delegation of its authority.

(c) A Special Purpose Entity (SPE) is an Instrumental Entity established, acquired, or entered into by corporate Synod and/or its agencies to carry out business functions that support, but do not themselves engage in, the activities outlined in Constitution Article III. An SPE may be formed only for one of the specific purposes permitted under subsection C. An SPE is not an agency of the Synod and is subject to the requirements of subsection C only.

(d) A Passive Investment Entity (PIE) is an Instrumental Entity established, acquired, or entered into by corporate Synod and/or its agencies strictly as passive investors and not to operate an active business or ministry. A PIE is not an agency of the Synod and is subject to the requirements of subsection D only.

1.5.1.2 Before Corporate Synod and/or any agencies of the Synod seek to establish, acquire, or enter into any Instrumental Entity other than a Passive Investment Entity, they must first obtain approval from the Synod’s Board of Directors.

(a) The Synod’s Board of Directors will decide if, and in which of the above Bylaw 1.5.1.1 categories, an Instrumental Entity may be established, acquired, or entered into. The Board shall develop policies and procedures for applications for such authorization.

(b) Each application shall include, at a minimum, the following:

- proposed Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws (or other governing documents) of the entity;
- the date when such entity is proposed to begin to function;
- an explanation of how the entity will aid in carrying out the responsibilities of the Participant(s); and
- draft language for the bylaws of the Participant(s) requiring the minutes and financial records of any subordinate agency or entity to be monitored regularly by the board(s) of the Participant(s).

(c) The board’s approval of an application to form and/or the Board’s classification of an Instrumental Entity must be documented in open meeting minutes.

1.5.1.2.1 Participant(s) establishing, acquiring, or entering into a Passive Investment Entity must report such event to the Board of Directors as required in Bylaw 1.5.4.1.

1.5.1.3 The Board of Directors will maintain a register of all agencies and other Instrumental Entities of the Synod, including their categorization and any granted modifications or waivers, and provide it to any member congregation upon request.

1.5.1.4 The regulations of Bylaw section 1.5 supersede all prior resolutions governing the formation or utilization of corporations by corporate Synod and agencies of Synod.

1.5.1.5 The requirements of this section shall apply to all preexisting Instrumental Entities.

(a) Participant(s) must submit to the Board of Directors of the Synod for categorization and approval any existing Instrumental Entity that has not (i) been approved by the convention or Board of Directors of the Synod and Commission on Constitutional Matters or that (ii) does not meet these requirements (potentially with modifications or waivers already granted). Thereafter, both the entity's governing documents and its categorization must be submitted to and approved by the Commission on Constitutional Matters in accordance with these Bylaws.

(b) Participant(s) in any preexisting Instrumental Entity requiring authorization, re-classification, or governing document review and approval shall have until a date four weeks prior to the report submission deadline for the 70th regular Synod convention to complete the above. Any not having completed the above by that date shall be reported by the Board of Directors to the convention with a recommendation for action.

(c) This bylaw is not to be construed to require categorization or approval of preexisting Passive Investment Entities, which are excluded from the approval process by Bylaw 1.5.1.2. These are, however, to be reported as required by Bylaw 1.5.4.1.

B. Regulations for Corporate Synod and Agencies of the Synod

1.5.2 The regulations of this subsection apply to corporate Synod and to agencies of the Synod.

1.5.2.1 Each Synod agency, along with every individual involved in its governance and management, is accountable to the Synod for operating within the specific responsibilities assigned to them or for which they have been otherwise authorized by the Synod, and for advancing the Synod's objectives.

1.5.2.2 Except for the Bylaw-mandated Agencies or as otherwise prohibited herein, the Board of Directors, as legal representative and custodian of the property of the Synod, may waive or modify the provisions of this subsection for individual agencies or classes of agencies. To do so, the Board must:

(a) obtain advice of legal counsel and the Commission on Constitutional Matters regarding the consequences of the provision and any proposed waiver or modification; and

(b) decide, in its sole discretion, that creating or using the agency is important to furthering the Synod's constitutional objectives; and

(c) decide, in its sole discretion, that the Synod's purposes and interests would be frustrated or unacceptably impaired apart from granting of the waiver or modification; and

(d) approve the waiver or modification by a two-thirds vote, record the decision in open minutes, and file it with the Commission on Constitutional Matters.

Board and Commission Membership

1.5.2.3 The board membership of corporate Synod and Synod agencies, and commission membership, shall be regulated as follows:

1.5.42.3.1 Board and commission members of all agencies shall be members of member congregations of the Synod. The Board of

Directors cannot waive this requirement, but may, in only the following cases, modify it to the extent indicated:

(a) for foreign mission agencies established at the request of the Board for International Mission and for foreign subagencies of agencies of the Synod, the Board of Directors may, to the extent legally required, permit a minority of the board members to be, instead of members of member congregations of the Synod, members of congregations or missions in altar and pulpit fellowship with the Synod.

1.5.42.3.2 Unless otherwise specified or permitted by the Bylaws, chief executives and executive directors, faculty, staff, and all other employees on either the national or district level shall not be members of the board of the agency under which they serve, nor shall any such executives or staff be members of the board of any other agency of the Synod. For purposes of this bylaw only, staff shall mean:

(a) Employees, other than faculty, rostered as ministers of religion—ordained or ministers of religion—commissioned, whether or not serving in such capacity; or

(b) Employees of corporate Synod or an agency of Synod, other than faculty, who are responsible for the development and/or implementation of policies, goals, and programs; or

(c) Employees of corporate Synod or an agency of the Synod who assist chief executives, executive directors and faculty in their work and are supervised by these individuals directly or through a line of supervision.

1.5.42.3.3 No one, ~~either in the Synod or a district, or between the Synod and a district,~~ shall hold more than one elective office; or hold more than two offices, although one or both be appointive; or ever hold two offices of which one is directly responsible for the work done by the other.

(a) For purposes of this bylaw, office includes service as an officer or board or commission member with corporate Synod or any agency of the Synod (Bylaw 1.2.1 [a]) other than a Managed Subagency as described in Bylaw 1.5.1 (b).

(~~a~~b) An office shall be regarded as elective only if it is an office filled through election by a national or a district convention, even though a vacancy in such an office may be filled by appointment.

(~~b~~c) Doubtful cases shall be decided by the President of the Synod.

Governing Documents

1.5.42.4 Notwithstanding anything in the Bylaws to the contrary, the Articles of Incorporation or other governing documents of each agency shall, in the most fundamental document possible, provide:

(a) That all provisions of its Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws, as well as its governance and operation, are subject to the provisions of the Constitution, the Bylaws, and the resolutions of the Synod in convention, as may hereafter be adopted or amended from time to time, and that in the event of any conflict or inconsistency between the agency's governing documents and those of the Synod, the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod shall govern; and

(b) That in the event of dissolution other than by direction from the Synod in convention, the assets of such agency, subject to its liabilities, shall be transferred, consistent with applicable state and federal laws, as follows:

(1) In the case of a synodwide corporate entity, district, university, college, or seminary, to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as may be more specifically described elsewhere in these Bylaws;

(2) In the case of a corporation formed by an agency (as defined in these Bylaws), to the agency that formed the dissolving corporation, or if such forming agency is not then in existence, to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod itself.

(c) That, if the agency has members, membership shall not be granted except to corporate Synod and/or to an agency or agencies of the Synod, except that a district has as its corporate members the member congregations assigned to it and a district church extension fund has as its corporate member(s): (i) its respective district; or (ii) the members of the board of directors and/or elected officers of its district; or (iii) the member congregations of its district.

(d) That its assets are property of the Synod as that term is defined in, and to the extent and for the purposes established in, the Bylaws of Synod, as the same may be changed from time to time.

(e) That the minutes of its board of directors, as well as quarterly and audited financials, shall be promptly furnished to the board of directors of its Participant(s).

(f) That any amendment or restatement of its Articles of Incorporation or Bylaws requires sixty days advance notice to any Participant(s) and to the Board of Directors of the Synod.

(g) That any amendment or restatement of its Articles of Incorporation or Bylaws is subject to the prior, written approval of the Commission on Constitutional Matters.

(h) That any amendment or restatement of its Articles of Incorporation or Bylaws without satisfaction of (f) and (g) is null and void and of no effect.

~~An agency may submit any concerns related to the inclusion of subsections (a) or (b) in its governing documents to the Board of Directors of the Synod, and the Board of Directors may determine to permit the removal or modification of these provisions for an affected agency.~~

The phrase "in the most fundamental document possible" means and refers to the foundational legal document that establishes the existence of the entity. If, for some reason, the Articles of Formation cannot include the provision (due to legal or practical constraints), then the next most authoritative document—such as the Bylaws—should be used.

Organization

1.5.2.5 The organization of corporate Synod and each agency of the Synod shall be regulated as follows:

~~1.5.32.5.1~~ Every agency—Bylaw-mandated Agency of the Synod (Bylaw 1.5.1 [a]) shall meet at least quarterly unless otherwise stipulated in the Bylaws. Exceptions require the approval at least annually of the President of the Synod. All such agencies shall announce their upcoming regular meetings.

1.5.2.5.2 Unless otherwise specified in the Bylaws, each agency is free to select a manner of meeting, consistent with Board of Directors policy, that best enhances its ability to accomplish its mission, taking into consideration fostering the open exchange of ideas, availability of technology to all members, stewardship of resources, perception of fairness, controversial nature of agenda items, and whether secret ballots might be used.

~~1.5.342.5.3 At~~ Unless otherwise stipulated in these Bylaws, at the initial meeting after members take office under new terms filled by regular election or appointment, all mission boards, commissions, and governing boards shall organize themselves as to chair, vice-chair, secretary, and other standing committees and positions as necessary or mandated by these Bylaws and shall conduct business in accordance with accepted parliamentary rules.

~~1.5.322.5.4~~ All mission boards, commissions, and governing boards may make use of executive committees to act in times of emergency between plenary meetings, to act on delegated assignments, and to act as specified elsewhere in these Bylaws.

(a) Executive committees may not perform acts specifically required by statute or by legislation or the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod to be performed by the agency, nor

~~may they overturn actions of the agency or alter or repeal actions of the board of the agency.~~

(b) All executive committee actions shall be reported to the next plenary sessions of the agency.

~~1.5.332.5.5~~ All mission boards, commissions, and governing boards may also delegate a specific assignment for a limited time to a committee composed of its own members.

~~1.5.342.5.6~~ All mission boards, commissions, and governing boards may appoint standing committees of specialists to provide professional or technical assistance to the board or commission and may delegate certain responsibilities to such committees while retaining supervision. Standing committees may be made up of or include non-board or commission members. The creation of standing committees including non-board or commission members shall be reported to the President and the Board of Directors of the Synod.

Minutes and Financial Books and Records

1.5.2.6 The minutes and financial records of corporate Synod and Synod agencies shall be regulated as follows:

~~1.5.352.6.1~~ All agencies of the Synod shall develop policies and procedures for making available official minutes of their meetings. All mission boards and commissions shall develop policies and procedures to make available upon request and at a reasonable price a verbatim copy of the official minutes of their meetings except for executive sessions. Any member of the Synod may request a copy of any official minutes of mission boards or commissions by submitting a written or electronic (via email) request to the Secretary of the Synod, who shall provide such minutes according to the policy of the Board of Directors.

Full Financial Disclosure

1.5.42.6.2 The Synod and each of its agencies shall fully disclose their financial books and records to any member congregation of the Synod.

(a) Full disclosure includes all information (including, but not limited to, information required to be made available under state law) recorded in any fashion, except the following:

(1) Information that would violate the expected confidentiality of donors.

(2) Personnel files or other information that would violate the expected confidentiality of employees.

(3) Information that relates to in-process negotiations of financial matters.

(4) Information the disclosure of which would breach a legal obligation of the Synod or its agencies or affect pending litigation or claims against the Synod or its agencies.

(5) Information that is preliminary in nature or otherwise has not been finalized in its form and content.

(b) Salaries of elected officers of the Synod, as identified in Constitution Art. X A, shall be published annually in an official periodical.

(c) The accounting department of the Synod shall publish annually in an official periodical an invitation to request full, audited financial statements and summary operating budgets of the Synod or its agencies.

(d) The Synod and its agencies shall share, upon request, the quarterly financial statements as reported to the respective governing boards.

(e) All information produced for normal publication or distribution shall be provided free of charge.

(f) Requests for detailed financial information or the inspection of financial records shall be made in writing to the respective corporate boards by a member congregation and shall state the records desired and the time period to be covered.

(1) All responses to requests for information involving research or compilation shall be billed to the member on the basis of actual costs.

(2) Any inspection of financial records shall be done by (a) member(s) of the congregation or its stated authorized agent at a mutually agreeable time and place.

(3) The board may decline to provide the information requested if the board can demonstrate by clear and convincing evidence that the member congregation's request is with the specific intent to cause harm to the Synod or one of its agencies or with the sole intent of deliberately and significantly disrupting the operations and affairs of the Synod or one of its agencies.

(4) Any declination to provide information or decision to limit inspection shall be explained in writing.

(5) Challenges to any board decisions declining to provide information or to limit inspection may be reviewed under the Synod's dispute resolution process.

1.5.2.6.3 The board of each Bylaw-Mandated Agency must regularly review the minutes (if applicable) and financial reports of its Instrumental Entities and, at least bi-annually, report to the Board of Directors of the Synod, in a form set by its policies, their existence and their performance in achieving their assigned objectives.

Agency Operations

1.5.2.7 The operations of corporate Synod and of each agency of the Synod shall be regulated as follows:

1.5.2.7.1 Every agency shall operate under the general human resources policies of the Synod as provided by the Board of Directors of the Synod, in accordance with Bylaw 3.3.4.3. Specific policies under these general policies may be adopted by each agency's governing board in order to accommodate the unique character of its operations.

1.5.2.7.2 All agencies shall develop policies regarding their relations with staffs in accordance with general human resources policies provided by the Board of Directors of the Synod.

1.5.2.7.3 When calling ordained or commissioned ministers, agencies shall seek the counsel of the district president who would, by virtue of the call, assume ecclesiastical supervision of the minister (Bylaw section 2.12). If the call is such that the district president to assume ecclesiastical supervision is not known, the counsel of the president of the district within which the agency is located or with which it is associated shall be sought.

Agency Conflict Resolution

1.5.2.8 Dissent to decisions of, and administrative and programmatic conflicts between, corporate Synod and Synod agencies shall be regulated as follows:

1.5.2.8.1 Dissent to decisions made by an agency shall ordinarily be expressed within the structure of that agency.

1.5.2.8.2 Administrative and programmatic conflicts between agencies of corporate Synod, between such agencies and the synodwide corporate entities, and between synodwide corporate entities shall be dealt with by the parties concerned in a Christian manner with the assistance of the President of the Synod.

Ethics and Conflicts of Interest

1.5.2.9 Ethical and conflict-of-interest standards for corporate Synod and Synod agencies shall be regulated as follows:

1.5.2.9.1 Every board or commission member, officer, and all staff of corporate Synod and every agency of the Synod shall be sensitive in their activities to taking or giving offense, giving the appearance of impropriety, causing confusion in the Synod, or creating potential liability.

Disclosure of Conflicts of Interest

1.5.2.9.2 Every board or commission member, officer, and all staff of corporate Synod and every agency of the Synod shall avoid conflicts of interest as described in this bylaw.

(a) Every agency shall implement the synodwide conflict-of-interest policy, and that policy shall be applicable to them and all staff operating under them. This policy shall include the following provisions:

(1) Every board or commission member shall disclose to the chairman of the agency and all staff shall disclose to the chief executive or executive director of the agency any potential conflicts of interest. Each chairman or chief executive or executive director shall disclose personal potential conflicts of interest to the appropriate board or commission.

(2) Such disclosures shall include board membership on, a substantial interest in, or employment of the individual or a relative by any organization doing business with corporate Synod or any of the agencies of the Synod.

(3) Every board or commission member, officer, and all staff of corporate Synod and every agency of the Synod who receives honoraria or payments for any sales or services rendered to corporate Synod or any of the agencies of the Synod shall disclose such information.

(4) All such disclosures shall be reported to the respective board or commission to determine by a vote of its remaining impartial members whether an inappropriate interest exists, and such vote shall be recorded in its official minutes. In the case of officers, all such disclosures shall be reported to the President of the Synod to determine whether an inappropriate interest exists.

(b) Responsibilities shall be carried out in a manner reflecting the highest degree of integrity and honesty consistent with the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod, the policies of corporate Synod and the agencies of the Synod, and civil laws.

(1) Activities shall not be entered into which may be detrimental to the interests of the Synod. Any inappropriate activity shall cease or the position will be vacated.

(2) Information acquired in the course of carrying out duties of the Synod shall not knowingly be used in any way that would be detrimental to the welfare of the Synod.

(3) No one shall vote on any transaction in which the individual might receive a direct or indirect financial gain.

(4) The Board of Directors shall establish policy regarding the acceptance of gifts, entertainment, or favors from any individual or outside concern which does or is seeking to do business with corporate Synod or the agencies of the Synod.

(c) Individuals, prior to accepting elected, appointed, or staff positions, shall initially and annually thereafter sign statements stating that they have received, understand, and agree to abide by this bylaw and the Synod's conflict of interest policy.

Removal of Individual Members from Board or Commission Membership

1.5.2.10 Individual members of the Synod's commissions and the boards of its agencies, as well as the individual members of its Board of Directors, shall discharge the duties of their offices in good faith. The following are considered cause for removal pursuant to this bylaw:

(1) Incapacity

(2) Breach of fiduciary responsibilities to the Synod or agency

(3) Neglect or refusal to perform duties of office

(4) No longer satisfying any of the qualifications for directors set forth in the articles of incorporation or bylaws of the entity as in effect at the beginning of the member's term

- (5) Conviction of a felony
- (6) Failure to disclose conflicts of interest to the Synod or agency
- (7) Conduct evidencing a scandalous life
- (8) Advocacy of false doctrine (Constitution Art. II)
- (9) Failure to honor and uphold the doctrinal position of the Synod
- (10) Accumulation of three unexcused absences within any term of office

1.5.7.2.10.1 Unless otherwise specified in these Bylaws, the procedure for removal of a member of a commission, agency board, or the LCMS Board of Directors, except for those persons subject to Bylaw sections 2.15 and 2.16, shall be as follows:

- (a) Action for removal shall require written notice to each member of the relevant commission, agency board, or LCMS Board of Directors at least 30 days prior to a special meeting of the commission, agency board, or LCMS Board of Directors called for that purpose. A copy of such notice shall be sent to the President and the Secretary of the Synod and to the ecclesiastical supervisor, if applicable.
- (b) The special meeting shall be held no later than 60 days after the provision of the written notice, unless extended by the mutual agreement of the parties.
- (c) Removal shall be effected by
 - (1) recommendation of such to the Synod's Board of Directors by a vote in favor of removal by at least three-fourths of all current members (excluding the person whose membership is in question) of the applicable commission, agency board, or LCMS Board of Directors; and
 - (2) by a vote in favor of the recommendation of removal by at least three-fourths of all current members (excluding the person whose membership is in question) of the Board of Directors of the Synod.
- (d) Removal may be appealed by a member who has been removed from a commission, agency board, or the LCMS Board of Directors through the use of the Synod's dispute resolution process as provided in Bylaw section 1.10.
- (e) From the time that written notice is given until the commission, agency board, or the LCMS Board of Directors takes action with respect to the removal, the member(s) subject to removal may not vote on matters before the commission, agency board, or LCMS Board of Directors.
- (f) If a Concordia University System (CUS) college or university board of regents is presented with a written notice from the CUS Board of Directors, a copy of which shall also have been sent to the President and Secretary of the Synod and to any applicable ecclesiastical supervisor, detailing the basis for cause for removal of a member of the board of regents pursuant to Bylaw 1.5.7.2.10 (2), (8), or (9), the written notice shall be handled as follows:
 - (1) The board of regents shall schedule and hold a special meeting as required under Bylaw 1.5.7.2.10.1 (a) and (b) and consider a recommendation for removal under Bylaw 1.5.7.2.10.1 (c) (1).
 - (2) If the board of regents fails to take action or declines to recommend removal under Bylaw 1.5.7.2.10.1 (c) (1) within 90 days of receiving the written notice from the CUS Board of Directors, the CUS Board of Directors may present the written notice to the Praesidium of the Synod.
 - (3) The Praesidium, without participation of the First Vice-President of the Synod, shall make an initial determination as to whether the written notice presents sufficient grounds for removal of a member of a board of regents under Bylaw 1.5.7.2.10 (2), (8), or (9).
 - (4) If the Praesidium determines, by majority vote, that the written notice presents sufficient grounds for removal, a three-

person panel shall be appointed, consisting of the First Vice-President of Synod, a member of the Council of Presidents appointed by the Council of Presidents, and an additional member who is a member of the Council of Presidents who shall be appointed by the First Vice-President and the member of the Council of Presidents who was appointed by the Council of Presidents.

(5) This panel shall consider the written notice and evidence submitted by the CUS Board of Directors and the board of regents member and make a determination as to whether there is sufficient grounds for removal of the board of regents member under Bylaw 1.5.7.2.10 (2), (8), or (9).

(6) If a majority of the panel concludes sufficient grounds exist, it shall make a recommendation to the Synod's Board of Directors. This recommendation shall be considered and acted upon under Bylaw 1.5.7.2.10.1 (c) (2).

(7) If the CUS Board of Directors presents written notice stating cause for removal of more than one member of the board of regents, each written notice shall be handled separately, although if a panel is appointed these can be considered by the same panel.

1.5.7.2.10.2 To the extent that the application of this bylaw is limited by applicable law with respect to the removal of members of a commission, agency board, or the LCMS Board of Directors, the commission, agency board, or LCMS Board of Directors on which the member serves may recommend the removal and attempt to cause the appropriate procedures under applicable law, these Bylaws, and the governing documents of the affected entity to be followed to permit the removal of such commission, agency board, or LCMS Board of Directors member.

Removal of Officers of the Synod or District from Office

1.5.8.2.11 Officers of the Synod and a district shall discharge the duties of office in good faith. The following are considered cause for removal from office of an officer of the Synod or a district pursuant to this Bylaw, but not from membership in the Synod:

- (1) Incapacity
- (2) Breach of fiduciary responsibilities to the Synod or a district
- (3) Neglect or refusal to perform duties of office
- (4) Conviction of a felony

1.5.8.2.11.1 Unless otherwise specified in these Bylaws, the procedure for removal of an officer of the Synod or a district from office shall be as follows:

- (a) Action for removal of an officer of a district other than a district president shall require written notice to each member of that district's board of directors at least 30 days prior to a special meeting of the board called for that purpose. A copy of such notice shall be sent to the President and the Secretary of the Synod and to the ecclesiastical supervisor, if applicable.
- (b) Other than in the prior subsection (a), action for removal of an officer of the Synod other than the President of the Synod shall require written notice to each member of the Synod's Board of Directors at least 30 days prior to a special meeting of the Board called for that purpose. A copy of such notice shall be sent to the President and the Secretary of the Synod and to the ecclesiastical supervisor, if applicable.
- (c) The special meeting provided for herein shall be held no later than 60 days after the provision of the written notice, unless extended by the mutual agreement of the parties.
- (d) Removal from office of an officer of a district, other than a district president, shall be effected by a vote in favor of removal by at least three-fourths of all current members of the district board of directors (excluding the officer in question if a member of the board); and

(e) Removal from office of an officer of the Synod, other than the Synod President, shall be effected by a vote in favor of the recommendation of removal by at least three-fourths of all current members (excluding the officer in question if a member of the board) of the Board of Directors of the Synod.

(f) Removal pursuant to this Bylaw may be appealed by the officer who has been removed from office through the use of the Synod's dispute resolution process as provided in Bylaw section 1.10.

C. Regulations for Special Purpose Entities

1.5.3 A Special Purpose Entity (SPE), as defined in Bylaw 1.5.1 [c] and further below, shall be subject to the following regulations.

(a) An SPE is an Instrumental Entity other than an agency that is established, acquired, or entered into by corporate Synod and/or one or more agencies (hereafter, "Participant[s]") to carry out business functions beyond the unaided capacity of its Participant(s) that support, but do not themselves enter into, the purposes outlined in Constitution Article III. An SPE does not call rostered church workers.

(b) Except as specifically provided in these bylaws or its governing documents, the property of a Special Purpose Entity is not property of the Synod. This provision does not exclude Participant(s) or the Synod from retaining rights of reversion or reentry, including those based on use restriction, in the property of the entity. Nor does it exclude from the property of the Synod, as that term is defined in, and to the extent and for the purposes established in, these Bylaws, any equity or ownership interest that the Participant(s) may hold in the entity in a capacity other than those excluded in Bylaw 1.2.1 (r).

(c) Participant(s) are responsible for the oversight and, to the extent specifically defined in SPE governing documents, supervision of the SPE.

(1) Participant(s) shall regularly and promptly review the minutes and financial statements—unaudited and audited, as presented to SPE boards—of their SPE(s).

(2) A Participant board shall facilitate access upon request by the Board of Directors of the Synod, as provided for in Bylaw 3.3.4.10, to the records of any SPE participated in.

1.5.3.1 Establishment of, acquisition of, or entry into a Special Purpose Entity is subject to applicable policies of, and requires that Participant(s) be authorized by, the Synod Board of Directors. The Board of Directors of the Synod may, at its discretion, approve a Special Purpose Entity for a specific purpose and for a limited duration. The approval shall be set forth in a resolution by request to the Board of Directors in open session.

(a) A request to form, acquire, or enter into a Special Purpose Entity must be submitted to the Board of Directors of the Synod by the Participant(s) under Bylaw subsection 1.5.1, above. In addition to the requirements set forth in Bylaw 1.5.1 above and policies adopted by the Board, the request shall include, at a minimum:

1. A description of the purpose of the entity and its intended support for the Participant(s)' assigned Article III mission and ministry responsibilities.
2. A complete draft of entity governing documents, which shall (except as a waiver is requested of the Synod Board of Directors):
 - provide for oversight of entity activities by the Participant(s);
 - indemnify and limit liability for the Synod and Participant(s) for the activities of the entity;
 - require approval of amendments to reserved rights of Participant(s), of Synod, or of Synod members in

entity governing documents by the Participant(s) and the Synod Board of Directors; and

- state the proposed duration of any specific purpose or project of the entity.
3. A risk management plan, including evidence of insurance.
 4. Information demonstrating the financial stability of the entity.
 5. Identification and characterization of any property of the Synod to be transferred or provided on an initial or ongoing basis to the entity.
 6. Assurance by the Participant(s) that they will exercise proper oversight of the entity, including receiving and review annual independent audited or compiled financial statements for the entity.
 7. Assurance by the Participant(s) that the entity will not engage in activities contrary to the doctrine and practice of the Synod or permit property of the entity to be used for such purposes.
 8. If applicable, the proposed duration of the Special Purpose Entity and criteria for project completion or termination.

(b) The Board of Directors may authorize Special Purpose Entities of the following types:

(1) Real estate development, redevelopment, or holding, provided that the project both includes features that physically accommodate ministry purposes and involves, at least as a consultant, the Lutheran Church Extension Fund.

(2) Other categories specifically identified in the published policies of the Board of Directors.

1.5.3.2 Participant(s) shall immediately report to the Board of Directors of the Synod ("Board") the establishment of, acquisition of, or entry into any Special Purpose Entity (all of which must be approved in advance by the Board), and shall report biannually to the Board, in a form it shall specify, on their continued participation in, and the activities and performance of, Special Purpose Entities.

D. Regulations for Passive Investment Entities

1.5.4 A Passive Investment Entity (PIE), as defined in Bylaw 1.5.1 [d] and further below, shall be subject to the following regulations.

(a) A PIE is an Instrumental Entity other than an agency that is established, acquired, or entered into (as more than a diminutive shareholder, which threshold may be further defined by the Board of Directors in its policies) by corporate Synod and/or one or more agencies (hereafter, "Participant(s)"), not to operate or manage an active business or ministry, and not to solicit donations or raise funds for the Participant, but solely to provide Participant(s) a means of passive investment. It may have an operating general partner or member, other than Participant(s), providing investment management day-to-day.

(b) Included as a PIE is an entity in which the LCMS Foundation, or an agency of the Synod with the guidance of the LCMS Foundation, receives an interest (as more than a diminutive shareholder) by gift, bequest, or devise. Such interest is not to be held beyond a period of time fixed by the Board of Directors of the Synod in its policies.

(c) Except as specifically provided for in these bylaws or its governing documents, the property of a PIE is not property of the Synod. This provision does not exclude Participant(s) or the Synod from retaining, where applicable, rights of reversion or reentry, including those based on use restriction, in the property of the entity. Nor does it exclude from the property of the Synod, as that term is defined in, and to the extent and for the purposes established in, these Bylaws, any equity or ownership interest the

Participant(s) may hold in the entity in a capacity other than those excluded in Bylaw 1.2.1 (r).

(d) Participant(s) are responsible for the oversight and, to the extent specifically defined in PIE governing documents, supervision of the PIE.

(1) Participant(s) shall regularly and promptly review the minutes, if available, and financial statements—unaudited and audited, as presented to PIE boards—of their PIE(s).

(2) Participant board(s) shall facilitate access, at the same level possible to them, upon request by the Board of Directors of the Synod, as provided for in Bylaw 3.3.4.10, to the records of any PIE participated in by the Participant(s) collectively at a majority level.

1.5.4.1 Participant(s) shall report to the Board of Directors of the Synod (“Board”) the establishment of, acquisition of, or entry into any Passive Investment Entity, and shall report on a biannual basis to the Board, in a form it shall specify, on their continued participation in, and the activities and performance of, Passive Investment Entities.

(a) Establishment, acquisition, or entry into a Passive Investment Entity in which Participant(s) have majority ownership shall be reported no less than fourteen (14) days prior to the Board of Directors. Excluded from this requirement and subject to (b) instead are PIEs as described in Bylaw 1.5.4 (b) and PIEs in which Participant funds invested are excluded from the definition of property of the Synod in Bylaw 1.2.1 (r).

(b) Establishment, acquisition, or entry into any other Passive Investment Entity shall be reported in the next biannual report.

1.5.4.2 Specifically reserved to the Board of Directors of the Synod is the right to regulate by its policies, as it sees the need arise, the establishment of, acquisition of, or entry into Passive Investment Entities, excepting those in which Participant funds invested are excluded from the definition of property of the Synod in Bylaw 1.2.1 (r).

and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw section 3.3.4.7 be amended as follows:

Board of Directors

...

3.3.4.7 The Board of Directors shall serve as the custodian of all the property of the Synod as defined in Bylaw 1.2.1 (r). Except as otherwise provided in these Bylaws, it shall have the authority and responsibility with respect to the property of the Synod as is generally vested in and imposed upon a board of directors of a corporation.

(a) It shall, however, delegate to district boards of directors the authority to buy, sell, and encumber real and personal property in the ordinary course of performing the functions which the district carries on for the Synod in accord with general policies (which shall be applicable to all districts) established from time to time by itself or the Synod in convention.

(b) It may, however, delegate to any agency of the Synod powers and duties with respect to property of the Synod for which such agency of the Synod has direct supervisory responsibility.

(c) Such delegation shall be in writing and shall be subject to change at any time by the Synod’s Board of Directors provided that reasonable deliberations, as determined by the Board of Directors, take place with such agency prior to the change.

(d) Regarding the Synod’s colleges, universities, and seminaries, the board shall approve capital projects in relation to campus property management agreements and institutional master plans, and shall establish and monitor criteria for determining institutional viability, fiscal and otherwise.

(e) An agency may submit any question related to the status of assets as property of the Synod to the Board of Directors of the Synod, which shall determine whether such assets are property of the Synod.

and be it finally

Resolved, That Bylaw section 3.6.1.1 be amended, to allow the Board of Directors not only to create new synodwide corporate entities but also to assign new responsibilities to those existing, as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

3.6 Synodwide Corporate Entities

General Principles

...

3.6.1.1 Formation of a synodwide corporate entity, or assignment of a new area of responsibility to an existing one, shall require the approval of the Synod in convention or the Board of Directors of the Synod.

(a) At least six months prior to such approval an announcement thereof shall be given in an official publication of the Synod together with a detailed explanation of the problems or factors which make the formation of the proposed synodwide corporate entity or assignment of new responsibility advisable or necessary.

(b) The announcement shall include an invitation for members of the Synod to submit comments thereon to the Board of Directors of the Synod.

(c) If the Board of Directors forms a new entity or assigns a new area of responsibility, it shall report its action to the Synod promptly and in a special report to the next Synod convention and, if it is in its judgment in the best interest of the Synod, it shall propose a Bylaw amendment reflecting the new entity or assignment to the subsequent convention of the Synod.

Board of Directors, Pacific Southwest District; LCMS Board of Directors; Board of Directors, Lutheran Church Extension Fund; Board of Trustees/Directors, Concordia Plans / Concordia Plan Services; Board of Trustees, LCMS Foundation

Ov. 9-07

To Focus on Things of God

Preamble

“The Synod’s Constitution says our objective is to ‘*strengthen congregations and their members in giving bold witness by word and deed to the love and work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and extend that Gospel witness into all the world.*’ This is as biblical and clear as the Word and work of Jesus, and the word and works of His apostles in Acts 4 and 5.” (President’s Report, Part 3 [2023 TB, 352]). Constitution Article III contains the full list of objectives of the Synod.

To support these objectives, “the Synod in convention is empowered to and has formed corporate entities which shall have legal powers ... to purchase, hold, administer, and sell property of every description in the interest of the Synod” (Const. Art. IV). Such entities, and our temporal property, exist in service to the objectives of the Synod, *in the interest of the Synod*; they are not an end unto themselves.

The Synod is blessed with entities such as the Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) and Concordia Plan Services (CPS), that help us use temporal goods in service to the Church. These entities are limited in number, have a specifically defined purpose—loans to churches and church workers and benefits for church workers—

and are carefully managed and overseen to ensure security and legal compliance.

But, when the Church strays too far into the left-hand kingdom through unrelated business ventures, it goes outside its vocation and may be assuming undue risk.

The Alberta-British Columbia District of Lutheran Church—Canada, unrelated to LCEF, was forced into bankruptcy due to its local church extension fund's failed investment in an ambitious real estate development project, with serious repercussions across the entire church body. Concordia University, Portland (CUP) entered into a significant outsourcing contract with HotChalk, a marketing and enrollment company, with negative financial impact on CUP, and ultimately, a lengthy lawsuit after its closure.

Some within the Synod believe that the Synod and its agencies (e.g., colleges and seminaries) can benefit by creating new types of legal entities, such as holding companies, and are considering adding complex new bylaws, policies, and procedures to allow Synod agencies to create multiple new types of entities (e.g., to engage in real estate development activities). Yet, experience teaches that the more numerous and complex the entities, the greater the difficulty to oversee them, and thus, the greater the risk.

Some have even proposed allowing property of our colleges and seminaries—which is currently property of the Synod—to be transferred to new entities, with varying levels of control and accountability, with the result that such property would no longer be property of the Synod.

Proposals also include placing the Synod Board of Directors (BOD) as the authorizer and primary overseer of new entities, with the responsibility to perform detailed legal and policy reviews. This would impose significant new powers and duties on the BOD, requiring additional time, effort, and potential expense for outside attorneys' bills and other professional fees.

WHEREAS, The foregoing matters suggest that major changes to the Synod's Bylaws to allow creation of potentially numerous new legal entities may be ill-advised; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod recommit itself and its agencies to their existing defined roles, focusing on the things of God without distraction for secular business ventures; and be it further

Resolved, That where the Synod or its agencies no longer need property or assets, those assets be appropriately sold or disposed of, with the proceeds used for the furtherance of their original intended purpose and the work of the church at large, rather than as the object of speculation, usury, real estate development, or other projects that distract time and attention from the core objectives of the Synod and its agencies; and be it further

Resolved, That if there is a legitimate need for any new entity to be formed, that any such entity be carefully, deliberately, and separately established, in a manner that does not risk or alienate the property of the Synod that was funded by God's grace through the gifts of individuals and congregations over generations; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks for the many temporal blessings God has bestowed upon us, as well as for those individuals and entities such as LCEF and CPS that have faithfully managed the same and pray for wisdom in the continued administration thereof.

St. Paul
Brookfield, IL

Ov. 9-08

To Amend Bylaws Exclusive to Lutheran Church Extension Fund to Clarify That It May Provide Real Estate Evaluation and Redevelopment Services in Support of Synod Mission and Ministry

Rationale

Most congregations and ministries within the Synod are owners of real estate. Many of these ministries need assistance evaluating their property so they can steward their assets wisely. In some cases, they may not have need for some or all of their real estate. In many cases, sale of the real estate is the best option to raise funds for future operations or to wind up affairs in an orderly way. In other cases, ministries want to keep some of the real estate to continue operations and divest of other portions. Such divestiture may entail a sale or lease of the property to either raise funds for continued operations, maintain ministry activity in the divested property, or both. Redevelopment of the real estate may occur with retained or divested property.

In most cases, ministries do not possess expertise in the evaluation, redevelopment, or re-purposing of real estate. Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) has decades of experience in assisting ministries in evaluating, acquiring, developing, and selling real estate through its church extension activities. LCEF has expanded this expertise in the last few years by hiring a team of individuals with extensive real estate consulting and redevelopment experience. LCEF can provide expanded real estate services that are of great value to the ministries of the Synod.

The requested bylaw changes are exclusive to LCEF and are necessary to clarify that it is within LCEF's purposes to provide such real estate services to ministries within the Synod.

Therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.6.4 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

The Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod

3.6.4 The Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod, as established on June 15, 1978, as a corporate entity under the laws of the State of Missouri, is operated by its members and Board of Directors, in accordance with its Articles of Incorporation and corporate Bylaws, to ~~further the objectives and duties of the church extension fund by providing~~ provide financial, real estate, and other related resources and related services for ministry, witness, and outreach within the Synod and, as approved by the Synod Board of Directors, beyond the Synod: (1) to and within partner churches with which the Synod is in altar and pulpit fellowship; or (2) upon the recommendation of the President of Synod, to Lutheran entities formed and operating outside of the United States that assist in fulfilling the Synod's ministry and mission objectives in foreign countries.

and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.6.4.4.1 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

3.6.4.4.1 The assets of the Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod shall be used exclusively to provide financing and services for the acquisition of sites, for the construction of facilities, for the purchase of buildings and equipment, for operating expenses, for professional church worker education, for the residential housing needs of professional church workers, for promoting strategic ministry planning and assisting in capital campaigns, for the evaluation and redevelopment of real estate; and for other purposes

approved by its governing board and the Synod Board of Directors, which purposes shall be consistent with the ministry and mission of the Synod.

Board of Directors
Lutheran Church Extension Fund

Ov. 9-09

To Amend the Bylaws to Clarify and Streamline Responsibilities of Appointed Synod Officers

Rationale

Under current bylaws, the positions of Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and Chief Financial Officer (CFO) exist to assist the Synod Board of Directors (BOD) in carrying out the responsibilities of the BOD to the Synod. These responsibilities include managing, on behalf of the BOD, left-hand kingdom affairs of the Synod and coordination with all other officers and agencies of the Synod. Both positions report to the BOD and both positions are appointed by the BOD, with the concurrence of the President.

The current responsibilities of the CAO and CFO are distinct, yet complementary. Maintaining the two positions at times creates ambiguity and slows coordination with other officers, boards, and agencies of the Synod. Consolidating the two positions into a single Chief Operating Officer (COO) will improve clarity of authority, resource alignment, and coordination across the Synod. It also will give the BOD the ability to allocate resources in a fashion that better serves left-hand kingdom Synod needs, such as audit, finance and accounting, human resources, legal, risk management, and information technology. Organization of these administrative and financial functions under one office will allow the board and its executive freedom to provide for these activities and their leadership with coordination and flexibility. Under the coordination provided by the COO, these principal staff members will provide sensible points of contact and long-term direction in manageable areas of service.

Combining the CAO and CFO positions into the COO position also will simplify the overall administration and structure of the Synod office, allowing the elimination of the Operations Team as currently prescribed in Bylaw 3.5.2. Present Operations Team functions would either be addressed by several bylaws that provide for coordination between the COO and CMO or handled by the Administrative Team (Bylaw 3.5.1), which includes also the elected officers, which will be retained and remain under the leadership of the President.

Therefore, be it

Resolved, That to effectuate the consolidation of the Chief Administrative Officer position and Chief Financial Officer position into the Chief Operating Officer position and to make other adjustments accordingly to improve efficiency and coordination with the Synod, Bylaws 3.1.6.1, 3.1.9, 3.2.1.1, 3.3.4.6 (d), 3.3.4.9, 3.4.1, 3.4.1.1–3.4.1.4, 3.5.1.1, 3.6.4.2.1, and 3.9.4.1 be amended and that Bylaws 3.4.2–3.4.2.3 and 3.5.2–3.5.2.1 be deleted as follows:

~~PRESENT~~/PROPOSED WORDING

Reports and Overtures

3.1.6.1 Reports to a convention of the Synod may be submitted only by the President, a vice-president, the Secretary, the Chief ~~Financial~~ Operating Officer, the Board of Directors of the Synod, a board or commission of the Synod as listed in Bylaws 3.2.2, 3.2.2.1,

3.2.3, and 3.2.3.1, and other individuals or duly constituted groups who may be required or permitted to do so by the Bylaws, by action of a prior convention of the Synod, or by the President.

(a) Reports are statements of work performed or contemplated by those who are charged with conducting the business of the Synod between conventions, communications to a convention with respect to studies that may have been made for the Synod in order to further its work, or other types of communications to the Synod.

(b) A report shall not include an overture unless the report is submitted by someone authorized to submit overtures.

...

Convention Order

3.1.9 The President shall be responsible for the overall organization and operations of the conventions of the Synod.

(a) The Chief ~~Administrative~~ Operating Officer or the Chief ~~Administrative~~ Operating Officer's designee shall serve as the convention manager. He shall be responsible to the President for making arrangements for and directing the externals of the convention and other major assemblies of the Synod and may assist with planning and arranging for district conventions.

...

(e) All travel and convention expenses of the Synod's Praesidium, Secretary, Chief ~~Administrative~~ Operating Officer, ~~Chief Financial Officer~~, Chief Mission Officer, Board of Directors, district presidents, Commission on Constitutional Matters, Commission on Handbook, Commission on Theology and Church Relations, and legal counsel are included in the operating cost of the convention and as such are included in the district levy.

...

Officers Appointed by the President and Board of Directors

3.2.1.1 The appointed officers of the Synod shall be the Chief ~~Financial~~ Operating Officer ~~and the Chief Administrative Officer~~, appointed by the Board of Directors of the Synod, and the Chief Mission Officer, appointed by the President of the Synod.

...

Board of Directors

...

3.3.4.6 The Board of Directors shall exercise general oversight over the operations and activities of the synodwide corporate entities, the Concordia Plans, and Concordia Plan Services as required of it in the Constitution of the Synod and specified in these Bylaws.

(a) It shall assure itself that their accounting, budgeting, and financial policies comply with generally accepted accounting standards.

(b) It shall assure itself that audits are performed by internal auditors or independent certified public accountants.

(c) It shall be furnished with copies of these and any interim financial reports it requests.

(d) The board shall have the right to designate a representative ~~(by default, the Chief Financial Officer) to attend~~, as a nonvoting member, ~~all meetings~~ of the boards of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Foundation, The Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod, Concordia Publishing House, Concordia University System, and the Board of Trustees—Concordia Plans (Board of Directors—Concordia Plan Services). These non-voting members are entitled to attend all meetings of the board, including executive sessions, and have the same rights and privileges of other board members, except the right to vote. The board's representative shall serve on the investment committee of

the Concordia Plans and Concordia Plan Services. The board and its representative shall, in reasonable time, receive notice of such meetings, the proposed agenda, and minutes thereof.

...

- 3.3.4.9 To carry out the business and legal affairs of the Synod, the Board of Directors may, after consultation with the Administrative Team, appoint other officers subject to the approval of the President. The Board of Directors may also and appoint staff as required.

...

Chief Financial Operating Officer

- 3.4.1 The Chief ~~Financial~~ Operating Officer shall administer the financial affairs of the Synod, excluding the synodwide corporate entities, the districts, the Concordia Plans, and Concordia Plan Services and shall assist the Board of Directors of the Synod in carrying out the responsibilities given to it by the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod.

- 3.4.1.1 The Chief ~~Financial~~ Operating Officer shall be an officer of the Synod and a layperson appointed by the Board of Directors of the Synod in consultation with and with the concurrence of the President of the Synod.

- 3.4.1.2 The Chief ~~Financial~~ Operating Officer shall serve a three-year renewable term of office during which he/she shall serve at the direction of the Board of Directors.

- (a) He/she may serve an unlimited number of terms.
- (b) Each reappointment by the Board of Directors shall be after consultation with and with the concurrence of the President of the Synod.

- 3.4.1.3 The Chief ~~Financial~~ Operating Officer also serves as the Treasurer of the corporation and shall

- (a) carry out the duties of the office in accordance with the rules and regulations adopted by the Synod and as directed by the Board of Directors of the Synod;
- (b) receive and disburse the moneys of corporate Synod and keep accurate account of them under the instruction of the Board of Directors of the Synod;
- (c) act as the depository for all funds at the hands of corporate Synod's boards (excluding the Concordia Plans and Concordia Plan Services), commissions, officers, and employees who by virtue of their office act as custodians or trustees of such funds;
- (d) keep informed about financial affairs of the synodwide corporate entities;
- (e) serve, if the board's representation is not otherwise designated, as a nonvoting member of the governing boards of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Foundation, The Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod, Concordia Publishing House, Concordia University System, the Board of Trustees—Concordia Plans (Board of Directors—Concordia Plan Services), and on the investment committee of the Concordia Plans and Concordia Plan Services;
- (f) keep on file a correct list of all devises and bequests that directly or indirectly have been given to corporate Synod. Legacies and bequests made to other agencies of the Synod shall be reported annually to the Chief ~~Financial~~ Operating Officer as part of the audit process;
- (g) report regularly to the Synod through an official periodical and at every meeting of the Synod in convention on the performance of his/her office;
- (h) be authorized to borrow in the name of the Synod, provided its Board of Directors has first determined the amounts and conditions under which such moneys shall be borrowed;
 - (1) instruments relative to such borrowing shall require two signatures:

- (2) one shall be the Chief ~~Financial~~ Operating Officer and the other shall be another officer of the Synod designated by the Board of Directors of the Synod;

- (i) at any time submit to an audit of official books and accounts when so ordered by the Synod or its Board of Directors; and
- (j) perform such other work as the Synod in convention, the President, or the Board of Directors of the Synod may assign.

- 3.4.1.4 The Chief ~~Financial~~ Operating Officer shall work together closely with the ~~Chief Administrative Officer and the Chief Mission Officer~~ in carrying out the programmatic, administrative, and financial functions of the national Synod.

Chief Administrative Officer

- 3.4.2 ~~The Chief Administrative Officer shall assist the Board of Directors of the Synod in carrying out the responsibilities given to it by the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod.~~

- 3.4.2.1 ~~The Chief Administrative Officer shall be an officer of the Synod and shall be appointed by the Board of Directors of the Synod in consultation and mutual concurrence with the President of the Synod.~~

- 3.4.2.2 ~~The Chief Administrative Officer shall serve a three year renewable term of office during which he/she shall serve at the direction of the Board of Directors.~~

- (a) ~~He/she may serve an unlimited number of terms.~~
- (b) ~~Each reappointment shall be with the mutual concurrence of the President and the Board of Directors of the Synod.~~

- 3.4.2.3 ~~The Chief Administrative Officer shall work together closely with the Chief Financial Officer and the Chief Mission Officer in carrying out the programmatic, administrative, and financial functions of the national Synod.~~

...

3.5 National Office Teams

Administrative Team

- 3.5.1 The Administrative Team shall assist the President and the Board of Directors of the Synod in carrying out their respective responsibilities for oversight, supervision, management, and coordination as set forth in the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod and according to the triennial emphases adopted by conventions of the Synod.

- 3.5.1.1 The Administrative Team shall consist of the President, the First Vice-President, the Secretary, the Chief ~~Financial~~ Operating Officer, and the Chief Mission Officer, and the Chief Administrative Officer and shall be under the leadership of the President.

Operations Team

- 3.5.2 ~~The Operations Team shall assist the President and the Board of Directors of the Synod in carrying out their respective responsibilities for oversight, supervision, management, and coordination of the operations of the national office and according to the triennial emphases adopted by conventions of the Synod.~~

- 3.5.2.1 ~~The Operations Team shall consist of the Chief Mission Officer, the Chief Administrative Officer, and the Chief Financial Officer and shall be convened by the Chief Administrative Officer.~~

...

The Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod

...

- 3.6.4.2.1 One class of members consists of the President of the Synod or his representative, the Chief ~~Financial~~ Operating Officer of the Synod, and such additional members appointed by the Board of Directors of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as shall equal one for each ten members of the other class of members.

...

Commission on Handbook

3.9.4 The Commission on Handbook provides for the ongoing maintenance and management of the *Handbook*, that is, the Constitution, Bylaws, and Articles of Incorporation of the Synod. The commission shall meet as it deems necessary but at least two times per year to carry out its assigned responsibilities.

3.9.4.1 The Commission on Handbook shall consist of eight members, five voting and three nonvoting:

1. Of the five voting members, three shall be individual members of the Synod and two shall be attorneys. Terms of voting members shall be for six years, renewable once.
2. The Chief Administrative Operating Officer of the Synod, the Secretary of the Synod, and an additional member of the Commission on Constitutional Matters shall serve as advisory members.

LCMS Board of Directors

Ov. 9-10

To Amend Bylaws to Coordinate Responsibilities of Chief Mission Officer with Other Synod Officers

Rationale

The 2010 Synod convention made substantial changes to the structure and organization of the national Synod office that impacted significantly the mission operations of the Synod. These changes included creating the Chief Mission Officer (CMO) position, eliminating the Synod's Board for Mission Services, and creating the Board for National Mission (BNM) and the Board for International Mission (BIM). The bylaws governing the CMO position have been in effect for 15 years, allowing time to assess their overall efficiency and effectiveness.

The CMO is ultimately responsible to the President of the Synod. The CMO also has responsibilities that have significant impact on matters within the supervision and responsibility of the Synod's Board of Directors (BOD) and must coordinate extensively with other officers of the Synod, some of whom report to the BOD.

While the content of the Synod's communications deals with doctrinal, practical, and programmatic material that belongs under the supervision of the President or the appointed officer reporting to him, namely the CMO, and while Synod's fundraising certainly relates to its programs, there are operational aspects of this work that the BOD suggests would benefit from closer coordination with other activities more operational than programmatic. Corporate Synod would benefit from an integrated treatment of its information systems. The BOD has made a significant ongoing investment in a constituent management system and a more comprehensive approach to information management, including building a team with the skills for internet and database development, is necessary if rewards are to be reaped in better service to the Synod's membership, enhanced presentation of its confession and mission in electronic platforms, and improved efficiency and capacity are to be realized. Likewise, the BOD is responsible for "providing operating and capital funds to carry out the work of the Synod" (Bylaw 3.3.4.5), but 2010 restructuring placed fundraising under the supervision of the President. While messaging and approach may shift with changes in presidential administrations, the fundamental communications and fundraising operations of the Synod should be provided for in a way that could survive such a transition. The change here proposed, to transfer these functions to reside under the board's Chief Operating Officer, while retaining certain approvals

to the President, therefore serves continuity as well as efficiency and effectiveness.

It is desirable and would assist the overall coordination and efficiency of the work of the CMO, other Synod officers, and the BOD to realign certain responsibilities among the CMO and other Synod officers that relate to budgetary, property, financial, legal matters, and other left-hand kingdom responsibilities.

Current Bylaw 3.10.4.6 provides that the CMO is a member of the Pastoral Formation Committee. The CMO is otherwise accountable to and reports directly to the President of the Synod, and it is desirable that the President of the Synod have discretion as to whether to appoint the CMO or another person to serve as his representative on the Pastoral Formation Committee.

Proposed Action

Therefore be it

Resolved, That to assist in the overall coordination and efficiency of the Synod's mission operations and to assist the overall coordination and efficiency of the work of the CMO, other Synod officers, and the BOD, Bylaws 3.4.3.2, 3.4.3.4, and 3.10.4.6 be amended, Bylaws 3.4.3.6 and 3.4.3.8 be deleted, Bylaws 3.10.4.7, 3.4.1.5, and 3.4.1.6 be added, and other renumbering of Bylaws be made as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Chief Mission Officer

3.4.3 The Chief Mission Officer shall be responsible to the President of the Synod for the mission, ministry, and any programmatic and coordinative functions which are implemented according to the policies adopted by the Board for National Mission and the Board for International Mission.

3.4.3.1 The Chief Mission Officer shall provide staff and other resource(s) to the Board for National Mission and the Board for International Mission.

3.4.3.2 The Chief Mission Officer shall be an officer of the Synod and shall be appointed and subsequently reappointed by the President of the Synod following the President's consultation with the Board for National Mission and the Board for International Mission and with the ~~mutual~~ concurrence of the Board of Directors and the concurrence of the Board for National Mission and the Board for International Mission acting jointly. The Chief Mission Officer may serve an unlimited number of terms.

3.4.3.3 The Chief Mission Officer shall be a minister of religion—ordained and shall serve a three-year renewable term of office and shall serve at the direction of the President of the Synod.

3.4.3.4 ~~The Chief Mission Officer shall meet regularly with the executive directors of the commissions (if any) and the chief executives of synodwide corporate entities as the liaison for and at the direction of the President of the Synod. In carrying out his responsibilities as described in Bylaw 3.4.3 as an aspect of the programmatic, administrative, and financial functions of the national Synod, the Chief Mission Officer He shall work together shall coordinate closely with the Chief Financial Operating Officer and the Chief Administrative Officer in carrying out the programmatic, administrative, and financial functions of the national Synod and shall meet regularly with the executive directors of the commissions (if any) and the chief executives of synodwide corporate entities as the liaison for and at the direction of the President of the Synod.~~

3.4.3.5 The Chief Mission Officer shall, at the direction of the President, supervise the work of the Office of National Mission and the Office of International Mission.

~~3.4.3.6 The Chief Mission Officer shall, on behalf of the President, supervise fundraising activity of the national office according to policies established by the Board of Directors of the Synod.~~

3.4.3.76 The Chief Mission Officer shall, on behalf of the President, supervise the content of communications, public relations, and news and information provided by the Synod, including the official periodicals of the Synod, *The Lutheran Witness* and *Reporter*.

~~3.4.3.8 The Chief Mission Officer shall, on behalf of the President, provide leadership, coordination, and oversight for pre-seminary education programs, seminary education, and post-seminary continuing education, and by providing advocacy for pastoral education and health within the Synod. He shall serve as the chairman of the Pastoral Formation Committee.~~

...

D. Pastoral Formation Committee

3.10.4 The Pastoral Formation Committee shall be responsible for ensuring that the Synod's objective of training pastors is fulfilled consistently (Constitution Art. III 3).

3.10.4.1 The committee shall recommend any new routes leading to ordination for approval by resolution of the Synod. Such a recommendation shall follow consultation with the two seminary boards of regents in their annual joint meeting.

3.10.4.2 Seminaries will implement new routes to ordination only upon approval by resolution of the Synod.

3.10.4.3 The committee shall review, assess, coordinate, support and make suggestions for improvement of all existing noncolloquy routes leading to ordination in the Synod, including seminary and pre-seminary education programs.

3.10.4.4 The committee shall monitor and receive reports from all directors and committees charged with oversight of all routes to ordination and shall foster coordination and collaboration among them.

3.10.4.5 The committee shall consider the long term strategic direction of pastoral formation within the Synod and facilitate discussion of the same with the two seminary boards of regents in their annual joint meeting.

3.10.4.6 The Pastoral Formation Committee shall comprise the following members:

Voting Members:

1. ~~The Chief Mission Officer~~ A member appointed by the President of the Synod, who will serve as chairman of the committee.

2. The presidents of the seminaries

Nonvoting Advisory Member:

The Executive Director of the Office of Pastoral Education

~~3.10.4.7 The chairman shall assist the President in overseeing the pre-seminary education programs, seminary education, and post-seminary continuing education.~~

3.10.4.78 The Pastoral Formation Committee shall meet at least once per year, and shall report on its work at the annual joint meeting of the two seminary boards of regents. Additional meetings shall be determined by the chairman in consultation with the committee members.

...

Chief Financial/Operating Officer

...

3.4.1.5 The Chief Operating Officer shall, on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Synod, supervise fundraising activity of the national office according to policies established by the Board of Directors of the Synod and subject to the supervision of the President of the Synod over the theological content of communications. The selection of the top executive responsible for fundraising of the

national office and all employees responsible for theological content of related communications can be made only with the concurrence of the President of the Synod. Selection of other outward facing employees shall occur only after consultation with the President of the Synod.

3.4.1.6 The Chief Operating Officer shall, on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Synod, supervise the budgetary, legal, and business aspects of communications, public relations, and news and information provided by the Synod, including the official periodicals of the Synod, *The Lutheran Witness* and *Reporter*. The selection of the top executive(s) responsible for communications, public relations, and news and information provided by the Synod and all employees responsible for theological content of such can be made only with the concurrence of the President of the Synod. Selection of other outward facing employees shall occur only after consultation with the President of the Synod.

LCMS Board of Directors

Ov. 9-11

To Amend Bylaws to Enhance Responsibilities of Synod Mission Boards

WHEREAS, The 2010 Synod convention made substantial changes to the structure and organization of the national Synod office that impacted significantly the mission operations of the Synod. These changes included creating the Chief Mission Officer (CMO) position and creating the Board for National Mission (BNM) and the Board for International Mission (BIM). The bylaws governing the BNM and BIM have been in effect for 15 years, allowing time to assess their overall efficiency and effectiveness; and

WHEREAS, The CMO is ultimately responsible to the President of the Synod, but also is subject to the actions of the BNM and BIM; and

WHEREAS, Current bylaws provide that the BNM and BIM have responsibility for developing and determining policies impacting the Synod's national and international mission operations but have limited influence on the selection of the CMO, limited ability to influence the budget, and limited ability to ensure proper implementation of the policies they develop; and

WHEREAS, It is desirable and would assist in the overall coordination and efficiency of the Synod's mission operations to better align the responsibility of the BNM and BIM with the authority given to the BNM and BIM, and enhance the ability of the BNM and BIM to better advance the Synod's operations both within the United States and worldwide; therefore be it

Resolved, That the provision of Bylaw 3.3.1.3 (e) be relocated and elaborated as Bylaw 3.8.1.1 and that Bylaws 3.8.2.1, 3.8.2.4, 3.8.3.1 and 3.8.2.4 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

3.3 Elected Officers of the Synod

President

...

Powers and Duties – Ecclesiastical and Administrative

3.3.1.3 The President shall have responsibilities and duties that are both ecclesiastical and administrative.

...

~~(e) Prior to his appointment of an executive director of a mission office, he shall engage in consultation with the appropriate~~

~~mission board to reach concurrence on a slate of candidates for the position.~~

(fe) ...

3.8 Mission Boards and Offices

Mission Boards

3.8.1 The mission boards of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are the following:

1. Board for National Mission
2. Board for International Mission

3.8.1.1 Each mission board shall relate to a mission office, developing and determining its policies and supervising their implementation by an executive director.

(a) The President shall make the initial appointment of an executive director from a slate developed in consultation with, and having the concurrence of, the respective mission board. Nominations shall first be solicited, in an official publication of the Synod, from the agencies and officers, congregational and individual members of the Synod.

(b) Each appointment of an executive director is for no more than three years, during which period the executive director shall serve at the pleasure of the President.

(c) Each mission board, with the assistance of Synod's Department of Human Resources, shall conduct a review of the executive director of its respective office every third year of service, after which the appointment may be renewed by the President with the concurrence of the respective mission board.

Board for National Mission

3.8.2 The Board for National Mission is charged with developing and determining policies for the coordination of and in support of district ministries which support congregations and schools (Bylaw 1.2.1 [n]). These policies shall embrace and apply the mission and ministry emphases adopted by the national convention. Under the leadership of the President of the Synod, pursuant to Bylaw 3.3.1.1.1, the board shall assist in identifying the specific goals for the Office of National Mission. Policies determined by the board (implemented by staff) may include but not be limited to:

- strong national mission leadership
- Lutheran school ministries and accreditation
- human care and domestic mercy efforts
- stewardship
- evangelism
- church planting and revitalization
- youth ministry

Upon recommendation of the Office of National Mission, the Board for National Mission shall serve as a calling agency for institutional and agency chaplains and other non-foreign specialized ministers (e.g., Veterans Administration chaplains, Bureau of Prison chaplains, hospital chaplains, pastoral counselors, and teachers of chaplaincy and pastoral counseling) after consultation with the appropriate district presidents(s) (cf. Bylaw 2.12.1.4).

3.8.2.1 ~~The Board for National Mission shall have oversight of supervision over the executive director of the Office of National Mission regarding the implementation of policies adopted by the board and implemented by the Office of National Mission for the coordination of and in support of district ministries which support congregations and schools. The board shall annually review and endorse approve the Office of National Mission strategic plan and review and provide input on approve the Office of National Mission initial annual budget proposal prior to its submission for approval by the Board of Directors. The board shall be under the ecclesiastical supervision of the President of the Synod regarding doctrine and~~

administration consistent with the President's responsibility under Constitution Art. XI B 1–4 (also Constitution Art. XI B 7; Bylaws 3.3.1.1–3.3.1.3) between conventions of the Synod and ultimately shall be responsible to the Synod in convention (Constitution Art. XI A 1–2).

...

Office of National Mission

3.8.2.4 The Office of National Mission implements the policies of the Board for National Mission under the supervision of the Chief Mission Officer and the Board for National Mission and shall be responsible for domestic ministries that especially serve congregations and schools through the districts of the Synod. Such district ministries may include but not be limited to:

- Lutheran school ministries and accreditation
- human care and domestic mercy efforts
- stewardship
- evangelism
- church planting and revitalization
- youth ministry

3.8.2.5 In carrying out its mission responsibilities, the Office of National Mission shall receive its primary focus from the mission and ministry emphases developed triennially by the national Synod in convention and from the policies developed and determined by the Board for National Mission. Through the Chief Mission Officer, it shall also receive direction from the President of the Synod on all aspects of its responsibilities.

3.8.2.6 The President's supervisory responsibilities under Constitution Art. XI B and Bylaws 3.3.1.1–3.3.1.3 will assure that the Office of National Mission incorporates the doctrine, mission, and vision of the Synod in its service to the Synod. All staff shall be responsible and accountable for their activities to the President of the Synod (Constitution Art. XI B 1–4) between conventions of the Synod and ultimately to the Synod in convention (Constitution Art. XI A 1–2).

...

Board for International Mission

3.8.3 The Board for International Mission is charged with developing and determining policies in support of mission and ministry in foreign countries for the Office of International Mission (Bylaw 1.2.1 [n]). These policies shall embrace and apply the mission and ministry emphases adopted by the national convention. Under the leadership of the President of the Synod, pursuant to Bylaw 3.3.1.1.1, the board shall assist in identifying the specific goals for the Office of International Mission. Policies determined by the board (implemented by staff) may include but not be limited to:

- strong mission leadership
- training of missionaries
- ministry for all of the Synod's military personnel
- safeguarding the rights of partner churches
- ministry for all civilians and their dependents overseas
- international human care
- liaison with the colleges, universities, and seminaries of the Synod
- liaison with the chief ecumenical officer of the Synod
- international schools

Upon the recommendation of the Office of International Mission, the board shall serve as the only sending agency through which workers and funds are sent to the foreign mission areas of the Synod, including the calling, appointing, assigning, withdrawing, and releasing of missionaries (ministers of religion—ordained and ministers of religion—commissioned) and other workers for the ministries in foreign areas.

3.8.3.1 The Board for International Mission shall have ~~oversight of supervision over the executive director of the Office of International Mission regarding~~ the implementation of policies adopted by the board and implemented by the Office of International Mission for the coordination of and in support of ministries of the Synod in foreign countries. The board shall annually review and ~~endorse/approve~~ the Office of International Mission strategic plan and review and ~~provide input on~~ approve the Office of International Mission ~~initial~~ annual budget proposal prior to its submission for approval by the Board of Directors. The board shall be under the ecclesiastical supervision of the President of the Synod regarding doctrine and administration consistent with the President's responsibility under Constitution Art. XI B 1-4 (Constitution Art. XI B 7; Bylaws 3.3.1.1-3.3.1.3) between conventions of the Synod and ultimately shall be responsible to the Synod in convention (Constitution Art. XI A 1-2).

...

Office of International Mission

3.8.3.4 The Office of International Mission implements the policies of the Board for International Mission under the supervision of the Board for International Mission and the Chief Mission Officer and shall be responsible for the work of the Synod in foreign countries. Such responsibilities may include but not be limited to:

- placement and support of foreign missionaries
- establishment and maintenance of international schools
- coordination of international relief efforts
- policy recommendations to the Board for International Mission
- support and encouragement of international partner churches in conjunction with the office of the President

3.8.3.5 In carrying out its mission responsibilities, the Office of International Mission shall receive its primary focus from the mission and ministry emphases developed triennially by the national Synod in convention and from the policies developed and determined by the Board for International Mission. Through the Chief Mission Officer, it shall also receive direction from the President of the Synod on all aspects of its responsibilities.

3.8.3.6 The President's supervisory responsibilities under Constitution Art. XI B and Bylaws 3.3.1.1-3.3.1.3 will assure that the Office of International Mission incorporates the doctrine, mission, and vision of the Synod in its service to the Synod. All staff shall be responsible and accountable for their activities to the President of the Synod (Constitution Art. XI B 1-4) between conventions of the Synod and ultimately to the Synod in convention (Constitution Art. XI A 1-2).

...

LCMS Board of Directors

Ov. 9-12

To Restructure Mission Boards

WHEREAS, The 2010 Synod convention adopted the recommendation of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Synod Structure and Governance to consolidate the boards and commissions of national Synod, including the Board for Pastoral Education, the Board for University Education, the Board for Black Ministry Services, the Board for Communication Services, the Board for District and Congregational Services, the Board for Human Care Ministries, the Board for Mission Services, the Commission on Ministerial Growth and Support, the Commission on Structure, and the Commission on Worship (2010 Res. 8-08A); and

WHEREAS, The bylaws, functions, and offices related to these boards and commissions were either eliminated, distributed to other

existing entities of Synod, or combined into two newly created mission offices—the Office of National Mission (ONM) and the Office of International Mission (OIM); and

WHEREAS, These newly created mission offices function under policies created by their respective boards, the Board for National Mission and the Board for International Mission, neither of which has the authority to issue calls (except as specifically permitted in Bylaws 3.8.2 and 3.8.3), make personnel decisions, or set budgets, unlike their predecessor boards and commissions; and

WHEREAS, Operating under this new structure for 16 years has reduced the authority with which these boards may act and therefore represent the Synod, which they are by design intended to do; and

WHEREAS, This lack of representation of the Synod in the mission boards is not only a departure from the long-established pattern of boards, commissions, and committees of the Synod, but has also raised suspicion of and temptation to abuses of power, fiscal malfeasance, and unresponsiveness to the congregations of the Synod; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention thank the mission boards for their labors under these conditions and for their efforts at representing those who elected and appointed them; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention revise bylaws so as to combine the two mission boards into one Board for Mission, setting policy for both the ONM and the OIM; and be it further

Resolved, That the Board for Mission be comprised of 16 members, including five elected laypersons (one from each region), five elected ordained ministers (one from each region), two elected commissioned ministers, two faculty representatives from the respective seminaries, one district president appointed by the Council of Presidents, and the President of the Synod or his representative; and be it further

Resolved, That the Board for Mission select four of its members to represent it as voting members of the Synod Board of Directors (BOD), thereby bringing the membership of the latter to 20 total members, 19 voting, thereby ensuring greater representation of the Board for Mission on the BOD and exercise of the powers and duties enumerated in Bylaw 3.3.4; and be it finally

Resolved, That the implementation of these bylaws and elections be delayed until the 2029 Synod convention.

Christ, La Mesa, CA; Circuit 9 (Decatur), Indiana District

Ov. 9-13

To Revisit 2010 Restructuring

WHEREAS, The Synod has periodically deemed it necessary to restructure its organization and operations and has done so repeatedly, including 1959, 1979, 1995, and most recently in 2010; and

WHEREAS, The 2010 Synod convention undertook a substantial restructuring of the Synod which impacted various boards, commissions, and other agencies; and

WHEREAS, That restructuring has since reduced the debt of Synod, streamlined operations, and produced many other benefits; and

WHEREAS, The restructuring also eliminated or consolidated numerous longstanding boards, commissions, and other agencies, reduced the representation of the Synod's congregations in

corporate Synod operations, and placed much power in the hands of too few; and

WHEREAS, Enough time has elapsed between the 2010 restructuring and the present that the Synod is in a better position to evaluate the costs and benefits, strengths and weaknesses of the current structure; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention commission a reconsideration of corporate Synod structure, including but not limited to the powers, composition, and representation of the Board of Directors (BOD), the mission boards and offices, other councils, committees, and boards (including the Pastoral Formation Committee, the Seminary Boards of Regents, and the Concordia University System Boards of Regents), with the goals of increasing representation and accountability and reducing the potential for abuse and misuse of power; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod charge the Office of the President (OTP) with establishing a task force of no fewer than eight members to include the Secretary of Synod, the Chief Financial Officer, the Chief Administrative Officer, the Chief Mission Officer, and additional representatives from the OTP, the BOD, the Commission on Constitutional Matters, and the Commission on Handbook; and be it finally

Resolved, That the task force submit its proposals at least nine months in advance of the 2029 convention for consideration at that convention.

Christ, La Mesa, CA; Circuit 9 (Decatur), Indiana District

Ov. 9-14

To Revisit 2010 Restructuring

WHEREAS, The Synod has periodically reviewed and revised its structure to better serve its mission, with major restructuring efforts undertaken in 1959, 1979, 1995, and most recently in 2010; and

WHEREAS, The 2010 Synod convention enacted substantial structural reforms that significantly impacted the configuration and responsibilities of boards, commissions, and agencies within the Synod (2010 Res. 8-07, 8-08A, 8-10, 8-12A, 8-13, 8-14A, 8-15, 8-16A, 8-17, 8-36, 8-39, 8-40, 8-41); and

WHEREAS, These reforms have produced certain measurable benefits, including a reduction in corporate Synod's debt, a streamlining of operations, and an increase in certain operational efficiencies; and

WHEREAS, The same reforms also led to the elimination or consolidation of many long-established boards and commissions, decreased direct representation of member congregations within Synod governance, and concentrated significant authority within a small number of individuals or offices; and

WHEREAS, More than a decade has passed since the 2010 restructuring, providing sufficient time to assess both the gains and the drawbacks of the current structural model with respect to representation, theological accountability, fiscal stewardship, and mission effectiveness; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention commission a comprehensive reconsideration of the corporate Synod structure, including but not limited to:

- the powers and composition of the Board of Directors (BOD);

- the authority and operation of the mission boards and offices; and
- the structure and responsibilities of synodwide councils, committees, and boards, including the Pastoral Formation Committee, seminary boards of regents, and Concordia University System boards of regents;

and be it further

Resolved, That this review be carried out with the express goal of increasing the theological, congregational, and regional representation in Synod governance; enhancing transparency and accountability; and reducing the potential for institutional overreach or misuse of authority; and be it further

Resolved, That the President of the Synod be directed to establish a task force of no fewer than eight members, including:

- the Secretary of the Synod;
- the Chief Financial Officer;
- the Chief Administrative Officer;
- the Chief Mission Officer; and
- additional representatives from the Office of the President, the BOD, the Commission on Constitutional Matters, and the Commission on Handbook;

and be it finally

Resolved, That this task force present its findings and proposals no later than nine months prior to the 2029 Synod convention, in order that such proposals may be thoroughly reviewed and considered for appropriate action.

South Lake
League City, TX

Ov. 9-15

To Amend Bylaw 3.6.4.3 to Increase the Number of Lutheran Church Extension Fund Directors Elected by the Synod in Convention from Three to Four

Rationale

During a review of Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF)'s Articles and Bylaws, the Commission on Constitutional Matters stated the following in Opinion 24-3024, dated March 15–16, 2024:

“Synod Bylaw 3.6.1.3 (a) provides that a minimum of one-third of the voting members of the governing board of a synodwide corporate entity [including LCEF] shall be elected by the Synod in convention. Thus, with three voting members elected by the convention, LCEF's board may contain no more than six appointed voting members; it presently has eight.”

In order to comply with the opinion, LCEF must either: (i) reduce the number of Directors elected by LCEF's members from eight to six, (ii) increase the number of Directors elected by the Synod in convention from three to four, or (iii) implement some other combination that complies with the mathematical conclusion of the opinion. The Board of Directors of LCEF has resolved that it is in the best interest of the good governance of LCEF, balancing the need for sufficient voices with that to avoid having too many voices, to increase the number of Directors elected by the Synod in convention from three to four. To implement this change, it will be necessary to revise Synod Bylaw 3.6.4.3 [1], a bylaw that only applies to LCEF.

Therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.6.4.3 (1) be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

The Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod

3.6.4.3 The board of directors for the Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod shall consist of such number of directors as are specified in the bylaws of the Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod. All voting members of the board of directors of the Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod shall serve a maximum of four three-year terms.

1. ~~Four~~^{Three} directors shall be elected by the Synod in convention and shall include one ordained or commissioned minister and ~~two~~^{three} laypersons.

Board of Directors
Lutheran Church Extension Fund

Ov. 9-16

**To Amend Bylaws 3.6.1.8 (c) and 3.6.4 (a)
to Clarify that Two-Thirds Approval
Requirements for Synodwide Corporate Entity
and Lutheran Church Extension Fund Governing
Document Amendments are Based on Members
Actually Present at Meeting**

Rationale

During a review of Lutheran Church Extension Fund's (LCEF) Articles and Bylaws, the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) stated the following in Opinion 24-3050A (Minutes of May 6, 2025, pp. 92–93) with respect to the conformity of LCEF's membership voting process with Synod Bylaws:

With regard to the first item, in view of Synod Bylaws 3.6.4 (a) and 3.6.1.8 (c), the commission notes an additional detail in Article NINTH, namely, that the “two-thirds majority vote” is to be of the members (whether all members or members appointed by the Board of Directors), not of the members present at such meeting. The two instances of “present at such meeting” should therefore be removed. The same changes need to be applied in the Bylaws, Article VII, as the same standards apply to the amendment of the LCEF Bylaws as to the LCEF Articles.

In consideration of the Opinion, at LCEF's annual meeting in November, 2025, LCEF's members amended its articles and bylaws to remove the phrase “present as such meeting” in the relevant places in order to be in compliance.

However, the Board of Directors of LCEF believe that it is in the best interest of LCEF that the two Synod Bylaws cited in the opinion be revised such that LCEF can revise its articles and bylaws in the future to reinsert the phrase “present at such meeting” in the relevant places. Presently, LCEF has 75 members. Therefore, two-thirds of the 75 members (50) must approve changes to LCEF's articles and bylaws regardless of how many members are present to vote. Thus, for example, if only 60 of the 70 members were present to vote at the meeting (the quorum requirement thus being satisfied), then 50 of the 60 members must approve any changes, which is 83.3 percent of the members present at the meeting. The two-thirds majority requirement is already a supermajority.

The current situation becomes even more challenging when certain changes are made to LCEF's articles and bylaws. In those cases, two-thirds of LCEF's members appointed by the Board of Directors

of the Synod (the members at large) must also approve voting as a separate class. There are six such members at large. Thus, to obtain approval of this class, two-thirds of the six (four) must approve. If only four of the six members at large are present at the meeting, then all four must approve, which is 100 percent of the members at large present.

It is customary and prudent in voting bodies that a majority or supermajority of those present at such meetings approve action items (assuming quorum requirements are met). LCEF requests the changes resolved below for LCEF to put in place a reasonable supermajority requirement.

Therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.6.1.8 (c) be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

General Principles

3.6.1.8 Each synodwide corporate entity shall provide in its governing instruments

- (c) a provision that any amendments to a provision of its governing instruments which relate to its objects and purposes, the designating of its members, or the procedure for amending its governing instruments shall require a two-thirds affirmative vote of its members present at such meeting, if any, who are appointed by the Board of Directors of the Synod;

and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.6.4 (a) be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

The Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod

3.6.4 The Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod, as established on June 15, 1978, as a corporate entity under the laws of the State of Missouri, is operated by its members and Board of Directors, in accordance with its Articles of Incorporation and corporate Bylaws, to further the objectives and duties of the church extension fund by providing financial resources and related services for ministry, witness, and outreach within the Synod and, as approved by the Synod Board of Directors, beyond the Synod: (1) to and within partner churches with which the Synod is in altar and pulpit fellowship; or (2) upon the recommendation of the President of Synod, to Lutheran entities formed and operating outside of the United States that assist in fulfilling the Synod's ministry and mission objectives in foreign countries.

- (a) Any amendment to the Articles of Incorporation and the corporate Bylaws of the Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod as heretofore adopted shall be made by a two-thirds vote of the members of the Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod present at such meeting as set forth in its Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws.

- (b) Amendments shall be reported to the next convention of the Synod.

Board of Directors
Lutheran Church Extension Fund

Ov. 9-17

To Initiate Proposal to Realign Districts

WHEREAS, The Synod and its component parts, which include its districts, “serves as the structure through which congregations carry out certain functions that can be performed more effectively and efficiently together with other member congregations” (Bylaw 1.3.3); and

WHEREAS, The Synod “establishes districts in order more effectively to achieve its objectives and carry on its activities” (Bylaw 4.1.1) by “performing the functions of the Synod” (Bylaw 4.1.1.1); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has 35 districts which vary widely in the number of congregations, from 47 to 345, and communicant membership, from 6,287 to 116,967, with 13 districts having fewer than 125 congregations (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “District Locator,” *locator.lcms.org/district*); and

WHEREAS, The presidents of each district of the Synod sit on the Council of Presidents (COP) (Bylaw 3.10.1), which receives and gives counsel to the President of the Synod (Bylaw 3.10.1.2), provides opportunity for district presidents and the Praesidium of the Synod to counsel with one another on matters regarding the doctrine and administration of the Synod (Id.), serves as the Board of Assignments (Bylaw 3.10.1.3), and carries out such duties as the Synod in convention may give to the COP (Bylaw 3.10.1.4); and

WHEREAS, The variance in the number of congregations and communicant membership of the districts of the Synod results in each congregation and each communicant member not being equally represented at the COP, nor among the regional vice-presidents, on matters regarding the doctrine and administration of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Modern technology has enabled various functions to be carried out effectively and efficiently without regard to district organization; and

WHEREAS, Each district of the Synod must have a district president, at least two vice-presidents, a secretary, a treasurer, circuit visitors (Bylaw section 4.3), board of directors (Bylaw section 4.5), hold a district convention (Bylaw section 4.2), and conduct official conferences (Bylaw section 4.8), all of which offices, positions, conventions, and conferences have and incur expenses; and

WHEREAS, The Synod, and its districts, has an ongoing obligation to efficiently and effectively steward those gifts of time, talent, and treasure which God leads faithful men and women to provide through offering, gifts, and service; and

WHEREAS, The variance in the number of congregations and communicant membership of the districts of the Synod raises for reflection whether the districts of the Synod are effectively and efficiently carrying out their functions on behalf of the member congregations of each district; and

WHEREAS, Bylaw 4.1.1.3 (a) provides for realignment of districts to “be initiated by a national convention of the Synod”; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention hereby direct that a proposal be developed to realign the districts of the Synod such that each realigned district shall have not fewer than 125 member congregations; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention hereby establishes a task force to develop said proposal in accordance with Bylaw 4.1.1.3, which task force shall comprise the district presidents from the six districts having the most member congregations and the five districts having the fewest member congregations as of July 1, 2026; and be it further

Resolved, That said proposal shall, in addition to those factors required to be addressed by Bylaw 4.1.1.3, address the issues of equal representation on the COP, stewardship, and efficiency in the

organization and operation of the districts on behalf of the member congregations of the Synod and such other issues or factors as the task force shall identify; and be it finally

Resolved, That said proposal shall be submitted to the 2029 Synod convention.

St. John
Seward, NE

Ov. 9-18

To Reclaim Beneficial Understanding of Our Synodical Union

WHEREAS, A Synodical union is an agreed association of congregations of the same confessions for the good of one another; and

WHEREAS, Satan tempts us to be our own “gods” and to do what is good in our own eyes as individuals and as congregations; and

WHEREAS, Such division confuses and obscures the proclamation of the Gospel; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention direct the Office of the President to seek a reclamation of our Synodical union as per the Preamble of the Constitution by producing a study of what it means to be part of a Synodical union.

Montana District

Ov. 9-19

To Amend Constitution and Bylaws to Alter Selection of Voting Delegates to National Convention

WHEREAS, The national convention of the Synod is the “principal legislative assembly” of the Synod and, *inter alia*, establishes general positions and policies of the Synod; elects officers, directors, and board and commission members; and provides overall program direction and priorities (Bylaw 3.1.1); and

WHEREAS, Member congregations of the Synod are grouped together to be represented by two voting delegates at a national convention of the Synod, one a pastor and one a lay delegate (Const. Art. IX 1), which grouping constitutes an “electoral circuit” of between “7 and 20 member congregations” of the Synod with aggregate confirmed membership of between 1,500 and 10,000 individuals (Bylaw 3.1.2 [a]); and

WHEREAS, In 2024, the Synod had 5,799 member congregations, of which 82 reported average weekly attendance in excess of 500 individuals while not less than 4,286 reported average weekly attendance of 100 or less (LCMS Office of National Mission handout, Smaller Congregation Summit, St. Louis, Mo., June 25–26, 2024); and

WHEREAS, There are member congregations of the Synod that have more than 1,500 confirmed members and could alone satisfy the aggregate confirmed membership requirements of Bylaw 3.1.2 (a) but are required to be included in an electoral circuit, diminishing representation of their members at a national convention of the Synod while, conversely, 20 congregations with 50 confirmed members each in an electoral circuit would have outsized representation at a Synod convention; and

WHEREAS, The Synod makes known the love of Christ by word and deed through its member congregations of all sizes in the

communities in which they carry out ministry, and all congregations are valued for said ministry, but the discrepancy in size between the largest and smallest congregations has expanded since the 1970s, such that more members of congregations of the Synod have fewer representatives at a Synod convention; and

WHEREAS, The member congregations of the Synod, as Synod, are “walking together” in ministry and, accordingly, representation with regard to the affairs of the Synod should take into account the varying sizes of the member congregations of the Synod; therefore be it

Resolved, That Constitution Article IX 1 be amended as follows:
~~PRESENT~~/PROPOSED WORDING

Article IX Representation

The synodical meetings are composed of regularly elected and delegated representatives and of certain individual persons, as specified in the Bylaws, to wit:

1. Representatives of congregations, entitled to vote. ~~A number of congregation or congregations shall form a group which shall be represented by two voting delegates, one a pastor and one a lay delegate.~~

...

and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.1.2 be amended as follows:

~~PRESENT~~/PROPOSED WORDING

Voting Delegates

3.1.2 Electoral circuits shall meet as required by the Bylaws of the Synod to elect circuit voting delegates to the Synod’s national conventions.

- (a) An electoral circuit shall consist either of one or two adjacent visitation circuits, as shall be determined by the district board of directors on the basis of the following requirements: each pair of delegates shall represent from 7 to 20 member congregations, involving an aggregate confirmed membership ranging from ~~1,500~~2,500 to ~~40,000~~7,500; provided, however, that a member congregation that is represented by voting delegates pursuant to Bylaw 3.1.2.3 shall be excluded from said representation and not included in said aggregation.

...

and be it finally

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.1.2.3 be adopted as follows:

~~PRESENT~~/PROPOSED WORDING

3.1.2.3 A member congregation of the LCMS that has an aggregate confirmed membership of 1,500 or more members shall elect one pastor and one layperson as its voting delegates. The voting delegates and their alternates shall be elected pursuant to the election procedures of the congregation set forth in its constitution and bylaws.

- (a) Delegates are responsible to the congregation they represent and shall attempt to discover the sentiment of the members thereof.

- (b) The congregation shall not require its delegates to vote in accordance with specific instructions, but each delegate shall be permitted to vote according to his or her own conviction.

- (c) Delegates are expected to be faithful in attendance at all sessions of the convention. All duly elected voting delegates shall attend all sessions regularly until the close of the convention. Delegates who arrive late or leave early or who do not attend at all shall present a written excuse.

(d) Delegates shall report the actions of the Synod to their congregation after each convention.

St. John
Seward, NE

Ov. 9-20

To Amend Bylaw 3.1.2 (a) to Change Size Requirements for Electoral Circuits

WHEREAS, In light of the declining number of congregations as well as communicant members throughout the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Current requirements for an electoral circuit are difficult to achieve as is evidenced by the growing number of circuits asking for exceptions to the current rules for valid electoral circuits; and

WHEREAS, Recent years have seen a decrease in worship attendance and membership in many congregations of the Synod; therefore be it

Resolved, That the 2026 Synod convention amend Bylaw 3.1.2 (a) to change the minimum requirements for a valid electoral circuit from seven congregations and 1,500 communicant members (Bylaw 3.1.2 [a]) to five congregations and 500 communicant members, as follows:

~~PRESENT~~/PROPOSED WORDING

Voting Delegates

3.1.2 Electoral circuits shall meet as required by the Bylaws of the Synod to elect circuit voting delegates to the Synod’s national conventions.

- (a) An electoral circuit shall consist either of one or two adjacent visitation circuits, as shall be determined by the district board of directors on the basis of the following requirements: each pair of delegates shall represent from ~~7-5~~ to 20 member congregations, involving an aggregate confirmed membership ranging from ~~1,500-500~~ to 10,000.

Board of Directors
Eastern District

Ov. 9-21

To Amend Bylaw Subsection 3.12.2 to Restore Presidential Election to Convention

WHEREAS, The 2010 Synod convention changed the longstanding practice of electing the Synod President at the convention and conferred that right to congregations using electronic voting; and

WHEREAS, The move to direct representation has seen decreased participation in every election since this process was adopted, to wit:

- The 2013 presidential election saw only 8,201 registered electors, and only 6,432 votes cast, the latter, representing only 62.16 percent of theoretical maximum participation;
- The 2016 presidential election saw only 7,348 registered electors, and only 6,157 votes cast, the latter, representing only 60.76 percent of theoretical maximum participation;
- The 2019 presidential election saw only 6,449 registered electors, and only 5,823 votes cast, the latter, representing only 58.97 percent of theoretical maximum participation;

- The 2023 presidential election saw only 6,045 registered electors, and only 5,000 votes cast, the latter, representing only 53.78 percent of theoretical maximum participation (2023 *Today's Business*, 2B:287);

and

WHEREAS, This limited and declining participation in the election of the Synod President does not assure substantially broader representation than the longstanding practice of circuit representation at conventions, which the Synod entrusts to decide all other elections and resolutions; and

WHEREAS, The longstanding practice of electing a president at convention has not only served the Synod well since its inception, but avoids the unnecessary trouble and expense associated with digital voting, not to mention increasingly more pervasive internet safety concerns; and

WHEREAS, 2023 Resolution 9-11, "To Elect Synod President at Convention" (2023 *Today's Business*, 1:190), proposing the election of the Synod President at the convention was not brought before or acted upon by the delegation; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention amend Bylaws 3.12.2.1–3.12.2.6 and 3.12.4.2 (a) as follows, as proposed in 2023 Res. 9-11, that the convention may again exercise the right it had since the founding of the Synod to elect the president:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Elections of President and First Vice-President

3.12.2.1 The candidates for the office of President shall be the five ordained ministers who received the highest number of votes in the nominating process and who consent to serve if elected. The candidates for the office of First Vice-President shall be the 20 ordained ministers receiving the highest number of votes in the nominating process. ~~No opportunity shall be provided for additional nominations.~~

(a) The Secretary of the Synod shall notify each candidate and shall secure his approval in writing within ten days after receiving the results of the ballots for the inclusion of his name on the ballot.

(b) In the event of the death, declination, or unavailability of any candidate, the nominee having the next highest number of votes shall become a candidate. In the event of a tie for the final candidate position, all names involved in the tie shall be included as candidates.

...

~~3.12.2.3 The Secretary of the Synod shall compile and maintain the voters list for the election of the President of the Synod. This list and any of its parts shall not be disseminated.~~

~~(a) This voters list shall include:~~

~~(1) the pastor of each member congregation or multi-congregation parish (assisting pastors are not eligible)~~

~~(2) a lay person from the congregation or parish~~

~~(b) The congregation shall present to the Secretary of Synod 90 days prior to the election a proper credentials form provided by the Secretary, signed by two of the congregation's officers. If a congregation or parish has more than one pastor eligible to vote, the congregation shall designate on the credentials form which pastor will cast a vote on behalf of the congregation.~~

~~(c) If one or both voters are unavailable, congregations shall be provided opportunity to select substitute voters up to a deadline designated by the Secretary.~~

~~(d) The registration status of congregations shall be made available to respective district presidents for the sole purpose of~~

~~their encouraging registration for greater congregational participation. The registration status of congregations shall not be further disseminated.~~

~~3.12.2.4 Six weeks prior to the national convention, the Secretary of the Synod shall provide, via a secure and verifiable method, opportunity for two voting delegates from each congregation, as determined according to Bylaw 3.12.2.3, to vote for one of the candidates for President. The Secretary shall, with the approval of the Board of Directors of the Synod, obtain the assistance necessary to accomplish this task. If no candidate receives a majority of the votes cast, a second or succeeding ballots are required for a majority; the candidate receiving the fewest votes and all candidates receiving less than 15 percent of the votes cast shall be dropped from the ballot, unless only one candidate receives 15 percent or more of the votes cast, in which case the three highest candidates shall constitute the ballot, and another vote shall be taken in the same manner.~~

~~3.12.2.5 Following the completion of the election and at least two weeks prior to the convention, the Secretary shall notify the candidates of the results of the ballot(s). He shall thereafter also make the results known to the public. The candidate receiving a majority of the votes cast shall be declared elected.~~

3.12.2.3 The convention shall have the right to add to the slate for President at the proper time by amendment.

(a) The amendment procedure shall include merely a motion, a second, and a vote on the amendment, deliberately excluding verbal characterizations and discussion of the motion (except for the chair to ascertain that the requirements have been met as to eligibility, consent, and the filing of the biographical form).

(b) Delegates making nominations from the floor shall have secured prior written consent of the candidates they wish to nominate.

(c) Such delegates shall immediately submit to the Secretary of the Synod this document and written pertinent information concerning their nominee(s) as detailed in Bylaw 3.12.2.2.

(d) After all such amendments have been voted on, the convention shall ratify the slate of candidates prior to each election.

3.12.2.4 Each voting delegate shall be entitled to vote for one of the candidates for President. The candidate receiving a majority of the votes cast shall be declared elected.

(a) If no candidate receives a majority of the votes cast, the four candidates receiving the highest number of votes shall be retained on the ballot, and another vote shall be taken.

(b) Thereafter, the candidate receiving the smallest number of votes shall be eliminated on each subsequent ballot until one candidate receives a majority of the votes cast.

3.12.2.6 Prior to all other elections, the convention shall elect the President and the First Vice-President.

(a) The newly elected President-elect shall select from the list of 20 nominees for the Office of First Vice-President five nominees who have consented to serve if elected, at least two of whom shall be taken from the top five nominees.

(b) Balloting will proceed with the candidate receiving the smallest number of votes eliminated from consideration until one candidate receives a majority of the votes cast, who shall be declared elected.

...

Committee on Elections

...

3.12.4.2 The President shall determine and announce a period of time during the convention for the election of the members of all elective boards and commissions.

(a) After the election of the President and the First Vice-President and the other vice-presidents in that order, the election by ballot of the Secretary shall next be conducted.

...

and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention restore the presidential election to the 2029 convention.

Christ, La Mesa, CA; Circuit 9 (Decatur), Indiana District

Ov. 9-22

To Amend Bylaw Subsection 3.12.2 to Restore Presidential Election to Convention

WHEREAS, The 2010 Synod convention changed the longstanding practice of electing the President of the Synod at the convention, instead conferring the right to congregationally-designated electors using a “secure and verifiable method” in an election taking place before the convention (Bylaw 3.12.2.4); and

WHEREAS, Since the implementation of this pre-convention voting process, participation has declined in every subsequent presidential election, to wit:

- In 2013: 8,201 registered electors with 6,432 votes cast (62.16 percent of theoretical maximum participation);
- In 2016: 7,348 electors with 6,157 votes cast (60.76% of theo. max.);
- In 2019: 6,449 electors with 5,823 votes cast (58.97% of theo. max.);
- In 2023: 6,045 electors with only 5,000 votes cast (53.78% of theo. max., 2023 *Today's Business*, 2B:287);

and

WHEREAS, This declining participation fails to demonstrate a substantially broader or more representative electorate than the historic system of circuit-elected delegates gathered at the Synod convention, who continue to vote on all other elections and resolutions; and

WHEREAS, The longstanding method of presidential election by convention delegates served the Synod well for generations, providing deliberative engagement, theological reflection, and real-time responsiveness to the church's needs; and

WHEREAS, The current system incurs ongoing financial and technological burdens, along with growing concerns over internet reliability, digital security, and access equity for smaller or underserved congregations; and

WHEREAS, 2023 Resolution 9-11, “To Elect Synod President at Convention,” (2023 *Today's Business*, 1:190–91) proposed restoring presidential elections to the convention floor, but was not brought forward for consideration or action by the delegation; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention amend Bylaws 3.12.2.1–3.12.2.6 and 3.12.4.2 (a) as follows, as proposed in 2023 Res. 9-11, thereby restoring the election of the Synod President to the Synod convention:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Elections of President and First Vice-President

3.12.2.1 The candidates for the office of President shall be the five ordained ministers who received the highest number of votes in the nominating process and who consent to serve if elected. The

candidates for the office of First Vice-President shall be the 20 ordained ministers receiving the highest number of votes in the nominating process. ~~No opportunity shall be provided for additional nominations.~~

(a) The Secretary of the Synod shall notify each candidate and shall secure his approval in writing within ten days after receiving the results of the ballots for the inclusion of his name on the ballot.

(b) In the event of the death, declination, or unavailability of any candidate, the nominee having the next highest number of votes shall become a candidate. In the event of a tie for the final candidate position, all names involved in the tie shall be included as candidates.

...

~~3.12.2.3 The Secretary of the Synod shall compile and maintain the voters list for the election of the President of the Synod. This list and any of its parts shall not be disseminated.~~

~~(a) This voters list shall include:~~

~~(1) the pastor of each member congregation or multi-congregation parish (assisting pastors are not eligible)~~

~~(2) a lay person from the congregation or parish~~

~~(b) The congregation shall present to the Secretary of Synod 90 days prior to the election a proper credentials form provided by the Secretary, signed by two of the congregation's officers. If a congregation or parish has more than one pastor eligible to vote, the congregation shall designate on the credentials form which pastor will cast a vote on behalf of the congregation.~~

~~(c) If one or both voters are unavailable, congregations shall be provided opportunity to select substitute voters up to a deadline designated by the Secretary.~~

~~(d) The registration status of congregations shall be made available to respective district presidents for the sole purpose of their encouraging registration for greater congregational participation. The registration status of congregations shall not be further disseminated.~~

~~3.12.2.4 Six weeks prior to the national convention, the Secretary of the Synod shall provide, via a secure and verifiable method, opportunity for two voting delegates from each congregation, as determined according to Bylaw 3.12.2.3, to vote for one of the candidates for President. The Secretary shall, with the approval of the Board of Directors of the Synod, obtain the assistance necessary to accomplish this task. If no candidate receives a majority of the votes cast, a second or succeeding ballots are required for a majority; the candidate receiving the fewest votes and all candidates receiving less than 15 percent of the votes cast shall be dropped from the ballot, unless only one candidate receives 15 percent or more of the votes cast, in which case the three highest candidates shall constitute the ballot, and another vote shall be taken in the same manner.~~

~~3.12.2.5 Following the completion of the election and at least two weeks prior to the convention, the Secretary shall notify the candidates of the results of the ballot(s). He shall thereafter also make the results known to the public. The candidate receiving a majority of the votes cast shall be declared elected.~~

3.12.2.3 The convention shall have the right to add to the slate for President at the proper time by amendment.

(a) The amendment procedure shall include merely a motion, a second, and a vote on the amendment, deliberately excluding verbal characterizations and discussion of the motion (except for the chair to ascertain that the requirements have been met as to eligibility, consent, and the filing of the biographical form).

(b) Delegates making nominations from the floor shall have secured prior written consent of the candidates they wish to nominate.

(c) Such delegates shall immediately submit to the Secretary of the Synod this document and written pertinent information concerning their nominee(s) as detailed in Bylaw 3.12.2.2.

(d) After all such amendments have been voted on, the convention shall ratify the slate of candidates prior to each election.

3.12.2.4 Each voting delegate shall be entitled to vote for one of the candidates for President. The candidate receiving a majority of the votes cast shall be declared elected.

(a) If no candidate receives a majority of the votes cast, the four candidates receiving the highest number of votes shall be retained on the ballot, and another vote shall be taken.

(b) Thereafter, the candidate receiving the smallest number of votes shall be eliminated on each subsequent ballot until one candidate receives a majority of the votes cast.

3.12.2.65 Prior to all other elections, the convention shall elect the President and the First Vice-President.

(a) The newly elected President-elect shall select from the list of 20 nominees for the Office of First Vice-President five nominees who have consented to serve if elected, at least two of whom shall be taken from the top five nominees.

(b) Balloting will proceed with the candidate receiving the smallest number of votes eliminated from consideration until one candidate receives a majority of the votes cast, who shall be declared elected.

...

Committee on Elections

...

3.12.4.2 The President shall determine and announce a period of time during the convention for the election of the members of all elective boards and commissions.

(a) After the election of the President and the First Vice-President and the other vice-presidents in that order, the election by ballot of the Secretary shall next be conducted.

...

and be it further

Resolved, That this restoration of the presidential election be implemented in time for the 2029 Synod convention.

South Lake
League City, TX

Ov. 9-23

To Affirm Regional Selection of Board Members

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is a nationwide church body with diverse regional, cultural, and missional contexts; and

WHEREAS, The Synod's Board of Directors (BOD), Board for National Mission (BNM), and Board for International Mission (BIM) exercise governance and mission oversight that affect congregations and districts across all regions of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, The Synod's Bylaws establish regional representation in the composition of the BOD (Bylaw 3.3.4.1), the BNM (Bylaw 3.8.2.3), and the BIM (Bylaw 3.8.3.3); and

WHEREAS, Regional representation in board membership helps ensure that decisions are informed by the lived realities, mission opportunities, and challenges present throughout the Synod; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has historically valued broad participation and shared responsibility in its governance and mission structures; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention affirm the principle of regional selection and representation in the nomination and election of members to the Synod's BOD, BNM, and BIM; and be it further

Resolved, That the appropriate Synod entities be encouraged to continue or strengthen processes that provide for balanced regional representation on these boards, so that the governance and mission leadership of the Synod reflects the breadth of its districts and ministries.

Board of Directors
Southeastern District

Ov. 9-24

To Create Task Force to Develop Overture for Change in Regional Vice-President Selection

WHEREAS, The Synod utilizes entities within specific groupings to live out its life together as *Synod* in an orderly way for the benefit of the Body of Christ; and

WHEREAS, Districts are "the Synod itself performing the functions of the Synod" (Bylaw 4.1.1.1); and

WHEREAS, "The district president shall represent the Synod in his district" (Bylaw 4.4.2); and

WHEREAS, "A president shall be elected from the clergy roster of the Synod by each district" (Bylaw 4.3.1); and

WHEREAS, "A visitation circuit is a network of congregations that 'walks together' for mutual care, support, advice, study, ecclesiastical encouragement, service, coordination, resources, and counsel—all for the sake of greater congregational participation in God's mission" (Bylaw 5.1.1); and

WHEREAS, Districts "establish visitation circuits according to geographical criteria" (Bylaw 5.1.2); and

WHEREAS, "Each circuit visitor shall assist the district president within the circuit" (Bylaw 5.2.3); moreover, "[the circuit visitor] shall serve under the direction of and be accountable to the district president and shall serve as his spokesman when so authorized and directed and shall assist him in doctrinal and spiritual supervision" (Bylaw 5.2.3 [a]); and

WHEREAS, "The circuit visitor shall hold his position by virtue of his selection by the circuit forum and ratification by the district convention" (Bylaw 5.2.2); and

WHEREAS, "The [Synod] vice-presidents shall be elected advisors of the President and, upon the President's request or as provided by the Synod, shall assist him in discharging his responsibilities or represent him" (Bylaw 3.3.2); and

WHEREAS, The filling of a vacancy in a regional vice-presidency is only made "in consultation with the district presidents within that region" (Bylaw 3.3.2.4); and

WHEREAS, Five Synod vice-presidents are designated "regional vice-presidents" (Bylaw 3.3.2.3); and

WHEREAS, Selection by regional groupings is deemed appropriate for circuit visitors and district presidents, each of whom serve under the direction of another, who is elected by a broader grouping; and

WHEREAS, Circuit visitors are selected in their regional grouping and ratified by the district in convention; therefore be it

Resolved, That a task force be established consisting of representatives from the Council of Presidents (COP), the

Commission on Handbook, and the Commission on Constitutional Matters, to develop an overture to be submitted to the 2029 Synod convention that provides for the necessary changes, so that the five regional vice-presidents would be selected by their respective regional delegates and ratified by the 2032 Synod convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the overture developed would be disseminated to the district presidents and circuit visitors in sufficient time for the appropriate bodies (e.g., district conventions, district boards of directors, circuit forums, congregations, etc.) to utilize the overture for permissible submission to the 2029 Synod convention; and be it finally

Resolved, That the COP take the lead on organizing the task force in sufficient time for the execution of this responsibility.

Board of Directors
Florida-Georgia District

Ov. 9-25

To Amend Bylaws to Allow Regional Delegates to Select Regional Vice-Presidents

WHEREAS, The Synod utilizes entities within specific groupings to live out its life together as *Synod* in an orderly way for the benefit of the Body of Christ; and

WHEREAS, Districts are “the Synod itself performing the functions of the Synod” (Bylaw 4.1.1.1); and

WHEREAS, “The district president shall represent the Synod in his district” (Bylaw 4.4.2); and

WHEREAS, “A president shall be elected from the clergy roster of the Synod by each district” (Bylaw 4.3.1); and

WHEREAS, “A visitation circuit is a network of congregations that ‘walks together’ for mutual care, support, advice, study, ecclesiastical encouragement, service, coordination, resources, and counsel—all for the sake of greater congregational participation in God’s mission” (Bylaw 5.1.1); and

WHEREAS, Districts “establish visitation circuits according to geographical criteria” (Bylaw 5.1.2); and

WHEREAS, “Each circuit visitor shall assist the district president within the circuit” (Bylaw 5.2.3); moreover “[the circuit visitor] shall serve under the direction of and be accountable to the district president and shall serve as his spokesman when so authorized and directed and shall assist him in doctrinal and spiritual supervision” (Bylaw 5.2.3 [a]); and

WHEREAS, “The circuit visitor shall hold his position by virtue of his selection by the circuit forum and ratification by the district convention” (Bylaw 5.2.2); and

WHEREAS, “The [Synod] vice-presidents shall be elected advisors of the President and, upon the President’s request or as provided by the Synod, shall assist him in discharging his responsibilities or represent him” (Bylaw 3.3.2); and

WHEREAS, The filling of a vacancy in a regional vice-presidency is only made “in consultation with the district presidents within that region” (Bylaw 3.3.2.4); and

WHEREAS, Five Synod vice-presidents are designated “regional vice-presidents” (Bylaw 3.3.2.3); and

WHEREAS, Selection by regional groupings is deemed appropriate for circuit visitors and district presidents, each of whom

serve under the direction of another, who is elected by a broader grouping; and

WHEREAS, Circuit visitors are selected in their regional grouping and ratified by the district in convention; therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.12.2.7 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Nominations and Elections of Regional Vice-Presidents

3.12.2.7 After the results of the first-vice-presidential election have been announced, the convention shall elect five regional vice-presidents according to the following nominations and elections process.

(a) Each member congregation of a region (including any non-geographic-district congregations in that region) shall have been given opportunity, through a secure and verifiable method provided by the Secretary of the Synod, to nominate two ministers of religion—ordained from the clergy roster of the Synod with residence in its designated region as candidates for regional vice-president.

(b) The names of the five ministers of religion—ordained residing within the boundaries of each geographic region who receive the most nominating votes shall form the slate from which the delegates to the Synod convention from the respective regions shall select by majority vote the each regional vice-president from their respective region.

(c) No opportunity shall be provided for additional nominations from the floor of the convention.

(d) Voting delegates to the national convention shall be entitled to vote for one of the candidates from ~~each region~~ the region of the congregation in which they hold membership. If no candidate receives a majority of the votes cast, the three candidates receiving the highest number of votes shall be retained on the ballot.

(e) Balloting shall continue with the candidate receiving the least number of votes eliminated until one candidate from each region has received a majority of the votes cast.

(f) After the selection of the regional vice-presidents, the selected vice-presidents shall be ratified by voting delegates to the Synod convention by majority vote.

(fg) Upon the ~~election~~ ratification of the regional vice-presidents, a final election will take place ranking the vice-presidents by separate ballots with a simple majority of voting delegates determining the second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth vice-presidents in line of succession.

Board of Directors
Florida-Georgia District

Ov. 9-26

To Develop Overture for Change in Regional Vice-President Selection

WHEREAS, The Synod utilizes entities within specific groupings to live out its life together as *Synod* in an orderly way for the benefit of the Body of Christ; and

WHEREAS, Districts are “the Synod itself performing the functions of the Synod” (Bylaw 4.1.1.1); and

WHEREAS, “The district president shall represent the Synod in his district” (Bylaw 4.4.2); and

WHEREAS, “A president shall be elected from the clergy roster of the Synod by each district” (Bylaw 4.3.1); and

WHEREAS, “A visitation circuit is a network of congregations that ‘walks together’ for mutual care, support, advice, study,

ecclesiastical encouragement, service, coordination, resources, and counsel—all for the sake of greater congregational participation in God’s mission” (Bylaw 5.1.1); and

WHEREAS, Districts “establish visitation circuits according to geographical criteria” (Bylaw 5.1.2); and

WHEREAS, “Each circuit visitor shall assist the district president within the circuit” (Bylaw 5.2.3); moreover, “[the circuit visitor] shall serve under the direction of and be accountable to the district president and shall serve as his spokesman when so authorized and directed and shall assist him in doctrinal and spiritual supervision” (Bylaw 5.2.3 [a]); and

WHEREAS, “The circuit visitor shall hold his position by virtue of his selection by the circuit forum and ratification by the district convention” (Bylaw 5.2.2); and

WHEREAS, “The [Synod] vice-presidents shall be elected advisors of the President and, upon the President’s request or as provided by the Synod, shall assist him in discharging his responsibilities or represent him” (Bylaw 3.3.2); and

WHEREAS, The filling of a vacancy in a regional vice-presidency is only made “in consultation with the district presidents within that region” (Bylaw 3.3.2.4); and

WHEREAS, Five Synod vice-presidents are designated “regional vice-presidents” (Bylaw 3.3.2.3); and

WHEREAS, Selection by regional groupings is deemed appropriate for circuit visitors and district presidents, each of whom serve under the direction of another, who is elected by a broader grouping; and

WHEREAS, Circuit visitors are selected in their regional grouping and ratified by the district in convention; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Secretary of the Synod develop an overture to be submitted to the 2029 Synod convention that provides for the needed changes, so that the five regional vice-presidents would be selected by their respective regions and ratified by the 2032 Synod convention.

Florida-Georgia District

Ov. 9-27

To Appoint Task Force to Improve District Representation on Synod Boards, Boards of Regents, and Commissions

Preamble

Given that *synod* in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) means “walking together,” there should be equitable representation to ensure that as many districts as possible are included in the “walking together” leadership of the LCMS.

WHEREAS, There were 69 elections at the 2023 Synod convention that included ordained ministers, commissioned ministers, and laypersons for the following offices, boards, and commissions: vice-presidents, Secretary, LCMS Board of Directors, Board for National Mission, Board for International Mission, Commission on Theology and Church Relations, Concordia Publishing House Board of Directors, Lutheran Church Extension Fund Board of Directors, Concordia University System Board of Directors, and boards of regents for the Seminaries and Concordia Universities; and

WHEREAS, Data analytics for the 2023 Synod convention show unequal district representation among those elected, including the following inequities:

- 57 percent of the districts have one or fewer representatives in the elected positions.
- Twelve districts (34 percent of districts), representing 1,292 congregations with 326,842 baptized members, have no one elected to any of the boards or commissions.
- Eight districts (23 percent of districts), representing 1,573 congregations with 416,004 baptized members, each have only one individual elected to either a board or commission.
- 12 percent of the districts have five or more representatives in the elected positions.
- One district (3 percent of districts), representing 158 congregations with 36,159 baptized members, has seven individuals elected to boards or commissions.
- Three districts (9 percent of districts), representing 777 congregations with 278,925 baptized members, each have five individuals elected to boards or commissions.

and

WHEREAS, There is also data to support inequities when looking at regions, with the East-Southeast Region having significantly fewer individuals elected than the other regions, and the non-geographic districts having significantly more representatives elected than the geographic districts; and

WHEREAS, With 69 elections and 35 districts, there should be a strong consideration to have on average two representatives from each district serving on Synod boards and commissions. While this may not always be possible, it is something that the Synod should be striving for. By improving district representation on Synod boards and commissions, the benefits for the Synod include, but are not limited to, the following:

- More district participation and perceived value
- More opportunities to share differing perspectives based on specific regional/district concerns
- Better decision-making

therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention establish a task force to consider methods, procedures, parameters, and changes to any applicable Synod bylaws and policies to improve the representation of all districts on Synod boards, boards of regents, and commissions elected during conventions; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force prepare an overture or overtures to implement any changes to improve the representation of all districts on Synod boards, boards of regents, and commissions elected during conventions; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force be composed of the Secretary of Synod, three representatives from the Council of Presidents, three district secretaries, lay representatives from or appointed by three district boards of directors, the Commission on Handbook, and the Commission on Constitutional Matters; and be it finally

Resolved, That the task force issue its report, including any proposed overtures, twelve months before the next Synod convention.

Eastern District; Board of Directors, Eastern District

Ov. 9-28**To Amend Bylaw 3.2.4.1 to Limit Terms of Office for President, First Vice-President, Regional Vice-Presidents, and Secretary**

WHEREAS, The Lord gifts all people with many and diverse gifts; and

WHEREAS, Paul acknowledges this truth in 1 Corinthians 12:28–31 with reference specifically to the Office of the Holy Ministry, where it is written, “And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts”; and

WHEREAS, The Lord has gifted the church with many faithful men who possess the gifts of leadership and administration; and

WHEREAS, We are discouraged from trusting in human princes—precisely because of their humanity—rather than in God who alone saves and endows all pastors with these various gifts, as it is written in Psalm 146:3, “Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation”; and

WHEREAS, All elected offices in the world and in the church, including the elected offices of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, are often very stressful and take their toll on any and all who hold them; and

WHEREAS, We should always be concerned for the physical, emotional, and spiritual welfare of all who hold office in our Synod, that they not become negatively impacted by their work and are encouraged to return to their lives after service, healthy at all levels; and

WHEREAS, One of the benefits of term limitation is that it focuses the office holder by helping him to see what limits there are to his time and the authority of his office; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has already seen the wisdom of limiting the tenure of board and commission members; therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.2.4.1 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING***Terms of Office***

3.2.4.1 As to reelection, the~~The~~ offices of President, the first Vice-President, regional vice-presidents, and Secretary shall be ~~without limitation as to reelection~~limited to four consecutive terms or a maximum of 15 years lifetime in one particular office.

...

and be it further

Resolved, That this amendment take immediate effect, meaning that the count of consecutive terms begin with the convention at which the amendment is adopted.

Circuit 21 (Oconomowoc)
South Wisconsin District

Ov. 9-29**To Amend Bylaw 3.2.4.1 to Establish Term Limits for Elected Synod Officers**

WHEREAS, The Synod is and has been served by the varied gifts and abilities of those who are elected by the Synod to serve as

officers, members of boards, and members of commissions of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Those individuals elected by the Synod are, during their term of office, using their gifts and abilities to the fullest extent in furtherance of the Synod’s life together, such that the duties and obligations of said officers and positions by necessity require tremendous focus and dedication by those elected thereto, at times to the exclusion or diminishment of their vocations to family and neighbor; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has been abundantly blessed by God with faithful men and women throughout its member congregations and its rosters of ordained and commissioned ministers with a multitude of gifts and abilities who are capable of serving the Synod in the offices and positions elected by the Synod, such that no officer, board member, or commission member is irreplaceable; and

WHEREAS, There is not uniformity of practice within the Synod with regard to term limits, as the offices of President of Synod, First Vice-President, regional vice-presidents, and Secretary of Synod are without limitation while members of all boards and commissions of the Synod are subject to limitations; and

WHEREAS, Term limits facilitate good order and harmony within the Synod, requiring the intentional selection of perspectives, gifts, and abilities well suited to the furtherance of the Synod’s work together in order to proclaim and witness to the nation and world; and

WHEREAS, Term limits demonstrate and affirm care for those who serve the Synod in the offices and positions elected by the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Term limits remind the members of the Synod that our hope, confidence, and trust rests and resides in Christ and Christ alone, the head of the Church; therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.2.4.1 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING***Terms of Office***

3.2.4.1 ~~The~~Those holding the offices of President, ~~the first~~First Vice-President, regional ~~vice-presidents~~vice-president, and Secretary shall be ~~without limitation as to reelection~~ineligible for reelection to the same office after serving a total of four (4) successive three-year terms, unless otherwise provided in the Bylaws.

(a) Service in said offices for more than one-half of a term shall be regarded as a full term under limited tenure rules.

(b) Any officer who is ineligible for reelection to an office may be elected or appointed to another office or position.

~~(ac)~~ (c) If the President, First Vice-President, or Secretary are not reelected or do not stand for re-election, they shall continue to receive full salary for a period of six (6) months while rendering transitional service.

~~(bd)~~ (d) Such service and salary will cease at the time such person accepts another full-time position.

~~(ee)~~ (e) Before his successor assumes office, the outgoing President shall use the intervening time to settle the affairs of his administration and assist the newly elected President as requested to become acquainted with the responsibilities of the office.

and be it further

Resolved, That the limitation established by Bylaw 3.2.4.1 as amended shall be applied, imposed, and effective for all elections held on or after Sept. 2, 2026.

St. John
Seward, NE

Ov. 9-30

To Amend Bylaw 3.2.4 to Establish Term Limits for Synod President and Vice-Presidents

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod treasures faithful leadership rooted in God’s Word and the Lutheran Confessions; and

WHEREAS, Scripture teaches that leadership in Christ’s Church is a stewardship, not personal possession (1 Cor. 3:5–9), and the Church flourishes when many servants exercise their gifts (Rom. 12:3–8; Eph. 4:11–12); and

WHEREAS, The history of the Church shows both the blessings of continuity and the dangers of undue concentration of authority, which term limits can help prevent; and

WHEREAS, Term limits encourage wider participation in leadership, raising up new servants for the sake of the Gospel’s advance; and

WHEREAS, Healthy turnover of leadership guards against stagnation, fosters humility, and reminds the Church that no one individual is indispensable, but Christ alone is head of His Church (Col. 1:18); and

WHEREAS, Term limits are a common practice in both civil society and the wider church, recognized as a way to ensure accountability and vitality in institutions; and

WHEREAS, Constitution Article XII governs districts and their presidents, and this overture does not propose to alter those provisions—thus district presidents may remain without term limits; therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.2.4 be amended as follows:

~~PRESENT~~/PROPOSED WORDING

Terms of Office

3.2.4 The term of office of all elected officers of the Synod (Bylaw 3.2.1) shall be three years; of the elected members of the Board of Directors and all other boards and commissions of the Synod six years; of all members of college and university boards of regents three years; and of all appointed members of boards, commissions, and standing committees three years, unless these Bylaws specifically provide otherwise.

(a) The President, First Vice-President, regional vice-presidents, Secretary, and members of all boards and commissions of the Synod who are elected by the Synod convention shall assume office on September 1 following the convention and shall be inducted into office on a date subsequent to September 1 following the convention. Members of college and university boards of regents elected by district conventions shall assume office upon the close of the convention at which they are elected.

(b) In the interim, the newly elected President shall meet with the reelected and newly elected vice-presidents to assess the state of the Synod, to plan for the communication and carrying out of the resolutions adopted at the convention, to assign areas of responsibility to the vice-presidents, and to gather names and obtain information helpful for making wise appointments; he shall meet with the chairman and the staff supporting the boards and commissions to discuss their convention reports, to assess with them the financial support they will need; and he shall meet with the financial and administrative officers to assess the financial status of the Synod and the estimate of the financial resources available for the coming year.

(c) The President of the Synod shall be limited to a maximum of five consecutive elected terms in that office.

(d) The First Vice-President and each regional vice-president of the Synod shall be limited to a maximum of five consecutive elected terms in that office.

(e) After reaching the maximum number of terms in office, an individual shall not be eligible for reelection to the same office.

(ef) ...

and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for all past and present officers of Synod who have faithfully served Christ’s Church, and pray that these term limits will serve the Gospel’s advance by encouraging renewal, accountability, and the raising up of future leaders.

Circuit 18
Texas District

Ov. 9-31

To Give Commissioned Ministers the Franchise and To Study Equal Lay and Clergy Representation on Boards and Other Bodies

WHEREAS, Commissioned ministers are laity and not clergy; therefore be it

Resolved, That Synod Bylaw changes be prepared for consideration at the next Synod convention by a task force appointed for the purpose of making commissioned ministers eligible to represent the congregations which hold their membership as lay delegates to circuit forums, district conventions, and Synod conventions, in such instances where the congregations and/or circuits in question deem the individual commissioned minister capable of representing the congregation and/or circuit fully in its interests due to their congregational involvement apart from their official commissioned church work; and be it further

Resolved, That the same task force study and make proposals at the next Synod convention concerning bringing the balance of all Synod and district boards and other bodies to 50 percent laity and 50 percent clergy.

Circuit 14 (Austin)
Minnesota South District

Ov. 9-32

To Amend Constitution Article XII 10 a to Provide Option of Appointing Ordained or Commissioned Minister as District Convention Rostered Voting Delegate

Preamble

The Synod’s ministers of religion—commissioned, such as deaconesses, teachers, directors of Christian education (DCEs), and other ministers, fulfill critical leadership and ministerial roles within the church. While not ordained, their service and experience is unique and vital to the schools, congregations, recognized service organizations (RSOs), and communities that the Synod serves. This overture proposes that all rostered workers be eligible to serve as the non-laity voting delegate to district convention under Constitution Article XII 10 a. The proposed constitutional amendment does not cause an imbalance between rostered church worker delegates and lay delegates.

WHEREAS, Deaconesses, teachers, DCEs, and other commissioned ministers provide essential spiritual, educational, and administrative leadership in Synod schools, congregations, RSOs, and communities; and

WHEREAS, The current voting structure excludes commissioned ministers from ever serving as delegates, making them essentially voiceless members of the Synod, yet their ministry and their life in the church are impacted by decisions made in convention; and

WHEREAS, The Synod values the unique contributions of all those called to service in the church and wishes to ensure their representation in a way that respects the unique capacities of rostered workers while preserving the balance of rostered church workers and laity; therefore be it

Resolved, That Const. Art. XII 10 a be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Article XII Districts of the Synod and Their Regulation

...

10. The meetings of the districts of the Synod are composed of the following:

a. Voting Delegates

Every member congregation or multi-congregation parish is entitled to two votes, one of which is to be cast by its pastor or commissioned minister and the other by the lay delegate elected and deputed by the congregation or parish.

...

and be it further

Resolved, That other Synod Constitution articles or bylaws which pertain to this change also be updated to reflect this new voting delegate composition.

Circuit 1

Northern Illinois District

Ov. 9-33

To Amend Bylaw 3.1.2 to Expand the Number of Circuit Delegates to Synod Conventions and to Include Ministers of Religion—Commissioned

Preamble

This overture amends the district voting delegate structure for Synod conventions by expanding the number of delegates each circuit may appoint from two to four. The two new delegates include an additional lay voting delegate and a commissioned minister voting delegate. This approach acknowledges that the service and experience of commissioned church workers is unique and vital to the schools, congregations, recognized service organizations, and communities that the Synod serves while maintaining the current representation of ordained pastors and laity.

WHEREAS, Rostered workers, such as deaconesses, teachers, directors of Christian education (DCEs), and other ministers of religion—commissioned (commissioned ministers) provide essential spiritual, educational, and administrative leadership in the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Commissioned ministers are trained and Synod approved for calls, and have made vows to uphold Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, meaning they are uniquely positioned to have significant insights into matters of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, The current voting structure excludes commissioned ministers from ever serving as delegates, making them essentially voiceless members of the Synod, and yet their ministry and their life in the Church are impacted by decisions made in convention; and

WHEREAS, The Synod values the unique contributions of all those called to service in the church and wishes to ensure their representation in a way that respects the unique capacities of the ordained pastoral office while preserving the balance of rostered church workers and laity; therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.1.2 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Voting Delegates

3.1.2 Electoral circuits shall meet as required by the Bylaws of the Synod to elect circuit voting delegates to the Synod's national conventions.

...

(c) Voting delegates shall consist of one pastor, one commissioned minister, and ~~one layperson~~ two laypersons from each electoral circuit. These pastoral and lay delegates and their alternates shall be elected according to the regulations of the Synod (Bylaw 3.1.2.1).

(d) The ~~commissioned minister and lay delegate~~ delegates shall serve throughout the triennium following the convention as an advisory member of the circuit forum.

and be it further

Resolved, That other bylaws which pertain to this change also be updated to reflect this new voting structure of four circuit delegates; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod's Commission on Constitutional Matters assist districts in preparing changes to their bylaws to be amended at the next district convention following the 2026 Synod convention.

Circuit 1, Northern Illinois District

Ov. 9-34

To Strengthen Convention Participation of Ministers of Religion—Commissioned

WHEREAS, Ministers of religion—commissioned are trained, authorized, and rostered as members of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Commissioned ministers support the Office of the Holy Ministry through the faithful teaching of the Word; and

WHEREAS, Commissioned ministers bring unique and faithful perspectives and gifts to the collective ministry of the Church; and

WHEREAS, Commissioned ministers have served essential roles in the faith formation of children, youth, adults, and families in congregations of the Northwest District; and

WHEREAS, Commissioned ministers have direct and unique influence on people who are considering vocational ministry within our congregations; and

WHEREAS, Commissioned ministers serve as celebrated ministry partners in support of pastors and ministries that provide access to Word and Sacrament ministry in all corners of the district; and

WHEREAS, Commissioned ministers have served in critical roles connecting the lost with a pastor and local congregation; and

WHEREAS, Commissioned ministers are required to attend district conventions or supply an official excuse to the district office (Bylaw 4.8.2 [d]); and

WHEREAS, Commissioned ministers have repeatedly brought significant value to floor committee work in the district; and

WHEREAS, Commissioned ministers enrich the discussions and discernment of floor committees and convention proceedings; and

WHEREAS, The Synod highly values commissioned ministers for their eagerness to serve the Lord and His Church (2019 Res. 9-17, “To Study Voting Privilege in the LCMS” [*Proceedings*, 201]); and

WHEREAS, Currently, there are 375 commissioned ministers (as of July 9, 2024) who serve the mission and ministry of congregations, schools, child development centers, camps, compassion centers, and mission work throughout the district; and

WHEREAS, We desire to honor the bylaws and structure of the Synod convention; and

WHEREAS, Commissioned ministers serving as advisory delegates are free to speak from the floor during all debates; therefore be it

Resolved, That the district in convention strongly encourage the district president to continue utilizing commissioned ministers to serve on convention floor committees; and be it further

Resolved, That commissioned ministers be encouraged to attend the convention by serving as advisory delegates; and be it further

Resolved, That they be encouraged to offer their voice at the microphone and by participating in an advisory poll preceding each vote on a resolution; and be it further

Resolved, That the district, having initiated this practice at the 2025 convention, continue this practice at subsequent district conventions; and be it further

Resolved, That calling entities be encouraged to fund commissioned minister expenses as advisory delegates in the same manner as pastoral and lay delegates; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention pass a like-minded resolution for Synod conventions.

Northwest District

Ov. 9-35

To Strengthen Nonvoting Advisory Role of Commissioned Ministers at Synod Conventions

WHEREAS, There are well over 10,000 ministers of religion—commissioned (including candidates and emeriti) who serve in roles such as classroom teachers, early childhood teachers, educational administrators, deaconesses, camp directors, directors of parish music, directors of Christian education, directors of Christian outreach, university professors, district and Synod staff, as well as in the foreign mission field; and

WHEREAS, Commissioned ministers are considered advisory members at district and Synod conventions, with a representative voice, but no vote; and

WHEREAS, Various districts (Pacific Southwest, California-Nevada-Hawaii, and Northern Illinois) have incorporated methods of hearing the guidance of commissioned ministers at their conventions using a non-binding advisory poll of the opinion of commissioned ministers, with results broadcast to the convention, prior to regular delegate votes on appropriate, non-election, convention actions, as determined by the chair; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has a legacy of promoting and supporting the role of non-ordained, full-time church workers with the

establishment of Lutheran colleges dating back to the 1800s, initially designed to train classroom teachers, which has now been followed with the creating of specialized training programs for other commissioned ministry positions, as they have been established by the Synod; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod develop a similar process practiced by several district conventions by which the voice of representative advisory commissioned ministers be used during Synod convention business, incorporating a process of a non-binding poll, with results broadcast to the convention, prior to regular delegate votes on appropriate, non-election, convention actions, as determined by the chair; and be it further

Resolved, That this action be memorialized to the 2026 Synod convention.

California-Nevada-Hawaii District

Ov. 9-36

To Amend Bylaws to Eliminate Ability of Circuit Forum to Submit Overtures

WHEREAS, The principal business of the Synod and its districts in convention is conducted through the consideration of reports and overtures (Bylaw 3.1.6); and

WHEREAS, Overtures to the Synod in convention and the districts in convention may be submitted by, *inter alia*, member congregations of the Synod and a forum of a circuit (circuit forum) (Bylaw 3.1.6.2); and

WHEREAS, Visitation circuits are a network of congregations, established by a district according to geographical criteria (Bylaw section 5.1), for which the circuit forum is designed to keep “congregations, particularly the lay leaders, commissioned ministers, and pastors, supportive of one another in their common confession and mutually active in developing programs for the good of member congregations, in considering and recommending new work, and in suggesting improvements for services and programming at the national and district levels” (Bylaw 5.3.1); and

WHEREAS, The Bylaws provide that a circuit forum consists of one pastor and one layperson from each member congregation (Bylaw 5.3.2), is encouraged to meet at least twice a year (Bylaw 5.3.1), and must meet at least once triennially (Bylaw 5.3.3), but do not establish requirements for a quorum or the voting threshold for a circuit forum to take action; and

WHEREAS, A member congregation of the Synod can submit overtures, authorized and approved by a majority of the voting members of said member congregation at a meeting at which a quorum is present or by its governing board if so authorized by the governing documents of said member congregation, either of which carries legitimacy in the act; and

WHEREAS, Conversely, submission of an overture by a circuit forum gives the impression that it is supported by all congregations of the visitation circuit when, in reality, it may have been approved by a minimal number of representatives who attended the circuit forum; and

WHEREAS, Nothing is accomplished by allowing circuit forums to submit overtures that cannot be accomplished through member congregations of a visitation circuit submitting the same overture to the Synod in convention or a district in convention; therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.1.6.2 be amended as follows:

~~PRESENT/PROPOSED~~ WORDING*Overtures*

3.1.6.2 Overtures to a convention of the Synod may be submitted only by a member congregation of the Synod, a convention or board of directors of a district, an official district conference of ordained and/or commissioned ministers, the faculty of an educational institution of the Synod, the Board of Directors of the Synod, a board or commission of the Synod listed in Bylaws 3.2.2, 3.2.2.1, 3.2.3, and 3.2.3.1, ~~or a committee established by a prior convention, or a forum of a circuit.~~

...

and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw section 5.3 be amended as follows:

~~PRESENT/PROPOSED~~ WORDING**5.3 Circuit Forums**

...

~~5.3.5 The circuit forum shall be qualified to submit overtures to national and district conventions.~~

St. John
Seward, NE

Ov. 9-37

To Amend Bylaw 3.1.6.2 to Allow Pastoral Circuit Meetings and Teacher Groups to Submit Overtures

WHEREAS, The Synod specifies that congregations are encouraged to submit ideas, suggestions or overtures to their circuit forum (Bylaw 5.3.1); and congregations, boards of directors, professional church worker conferences, educator/teacher conferences, as well as circuit forums, may forward overtures for the consideration of the Synod convention; and

WHEREAS, Circuit forums and professional church worker conferences are not designed for deliberation of complex and potentially divisive issues; and circuit forums and congregations are not wise settings for revealing serious issues in the Synod or districts; and

WHEREAS, In the past, pastoral circuits and teacher groups were allowed to submit overtures, and they had both the time and structure for extensive study and debate leading to wise proposals; Therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod again allow pastoral circuits and educator/teacher groups to submit overtures to the Synod and districts; and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.1.6.2 be amended as follows:

~~PRESENT/PROPOSED~~ WORDING*Overtures*

3.1.6.2 Overtures to a convention of the Synod may be submitted only by a member congregation of the Synod, a convention or board of directors of a district, an official district conference of ordained and/or commissioned ministers, the faculty of an educational institution of the Synod, the Board of Directors of the Synod, a board or commission of the Synod listed in Bylaws 3.2.2, 3.2.2.1, 3.2.3, and 3.2.3.1, a committee established by a prior convention, district pastoral circuits and educator/teacher groups, or a forum of a circuit.

...

Circuit 3 (Baltimore East)
Southeastern District

Ov. 9-38

To Amend the Bylaws to Require Sixty-Percent Affirmative Vote for All Non-Election Matters

WHEREAS, The Synod is united in doctrine and practice by a commitment to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, requiring a high degree of consensus on matters of significance; and

WHEREAS, Decisions adopted by a narrow simple majority (50 percent plus one) may not reflect the broad consensus of the Synod's delegates, leading to perceived institutional instability, division, or resistance to implementation among the congregations and workers of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, The adoption of major resolutions, particularly those impacting the Synod's structure, mission priorities, or financial commitments, benefits from a stronger mandate to ensure unity of purpose and widespread support; and

WHEREAS, A requirement for a greater majority margin for non-election decisions would promote more robust discussion, encourage amendments that build broader consensus, and increase the Synod's institutional unity in its adopted positions; and

WHEREAS, The Synod's Constitution and Bylaws already require a two-thirds majority for certain significant actions (e.g., changes to the Constitution, doctrinal resolutions), demonstrating that a higher threshold is appropriate for consequential votes; therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.1.1 be amended as follows:

~~PRESENT/PROPOSED~~ WORDING**3.1 National Conventions**

3.1.1 The national convention of the Synod shall afford an opportunity for worship, nurture, inspiration, fellowship, and the communication of vital information. It is the principal legislative assembly, which amends the Constitution and Bylaws, considers and takes action on reports and overtures, and handles appropriate appeals. It establishes general positions and policies of the Synod, provides overall program direction and priorities, and evaluates all such positions, programs, policies, directions, and priorities in order to provide responsible service for and on behalf of its members. Only a national convention of the Synod shall authorize affiliation or association and the discontinuance of such affiliation or association of the Synod with other church bodies, synods, or federations. Except as otherwise provided in the Constitution or Bylaws (e.g., Constitution Article XV for constitutional amendments), a resolution or motion shall be adopted by a majority of the delegates voting, the majority being more than one-half of the votes cast (i.e., greater than 50 percent). However, for all resolutions and motions on the convention floor, except for elections for office, the majority of adoption shall be 60 percent or more of the votes cast, unless a higher threshold is already required by the Constitution or Bylaws.

and be it further

Resolved, That this supermajority requirement shall not apply to procedural motions, the adoption of minutes, or other routine, non-substantive business as determined by the chair; and be it further

Resolved, That the Secretary of the Synod ensure that voting procedures and electronic systems are configured to apply this requirement appropriately; and be it further

Resolved, That the Commission on Handbook and the Commission on Constitutional Matters be directed to make all necessary and corresponding amendments, cross-references, and editorial adjustments throughout the Bylaws to maintain consistency with this provision; and be it finally

Resolved, That this bylaw amendment take effect at the close of the 2026 Synod convention.

St. Thomas
Magnolia, TX

Ov. 9-39

To Bring Resolutions with Strong District Support to Convention Floor

WHEREAS, The Synod receives more resolutions each triennium than can reasonably be brought to the delegates of the national convention; and

WHEREAS, The Bylaws provide for the President of Synod and the convention floor committees to vet, edit, and organize overtures submitted to provide oversight and to maximize the efficiency of the Synod convention (Bylaws 3.1.6.2 and 3.1.7); and

WHEREAS, Committees often, but do not always, give priority to concerns and resolutions that have received support from multiple districts of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Each triennium, significant numbers of overtures, including some that have the support of multiple districts, remain unaddressed at the Synod convention, or are referred to authorities outside the Synod acting in convention; therefore be it

Resolved, That any resolution, or cause, receiving support from seven or more districts of the Synod, whether by action of their respective conventions or their boards of directors, be referred to the Synod in convention for full consideration; and be it further

Resolved, That if such a cause or resolution receiving support from seven or more districts is found to be in violation of the Synod's doctrinal standards or Bylaws that cause be given for the dismissal of the resolution; and be it further

Resolved, That such cause be published in the *Convention Workbook*, *Today's Business*, or announced by the chair to the convention; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Bylaws be amended to reflect the above.

Eastern District; Board of Directors, Eastern District

Ov. 9-40

To Create Process for Initiatives and Referenda

WHEREAS, The Michigan District is organized under the laws of the state of Michigan; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is organized under the laws of the state of Missouri; and

WHEREAS, Our church body is based on a common constitution; and

WHEREAS, The laws of Missouri (and Michigan) recognize the constitutional power of initiative and referendum; and

WHEREAS, Under these constitutional principles, the people reserve to themselves the power to propose laws and to enact and reject laws—called the initiative—and the power to approve or reject laws enacted by the legislature—called the referendum; and

WHEREAS, Under these constitutional principles, our congregations reserve to themselves all constitutional powers not previously granted, including the power to propose laws and to enact and reject laws—called the initiative—and the power to approve or reject laws enacted by the legislature—called the referendum; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod shall, within six months from the close of this convention, submit bylaw provisions to the congregations, setting forth procedures by which congregations can submit initiatives and referendums to the Secretary of Synod for approval by the congregations.

Huntington Woods, Huntington Woods, MI;
Circuit 18 (Birmingham), Michigan District

Ov. 9-41

To Provide Clarity about Amendments to Resolutions

WHEREAS, The apostle Paul proclaims that “For God is not a God of confusion but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33); and

WHEREAS, The current practice at the Synod convention is to show changes to resolutions only in their final form in the publication of *Today's Business*, with no clear explanation of the changes to the resolutions (e.g., Res. 7-01A [2023 *Today's Business*, 2B:309]); and

WHEREAS, Many of the resolutions are significantly lengthy, especially those dealing with changes to the Bylaws; and

WHEREAS, It is difficult for convention delegates to understand the changes between successive revisions of resolutions given the window between publications of *Today's Business*, which is often short; and

WHEREAS, Delegates who do not understand a revision will not be able to vote in good conscience on a given resolution; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Commission on Handbook and other appropriate parties consider changes to the practice of bringing revised resolutions to the floor, to include a complete verbal explanation and print notation of changes made in a revision; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod convention processes seek to bring more clarity to the delegates who are voting upon the important matters considered.

Florida-Georgia District

Ov. 9-42

To Change to Four-Year Convention Cycle

WHEREAS, It has been studied and discussed for several years to move from a three-year district and Synod convention cycle to a four-year cycle; and

WHEREAS, Such a change would save millions of dollars in district and Synod convention expenses; and

WHEREAS, Moving to a four-year convention cycle would demonstrate a sensitivity to the financial challenges facing many congregations and a commitment to practice wise stewardship; and

WHEREAS, In response to the COVID-19 pandemic some districts and the Synod moved to a four-year convention cycle without great difficulty; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention adopt a four-year convention cycle, effective upon completion of the 2026 Synod convention.

Board of Directors
Eastern District

Ov. 9-43**To Amend Const. Art. VIII A 1 to Change to Four-Year Convention Cycle**

WHEREAS, It has been studied and discussed for several years to move from a three-year district and Synod convention cycle to a four-year cycle; and

WHEREAS, Such a change would save millions of dollars in district and Synod convention expenses; and

WHEREAS, Moving to a four-year convention cycle would demonstrate a sensitivity to the financial challenges facing many congregations and a commitment to practice wise stewardship; and

WHEREAS, In response to the COVID-19 pandemic some districts and the Synod moved to a four-year convention cycle without great difficulty; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention adopt a four-year convention cycle, effective upon completion of the 2026 Synod convention; and be it further

Resolved, That Article VIII of the Constitution be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING**A. Time and Legality of Meetings**

1. The Synod convenes every ~~three~~four years for its regular meeting.

...

and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention direct each district to adopt a four-year convention cycle, coordinated with the Synod's four-year convention cycle.

Southeastern District

Ov. 9-44**To Amend Bylaw 4.2.2 to Grant Lay Vote to Every Congregation at District Conventions**

WHEREAS, The Synod Constitution Article V A deals with voting members of the Synod and states: "All organized congregations that have joined the Synod hold voting membership." At the meetings of the districts of the Synod every congregation or parish is "entitled to two votes, one of which is to be cast by the pastor and the other by the lay delegate" (Const. Art. XII 10 A); and

WHEREAS, Multi-congregation parishes are presently represented by one voting pastoral delegate (if not vacant) and one voting lay delegate, plus an advisory lay delegate for each congregation that does not supply a voting delegate (Bylaw 3.1.2.1 [c]); and

WHEREAS, The emphasis of our polity on the representation of congregations is intrinsically connected to the scriptural and confessional understanding of a congregation's bearing all the characteristics of the Church; and

WHEREAS, Every individual congregation is a member of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Few, if any, district conventions have had an equal number of lay and clergy delegates present and has never resulted in a domination of either lay or clergy; and

WHEREAS, All congregations are created equal: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matt. 18:20); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod in convention give all organized congregations that hold membership in the Synod the opportunity to be represented by a lay delegate and a pastoral delegate at district conventions, noting that Bylaw 3.1.2.1 (c) allows such representation at circuit forums and regional caucuses; and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 4.2.2 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING**4.2 District Conventions**

...

- 4.2.2 The delegates of a voting congregation or multi-congregation parish to a district convention shall be accredited.

...

(d) Each member congregation of the Synod shall be entitled to representation at its district convention by one voting lay delegate elected and deputed by that congregation. Congregations served in multi-congregation parishes shall, in addition, be represented collectively by one voting pastoral delegate in accordance with Constitution Article XII 10, so that every organized member congregation has its own lay vote at district conventions.

Southeastern District

Ov. 9-45**To Permit Majority Voting in Electronic Decisions for Synod Boards and Agencies**

WHEREAS, Electronic voting is a valuable tool for the Synod's boards and agencies, enabling prompt and efficient decision-making when in-person meetings are not feasible; and

WHEREAS, The current requirement of agencies of the Synod for unanimous consent in electronic voting can delay essential decisions, potentially hindering the responsiveness and effectiveness of Synod governance; and

WHEREAS, A majority or supermajority voting requirement for electronic decisions provides flexibility while still ensuring a strong consensus, which may be sufficient for most governance matters; and

WHEREAS, Missouri Nonprofit Corporation Law (§ 355.286) allows majority voting in electronic decisions unless a greater requirement is specified in an organization's articles of incorporation or bylaws, thereby providing a legal foundation for this practice; and

WHEREAS, The need for discussion and deliberation is a valid concern in electronic voting, and the adoption of asynchronous communication practices can support meaningful dialogue without delaying decision timelines; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Nebraska District in convention memorialize the Synod to amend its policies to permit majority or supermajority voting in electronic decisions conducted by its boards and agencies, in accordance with Missouri Nonprofit Corporation Law; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod encourage boards and agencies to facilitate asynchronous discussions prior to electronic votes, using secure and accessible online platforms (such as forums or dedicated

messaging channels) where members can raise questions, provide feedback, and review responses from others; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod recommend best practices for asynchronous communication, such as establishing a minimum discussion period, setting clear guidelines for questions and responses, and designating a board member or facilitator to monitor and summarize key points, ensuring a balanced and comprehensive discussion; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod provide training and resources on best practices for conducting electronic votes and asynchronous discussions, helping boards and agencies to make decisions thoughtfully, transparently, and in alignment with governance principles.

Nebraska District

Ov. 9-46

To Amend Bylaw 3.6.1.8 (c) to Clarify That Two-Thirds Synod Member Approval Requirement for Synodwide Corporate Entity Governing Document Amendments Is Based on Members Actually Present at Meeting

WHEREAS, The board of trustees of the LCMS Foundation has reviewed the convention overture submitted by LCEF “To Amend Bylaws 3.6.1.8 (c) and 3.6.4 (a) to Clarify that Two-Thirds Approval Requirements for Synodwide Corporate Entity and Lutheran Church Extension Fund Governing Document Amendments are Based on Members Actually Present at Meeting”; and

WHEREAS, The LCMS Foundation has determined that as a synodwide corporate entity, the Foundation is also challenged by the issues raised in the aforementioned overture as contained in Synod Bylaw 3.6.1.8 (c) and wishes to express its support for the proposed change, so far as it applies to the LCMS Foundation; therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.6.1.8 (c) be amended as follows:

~~PRESENT~~/PROPOSED WORDING

3.6 Synodwide Corporate Entities

General Principles

...

3.6.1.8 Each synodwide corporate entity shall provide in its governing instruments

...

(c) a provision that any amendments to a provision of its governing instruments which relate to its objects and purposes, the designating of its members, or the procedure for amending its governing instruments shall require a two-thirds affirmative vote of its members present at such meeting, if any, who are appointed by the Board of Directors of the Synod; and

...

Board of Trustees
LCMS Foundation

Ov. 9-47

To Amend Bylaw 3.6.4.3 to Clarify That All Lutheran Church Extension Fund Voting Directors are *Elected* and To Add That No More Than Two Such Directors Can Be from the Same District

Rationale

Bylaw 3.6.4.3 [2] refers to some of Lutheran Church Extension Fund’s (LCEF) directors as being *chosen* by its members. However, the first sentence of the immediately following Bylaw 3.6.4.3.1 refers to the same directors as being *elected*. The proposed wording below would resolve this inconsistency by changing *chosen* to *elected* in Bylaw 3.6.4.3 [2].

The LCEF Bylaws in Section 1, Article II, contain a sentence that reads, “No more than two elected Directors can be from the same District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.” The Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM), in Opinion 26-3076, dated March 5, 2026, has stated that the aforesaid limitation does not apply to the LCEF directors elected by the Synod in convention since the limitation does not appear in the Synod’s Bylaws. The CCM also suggested that, “The convention can be asked to add the language to the Synod Bylaws, perhaps to Bylaw 3.6.4.3, and if it does so, the provision would be operative from the time of adoption.”

In order, therefore, to clarify that the requirement that no more than two elected LCEF directors can be from the same district also pertains to the LCEF voting directors elected by the Synod in convention, a sentence similar to that in the LCEF Bylaws is proposed to be added to Synod Bylaw 3.6.4.3. This would avoid the possibility that the LCEF directors elected by the Synod convention, when added to the directors elected by the LCEF membership, could exceed the limitation. Since LCEF amended its Bylaws in 2025 to remove geographical restrictions regarding the election of its directors, the proposed change would prevent overrepresentation on the LCEF Board of Directors by any one district.

Therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.6.4.3 be amended as follows:

~~PRESENT~~/PROPOSED WORDING

3.6.4.3 The board of directors for the Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod shall consist of such number of directors as are specified in the bylaws of The Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod. All voting members of the board of directors of the Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod shall serve a maximum of four three-year terms.

1. Three directors shall be elected by the Synod in convention and shall include one ordained or commissioned minister and two laypersons.
2. The remaining voting directors shall be ~~chosen~~elected by the members.
3. The representative designated by the Board of Directors of the Synod shall also be a nonvoting member of the board.

No more than two elected directors shall be from the same district, provided that the current term of a director shall not be affected if the director moves from one district to another during the term.

Board of Directors
Lutheran Church Extension Fund

Ov. 9-48

To Affirm and Use Biblical Terminology concerning Ministry

WHEREAS, The Word of God, “the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testament” is “the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with [all] teachers should be estimated and judged” (FC Ep, Summary Content, 1, Triglotta); and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is made up of local churches, their ministers, and various organizations and their workers to promote the God-given work of the churches and the kingdom of God; and

WHEREAS, It is desirable to use the language of the Holy Scriptures to describe and define the work of our churches and Synod, in order to conform our actions to the Word of God and to protect us from false teaching and sins (which result from the temptations of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh); and

WHEREAS, God instituted an office in Christ’s Church, with various responsibilities, variously called:

apostles: ἀποστόλους, men sent on a mission, Matt. 10:2; Acts 1:2; 15:2, 4, 6, 22; Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 9:1, 5; 12:28; 15:7, 9; 2 Cor. 1:1; 12:11; Gal. 1:1, 17, 19; Eph. 1:1; 2:20; 3:5; 4:11; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 17; Rev. 2:2; 18:20; 21:14; perhaps 2 Cor. 8:23; and Phil. 2:25 (though most translations call these men a “messenger” or “envoy” from their churches); Jesus Himself is called “the apostle and high priest of our confession,” Heb. 3:1; an office of “apostleship,” ἀποστολή, is mentioned in Rom. 1:5; 1 Cor. 9:2; Gal. 2:8;

prophets: προφήτας, Acts 13:1; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 2:20; 3:5; 4:11; Rev. 18:20;

evangelists: εὐαγγελιστάς, Acts 21:8; Eph. 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:5; verb εὐαγγελίζω, “evangelize,” tell the good message, Acts 5:42; 8:4, 12, 25, 35, 40; 14:7, 15, 21; 15:35; et al.; Rom. 1:15; 15:20; 1 Cor. 1:17; 9:16, 18; 15:1; Gal. 1:8, 11, 16, 23; Eph. 3:8; 1 Peter 1:12, 25; done also by Jesus and angels, e.g., Matt. 11:5; Luke 1:19; 2:10; 3:18; 16:16; Rev. 14:6;

pastors or shepherds: ποιμένας, Eph. 4:11; a term used for Jesus in John 10:11, 14, 16; Heb. 13:20; and 1 Peter 2:25; the verb ποιμαίνω is used in Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:2;

teachers: διδασκάλους, Latin *magister* or *doctor*, Acts 13:1; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11; James 3:1; this term is used by Jesus for Himself, e.g., Matt. 26:18; John 13:13; their work is διδασκαλία, “teaching,” 1 Tim. 5:17; verb διδάσκω, “teach,” Acts 15:35, also describes Jesus’ work, e.g., Luke 20:1; Acts 5:42;

overseers or bishops: ἐπισκόπους, Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7; their work is ἐπισκοπή, “oversight,” Acts 1:20; 1 Tim. 3:1; verb ἐπισκοπέω, 1 Peter 5:2; forms applied to Jesus in 1 Pet 2:25; Luke 19:44;

elders: πρεσβυτέρους, Acts 14:23; 20:17; 21:18; 15:2, 4, 6, 22; 16:4; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:17, 19; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1; 2 John 1; Rev. 4:4;

ministers: λειτουργούς, “of Christ Jesus,” Rom. 15:16;

co-workers: συνεργούς, Rom. 16:21; 2 Cor. 8:23; “God’s co-worker,” 1 Cor. 3:9;

servants or slaves: διακόνους, 1 Cor. 3:5; Col. 4:7; “of a new testament,” 2 Cor. 3:6; “of God,” 2 Cor. 6:4; “of Christ,” 2 Cor. 11:23; Eph. 3:7; “of the Gospel,” Col. 1:7, 23; 1 Tim. 4:6; “in the Lord,” Eph. 6:21; “of [Christ’s] body, which is the church,” Col. 1:24–25; συνδούλους, “beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow-slave in the Lord,” Col. 4:7; ὑπηρέτας, “servants,” “of Christ and stewards [οἰκονόμους, “managers”] of the mysteries of God,” 1 Cor. 4:1; δούλους, “slave,” “of Jesus Christ,” Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1; Gal. 1:10; referring to Christians, 1 Cor. 7:22; Eph. 6:6; Col. 4:12; “for Jesus’ sake,” 2 Cor. 4:5; “of God,” Titus 1:1; “of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,” James 1:1;

preachers: κήρυκας, those who deliver proclamations, German *Prediger*, 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11; and

stewards: οἰκονόμους, “of God,” Titus 1:7;

and

WHEREAS, The New Testament uses various words to refer to other workers among God’s people in Christ’s kingdom, who were not specifically in offices instituted or mandated by God, such as:

servants or deacons: διακόνους, Matt. 20:26; 23:11; John 12:26; Rom. 13:4 (government rulers); 16:1 (female); Phil. 1:1; and 1 Tim. 3:8–13 (in contrast to a “bishop” vs. 1–7), noting, “these also should be examined first; then they may serve as deacons, if they are without charges”; 1 Tim. 3:10; also the verb διακονέω, Matt. 8:15 (household service); 25:44; 27:55; Luke 8:3; 10:40; also the noun διακονία, Acts 6:2; 1 Tim. 3:10, 13; Philemon 13; 1 Peter 4:10f.;

rulers: ἄρχοντας, Acts 4:5, 8, of the Jews;

elders: πρεσβυτέρους, Acts 4:5, 8, of the Jews; 11:30 and perhaps 15:2, of Christians;

co-workers: συνεργούς, “in Christ,” Rom. 16:3, 9; “co-worker,” Rom. 16:21; Phil. 4:3; Col. 4:11; “God’s co-worker,” Romans 16; 1 Thess. 3:2; Philemon 24; “co-worker and fellow-soldier (συστρατιώτην) and ... minister (λειτουργόν) for my needs,” Phil. 2:25;

workers: ἐργάτας, 2 Tim. 2:15; and

stewards: οἰκονόμους, “good stewards of God’s varied grace,” 1 Peter 4:10;

and

WHEREAS, One biblical Greek word for *servant* (διάκονος) has entered the English language in three ways: by translating it as *servant*, by anglicizing the Greek word as *deacon* or *deaconess*, and by using the Latin translation as *minister*, and this Greek word refers to servants generally (Matt. 23:11), including household servants (Matt. 22:13; Mark 9:35; 10:43; John 2:5, 9), government rulers/authorities (Rom. 13:1–4), servants in the church (cited above), Christ Himself (Rom. 15:8), and even servants of Satan (2 Cor. 11:14–15) or servants of sin (Gal. 2:17); and

WHEREAS, Over time the English word *minister* has largely lost the denotation of *servant* to others (who are their lords), and has taken on the connotation of a higher position than that of others (e.g., *ministers* as heads of various government agencies in the British empire, under the *prime minister*, who is no longer seen as the first of servants of the king and of the people but as the head of

the government), and in the Synod “the Office of the Ministry” has been termed “the highest office in the Church” (Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics Vol. III* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953], 461), which should not be understood as contradicting the rest of what Pieper wrote about the ministry (extensively citing the Bible, Luther, and the Lutheran Confessions); and

WHEREAS, It is good and helpful to distinguish between the men whom God has called to perform the duties of the divinely instituted preaching office in the Church (*Predigtamt*) for proclaiming and teaching God’s Word and administering the Sacraments (pastor/bishop/teaching elder), on the one hand, and the men and women whom churches may appoint to perform other duties or hold other offices in the churches, who are expected to believe, teach, confess, and uphold the same confession of faith; and it is helpful for the Synod to certify and keep records of those who have been deemed qualified and have been appointed or called to these other offices; and

WHEREAS, The New Testament uses various terms to describe how people are designated or authorized to perform God-pleasing duties in the Church, such as, “called” (κλητός, Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1), “call” (καλέω, Gal. 1:15), “set apart” (ἀφορίζω, Acts 13:2; Rom. 1:1; cf. Gal. 1:15) or “appoint” (ἀναδείκνυμι, Luke 10:1; “point out,” Acts 1:24; καθίστημι, “put in charge,” Acts 6:3; Titus 1:5; Heb. 5:1; see also Matt. 24:45–47; 25:21–23; ποιέω, “make,” Mark 3:14; Heb. 3:2; τίθημι, “set,” John 15:16 and 1 Cor. 12:28; 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11; “by prophecy with the laying on of hands,” 1 Tim. 4:14; or “ordain” [KJV, the Greek word χειροτονέω involves either laying on hands or a show of hands, Acts 14:23], or “appoint choose, or hand-pick,” 2 Cor. 8:19), but there is no mention of ordaining (initiating someone into a specific “order”) or commissioning (though it does mention “putting in charge” or “appointing,” καθίστημι, Acts 6:3) of the people who are to do other kinds of service or hold other offices in the Church; and

WHEREAS, Historically the Synod has affirmed that, “the preaching office is conferred by God through the congregation as the possessor of all ecclesiastical power, or the Keys, and through the call that is prescribed by God. The ordination of those who are called with laying on of hands is not a divine institution but an apostolic, churchly order and only a solemn public ratification of the call” (C.F.W. Walther, Ministry Thesis VI, 1852; in ed. Harrison, *The Church and the Office of the Ministry* [CPH, 2012], p. 5), a position reaffirmed by 2001 Resolution 7-17A, “To Affirm Synod’s Official Position on Church and Ministry” (*Proceedings*, 172–73); and

WHEREAS, For most of its history, the Synod carefully distinguished between pastors, who serve in the “preaching office” or “pastoral office,” which “is not a human institution but an office that God himself has established” (C.F.W. Walther, Ministry Thesis II, *Church and Ministry*, p. 5), “the highest office in the Church, from which flow all other offices in the Church” (Ministry Thesis VIII, *ibid.*), on the one hand, and “auxiliary offices,” which in biblical times included the offices of elders and the deaconate, and in Walther’s day included the offices of “schoolteachers who have the Word of God in their schools, distributors of alms, sextons, precentors [i.e., leaders of singing] at public worship, and others” listed in Ministry Thesis VIII, section 1 of *Church Ministry* (*ibid.*, p. 286); and

WHEREAS, The current Synod Constitution and Bylaws use non-biblical terminology for these two groups of workers in the church (“ministers of religion—ordained” and “ministers of religion—commissioned”) instead of biblical terms, making a distinction without biblical difference (e.g., what we call “the Great Commission” was delivered to men whom Jesus appointed to the Divine Office, who are currently rostered as “ordained ministers,” while there is no biblical term for those currently rostered as “commissioned minister,” those whom God permits the church to appoint to serve in ways other than public preaching and teaching of God’s Word and administering the Sacraments); and

WHEREAS, Historically the Synod, in its Constitution and Bylaws, has referred to “pastors” also as “ministers of the Gospel,” and referred to other theologically trained church workers by various terms that describe their training, duties, or functions; and

WHEREAS, The practices of the Synod have become examples to Lutheran churches around the world, living under the laws of widely divergent governments, and the doctrine and terminology of Lutheran churches should not be determined by the civil governments in which we find ourselves; and

WHEREAS, The terminology “minister of religion—ordained and ministers of religion—commissioned” (Const. Art. V) first entered into Constitution in 1992, replacing the historic wording (through 1986):

Membership in the Synod is held and may be acquired by congregations, ministers of the Gospel, and teachers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church who confess and accept the confessional basis of Article II.

and

WHEREAS, From 1989 through 2004 the Synod in convention added numerous man-made offices to the list of “ministers of religion—commissioned,” incorporating the graduates of programs offered by various colleges and universities of the Synod:

Membership in the Synod is held and may be acquired by congregations, ministers of the Gospel, teachers, and deaconesses of the Evangelical Lutheran Church who confess and accept the confessional basis of Article II. (1989 Const. Art. V);

Membership in the Synod is held and may be acquired by congregations, ministers of religion—ordained and ministers of religion—commissioned, such as teachers, directors of Christian education, directors of Christian outreach, and deaconesses of the Evangelical Lutheran Church who confess and accept the confessional basis of Article II. (Const. Art. V; added 1992; “certified lay ministers” added in 1995; “parish assistants” added in 1998; “directors of parish music” added in 2001; “directors of family life ministry” added in 2004; the “such as” list was moved to the Bylaws in 2019);

and

The following two whereases are present only in the Central Illinois District Board of Directors submission:

WHEREAS, The Central Illinois District has for the most part continued using the historic/biblical terms “pastor” and “teacher” in its Constitution and Bylaws (which also conform more to the terms commonly used in congregations to refer to these workers whom we authorize to teach the faith) after the Synod changed its terminology in its Constitution and Bylaws; and

WHEREAS, The Synod's Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM Op. 25-3053, "Central Illinois District Bylaws, Proposed Revision") directed the district:

The district should, except where it is following explicit Synod Bylaw language that does otherwise, consistently use "ordained minister" and "parish pastor" where it intends these distinct senses. ... The standard language "commissioned minister" would be clearer than the district's language, "commissioned church worker from the Synod roster."

and

WHEREAS, The terminology "minister of religion—ordained" and "ministers of religion—commissioned" was derived in part from the terminology used by the United States of America's Internal Revenue Service (Publication 517, *Social Security and Other Information for Members of the Clergy and Religious Workers*):

Ministers defined. Ministers are individuals who are duly ordained, commissioned, or licensed by a religious body constituting a church or church denomination. Ministers have the authority to conduct religious worship, perform sacerdotal functions, and administer ordinances or sacraments according to the prescribed tenets and practices of that church or denomination. If a church or denomination ordains some ministers and licenses or commissions others, anyone licensed or commissioned must be able to perform substantially all the religious functions of an ordained minister to be treated as a minister for social security purposes. (2025 edition, p. 4, irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p517.pdf);

and

WHEREAS, By conforming the Synod's terminology to that used by the IRS, which for tax purposes treats "ministers" differently from other church employees (who are not considered "ministers" but are subject to regular employment laws), the Synod seems to have chosen a pragmatic way to save our "ministers" some expense on taxes (perhaps violating Jesus' warning: "You cannot serve God and mammon/money," Matt. 6:24 NKJV/ESV), as well as the right to define "ministers" as we wish, without government control; and

WHEREAS, The Synod's lawyers successfully argued before the U.S. Supreme Court (*Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. EEOC*, 565 U.S. 171 [2012], supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/565/171) that all who qualify as "ministers" under our Constitution may be removed from their employment according to our policies, even if for reasons that would violate employment laws for non-ministers; and

WHEREAS, A concurring opinion to *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. EEOC* by Justice Alito noted,

while a ministerial title is undoubtedly relevant in applying the First Amendment rule at issue, such a title is neither necessary nor sufficient. As previously noted, most faiths do not employ the term "minister," and some eschew the concept of formal ordination. [FN3 mentions Muslims as an example.] And at the opposite end of the spectrum, some faiths consider the ministry to consist of all or a very large percentage of their members. [FN4 mentions Jehovah's Witnesses as an example.] Perhaps this explains why, although every circuit to consider the issue has recognized the "ministerial" exception, no circuit has made ordination status or formal title determinative of the exception's applicability.

and

WHEREAS, The use of the term "religion" instead of "church" or "faith" has a long history in the U.S. (e.g., Bill of Rights, Amendment 1: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof"), and the word "religion" in the Bible is used by people who do not share that "religion" (δεισιδαιμόνων, Acts 17:22; δεισιδαιμονία, Acts 25:19; ἐθελοθρησκία, Col. 2:23; or by people who do not share the "religion" of someone else (θρησκεία, Acts 26:5; also "religious," θρησκός, James 1:26; and only once of "religion that is pure and undefiled," James 1:27); thus the government's reference to "religion" is meant to be neutral; but the Church's confession is that we hold the one true faith in the one true God; and

The following whereas is present only in the Central Illinois District Board of Directors submission:

WHEREAS, The introduction of the category of specific ministry pastor to designate men who are "ordained," but not fully qualified to be overseers of a congregation (as other pastors are), since they require oversight of another pastor, added to the confusion that has come with trying to fit professional servants of the church with different educational backgrounds and qualifications into just two categories of church workers; and

WHEREAS, The 1992 Synod convention adopted Res. 5-21, "To Study Classification of Professional Church Workers," and President Alvin Barry appointed a Nomenclature Study Committee (NSC), which delivered its report to the 1998 Synod convention; and

WHEREAS, This committee recommended the following:

[I]t will be in the best interest of the Synod to classify all certified and rostered church workers with the following nomenclature:

1. Pastors
2. Teachers and Associates in Ministry

The NSC believes that this nomenclature clearly distinguishes between the one divinely established office of the ministry, the pastoral office, and those offices that the church has created to help discharge the functions of the pastoral office. (1998 Convention Report R1-8-02, Nomenclature Study Committee, *Workbook*, 8),

but the 1998 Res. 7-14A, "To Address Nomenclature of Church Workers," stated:

WHEREAS, This report has insufficient evidence to justify the proposed changes; and

WHEREAS, The underlying concern which has been identified by the Nomenclature Committee stems from confusion caused by various understanding of the Doctrine of the Ministry; and

...

Resolved, That the recommendations and conclusions of the Nomenclature Committee report be declined at this time; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod in convention commend to the congregations and professional church workers the CTCR document, "The Ministry: Offices, Procedures and Nomenclature" for study that the Synod might open dialog and come to a clearer understanding of the Doctrine of the Ministry" (1998 *Proc.*, 152);

therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod take up this “dialog” by a renewed study of the Holy Scriptures’ teaching concerning the church and its ministries, focusing on God’s will for those who serve and teach His people, and on the proper terms to describe this, reexamining the changes in terminology that the Synod has made over time; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod recognize that using biblical terminology to refer to pastors, ministers, teachers, and other workers in the church is in harmony with the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod, and may be used in the Constitutions and Bylaws of the Synod’s districts and congregations instead of the terminology that is used by the government; and be it further

Resolved, That, in an effort to remove confusion over the use of the term *pastor* or *minister*, the Synod encourage congregations to issue Divine Calls to “retired” pastors, who are willing and able to perform Word and Sacrament ministry in the absence of (or in an assisting capacity to) full-time pastors, in order to reinforce the biblical teaching that those who are “apt to teach” are actually authorized to do so by means of a call or appointment to a congregation or mission, not only by certification by the Synod as someone qualified to do so; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention hereby overturn CCM Op. 25-3053 and 25-3053A and any others, insofar as they have expressed a preference for the terminology of the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod over the historical and biblical use of the term *pastor* and avoidance of calling other church workers *ministers*; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod go back to using biblical terminology wherever possible in its Constitution and Bylaws, choosing more biblically accurate ways to refer to church workers, keeping in mind how we may explain our terminology and practices to a government that does not share our biblical faith or use biblical terminology. For example, if we wish to retain two categories, they could be: pastors and other approved/appointed/authorized church workers; pastors could be divided into the categories of pastors/overseers/doctors and pastors with limitations (including current specific ministry pastors, candidates without call, retired pastors, and chaplains authorized for Word and Sacrament ministry outside of congregations); approved/appointed/authorized church workers could include parochial school teachers who meet the requirements to teach the Bible and Lutheran theology (current “called” teachers), directors of Christian education, deaconesses, cantors, and other church musicians who would be authorized to pick the texts of music sung in Divine Services.

Zion, Taylor Ridge, IL;
Board of Directors, Central Illinois District

Ov. 9-49

To Clarify Multipoint and Multicampus Parish

WHEREAS, The creating or planting of new multi-point parishes, campus locations, or outreach locations across circuit lines, or without clear communication among area or affected congregations and ministries, causes unneeded tension; and

WHEREAS, There are currently no clear guidelines about how to deal with cross-circuit or district lines of these locations; and

WHEREAS, There are no current Synod or district tools to deal with these growing issues; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Nebraska District in convention request that the Synod study the interactions between multi-campus, multi-parish, and regular congregations in order to offer guidance on how such congregations may best work together in planting, consolidating, and establishing satellite campuses with respect to circuit boundaries; and be it further

Resolved, That in the meantime, the district encourages multi-campus and multi-point congregations to communicate and collaborate with brother pastors and congregational leaders of congregations or ministries that may be affected by expansion in their area; and be it finally

Resolved, That a congregation planning new multi-point campus locations, outreach locations, or a new parish, communicate with the district’s Missions and Revitalization Office and the local circuit.

Nebraska District

Ov. 9-50

To Adopt Dual Title of *Bishop and President* for District Presidents

WHEREAS, The English District, Atlantic District, and Southeastern District of the Synod have adopted the dual title of *bishop and president* utilizing *president* in administrative and board settings and *bishop* in congregational and pastoral contexts; and

WHEREAS, The Greek term *episcopos*, often translated as *bishop* appears in scriptural passages such as 1 Timothy 3; 6 and Titus 1, describing one who watches over and provides care for the flock of Christ; and

WHEREAS, The role of a bishop has traditionally been understood as the pastor to pastors, serving as spiritual caregiving and shepherd to those entrusted with the care of Christ’s people; and

WHEREAS, The historical use of the term *bishop* dates back to the Council of Nicaea and has been regularly applied to men serving as leaders within the Christian church; and

WHEREAS, The designation of *bishop* emphasizes the spiritual and pastoral nature of the office in contrast to the corporate title *president*, which aligns with legal and administrative functions; and

WHEREAS, The term *bishop* carries significant weight and is recognized as a respected spiritual office by many in our church communities and broader Christian world, facilitating a contextual understanding that is both spiritually grounded and relational; and

WHEREAS, The title *bishop* is associated with a pastoral, caring approach distinguishing from more administrative connotations associated with the term *president*; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod strongly encourage districts to adopt and implement the title *bishop* for the district president when serving in spiritual and pastoral capacities among congregations, while retaining *president* for administrative and corporate purposes; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod strongly encourage districts to adopt and implement the title *bishop and president emeritus* for former district presidents.

Board of Directors
Eastern District

Ov. 9-51**To Authorize Title *Bishop* for Synod President and District Presidents**

WHEREAS, In common usage the title *president* is a secular rather than an ecclesiastical title; and

WHEREAS, The title *president* when used to refer to the President of the Synod or a district president is unfamiliar not only to the general public but also to members of churches both nationally and around the world; and

WHEREAS, The title *president* does not adequately express the nature of the offices of President of the Synod and district president as being that of a pastor charged with the supervision of the doctrine and practice of pastors and congregations (Const. Art. XI B 1; XII 7); and

WHEREAS, The title *president* does not adequately express the nature of the office of district president as being that of a pastor charged with the responsibility of ordaining (either in person or by proxy) candidates for the pastoral office (Const. Art. XII 9 c); and

WHEREAS, The functions of the President of the Synod and the district presidents, as defined by the Constitution and Bylaws, that entail supervising the doctrine and practice of pastors and congregations and ordaining (either in person or by proxy) candidates for the pastoral office, are the functions of those who from ancient times and in many parts of the Lutheran church have borne and continue to bear the title *bishop*; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions express the desire of the confessors to retain the office of bishop; and

WHEREAS, Martin Luther during his lifetime consecrated two bishops; and

WHEREAS, Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther's Synod address of 1848 shows that he did not in principle reject the office of bishop, saying, "Which person ... would deny that the Swedish Church grew splendidly under its episcopal constitution, especially so long as men like Laurentius Petri ... bore the episcopal dignity ...?" (Matthew C. Harrison, *At Home in the House of My Fathers: Presidential Sermons, Essays, Letters, and Addresses from the Missouri Synod's Great Era of Unity and Growth*, [CPH, 2011]); and

WHEREAS, The original 1847 Synod Constitution does not use the German word *präsident* but rather the Latin word *praeses*, a usage that continued as long as the business of the Synod and the districts was conducted in the German language, as can be seen in the reports of both Synod and district conventions; and

WHEREAS, Many of the Synod's partner churches use the title *bishop* for those charged with the supervision of doctrine and practice, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England, which recently adopted the title *bishop* for the official formerly known as the *chairman*; and

WHEREAS, The English, Atlantic, and Southeastern districts have authorized the use of the historic ecclesiastical title *bishop* for their district presidents; therefore be it

Resolved, That in order to clarify for members of the Synod and for the general public the nature and function of the offices of President of the Synod and district president, and to bring the Synod's nomenclature into closer conformity with ancient usage as preserved in many parts of the Lutheran church from the sixteenth century to the present day, the Synod in convention authorize the

use of the historic ecclesiastical title *bishop* for the President of the Synod and the district presidents; and be it further

Resolved, That authorization to use the title *bishop* implies no change whatsoever in the status, functions and responsibilities of the President of the Synod and the district presidents as defined in the Constitution and Bylaws; and be it finally

Resolved, That authorization to use the title *bishop* implies no change whatsoever to the Church's doctrine that the form of ecclesiastical polity (including the nomenclature of those charged with the supervision of doctrine and practice) is adiaphora, that is, neither commanded nor forbidden by the Word of God.

Our Saviour
Baltimore, MD

Ov. 9-52**To Declare Commission on Constitutional Matters Unconstitutional and Void All Its Opinions**

WHEREAS, The Constitution of the Synod controls and supersedes bylaws and all other rules and regulations of the Synod (Const. Art. XIV); and

WHEREAS, The constitution has limited Synod governance to executive (Const. Art. X, XI) and oversight powers (Const. Art. IV, XIV), specifically excluding any judicial power; and

WHEREAS, The congregations of the Synod have reserved all grants of all other powers, including the judicial power; and

WHEREAS, The Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) has no constitutional grant of power; and

WHEREAS, The CCM was created by the Synod in convention in 1923 by convention resolution; and

WHEREAS, The Synod in convention exceeded its oversight powers when it created the CCM by granting it judicial powers; and

WHEREAS, Congregations have limited the Synod in convention's oversight powers, specifically, "The Synod in convention may adopt bylaws that are consistent with and do not contradict the Constitution of the Synod" (Const. Art. XIV); and

WHEREAS, The CCM exists to exercise judicial functions, being the interpretation of the Synod's governing documents (Bylaw sections 3.9.2, 3.9.2.2) and through the publication of opinions; and

WHEREAS, The CCM acts in a judicial manner through its interpretations and reviews and the publication of its opinions; and

WHEREAS, The Synod in convention has exceeded its limited powers under Const. Art. XIV, as the CCM role, by exercising judicial powers, is not consistent with and contradicts the Constitution of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, "In relation to its members the Synod is not an ecclesiastical government exercising legislative or coercive powers" (Const. Art. VII); therefore be it

Resolved, That the CCM is unconstitutional; and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw sections 3.9.2–2.9.2.2.3 shall be stricken; and be it further

Resolved, That all additional references to the CCM in the Synod's governing documents shall be likewise stricken; and be it finally

Resolved, That all opinions, and any other pronouncements, of the CCM be stricken and void.

Huntington Woods
Huntington Woods, MI

10. Ecclesiastical Supervision and Dispute Resolution

REPORTS

R1, R2, R3–R4.1, R9, R21–R55, R61, R62.12

OVERTURES

Ov. 10-01

To Encourage Visitation by Synod and District

Preamble

The Synod defines ecclesiastical oversight as:

The responsibility, primarily of the district president, to monitor; to make inquiry and receive a response thereto; to make suggestions; to bring concerns to the attention of a higher authority, namely the Synod status granting office, as relates specifically to the ecclesial relations of a recognized service organization operating within his district, and the impact and/or reflection of its work on the mission and ministry of the church (Bylaw 1.2.1 [i]).

So also, the Synod defines ecclesiastical supervision as:

The responsibility, primarily of the President of the Synod and district presidents, to supervise on behalf of the Synod the doctrine, life, and administration of its members, officers, and agencies. Such supervision, subject to the provisions of the Synod's Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions, includes visitation, evangelical encouragement and support, care, protection, counsel, advice, admonition, and, when necessary, appropriate disciplinary measures to assure that the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod are followed and implemented. Thus, ecclesiastical supervision is also the presenting, interpreting, and applying of the collective will of the Synod's congregations. Ecclesiastical supervision does not include the responsibility to observe, monitor, control, or direct the day-to-day activities of individual members of the Synod, whether in the conduct of their work or in their private lives (cf. Bylaw 2.14.1 [a]). Further, those constitutional articles and bylaws pertaining to ecclesiastical supervision shall determine the full definition of ecclesiastical supervision (Bylaw 1.2.1 [j]).

While The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) does not, strictly speaking, practice an episcopal form of governance, there remains an evangelical and biblical form of governance that places pastors under the supervision of their district president, and district presidents under the supervision of the President of Synod. That supervision is enacted by way of visitation (ἐπισκοπή, Luke 19:44).

It is the Evangelical Lutheran position that forms of governance are adiaphora, but as the Synod Constitution and Bylaws are a human institution (1 Peter 2:13), Christians who have willingly aligned themselves with the LCMS are duty-bound to submit to the authority of the LCMS insofar as the LCMS remains faithful to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

The shared ordination vows of pastors, as well as the confirmation vows of laypersons, demonstrate that there is an earnest desire to *walk together* as Synod. There are, however, theological differences

among pastors and laypersons that extend far beyond those topics that may be relegated to adiaphora.

Concerning supervision and oversight, Martin Chemnitz, in his *Enchiridion* (1574; *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion* [CPH, 1981], 17–18) writes:

Now, when this little book was to be published, I then dedicated and addressed it first to you, reverend heads of the monasteries of this duchy, because the reformation of the monasteries was directed to this end, that the prelates should gradually be drawn in and used in the consistory, for visitation, for examinations, and for synods, etc. and because the examinations of pastors in the first visitation were for the most part held in the monasteries—so that this little book might publicly testify what kind of doctrine it is regarding which pastors were examined toward the beginning of the reformation, which [doctrine] also Your Reverences embraced and still profess. Moreover, at the same time I also addressed you, the superintendents, general and special, and all pastors of the churches of this duchy, to testify publicly, confirm thoroughly, and firmly preserve Christian, salutary unity in pure doctrine, against all pernicious corruptions, among the ministers of the churches in the duchy and in the city of Brunswick, as this very model of pure, incorrupt doctrine resounded by divine grace in all these neighboring and other nearby churches of Saxony, in thesis and antithesis, till now and still resounds, as the chief points are explained in a simple manner in this manual. And since God has given His special grace and blessing, so that the Christian declaration of the disputed points of religion—which [declaration] was incorporated in the church order of the duchy of Brunswick, from which also this manual was for the most part drawn—is approved and praised as correct by many leading churches, not only nearby but also far away, I could not object when the printer wanted to issue this little book anew, and I have also improved it in some places. And I hereby want the first, previous dedication of this little book to Your Reverence and Honor to be repeated and confirmed.

May the faithful and most merciful God rule, teach, bless, and keep us in pure doctrine and unity of the Spirit, so that we may one and all, by the grace and help of the Holy Spirit, according to the teaching of Paul, hold steadfastly to the Word, which is salutary and sure, refute those who contradict, Tts 1:9, and endeavor to keep—besides pure doctrine—Christian, brotherly unity and the bond of peace, Eph 4:3. Let us guard against unnecessary, vexatious division and schism, Ro 16:17. Let us not give way or place, even in the least, to the wolf and to tares of false doctrine, Jo 10:12, but, as Luther says, do both faithfully and diligently: feed the sheep and drive away the wolf. Amen. Written at Brunswick, August 6, A.D. 1574

Martin Chemnitz
Lord Superintendent

It is well-established by the LCMS in its Constitution that visitation is a duty of district presidents and the President of the Synod:

Article III Objectives

The Synod, under Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, shall—

1. Conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3–6; 1 Cor. 1:10), work through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom. 16:17), and heresy;

2. Strengthen congregations and their members in giving bold witness by word and deed to the love and work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and extend that Gospel witness into all the world;
3. Recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth;
4. Provide opportunities through which its members may express their Christian concern, love, and compassion in meeting human needs;
5. Aid congregations to develop processes of thorough Christian education and nurture and to establish agencies of Christian education such as elementary and secondary schools and to support synodical colleges, universities, and seminaries;
6. Aid congregations by providing a variety of resources and opportunities for recognizing, promoting, expressing, conserving, and defending their confessional unity in the true faith;
7. Encourage congregations to strive for uniformity in church practice, but also to develop an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith;
8. Provide evangelical supervision, counsel, and care for pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers of the Synod in the performance of their official duties;
9. Provide protection for congregations, pastors, teachers, and other church workers in the performance of their official duties and the maintenance of their rights;
10. Aid in providing for the welfare of pastors, teachers, and other church workers, and their families in the event of illness, disability, retirement, special need, or death.

Article XI Rights and Duties of Officers

A. In General

1. The officers of the Synod must assume only such rights as have been expressly conferred upon them by the Synod, and in everything pertaining to their rights and the performance of their duties they are responsible to the Synod.
2. The Synod at all times has the right to call its officers to account and, if circumstances require it, to remove them from office in accordance with Christian procedure.

...

B. Duties of the President

1. The President has the supervision regarding the doctrine and the administration of
 - a. All officers of the Synod;
 - b. All such as are employed by the Synod;
 - c. The individual districts of the Synod;
 - d. All district presidents.
2. It is the President's duty to see to it that all the aforementioned act in accordance with the Synod's Constitution, to admonish all who in any way depart from it, and, if such admonition is not heeded, to report such cases to the Synod.
3. The President has and always shall have the power to advise, admonish, and reprove. He shall conscientiously use all means at his command to promote and maintain unity of doctrine and practice in all the districts of the Synod.
4. The President shall see to it that the resolutions of the Synod are carried out.

...

Article XII Districts of the Synod and Their Regulation

...

7. The district presidents shall, moreover, especially exercise supervision over the doctrine, life, and administration of office of the ordained and commissioned ministers of their district and acquaint themselves with the religious conditions of the congregations of their district. To this end they shall visit and, according as they deem it necessary, hold investigations in the congregations. Their assistants in this work are the circuit visitors, who therefore shall regularly make their reports to the district president.
8. District presidents are empowered to suspend from membership ordained and commissioned ministers for persistently adhering to false doctrine or for having given offense by an ungodly life, in accordance with such procedure as shall be set forth in the Bylaws of the Synod.

...

As it is also in the Bylaws of the Synod:

- 1.9.2 Before materials stipulated in Bylaw 1.9.1 are published, they shall be submitted to (a) doctrinal reviewer(s). Reviewers shall make a careful evaluation of the doctrinal content of all items submitted. Materials are to be reviewed in a prompt manner and completed in no longer than four weeks. Exceptions shall be arranged by mutual agreement between the reviewer(s) and the originating entity.

- (a) The primary responsibility for doctrinal supervision and review lies with the President of the Synod (Constitution Art. XI B 1).

...

- 4.4.4 The district president shall, in accordance with the Constitution of the Synod, in his ministry of ecclesiastical supervision visit the congregations of the district.

- (a) He shall arrange in advance for an official visit to each congregation of his district at least once every three years and otherwise as he deems it necessary. He may call upon the circuit visitors and vice-presidents to assist him with the triennial visitation of congregations.

- (b) In his official visits he shall seek to bring about to the greatest possible degree the achievement of the Synod's objectives as expressed in Article III of its Constitution.

- (c) He shall conduct his official visits in an evangelical manner.

- (d) He shall come to the pastor and the congregation as a brotherly advisor, reminding them of the joy of serving in the mission and ministry of the church.

- (e) In his visits he shall include fraternal discussion in regard to worship and communion attendance; participation by the congregation in missions and the work of the church at large; the congregation's evangelism and education endeavors; its cultivation of sound stewardship principles; all aspects of compensation for professional church workers; the need for maintenance of purity of doctrine; the strengthening of the bond of Christian fellowship; and the provision of resources, opportunities, and assistance so God's people can grow in their faith, hope, and love.

...

WHEREAS, All pastors of the LCMS make the same vows upon their ordination and installation concerning pure doctrine; and

WHEREAS, It is the duty of district presidents to carry out ecclesiastical oversight and supervision per the Bylaws of Synod; and

WHEREAS, It is the duty of the President of the Synod to carry out ecclesiastical supervision per the Bylaws of Synod; and

WHEREAS, It is the duty of the Synod in convention to exhort the men who hold such offices to do their duty; and

WHEREAS, Christians are called to submit to all human institutions (1 Peter 2:13); and

WHEREAS, Hebrews 13:17 teaches that submission to leaders is to be done out of love and respect, with the confession that such leaders watch over the souls of those under them and will have to give an account to Christ at judgment day; and

WHEREAS, Pastors must therefore give an account for the souls in their congregations (Heb. 13:17; Acts 20:28); and

WHEREAS, District presidents must therefore give an account for the pastors in their district; and

WHEREAS, The Synod President must therefore give an account for district presidents; and

WHEREAS, Proverbs 10:17 teaches that paternal discipline is a blessing to the one being disciplined. This lesson is also taught in Proverbs 23:13–14 as well as Hebrews 12:5–6, 11; and

WHEREAS, God desires that all people—including pastors—would repent when their error is made known to them (Ezek. 33:11; Matt. 18; 2 Peter 3:9); and

WHEREAS, No one lights a lamp and then hides it (Luke 8:16); therefore be it

Resolved, That congregational pastors and district presidents be open and transparent with their ecclesiastical supervisors concerning their doctrine and practice; and be it further

Resolved, That the President of the Synod be encouraged to visit each district at least once during each triennium for the sake of theological review, pastoral counseling, and reproof where necessary; and be it finally

Resolved, That district presidents allow their leaders to visit them “with joy and not with groaning” (Heb. 13:17).

Wyoming District

Ov. 10-02

To Develop Guidelines for Ecclesiastical Supervision of Internet Accusations

Rationale

The biblical and confessional theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church addresses ecclesiastical supervision clearly with a focus on Gospel-focused collegiality and accountability. A spirit of personal interaction, trust, and restoration sets the tone for ecclesiastical supervision efforts with congregations and pastors. “Spying on,” or “going after” erring constituents, and playing “gotcha” with pastors, congregations, or fellow district presidents runs counter to the clear teaching of the Scriptures and Confessions and the spirit of ecclesiastical oversight. The use of the internet to supplement visitation and oversight must be consistent with the clear doctrinal and constitutional foundations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

- A. Constitution Article XII 7 assigns the responsibility of ecclesiastical supervision of congregations and church workers to district presidents as follows: “The district presidents shall, moreover, especially exercise supervision over the doctrine, life, and administration of office of the ordained and commissioned ministers of their district and acquaint themselves with the religious conditions of the

congregations of their district. To this end they shall visit and, according as they deem it necessary, hold investigations in the congregations. Their assistants in this work are the circuit visitors, who therefore shall regularly make their reports to the district president.”

- B. Bylaw 1.2.1 (j) defines *ecclesiastical supervision* as follows: “The responsibility, primarily of the President of the Synod and district presidents, to supervise on behalf of the Synod the doctrine, life, and administration of its members, officers, and agencies. Such supervision, subject to the provisions of the Synod’s Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions, includes visitation, evangelical encouragement and support, care, protection, counsel, advice, admonition, and, when necessary, appropriate disciplinary measures to assure that the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod are followed and implemented. Thus, ecclesiastical supervision is also the presenting, interpreting, and applying of the collective will of the Synod’s congregations. Ecclesiastical supervision does not include the responsibility to observe, monitor, control, or direct the day-to-day activities of individual members of the Synod, whether in the conduct of their work or in their private lives (cf. Bylaw 2.14.1 [a]). Further, those constitutional articles and bylaws pertaining to ecclesiastical supervision shall determine the full definition of ecclesiastical supervision.”
- C. Additionally, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) noted complications in dealing with supervision issues in an internet age, noting in its 2006 report, *Public Rebuke of Public Sin* (adopted May 2006, pp. 22–23): “As we reflect on the meaning of the term “public” in this present context in which we in the LCMS find ourselves, we would do well to keep in mind the situation in the earlier years of our Synod. We may note, for example, that the polity of the LCMS makes all of its members—pastors and congregations—accountable to each other for their lives and teaching. When that polity was adopted in the nineteenth century, communication was such that pastors and congregations that were not in close geographic proximity would know very little about each other. Only the most serious cases would be found worthy of being reported to synodical leadership, and only a very few would ever have been considered by the Synod as a whole. Today that is simply not the case. No deliberation at the local level is needed, when anyone can send an e-mail or post a rebuke on their Web site in response to a real or perceived sin. This situation creates some profound difficulties—not the least of which is that there is nothing in Scripture or the Confessions that justifies a public rebuke made unilaterally in the absence of conversation with others who are aware of the public sin (cf. Acts 18:24–26). In the case of Paul rebuking Peter, Paul was in conversation with the church in Antioch. Luther, too, could and did enlist the help and support of others who recognized that the message of the Gospel had been obscured by the papacy. “Even if consultation should take place, however, modern methods of communication have added another layer of complexity to the problem. Not only is it possible, but it is likely that a public rebuke will receive a wider audience than the public sin that elicited it. In other words, the rebuke has the side effect of publicizing the sin more

widely, of making it known to an audience that had no prior knowledge of it. We must recognize that the number of people directly affected by a public sin might be limited. Although all members of the Synod are accountable to each other, in most cases it will only be necessary to deal with public sin at the local level. Publicity beyond that level may serve to scandalize more than to instruct. This observation should lead to a careful consideration of the audience for a public rebuke. It is neither necessary nor beneficial to involve all members of the Synod in every case of public sin. Those who would undertake a rebuke should take great care, therefore, in choosing their medium of communication and in determining their audience.”

- D. Furthermore, this same CTCR document cites the Confessions in emphasizing the need for Christian charity in addressing wrongdoing that becomes known by others: “In the matter of ‘public sin’ it is also important to recognize that traditionally theologians have distinguished between sins committed willfully and those committed out of ignorance. This distinction is maintained, for example, in the Preface to *The Book of Concord*. ‘In regard to the condemnations, criticisms, and rejections of false, impure teaching (particularly in the article concerning the Lord’s Supper), which had to be expressly and distinctly set forth in this explanation and thorough settlement of the disputed articles so that all would be able to protect themselves from them, and which can in no way be avoided for many other reasons: it is likewise not our will or intention thereby to mean persons who err naively and do not blaspheme the truth of the divine Word, much less whole churches, inside the Holy Empire of the German nation or out. Instead, it is our will and intention thereby to condemn only the false and seductive teachings and the stiff-necked teachers and blasphemers of the same.’ (20)

“The confessors’ approach here would seem to imply that not every expression of false belief is automatically a candidate for public rebuke. Repeated expressions of false belief would certainly qualify as sin that would warrant public rebuke. But in cases of human weakness and ignorance, Christian charity would require private and personal discussion rather than public rebuke. The same point could be made concerning sins of personal conduct, errors in pastoral judgment, and whatever else might broadly be considered sin. Public rebuke should never be the first response in a situation where the one rebuked has no history of erroneous belief or behavior, and has not persisted in the sin. When sin has been committed there is the need for confession and repentance, and the pronouncement of absolution.” (*ibid.*, 25)

- E. Notably, the Scriptures note that God’s people need to be slow to call attention to the sins of others and that ministers of the Gospel need to exhibit humility instead of arrogance: “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye” (Matt. 7:3–5).

“For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain” (Titus 1:7).

- F. Also notably, the Confessions provide guidance regarding the active search for sinful situations: “As for the enumeration of sins in confession, we have said earlier (6–8) that we do not believe that it is necessary by divine right. When someone objects that a judge must hear a case before pronouncing sentence, that is irrelevant because the ministry of absolution is in the area of blessing or grace, not of judgment or law. The ministers of the church, therefore, have the command to forgive sins; they do not have the command to investigate secret sins. In addition, they absolve us of those which we do not remember; therefore absolution, which is the voice of the Gospel forgiving sins and consoling consciences, does not need an investigation.” (Ap XII [ed. Tappert], 102–105)
- G. Finally, in his book “Pastoral Theology”, Rev. John H.C. Fritz reinforces the proper approach to hearing confession rather than searching for outstanding sins: “It is self-evident that a pastor should not use the opportunity afforded him by Communion registration to search out secret sins or family affairs or in any way to encourage gossiping and tattling.” (John H.C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1932], 133)
- “Says Luther, ‘If anyone comes to confession who is under suspicion, I must diligently inquire into the circumstances. If the person denies that he is guilty, I must be satisfied to believe him rather than my own conjecture in the matter’” (*ibid.*, 133–34).

Therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod give thanks to God for the wisdom written down in Scripture, the Confessions, and elsewhere in dealing with our fellow believers when one believes that another has sinned; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod develop guidelines for ecclesiastical supervision when the internet has been used by one party to accuse another of sin; and be it further

Resolved, That such guidelines would, at minimum, address:

1. The distinct responsibility of ecclesiastical oversight given to district presidents in their respective districts that no worker or lay person should usurp, but rather give aid to the district president in his supervision responsibilities.
2. That ecclesiastical supervision “includes visitation, evangelical encouragement, and support, care, protection, counsel, advice, admonition, and when necessary appropriate disciplinary measures,” and does not include seeking out wrongdoing, namely, “the responsibility to observe, monitor, control, or direct the day-to-day activities of individual members of the Synod, whether in the conduct of their work or in their private lives,” (Bylaw 1.2.1 [j]) by electronic or other means.
3. That profound difficulties result when calling out wrongdoing on the internet or otherwise based on online discoveries, “not the least of which is that there is nothing in Scripture or the Confessions that justifies a public rebuke made unilaterally in the absence of conversation with

others who are aware of the public sin.” (LCMS CTRC, *Public Rebuke of Public Sin* [adopted 2006], 22)

4. “That Christian charity would require private and personal discussion rather than public rebuke for wrongdoing or misunderstandings discovered online.” (*ibid.*, 25)
5. That “the ministers of the Church, therefore have the command to forgive sins; they do not have the command to investigate secret sins.” (Ap XII [ed. Tappert], 104)
6. And that if suspected wrongdoing is discovered online, the person discovering such wrongdoing needs to follow scriptural and confessional principles regarding the offense, starting with Matthew 18. If need be, the appropriate ecclesiastical supervisor should be notified for appropriate action.

and be it finally

Resolved, That such guidelines be produced in consultation with the Council of Presidents by the 2029 Synod convention so that they may be reported upon at that meeting.

Florida-Georgia District

Ov. 10-03

To Address Use of Named or Anonymous Social Media Accounts to Create Strife and Division within the Church

WHEREAS, Our Lord commands us to not bear false witness; and

WHEREAS, Martin Luther, teaching on the Eighth Commandment in the Large Catechism (LC I, Triglotta), sharply reminds us that this commandment “forbids all sins of the tongue whereby we may injure or approach too closely our neighbor” (263), and reminds us that “here belongs particularly the detestable, shameful vice of speaking behind a person’s back” (264). He continues:

Therefore, to avoid this vice we should note that no one is allowed publicly to judge and reprove his neighbor, although he may see him sin, unless he have a command to judge and to reprove. For there is a great difference between these two things, judging sin and knowing sin. You may indeed know it, but you are not to judge it. I can indeed see and hear that my neighbor sins, but I have no command to report it to others. Now, if I rush in, judging and passing sentence, I fall into a sin which is greater than his. But if you know it, do nothing else than turn your ears into a grave and cover it, until you are appointed to be judge and to punish by virtue of your office.

Those, then, are called slanderers who are not content with knowing a thing, but proceed to assume jurisdiction, and when they know a slight offense of another, carry it into every corner, and are delighted and tickled that they can stir up another’s displeasure [baseness], as swine roll themselves in the dirt and root in it with the snout. This is nothing else than meddling with the judgment and office of God, and pronouncing sentence and punishment with the most severe verdict. For no judge can punish to a higher degree nor go farther than to say: ‘He is a thief, a murderer, a traitor,’ etc. Therefore, whoever presumes to say the same of his neighbor goes just as far as the emperor and all governments. For although you do not wield the sword, you employ your poisonous tongue to the shame and hurt of your neighbor.

God therefore would have it prohibited, that any one speak evil of another even though he be guilty, and the latter know it right well; much less if he do not know it, and have it only from hearsay. But you say: Shall I not say it if it be the truth? Answer: Why do you not make accusation to regular judges? Ah, I cannot prove it publicly, and hence I might be silenced and turned away in a harsh manner [incur the penalty of a false accusation]. ‘Ah, indeed, do you smell the roast?’ If you do not trust yourself to stand before the proper authorities and to make answer, then hold your tongue. But if you know it, know it for yourself and not for another. For if you tell it to others, although it be true, you will appear as a liar, because you cannot prove it, and you are, besides, acting like a knave. For we ought never to deprive any one of his honor or good name unless it be first taken away from him publicly.

False witness, then, is everything which cannot be properly proved. Therefore, what is not manifest upon sufficient evidence no one shall make public or declare for truth; and, in short, whatever is secret should be allowed to remain secret, or, at any rate, should be secretly reprove, as we shall hear. Therefore, if you encounter an idle tongue which betrays and slanders some one, contradict such a one promptly to his face, that he may blush; thus many a one will hold his tongue who else would bring some poor man into bad repute, from which he would not easily extricate himself. For honor and a good name are easily taken away, but not easily restored. (LC I 266–70)

...

But the true way in this matter would be to observe the order according to the Gospel (Matt. 18:15) where Christ says: *If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone*. Here you have a precious and excellent teaching for governing well the tongue, which is to be carefully observed against this detestable misuse. Let this, then, be your rule, that you do not too readily spread evil concerning your neighbor and slander him to others, but admonish him privately that he may amend [his life]. Likewise, also, if some one report to you what this or that one has done, teach him, too, to go and admonish him personally, if he have seen it himself; but if not, that he hold his tongue. (LC I 276)

and

WHEREAS, The Synod has policies and procedures designed to allow those in disagreement to reconcile with one another and to reprove and correct those in error so as to restore them to Christ and His Church and not to cause public division, scandal, and shame; and

WHEREAS, Church workers and laity of the Synod who use social media accounts so as to cause division within the Church do so in direct violation of the scriptural and confessional understanding of the Eighth Commandment and therefore engage in unrepentant sin; and

WHEREAS, Those who engage in such actions harm the public witness of the Church and greatly sin against their brothers and sisters in Christ; and

WHEREAS, Those who engage in such behavior should in Christian love be called to repentance so as to be restored to the brothers and sisters they have sinned against and be forgiven; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Oklahoma District address its church workers and laity who use social media accounts to create strife and division in violation of the Eighth Commandment and call them to repent of their actions and sins; and be it further

Resolved, That the district call its church workers and laity to remove posts in violation of the Eighth Commandment and those who operate anonymous accounts to delete the anonymous account as a sign of repentance; and be it further

Resolved, That the district call on those who operate social media accounts to create strife and division to seek private Confession and Absolution so they can hear the pure Gospel in light of their repentance; and be it finally

Resolved, That the district memorialize the Synod to pass this resolution in convention in 2026.

Oklahoma District

Ov. 10-04

To Request Theological and Pastoral Statement and Bylaw Review regarding Social Media, Partisan Media, and Eighth Commandment in Ecclesiastical Proceedings

WHEREAS, The Eighth Commandment forbids bearing false witness against our neighbor and commands that we defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way; and

WHEREAS, Luther's explanation of the Eighth Commandment in the Small and Large Catechisms warns against gossip and slander and calls for appropriate, orderly channels when confronting sin; and

WHEREAS, Our Lord's words in Matthew 18:15–20 provide a pattern for addressing sin first privately, then with one or two witnesses, and finally, if needed, before the Church; and

WHEREAS, In our time, social media, blogs, podcasts, and other informal online platforms provide unprecedented means to spread accusations, insinuations, and commentary about pastors and congregations, often without accountability and without following the Lord's pattern; and

WHEREAS, While legitimate concerns sometimes come to light through such channels, the Church must take great care lest unverified, anonymous, or partisan online content be treated as the equivalent of properly received testimony in ecclesiastical proceedings; and

WHEREAS, There is growing concern in the Synod that highly partisan or coordinated online campaigns can exert undue pressure on ecclesiastical supervisors and shape outcomes in ways that are not conducive to sober, evangelical judgment; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod direct the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), in consultation with the Council of Presidents, to prepare a theological and pastoral statement addressing:

- the Eighth Commandment in the digital age;
- the proper handling of accusations against pastors and congregations;
- the appropriate and inappropriate uses of social media, blogs, podcasts, and similar media in relation to ecclesiastical supervision and discipline; and

- the distinction between information that may prompt investigation and evidence that may justly be used in reaching judgments;

and be it further

Resolved, That the CTCR statement include guidance on:

- the dangers of anonymous or pseudonymous attacks;
- the responsibility of Christians to refrain from sharing unverified accusations; and
- the need for church leaders to resist allowing online outrage or partisan media pressure to drive disciplinary decisions; and be it further

Resolved, That the Commission on Handbook, in light of such a statement, be requested to review and, where appropriate, propose bylaw language or official guidelines making clear that:

- anonymous or partisan online content may be a prompt for further inquiry but may not be treated as inherently reliable evidence;
- ecclesiastical investigations must seek firsthand testimony and properly documented facts; and
- decisions in disciplinary cases are to be based on evidence gathered through appropriate, churchly procedures, not on the volume or intensity of online commentary;

and be it further

Resolved, That districts be encouraged to provide teaching resources for congregations on the Eighth Commandment and digital communication, to help members understand how to use social media in a manner befitting Christians; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod encourage all pastors and laypeople to commit themselves anew to guarding their tongues and keyboards, that we may "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15) and avoid harming Christ's flock through uncharitable or disorderly speech.

Our Savior, Arlington, VA; St. John's, Alexandria, VA;
Trinity, Lexington Park, MD;
Circuit 8 (Washington, South), Southeastern District

Ov. 10-05

To Uphold Eighth Commandment in Digital Communication and Ecclesiastical Proceedings

WHEREAS, The Eighth Commandment forbids bearing false witness against our neighbor and commands that we "defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way" (SC I, Eighth Commandment); and

WHEREAS, Luther's explanation of the Eighth Commandment in the Small and Large Catechisms warns against gossip and slander and calls for appropriate, orderly channels when confronting sin; and

WHEREAS, Our Lord's words in Matthew 18:15–20 provide a pattern of addressing sin first privately, then with one or two witnesses, and finally, if needed, before the Church; and

WHEREAS, In our time, social media, blogs, podcasts, and other informal online platforms provide unprecedented means to spread accusations, insinuations, and commentary about pastors and congregations, often without accountability and without following the Lord's pattern; and

WHEREAS, While legitimate concerns sometimes come to light through such channels, the Church must take great care lest

unverified, anonymous, or partisan online content be treated as the equivalent of properly received testimony in ecclesiastical proceedings; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod encourage pastors, congregations, and members, for the sake of theological clarity, pastoral care, and a spirit of reconciliation, to refrain from using social media to express disagreements and instead seek in-person opportunities for civil and respectful conversation; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, in consultation with the Council of Presidents, to prepare a theological and pastoral statement addressing:

- the Eighth Commandment in the digital age;
- the proper handling of accusations against pastors and congregations; and
- the appropriate and inappropriate uses of social media, blogs, podcasts, and similar media in relation to ecclesiastical supervision and discipline;

and be it further

Resolved, That the statement include guidance on:

- the dangers of anonymous or pseudonymous attacks;
- the responsibility of Christians to refrain from sharing unverified accusations; and
- the need for church leaders to follow the Fifth Commandment, the Eighth Commandment, Matthew 18, and the Synod Bylaws when addressing accusations, rather than allowing online outrage or partisan media to circumvent these standards;

and be it further

Resolved, That the Commission on Constitutional Matters, in light of such a statement, be requested to review and, where appropriate, propose bylaw language or official guidelines making clear that:

- Anonymous or partisan online content may serve as a prompt for further inquiry but may not be treated as inherently reliable evidence.
- Ecclesiastical investigations must seek firsthand testimony and properly documented facts.
- Decisions in disciplinary cases are to be based on evidence gathered through appropriate churchly procedures, not on the volume or intensity of online commentary.

and be it further

Resolved, That districts be encouraged to provide teaching resources for congregations on the Eighth Commandment and digital communication, to help members understand how to use social media in a manner befitting Christians; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod encourage all pastors and laypeople to commit themselves anew to guarding their tongues and keyboards, that we may speak “the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) and avoid harming Christ’s flock through uncharitable or disorderly speech.

Board of Directors
Southeastern District

Ov. 10-06

To Safeguard Evangelical Ecclesiastical Supervision and District Judgments

WHEREAS, Our Lord has entrusted the care of His flock to undershepherds who are to exercise oversight not “domineering over those in [their] charge, but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3); and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions teach that bishops/superintendents are to exercise churchly oversight according to the Gospel, not according to arbitrary or lordly power (AC XXVIII; Tr 8); and

WHEREAS, The Synod Constitution recognizes the congregation as “the basic unit of the Synod” (Bylaw 1.3.1) and describes the Synod’s relation to its members as advisory rather than coercive (Const. Art. VII); and

WHEREAS, District presidents are charged in the Constitution and Bylaws with ecclesiastical supervision of doctrine and practice within their districts, including careful investigation and pastoral handling of concerns involving pastors and congregations; and

WHEREAS, For the sake of good order, mutual trust, and the consciences of pastors and congregations it is vital that the careful work of congregational leaders and district presidents not be lightly or opaquely overridden by Synod actions taken from afar; and

WHEREAS, There is growing concern in the Synod that district-level investigations and pastoral resolutions may in practice be reversed from the Synod level without clear, substantive explanation and without robust involvement of the Council of Presidents (COP), thus undermining confidence in evangelical ecclesiastical supervision; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm the biblical and confessional principles of ecclesiastical supervision as exercised in a brotherly, evangelical manner, in keeping with Augsburg Confession XXVIII and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod affirm that district presidents, as local ecclesiastical supervisors, have a genuine and weighty responsibility in investigating, judging, and resolving cases involving pastors and congregations under their care; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct the Commission on Handbook, in consultation with the COP, to review all bylaws relating to ecclesiastical supervision and expulsion with a view toward:

- clarifying the respective responsibilities of congregations, district presidents, and the President of the Synod;
- strengthening provisions that require serious, documented rationale when Synod actions overturn district-level judgments; and
- providing for meaningful collegial involvement (e.g., defined COP concurrence or similar mechanism) when district conclusions are set aside in favor of Synod actions, such as removal from the roster;

and be it further

Resolved, That such proposed amendments be presented to the next regular Synod convention for consideration; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod encourage all officers and church leaders to exercise ecclesiastical supervision in a manner that

honors local and district judgments, promotes evangelical care, and builds trust rather than fear among pastors and congregations.

Our Savior, Arlington, VA; St. John's, Alexandria, VA;
Trinity, Lexington Park, MD;
Circuit 8 (Washington, South), Southeastern District

Ov. 10-07

To Establish an Independent Appeals Panel in Cases Involving the President's Decisions

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture warns against partiality and instructs that accusations against elders be handled with great care and fairness (1 Tim. 5:19–21); and

WHEREAS, Our Lord teaches that judgment within the Church must be carried out with humility and awareness of our own sin (Matt. 7:1–5); and

WHEREAS, The Synod Constitution and Bylaws provide for due process and appeal in matters of ecclesiastical discipline, so that decisions may not rest solely on one person's judgment; and

WHEREAS, It is a fundamental principle of justice and good order that one should not be the sole judge in his own case, nor should final appeals be structurally dependent on the very office whose decisions are being challenged; and

WHEREAS, In cases where the President of the Synod or his office is the originating or decisive authority in a disciplinary action, the perception that appeals are heard and decided by bodies closely tied to that same office can undermine confidence in the fairness and independence of the process; and

WHEREAS, For the sake of the consciences of pastors and congregations, it is beneficial that appeals in such cases be heard by an independent body clearly distinct from the Office of the President (OTP); therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod affirm the importance of genuine, independent appeals in cases of ecclesiastical discipline, especially where the decisions of the OTP are at issue; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct the Commission on Handbook to propose bylaw amendments establishing an Ecclesiastical Appeals Panel (or similarly named body) which:

- is appointed by the Council of Presidents (COP), with representation from across the Synod;
- includes both ordained ministers and laypersons known for their confessional fidelity and wisdom;
- does not include current staff of the OTP or current members of the Synod's Board of Directors;
- has the responsibility to hear and adjudicate appeals in disciplinary cases in which the President or his office served as the final decision-maker at the first level;

and be it further

Resolved, That such bylaw amendments:

- provide that decisions of this appeals panel be issued in writing with stated reasons;
- specify whether and how such decisions may themselves be reviewed by a broader body (e.g., convention or COP by a defined supermajority), thereby ensuring both accountability and independence;

and be it further

Resolved, That the President of the Synod be encouraged, as a matter of evangelical practice even prior to formal bylaw amendment, to delegate the hearing and adjudication of appeals in cases directly involving his office's decisions to an independent panel appointed by the COP; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod commend all who serve in supervisory offices to the Lord's care, praying that such structural safeguards may assist them in carrying out their duties in a manner above reproach and worthy of the trust of Christ's flock.

Our Savior, Arlington, VA; St. John's, Alexandria, VA;
Trinity, Lexington Park, MD;
Circuit 8 (Washington, South), Southeastern District

Ov. 10-08

To Require Greater Transparency When Disciplinary Judgments Are Reversed

WHEREAS, Our Lord teaches that "everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light" (John 3:20–21); and

WHEREAS, The Eighth Commandment and its explanation in Luther's Small and Large Catechisms call us both to protect our neighbor's reputation and to speak truthfully and clearly; and

WHEREAS, The Constitution and Synod Bylaws provide for ecclesiastical supervision, discipline, and expulsion, including the possibility that earlier judgments may be revisited in light of further information; and

WHEREAS, When a matter has been carefully investigated and publicly described as resolved, and especially when that resolution has been communicated to the Synod at large, a subsequent reversal or reopening of the case without clear, substantive explanation can deeply trouble the consciences of pastors and congregations; and

WHEREAS, Vague references to "additional information" or similar phrases, when unaccompanied by a basic explanation of the nature of the concerns and the reasons for reversal, can undermine confidence in both the fairness and the evangelical character of ecclesiastical supervision; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod affirm the importance of transparency and clear communication in matters of ecclesiastical discipline, while still honoring legitimate needs for confidentiality and protection of reputations; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct the Commission on Handbook to review and propose amendments to the bylaws relating to ecclesiastical supervision and discipline, such that:

- whenever a prior written conclusion or public statement regarding the resolution of a disciplinary matter is later reversed or superseded by a significantly different action (e.g., removal from the roster, suspension, or public censure), the authority reversing the decision must provide a written rationale to the pastor, the congregation, the district president, and the Council of Presidents, summarizing in general terms:
 - the nature of the additional or newly weighted concerns; and
 - the reasons why the earlier resolution is no longer judged sufficient; and

- such rationale shall be preserved as part of the record of the case and be available, as appropriate, to any authorized appeals body;

and be it further

Resolved, That any Synodwide or churchwide communication regarding such a reversal or significant disciplinary action be crafted in a manner that

- avoids gossip, speculation, and violation of the Eighth Commandment;
- acknowledges the prior conclusion that is being superseded; and
- provides enough substantive explanation so that pastors and congregations are not left solely with unclear or formulaic phrases that fail to explain why the action was taken;

and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod encourage all officers and church leaders, when making or communicating difficult decisions, to remember that clear, honest explanation—offered in as charitable and careful a way as possible—is a vital component of evangelical care for the whole Church.

Our Savior, Arlington, VA; St. John's, Alexandria, VA;
Trinity, Lexington Park, MD;
Circuit 8 (Washington, South), Southeastern District

Ov. 10-09

To Provide Pastoral Care for Congregations Affected by Major Disciplinary Actions

WHEREAS, When one member of the body suffers, all suffer together (1 Cor. 12:26); and

WHEREAS, When a pastor is removed from the roster, suspended, or publicly censured, the congregation he has been serving often experiences confusion, grief, division, and deep spiritual distress; and

WHEREAS, The primary concern of ecclesiastical discipline must always be the honor of Christ, the protection of the flock, and the restoration of sinners, not merely the resolution of an administrative case; and

WHEREAS, Congregations whose pastors are the subject of disciplinary action often need intentional, structured pastoral care and guidance in order to navigate the aftermath faithfully and fruitfully; and

WHEREAS, The Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod charge district presidents and other officers with the pastoral care of congregations and workers under their supervision; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod recognize the special pastoral needs of congregations directly affected by major disciplinary actions involving their pastors; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod direct the Commission on Handbook, in consultation with the Council of Presidents, to propose bylaw additions or official guidelines requiring that, in cases of:

- removal from the roster;
- long-term suspension; or
- public censure of a pastor in relation to his conduct as pastor of a specific congregation,

the supervising district shall work with the congregation's elected leaders to develop a *written pastoral care plan*, addressing at least:

- immediate spiritual care and communication to the congregation;
- provision for Word and Sacrament ministry (e.g., interim pastors, pulpit supply, pastoral visitation);
- opportunities for congregational lament, healing, and reconciliation where appropriate; and
- guidance for the congregation's ongoing mission and witness in the community;

and be it further

Resolved, That such pastoral care plans be tailored to the specific circumstances of each case and be implemented in a way that seeks to protect consciences, avoid needless scandal, and keep Christ and His Gospel at the center; and be it finally

Resolved, That districts be encouraged to provide resources, training, and, where possible, financial assistance to support such pastoral care for affected congregations, so that they may not be left to navigate these storms alone.

Our Savior, Arlington, VA; St. John's, Alexandria, VA;
Trinity, Lexington Park, MD;
Circuit 8 (Washington, South), Southeastern District

Ov. 10-10

To Study Ecclesiastical Supervision in Light of Lutheran Confessions

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions, particularly Augsburg Confession VII, VIII, and XXVIII, and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, set forth a rich and careful doctrine of the Church, the ministry, and church authority; and

WHEREAS, These confessional writings emphasize that churchly authority is given for the sake of the Gospel, that human ordinances are not to burden consciences, and that bishops/superintendents are not to lord it over the church; and

WHEREAS, The Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod, including those portions concerning congregations, district presidents, the President of the Synod, ecclesiastical supervision, discipline, and expulsion, are intended to reflect and operationalize these confessional principles; and

WHEREAS, In recent years, difficult and highly visible cases of discipline and supervision have raised questions among pastors and laypeople about whether our current structures and practices fully and transparently embody our confessional teaching; and

WHEREAS, It is fitting and salutary for the Synod, from time to time, to reexamine its polity and practice in the light of Scripture and the Confessions, that we may repent where needed and strengthen what is good; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod request the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), in consultation with the Council of Presidents, legal/handbook experts, and representatives of congregations, to undertake a comprehensive study of ecclesiastical supervision and discipline in the Synod, addressing at least:

- the biblical and confessional foundations for church authority, oversight, and discipline;
- the relationship between congregations, districts, and the Synod;
- the proper reach and limits of the president's supervisory authority;

- the theological grounding for due process, appeals, and protections against conflicts of interest; and
- the ways in which current Synod structures and practices either serve or hinder evangelical, confessional oversight;

and be it further

Resolved, That this study pay particular attention to how our structures can best:

- protect the flock from false doctrine and scandalous life;
- protect pastors and congregations from arbitrary or politicized uses of authority; and
- encourage mutual trust and cooperation among congregations, districts, and the Synod;

and be it further

Resolved, That the CTCR be asked to present a written report of its findings and recommendations to the next regular convention of the Synod, including both theological analysis and, where appropriate, suggested directions for future constitutional or bylaw changes; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod encourage pastors and congregations to study this report once available, so that our life together may increasingly reflect both our confessional commitments and the gentleness and truth of Christ, the Chief Shepherd.

Our Savior, Arlington, VA; St. John's, Alexandria, VA;
Trinity, Lexington Park, MD;
Circuit 8 (Washington, South), Southeastern District

Ov. 10-11

To Amend Bylaw 4.4.6 (c) to Require Reporting All Complaints to Subjects

WHEREAS, District presidents, when they receive complaints about rostered staff, sometimes do not report the complaint to the individual, yet may keep them in secret files; and

WHEREAS, The individual is unaware of the complaint and unable to seek resolution with the offended party; therefore be it

Resolved, That all complaints, even if anonymous, must be reported to the individual the day they are received with all known information; and be it further

Resolved, That no record may be made of anonymous complaints; and be it finally

Resolved, That Bylaw 4.4.6 be amended as follows:

~~PRESENT~~/PROPOSED WORDING

4.4 District President

4.4.6 The district president, even without formal request therefor, may through the proper channels arrange for an official visit or investigation when a controversy arises in a congregation or between two or more congregations of the district or when there is evidence of a continuing unresolved problem in doctrine or practice.

(a) He shall ask for a full report on the case in order that he may have a clear understanding of the situation.

(b) If he authorizes anyone to represent him in such matters, his representative shall be accorded the same rights as the district president.

(c) All complaints, even if anonymous, must be reported to the individual the day they are received with all known information. No record may be made of anonymous complaints.

Ov. 10-12

To Amend Bylaw Section 2.14 to Address How Public Sin Is Handled by Dispute Resolution Process

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture distinguishes between private sins that are first to be rebuked privately: "If your brother sins against you [εἰς σὲ (singular)], go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone [μόνου] ..." (Matt. 18:15); and public sins that are to be rebuked publicly: "Those [elders] who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all [ἐνώπιον πάντων], that the rest also may fear" (1 Tim. 5:20 NKJV); and

WHEREAS, The practice of publicly rebuking a public sin is demonstrated and confirmed by the example of our Lord Jesus Christ in Holy Scripture: "But when [Jesus] turned around and looked at His disciples [τοὺς μαθητὰς (plural) αὐτοῦ], He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Mark 8:33 NKJV); and

WHEREAS, The practice of publicly rebuking a public sin is also demonstrated and confirmed by apostolic example in Holy Scripture: "When I [Paul] saw that they [Peter and the Jews] were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before all [ἐμπροσθεν πάντων], 'If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel the Gentiles to live as Jews?'" (Gal. 2:14 NKJV); and

WHEREAS, This distinction between private sin and public sin is also maintained in the Lutheran Confessions in the explanation of the eighth commandment in Martin Luther's Large Catechism: "All this has been said about secret sins [*heimlichen Sünden*]. But where the sin is quite public [*öffentlich*], so that the judge and everybody knows about it, you can without any sin shun the offender and let him go his own way, because he has brought himself into disgrace. You may also publicly testify [*öffentlich ... zeugen*] about him. For when a matter is public [*offenbar*] in the daylight, there can be no slandering or false judging or testifying. ... Where the sin is public [*öffentlich*], the rebuke also must be public [*soll auch billig öffentliche Strafe folgen*], that everyone may learn to guard against it" (LC I [Eighth Commandment] 284); and

WHEREAS, This distinction has also been maintained in the personal writings of orthodox Lutheran theologians such as C.F.W. Walther, who writes: "If the sin of a congregational member is so manifest that the entire congregation knows about it and the entire congregation is therefore also offended by it, it is in principle not necessary to observe the stages of admonition given in Matthew 18, since in the case the congregation is precisely the person of whom the Lord says, 'If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone' (Matt. 18:15). We therefore read that even Paul, after Peter had caused a public offense known to all, did not first rebuke him in stages, but 'publicly before everyone' immediately (Gal. 2:13-14). Paul also writes explicitly about such a case: 'Whoever sins, rebuke in the presence, so that the others may also be afraid' (1 Tim. 5:20)." (C.F.W. Walther, *Walther's Works: Pastoral Theology* [Concordia Publishing House, 2017] 384); and

WHEREAS, Public sins not only require a public rebuke but also a public apology, as C.F.W. Walther writes: "A public fall into sin is also a sin against the entire congregation, just as according to

Matthew 18:15 a nonpublic one done only in the presence of individuals is a sin against them. Thus, as in the latter case, reconciliation through apology is likewise necessary in the first one—but [in this case] a public one.” (*ibid.*, 389); and

WHEREAS, This distinction is not adequately maintained in the current dispute resolution process of the Synod, but all sins are treated as if they were private sins according to Bylaw 2.14.3 (c); and

WHEREAS, The failure to deal with a public sin through public church repentance gives the impression that the respective sin is tolerated in the Church of God, thereby endangering souls who support and persist in such a sin; therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 2.14.3 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Consultation

2.14.3 When a member congregation or individual member of the Synod is aware of information which could lead to the expulsion of a member from the Synod under Article XIII of the Constitution, prior to any formal written complaint or accusation the member shall consult with his or her respective district president to seek advice and also so that it can be determined whether this is the appropriate bylaw procedure (Bylaw section 2.14) or whether the matter falls under Bylaw sections 2.15, 2.16, 2.17, or 1.8; Bylaws 3.10.5.7.9 or 3.10.6.9.6; or dispute resolution under Bylaw section 1.10. In regard to this consultation:

...

(c) If Bylaw section 2.14 applies and the matter is a private dispute between two individuals, the district president shall ensure that the accuser has met face-to-face with the accused in the manner described in Matthew 18:15. ~~Even if the alleged violation of Article XIII of the Constitution is considered to be “public,” this provision of Matthew 18:15 shall be followed. The reputation of all parties is to be protected as commanded in the Eighth Commandment. However, if the matter is a public sin that has caused scandal to an entire congregation, circuit, or district, then the respective district president shall commence action according to 1 Timothy 5:20 and Bylaw 2.14.4. In the case of such a public sin or scandal, the stages of admonition for private sin outlined in Matthew 18:15–16 shall not apply, as stated in the Lutheran Confessions (LC I [Eighth Commandment] 284).~~

...

and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 2.14.4 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Commencing an Action

2.14.4 Under this bylaw (Bylaw section 2.14) the district president of the accused shall commence the following action when he becomes aware of information or allegations that could lead to expulsion of a member from the Synod under the provisions of Article XIII of the Constitution. The district president may become aware of such information by his own personal knowledge. Such information or allegations may also be conveyed to him in a formal written complaint or accusation made by a member of the Synod who has carried out the above provision (Bylaw 2.14.3). In commencing such action, the district president of the accused:

...

(b) Shall proceed in the manner described in Matthew 18:15–16 for private sins or 1 Timothy 5:20 for public sins as the required admonition in Article XIII of the Constitution, if applicable, continues to be carried out.

...

and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 2.14.7.1 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Hearing Panel

2.14.7.1 At the time that the request for hearing is made, the suspending ecclesiastical supervisor shall forward to the Secretary of the Synod the statement of the matter and a written memorandum describing the manner in which there was compliance with the guidelines provided in Matthew 18:15–16 or 1 Timothy 5:20, “previous futile admonition” (Constitution Art. XIII 1), as well as all of the provisions of Bylaws 2.14.3–2.14.6.1.

and be it finally

Resolved, That Bylaw 2.14.10 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

General Regulations

2.14.10 The district president of the accused/suspended member and the district president of the accuser shall take those steps necessary to attend to the spiritual needs of all those affected and shall continue efforts to resolve those matters which led to the commencement of the formal action against the accused member.

(a) In the case of a public sin involving an ordained or commissioned minister who has promoted false doctrine or who has introduced a practice contrary to Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, and has thereby scandalized a circuit, district, or Synod, the respective district president shall issue a public statement in cooperation with the President of Synod, Council of Presidents, and the Commission on Theology and Church Relations. The statement shall address how the false doctrine or practice is not to be tolerated in the Church of God and in the congregations of the Synod. Such statement shall be issued through regular mail and through digital communication (e-mail, the district newsletter, etc.).

Mission of the Cross
Crosslake, MN

Ov. 10-13

To Replace Dispute Resolution Process with Biblical, Workable, and Effective System for Ecclesiastical Supervision

Preamble

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is united in a common confession of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions and is called to maintain unity in doctrine and judgment while addressing disputes in a fraternal and timely manner (1 Cor. 1:10; Matt. 5:24). Such reconciliation serves both the Gospel and the well-being of the church.

The current dispute resolution process, codified in Bylaw section 1.10, was established to resolve disputes within the church while avoiding secular litigation. In practice, however, the process has become lengthy, complex, and costly. Its extensive procedural requirements and frequent reliance on in-person meetings can cause disputes to take years to address, or to remain unresolved altogether. When disputes concerning doctrine, practice, or church life are not resolved in a timely and meaningful way, the unity of the church suffers and confidence in ecclesiastical supervision is weakened. A process that is difficult to use in practice does not adequately serve congregations, pastors, or those charged with supervision.

This overture proposes replacing the current dispute resolution process with a new system that is biblically grounded, confessionally faithful, and practically workable. The goal is to restore dispute resolution as an ecclesial and pastoral function, providing clear pathways to resolution, meaningful outcomes, and effective support for those exercising ecclesiastical supervision. The proposed committee is charged with developing a comprehensive replacement system, including any necessary constitutional and bylaw changes, for consideration and adoption by the Synod in convention.

WHEREAS, 1 Corinthians 1:10 says, “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment;” and Constitution Article II states that we confess all doctrines of Holy Scripture, as confessed in the Lutheran Confessions of 1580; and

WHEREAS, The current dispute resolution process is codified in Bylaw section 1.10; and

WHEREAS, The dispute resolution process is unwieldy, taking up over 15 pages in the *Handbook* and often requiring in-person visits that can involve significant expense; and

WHEREAS, These practical requirements can lead to disputes not being resolved in a timely manner, sometimes taking years, and when disputes remain unresolved, the Body of Christ suffers; and

WHEREAS, Matthew 5:24 says to go to the person who has a problem with you and be reconciled with him, a process that can now be accomplished electronically in appropriate circumstances; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod acknowledge that the current dispute resolution process is impractical for effective ecclesiastical supervision and direct the President of the Synod, in consultation with the vice-presidents and the Secretary of the Synod, to appoint a representative committee to develop as its replacement a wholly new dispute resolution and ecclesiastical supervision system, grounded in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, and including the following features:

- prioritization of ecclesiastical supervision, pastoral admonition, and doctrinal clarity;
- timely, clear, and decisive action in matters of doctrine and life, with the process not taking years to complete;
- provision of clear, predictable, and workable pathways for resolving disputes, ensuring every matter reaches a practical outcome;
- inclusion of provisions for regular, periodic examination of pastors’ doctrine and practice, within the framework of ecclesiastical supervision, with frequency and form determined by the committee;
- production of meaningful and enforceable ecclesiastical outcomes, including admonition, correction, restoration, and, where necessary, discipline;
- support and strengthen, rather than hinder, the supervisory responsibilities of district presidents;
- avoidance of unnecessary procedural complexity, cost, and delay; and
- service to the Gospel and the unity of the Church rather than merely management of conflict;

and be it further

Resolved, That the committee be empowered and directed to recommend all necessary amendments to Constitution, Bylaws, and policies required to fully implement the replacement system; and be it finally

Resolved, That the committee present its proposed replacement system, with all recommended constitutional, bylaw, and policy changes, to the next regular convention for consideration, amendment, and adoption.

Good Shepherd
Lincoln, NE

Ov. 10-14

To Replace Dispute Resolution Process with Biblical, Workable, and Effective System for Ecclesiastical Supervision

WHEREAS, 1 Corinthians 1:10 says, “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment;” and Constitution Article II states that we confess all doctrines of Holy Scripture, as confessed in the Lutheran Confessions of 1580; and

WHEREAS, The current dispute resolution process is codified in Bylaw section 1.10; and

WHEREAS, The dispute resolution process is unwieldy, taking up over 15 pages in the *Handbook* and often requiring in-person visits that can involve significant expense; and

WHEREAS, These practical requirements can lead to disputes not being resolved in a timely manner, sometimes taking years, and when disputes remain unresolved, the Body of Christ suffers; and

WHEREAS, Matthew 5:24 says to go to the person who has a problem with you and be reconciled with him, a process that can now be accomplished electronically in appropriate circumstances; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod acknowledge that the current dispute resolution process is impractical for effective ecclesiastical supervision; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod in convention direct the President of the Synod, in consultation with the vice-presidents and the Secretary of the Synod, to appoint a representative committee to develop as its replacement a wholly new dispute resolution and ecclesiastical supervision system; and be it further

Resolved, That the new system of ecclesiastical supervision be grounded in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, and focus on the following features:

- prioritization of ecclesiastical supervision, pastoral admonition, and doctrinal clarity;
- timely, clear, and decisive action in matters of doctrine and life, with the process not taking years to complete;
- provision of clear, predictable, and workable pathways for resolving disputes, ensuring every matter reaches a practical outcome;
- inclusion of provisions for regular, periodic examination of pastors’ doctrine and practice, within the framework of ecclesiastical supervision, with frequency and form determined by the committee;

- delineation of meaningful and enforceable ecclesiastical outcomes, including admonition, correction, restoration, and, where necessary, discipline;
- avoidance of unnecessary procedural complexity, cost, and delay; and
- service to the pure Gospel and the unity of the Church rather than management of conflict;

and be it further

Resolved, That the committee be empowered and directed to recommend all necessary amendments to Constitution, Bylaws, and policies required to fully implement the replacement system; and be it finally

Resolved, That the committee present its proposed replacement system, with all recommended constitutional, bylaw, and policy changes, to the next regular convention for consideration, amendment, and adoption.

Mount Calvary
Omaha, NE

Ov. 10-15

To Provide Scriptural Reforms to Dispute Resolution Process

Preamble

Bylaw 1.10.1 states, “When disputes, disagreements, or offenses arise among members of the body of Christ, it is a matter of grave concern for the whole church. Conflicts that occur in the body should be resolved promptly (Matt. 5:23–24; Eph. 4:26–27).”

Dispute resolution must provide fairness and due process (James 2:1–5; Lev. 19:15). Ideally, the process should also be simple and understandable, involve persons with formal legal training and skill, and provide a clear and definitive resolution.

Where public sin or false doctrine by a church leader is involved, 1 Timothy 5:19–20 (KJV) directs us, “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses,” but “Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.” This means that false teaching must be publicly rebuked and not swept under the rug, lest others perish, and that, where public sin by a church leader is involved, public rebuke of persistent sin is necessary.

- The Synod’s current dispute resolution system (Bylaw section 1.10) is not simple. The 1989 Bylaw chapter 8, “Reconciliation, Adjudication, and Appeal,” filled seven pages (129–35); the current Bylaw section 1.10, “Dispute Resolution of the Synod,” spans 17 pages (39–55). It is supplemented by a 52-page Standard Operating Procedures Manual (files.lcms.org/api/file/preview/standard-operating-procedures-manual-bylaw-1-10-pdf).
- The Synod’s current dispute resolution system (Bylaw section 1.10) is not prompt; resolution can take up to 15 months or more (up to 30 days for face-to-face meeting; possible 30 days for CCM or CTCR opinion; up to 45 days for district president to advise as to bylaw process; up to 15 days to select a reconciler; possible 60 days for further reconciliation efforts; formal in-person reconciliation meeting at “earliest reasonable date”; up to 15 days after reconciler’s written report to request Dispute Resolution Panel [DRP]; up to 21 days to select panel; up to 45 days to hold formal DRP hearing; up to 30 days to issue a written

decision; up to 15 days to appeal; up to 21 days to select an appeal panel; up to 30 days to issue a decision; up to 21 days to form Review Panel; up to 45 days to proceed; up to 30 days to issue final decision [*ibid.*, “Dispute Resolution Process Flow Chart,” p. 27]).

- The Synod’s current dispute resolution system (Bylaw section 1.10) imposes a “gag order” on participants throughout the duration of the process (Bylaw 1.10.18.1 [d]). This means that public sin cannot be publicly addressed by those charged with authority during this extended period. However, in recent years outside parties, who were not bound by the bylaw, publicized certain controversies through social media campaigns, with the perceived result of influencing and accelerating the process, which is hardly a salutary or edifying situation for the church.
- The Synod’s current dispute resolution system (Bylaw section 1.10) does not provide for accountability of the panel members to the Synod-at-large, since they are appointed, not elected. And it does not require any of the reconcilers or other panel members to be attorneys or have any formal legal training.

Since 1941, the Synod has had four different adjudication systems: the Boards of Appeals (1941–71), the Commissions on Adjudication and Appeals (1971–92), the Dispute Resolution System (1992–2004), and the Dispute Resolution System and Hearing Panels (2004–present) (s3.amazonaws.com/mychurchwebsite/c2001/martynoland-shorthistoryofdisciplineanddisputeresolution.pdf). Notably, the prior and more direct bylaws for Commissions on Adjudication and Appeals were drastically altered and replaced with the Dispute Resolution System at a time when Dr. Robert Preus, now of blessed memory, was utilizing the prior procedures successfully to contest his invalid removal as president of Concordia Theological Seminary.

WHEREAS, The foregoing factors support the return to the Commissions on Adjudication and Appeals system, with certain improvements; therefore be it

Resolved, That a task force be formed prior to December 31, 2026, to consist of the Secretary of Synod or his designee, a member of the Commission on Handbook appointed by that commission, and three ordained ministers, a commissioned minister, and three laymen (at least two of whom shall be attorneys) appointed by the Praesidium after consultation with the Council of Presidents. The task force shall submit a proposal for new dispute resolution bylaws for review and comment by congregational and individual members of the Synod not later than June 30, 2028, allowing a period of six months for comments; and be it further

Resolved, That such proposal shall include the following:

- the replacement of the current dispute resolution system and hearing panels with the 1989 Bylaw chapter 8, “Reconciliation, Adjudication, and Appeal,” with enhancements described in this resolution;
- confirmation that public teaching includes materials publicly shared on the internet, in public worship, or through other means whereby they are clearly not intended for private use only: “but where the sin is so public that the judge and everyone else are aware of it . . . you may also testify publicly against them” (LC I [Eighth Commandment] 284 [Kolb/Wengert]);

- confirmation that if those charged with ecclesiastical supervision fail to carry out their duties and responsibilities, public rebuke may be pursued by any Christian, including if those charged with supervision fail to act with reasonable promptness (see LCMS CTCR, *Public Rebuke of Public Sin* [adopted 2006]);
- provisions for laymen aggrieved by decisions of their congregational polity to seek enforcement of their congregation's governing documents through their circuit visitor and/or district, provided that this shall not apply to matters of pastoral discretion (e.g., the minor ban);
- the limitation of the time frame for adjudication of disputes to a total of not more than six months, and not more than one face-to-face meeting if a party would be significantly burdened by travel; and
- a requirement that, when a congregational or individual member of the Synod is removed from membership for cause, the cause be publicly reported following the conclusion of the proceedings, provided that it can be done in a manner that does not disclose personal information of innocent parties (e.g., abuse victims);

and be it finally

Resolved, That the task force shall submit a final overture to the 2029 Synod convention to implement the above bylaw changes, after due consideration of comments received.

St. Paul
Brookfield, IL

Ov. 10-16

To Provide Scriptural Reforms to Dispute Resolution Process

WHEREAS, Since 1941, the Synod has had four different adjudication systems: the Boards of Appeals (1941–71), the Commissions on Adjudication and Appeals (1971–92), the Dispute Resolution System (1992–2004), and the Dispute Resolution System and Hearing Panels (2004–present) (s3.amazonaws.com/mychurchwebsite/c2001/martynoland-shorthistoryofdisciplineanddisputeresolution.pdf); and

WHEREAS, The current dispute resolution process focuses excessively on the words of Matthew 18, as though that was the only scriptural passage dealing with conflict and doctrinal issues; it also implements undue secrecy. First Timothy 5:19–20 (KJV) reminds us, “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses,” but, “them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.” This means that false teaching must be publicly rebuked and not swept under the rug, lest others perish; and

WHEREAS, In a number of recent cases, it appeared that discipline moved rapidly only after a social media firestorm, which is hardly a salutary or edifying situation for the church; and

WHEREAS, a number of deficiencies could be addressed in our dispute resolution process. For example, laymen have no real rights or protections against malfeasance by those in control of their congregations; they are not members of the Synod so they cannot use dispute resolution, and they cannot go to civil court both for reasons scriptural and having to do with the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The process cannot be completed in less than a year, and there is no requirement to comply with the mandate of 1

Timothy 5:19–20 to publicly rebuke what is determined to be false doctrine; and

WHEREAS, It is appropriate that the Synod appoint a task force to present improvements to the 2029 Synod convention for adoption; therefore be it

Resolved, That a task force be formed prior to December 31, 2026, to consist of the Secretary of Synod or his designee, a member of the Commission on Handbook appointed by that commission, and three ordained ministers, a commissioned minister, and three laymen (at least one of whom shall be an attorney) appointed by the Praesidium. The task force shall submit, not later than June 30, 2028, a proposal for review by the Synod that shall include without limitation the following:

- confirmation that public teaching includes materials publicly shared on the internet, in public worship, or through other means whereby they are clearly not intended for private use only: “but where the sin is so public that the judge and everyone else are aware of it ... you may also testify publicly against them” (LC I [Eighth Commandment] 284 [Kolb/Wengert]);
- confirmation that if those charged with ecclesiastical supervision fail to carry out their duties and responsibilities, public rebuke may be pursued by any Christian, including if those charged with supervision fail to act with reasonable promptness (see LCMS CTCR, *Public Rebuke of Public Sin* [adopted 2006]);
- provisions for laymen aggrieved by decisions of their congregational polity to seek enforcement of their congregation's governing documents through their circuit visitor and/or district, provided that this shall not apply to matters of pastoral discretion (e.g., the minor ban);
- the limitation of the reconciliation provisions of Bylaws 1.10.5–1.10.6 to a total of not more than 120 days and not more than one face-to-face meeting if either party would be significantly burdened by travel; and
- a requirement that, when a member of the Synod is removed from membership for cause, the cause be publicly stated, provided that it can be done in a manner that does not disclose personal information of innocent parties (e.g., abuse victims).

Circuit 24 (Sedalia)
Missouri District

Ov. 10-17

To Amend Bylaw 1.10.2 to Render Dispute Resolution Non-Exclusive Remedy

WHEREAS, Dispute resolution of the Synod is addressed in Bylaw section 1.10, and Bylaw 1.10.2 states, “It shall be the exclusive remedy to resolve such disputes that involve theological, doctrinal, or ecclesiastical issues ...”; and

WHEREAS, This prohibits legal action by those who have suffered actual harm; and

WHEREAS, Staff, congregations, districts and Synod can do anything without risk of legal consequences; and

WHEREAS, Dispute Resolution Panel (DRP) reconcilers (see Bylaw 1.10.4 [e]), as normal sinful people subject to error, can and

do misjudge and ignore real harm to victims and show deference to powerful perpetrators; and

WHEREAS, This may leave victims of harm no way to seek redress, apology, amendment of harm, and no way to enforce the award of monetary damages; and

WHEREAS, Anything and everything may be secret and undocumented; and

WHEREAS, The DRP is effectually a trial and passes judgment on the validity of the complaint; the DRP may damage the career of the accused or leave the complainant further victimized; and

WHEREAS, In Scripture, the Confessions, and normal standards of the secular world, the accused is to see and hear the evidence and both parties receive an impartial, complete examination; and

WHEREAS, DRP reconcilers are normal sinful people with varying abilities and have absolute power over the careers of rostered staff and over the individuals who make complaints; and

WHEREAS, No report is made concerning DRP reconcilers' success or failure; and the members of the district are unaware and unable to evaluate them for appointment and reappointment; and

WHEREAS, DRP is forced arbitration and enforced by non-disclosure under penalty of dismissal from Synod membership and civil judgment; and

WHEREAS, DRP forbids the parties from seeking satisfaction in civil courts even though Synod itself takes action in civil courts; therefore be it

Resolved, That all non-disclosure clauses, including those in the past, are no longer in effect and forbidden in the future; and be it further

Resolved, That no one is, as a condition of membership in Synod, forbidden to seek redress in the courts; and be it further

Resolved, That each time a reconciler is involved, the parties are to be asked for their evaluation and recommendation about the reconciler to be continued in their position; and be it further

Resolved, That a report be made before reappointment of the success/failure rate for each reconciler; and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 1.10.2 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Purpose

1.10.2 ... It shall be the ~~exclusive~~ suggested remedy to resolve such disputes that involve theological, doctrinal, or ecclesiastical issues except those covered under Bylaw sections 2.14–2.17 and except as provided in Bylaw 1.10.3, and shall be binding on all parties. It is applicable whether the dispute involves only a difference of opinion without personal animosity or is one that involves ill will and sin that requires repentance and forgiveness. No person, congregation, or agency to whom or to which the provisions of this dispute resolution process are applicable because of their membership in the Synod may render this procedure inapplicable by terminating that membership during the course of the dispute resolution process. Since monetary damages that can only be awarded by civil court, the Dispute Resolution Panel cannot be used as a defense to prevent issues from being heard in the courts.

Circuit 3 (Baltimore East)
Southeastern District

Ov. 10-18

To Require No One to Participate in the Dispute Resolution Process

Preamble

The *Standard Operating Procedures Manual* for Bylaw Section 1.10 (December 2023, p. 25; available from lcms.org/ccm) has as General Provision Y, “Exclusion from Liability,” the following: “Parties are to understand that the Synod, its reconcilers, its ecclesiastical supervisors, its process administrators, its panels, and all panel members shall be immune from any liability for any acts or omissions that occur during the processes described in Bylaw section 1.10 and this manual.”

WHEREAS, This exclusion from liability is effectively an admission of incompetence; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has no confidence in the dispute resolution process; therefore be it

Resolved, That no one is required to participate in the dispute resolution process.

Circuit 3 (Baltimore East)
Southeastern District

Ov. 10-19

To Allow Parties to Delay Hearing to Await Commission Opinion

Preamble

Bylaw 1.10.18.1 (h) states: “If any part of the dispute involves a specific question of doctrine or doctrinal application, each party shall have the right to an opinion from the Commission on Theology and Church Relations. If it involves questions of constitution or bylaw interpretation, each party shall have the right to an interpretation from the Commission on Constitutional Matters. The request for an opinion must be made through the Dispute Resolution Panel or Review Panel, which shall determine the wording of the question(s).”

WHEREAS, The dispute resolution reconciler is not required to forward the request for the opinion without modification; and

WHEREAS, A requested opinion may not arrive before the dispute resolution hearing; and

WHEREAS, The question, “Can a laywoman on her own authority command a clergyman not to write a letter?” was the core issue in the complaint; the letter truthfully reported the action of the leadership to the congregation; and the dispute resolution reconciler ruled the accusation valid grounds for discipline; therefore be it

Resolved, That a party may postpone a hearing until the requested opinion is received.

Circuit 3 (Baltimore East)
Southeastern District

Ov. 10-20

To Amend Bylaw 1.10.18.1 (g) to Allow Parties to Record Proceedings

Preamble

Bylaw 1.10.18.1 (g) includes, “All Dispute Resolution Panel, Appeal Panel, or Review Panel records of disputes in which a final decision has been rendered by the Dispute Resolution Panel, Appeal

Panel, or Review Panel shall be placed in the custody of Concordia Historical Institute. All such records shall be sealed....”

Some of the issues that lead to the dispute resolution process begin with private actions and conversations, so it is wise and proper to maintain confidentiality. However, some issues begin with public actions and conversations that affected the Church, so it is unwise and improper to conceal the hearings from public view. Public accusation is not resolved by private response (Acts 16:37).

WHEREAS, Staff, congregations, districts, and the Synod can do anything without risk of legal consequences; and

WHEREAS, Dispute resolution reconcilers, as normal sinful people subject to error, can and do misjudge and ignore real harm to victims and show deference to powerful perpetrators; and

WHEREAS, This may leave victims of harm no way to seek redress, apology, or amendment of harm, and no way to enforce the award of monetary damages; and

WHEREAS, Anything and everything may be secret and undocumented; and

WHEREAS, The dispute resolution process is effectually a trial that passes judgment on the validity of the complaint which may damage the career of the accused or leave the complainant further victimized; and

WHEREAS, In Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and normal standards of the secular world, the accused is to see and hear the evidence, and both parties are to receive an impartial, complete public examination; and

WHEREAS, Dispute resolution reconcilers are normal sinful people with varying abilities, and yet they have absolute power over the careers of rostered church workers and over the individuals who make complaints; and

WHEREAS, No report is made concerning the success or failure of dispute resolution reconcilers, and so the members of a district are unaware and unable to evaluate them for appointment and reappointment; and

WHEREAS, The dispute resolution process is *forced arbitration* and enforced by *non-disclosure* under penalty of dismissal from Synod membership and civil judgment; and

WHEREAS, Even a normal dispute resolution situation is unequal, and it is disastrous when there is a victim-perpetrator issue or if it between unequal parties; and

WHEREAS, A common result is a wounded person who is left without reconciliation and so is harmed again; therefore be it

Resolved, That all non-disclosure clauses, including those in the past, no longer be in effect and be forbidden in the future; and be it further

Resolved, That the accused and complainant be permitted to record the entire proceedings and be given copies of all documentation, and that the mandate for two witnesses in 1 Tim. 5:19 be met by one witness and documentation; no one and nothing may be kept secret from the accused; and be it further

Resolved, That the ruling must be supported by public testimony and documents; if the accused resigns from public office before the ruling, then the complaint remains secret since talebearing is sin; and be it finally

Resolved, That Bylaw 1.10.18.1 (g) be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Rules of Procedure

...

1.10.18.1 The following rules of procedure shall be followed:

...

(g) All Dispute Resolution Panel, Appeal Panel, or Review Panel records of disputes in which a final decision has been rendered by the Dispute Resolution Panel, Appeal Panel, or Review Panel shall be placed in the custody of Concordia Historical Institute. ~~All such records shall be sealed and shall be opened only for good cause shown and only after permission has been granted by a Dispute Resolution Panel, selected by blind draw for that purpose.~~ The accused and complainant are permitted to record the entire proceedings, and be given copies of all documentation.

...

Circuit 3 (Baltimore East)
Southeastern District

Ov. 10-21

To Direct Revisions to Bylaw Section 1.10 Standard Operating Procedures Manual re Witnesses and Evidence

WHEREAS, in Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and normal standards of the secular world, the accused is to see and hear the evidence and both parties receive an impartial, complete examination; and

WHEREAS, The *Standard Operating Procedures Manual* for Bylaw section 1.10, General Regulation N, “Witnesses and Evidence” (Dec. 2023, p. 19; available from lcms.org/ccm) allows for gossip to be considered valid evidence; and

WHEREAS, Gossip is sadly common in the Church and identified as a major cause of congregational conflict and decline; and

WHEREAS, This allows for the final ruling to not be supported by the testimony; therefore be it

Resolved, That in any Dispute Resolution Panel hearing or meeting, if anyone presents evidence based on gossip, their testimony ends, and they are not allowed to continue until they repent of their sin and apologize.; and be it further

Resolved, That the 1 Tim. 5:19 mandate of two witnesses may be met by one witness and documentation: and be it further

Resolved, That the ruling must be supported by public testimony and documents, and be it finally

Resolved, *Standard Operating Procedures Manual* for Bylaw section 1.10, General Regulation N, “Witnesses and Evidence” (Dec. 2023, p. 19), subparagraph (c). be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

N. WITNESSES AND EVIDENCE

(c) Conformity to legal rules of evidence shall ~~not~~ be necessary. The mandate in 1 Tim. 5:19 of two witnesses may be met by one witness and documentation. The ruling must be supported by public testimony and documents.

Circuit 3 (Baltimore East)
Southeastern District

Ov. 10-22**To Amend Bylaw 1.10.7.4 to Allow Advisors to Represent Parties in Dispute Resolution Process****Preamble**

Bylaw 1.10.7.4 (a) states that “The hearing shall be private, attended only by the parties to the dispute and one advisor of each party’s choice, should any party desire one. This advisor shall not address the panel or participate in the discussion at the hearing.”

WHEREAS, The Lord of Scripture recognizes the need for advocates, identifying the Holy Spirit as our advocate before the Father; and

WHEREAS, All secular and religious history recognizes the need for advocates; and

WHEREAS, This is disastrous when there is an issue between unequal parties; a normal dispute resolution process is unequal, that is when a complaint is made about the actions of an authority figure; and

WHEREAS, A common result is a wounded person, left without reconciliation, harmed again; therefore be it

Resolved, That each party may have an advisor who may take a lead position, directing the testimony and presenting the issues to be resolved, and the complainant is not required to speak other than answering the questions they are asked; and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 1.10.7.4 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING***Procedure of a Dispute Resolution Panel***

...

1.10.7.4 The following rules for the Dispute Resolution Panel shall apply:

(a) The hearing shall be ~~private~~public, attended ~~only~~by the parties to the dispute and one advisor of each party’s choice, should any party desire one. This advisor ~~shall not address the panel or participate~~may take a leading position, directing the testimony and presenting the issues to be resolved. The complainant is not required to speak other than answering the questions they are asked in the discussion at the hearing. Witnesses who can substantiate the facts relevant to the matter in dispute may be called before and address the panel. The administrator of the process shall not attend the hearing or serve as a witness. The panel shall establish the procedure to be followed in the hearing and the relevancy of evidence so that each party shall be given an opportunity fully to present its respective position. In performing its duty, the panel shall continue efforts to reconcile the parties to the dispute on the basis of Christian love and forgiveness.

...

Circuit 3 (Baltimore East)
Southeastern District

Ov. 10-23**To Amend Bylaw 1.10.10.1 to Provide for Reconciler Reviews**

WHEREAS, Bylaw 1.10.10 states that “Each district board of directors shall appoint and maintain a district roster of four reconcilers ...”; and

WHEREAS, Dispute resolution process (DRP) reconcilers, as normal, sinful people who are subject to error, can and do misjudge

and ignore real harm to victims and show deference to powerful perpetrators; and

WHEREAS, The DRP is effectively a trial that passes judgment on the validity of the complaint, and may damage the career of the accused or leave the complainant further victimized; and

WHEREAS, No report is made concerning the success or failure of dispute resolution process reconcilers and so the members of the district are unaware and unable to evaluate them for appointment and reappointment; therefore be it

Resolved, That each time a reconciler is involved, the parties be asked for their evaluation and recommendation about the reconciler’s continuation in that position; and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 1.10.10.1 be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING***District Reconcilers***

...

1.10.10.1 The term of service of a reconciler shall be six years, renewable immediately following every even-numbered regular Synod convention (e.g., 64th in 2010, 66th in 2016, 68th in 2023, etc.) without term limitations. Reconcilers shall be people “of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3). Each time a reconciler is involved, the parties are asked for their evaluation and recommendation about the reconciler to be continued in their position. Vacancies shall be filled by the district board of directors in the same manner as regular appointments. The district board of directors may add to the district roster of reconcilers a reconciler who has moved into the district from another district.

Circuit 3 (Baltimore East)
Southeastern District

Ov. 10-24**To Request Council of Presidents to Clarify Circumstances of Called Worker Removal or Resignation**

WHEREAS, The Church, as instituted by her Lord Jesus Christ, publicly calls both commissioned and ordained ministers according to good order (Eph. 4:11–12); and

WHEREAS, Every called worker solemnly promises to serve God’s people in accordance with Holy Scripture and with our Lutheran Confessions (*LSB Agenda*, 166, 212); and

WHEREAS, Every called worker likewise promises to adorn the Gospel of Jesus Christ with a holy and godly life (ibid.); and

WHEREAS, There is a public nature to the work undertaken by those who serve the Church (Matt. 5:16; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2–4), as such a task includes exemplifying the faith for those they serve to see and emulate; and

WHEREAS, Though rare, shameful and scandalizing cases have arisen, in which called workers are found to be unfit according to the scriptural requirements (Rom. 12:3–8; Col. 3:12–17; 1 Tim. 3:1–7; 4:1–5, 14–16) of those serving in called positions in the Church, which require a removal or resignation from the office held; and

WHEREAS, Such cases are publicized to the Church in a straightforward but question-inspiring manner, which gives way to justifiable curiosity, concern, and, worse, speculation or rumor; and

WHEREAS, Those who have been removed or have resigned from called positions that once qualified them to publicly teach God’s

Word in our midst at times move to other organizations or church bodies despite their being found unfit according to God's clear standards, thus further scandalizing the Church and sowing confusion; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Council of Presidents (COP) confer and compose a clear process by which the removal or resignation of called workers in the Synod will be more clearly relayed to the wider Synod, taking into consideration Bylaw sections 2.13 and 2.17, with particular attention to Bylaw 2.13.2.1 (a–c); and be it further

Resolved, That the COP, in their work, consider relaying the status of the called worker (*restricted*, *suspended*, or *under investigation*) at the time of the removal or resignation.

Circuit 20 (Mankato), Minnesota South District;
Circuit 8 (Oklahoma City), Oklahoma District

Ov. 10-25

To Request Council of Presidents to Clarify Circumstances of Called Worker Removal or Resignation from Roster

WHEREAS, The Church, as instituted by her Lord Jesus Christ, publicly calls both commissioned and ordained ministers according to good order (Eph. 4:11–12); and

WHEREAS, Every called worker solemnly promises to serve God's people in accordance with Holy Scripture and with our Lutheran Confessions (*LSB Agenda*, 166, 212); and

WHEREAS, Every called worker likewise promises to adorn the Gospel of Jesus Christ with a holy and godly life (*ibid.*); and

WHEREAS, There is a public nature to the work undertaken by those who serve the Church (Matt. 5:16; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2–4), as such a task includes exemplifying the faith for those they serve to see and emulate; and

WHEREAS, Though rare, shameful and scandalizing cases have arisen, in which called workers are found to be unfit according to the scriptural requirements (Rom. 12:3–8; Col. 3:12–17; 1 Tim. 3:1–7; 4:1–5, 14–16) of those serving in called positions in the Church, which require a removal or resignation from the office held; and

WHEREAS, Such cases are publicized to the Church in a straightforward but question-inspiring manner, which gives way to justifiable curiosity, concern, and, worse, speculation or rumor; and

WHEREAS, Those who have been removed or have resigned from called positions and from the roster that once qualified them to publicly teach God's Word in our midst at times move to other organizations or church bodies despite their being found unfit according to God's clear standards, thus further scandalizing the Church and sowing confusion; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Council of Presidents (COP) confer and compose a process by which the removal or resignation of called workers from the roster of the Synod, and the nature thereof (e.g., false doctrine, immoral life, inability to serve—omitting details), will be more clearly relayed to the wider Synod, taking into consideration Bylaw sections 2.13 and 2.17, with particular attention to Bylaw 2.13.2.1 (a–c); and be it further

Resolved, That the COP, in their work, consider relaying the status of the called worker (*restricted*, *suspended*, or *under*

investigation) at the time of the removal or resignation from the roster.

Circuit 25 (Kenosha), South Wisconsin District;
Circuit 26 (Racine), South Wisconsin District

Ov. 10-26

To Amend Bylaw 2.13.3.2 to Make Restriction Appeals Public Record and to Allow Further Review

Rationale

A district president placed a pastor on restricted status. In response to the question, why was the letter written, the pastor replied, “to defend my children,” and referred to the scene in *Braveheart* where the man defended his wife. The letter was written five years prior, to someone else. The district president, a week later, felt threatened and publicly announced to the entire Synod that the pastor was placed on restricted status. In the appeal hearing with three other district presidents, unrecorded, the ruling was in favor of the first district president, even though he admitted he acted in violation of the Synod Constitution and normal practice by ruling on his own case (although the clause forbidding ruling on a matter where the district president was a party has since been removed), and rendering a judgment far in excess of the original offense.

Therefore be it

Resolved, That the entire appeal must be recorded, with a transcript given to the parties and placed in Synod and district files as a permanent public record; and be it further

Resolved, That the Praesidium of the Synod (the President and vice-presidents) have authority to review and discipline district presidents that violate their oath of office to uphold the Scriptures, Confessions, and Constitution of the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 2.13.3.2 be amended as follows:

~~PRESENT~~/PROPOSED WORDING

Removal of Restricted Status and Limitations

...

2.13.3.2 Such petition for removal of restricted status shall be addressed solely to the Council of Presidents through the office of the President of the Synod. The Council of Presidents shall rule on such petition within six months from the date of receipt.

...

(e) The hearing before the panel shall be ~~private~~public, attended ~~only~~by the parties and the witnesses who can substantiate the facts relevant to the matter in dispute. The panel shall establish the procedure to be followed in the hearing and the relevancy of evidence so that each party shall be given an opportunity fully to present its respective position. The entire appeal must be recorded, with a transcription given to the parties and placed in Synod and district files as a permanent public record.

...

(g) The decision of the hearing panel shall be the decision of the Council of Presidents and ~~shall~~may be final with ~~no~~the right of appeal to the Praesidium of the Synod that has authority to review and discipline district presidents that violate their oath of office to uphold the Scriptures, Confessions, and the Synod Constitution.

Circuit 3 (Baltimore East)
Southeastern District

Ov. 10-27**To Standardize and Strengthen Response to Rostered Worker Sexual Abuse****Preamble**

The 2023 Synod convention adopted Resolution 10-05A, “To Speak to Spiritual Care of Victims of Sexual Misconduct by Individual Members of the Synod,” which addressed the issue of spiritual care for all parties involved in accusations of clergy sexual misconduct. This overture is focused on care for victims who come forward with their stories in light of “institutional abuse”—as experienced by victims who are further traumatized by the current process outlined in Bylaw section 2.17. The goal is twofold: (1) to shape a response that is trauma-informed and centered in the needs of victims, and (2) to safeguard congregational life for those vulnerable to sexual boundary violations.

WHEREAS, God establishes the Office of the Holy Ministry for the care of His people (John 20:21–23; 1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9), and those who serve in this office are called to lives that are “above reproach” (1 Tim. 3:2); and

WHEREAS, The Synod has created systems of ecclesiastical supervision to protect congregations, preserve the pastoral office, and address serious sin among rostered workers; and

WHEREAS, Reports of sexual misconduct, abuse, harassment, assault, or boundary violations require immediate and serious response that centers the safety and well-being of those harmed; and

WHEREAS, Any sexualized behavior by rostered workers (ordained and commissioned ministers) toward those under their spiritual care is abusive because of unequal power, spiritual authority, and vulnerability; and

WHEREAS, Abuse of spiritual authority causes lasting spiritual, emotional, and psychological harm; and

WHEREAS, Present practice allows a rostered worker to resign at any stage, preventing investigation or stopping it mid-process; and

WHEREAS, Such resignation hides the reason for departure, avoids accountability, and allows movement into new ministry spaces without warning; and

WHEREAS, Those who are harmed deserve a process that seeks truth and justice without pressure toward reconciliation or silence; and

WHEREAS, There is no consistent public method for identifying pastors who leave while under investigation; and

WHEREAS, District presidents currently exercise wide procedural discretion, resulting in inconsistent handling of allegations, uneven documentation, and differing outcomes across districts and over time; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod adopt clear definitions for sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, and sexual assault using pastoral, legal, and psychological standards, and affirm that sexualized behavior by rostered workers toward those under their care is abuse; and be it further

Resolved, That allegations of sexual misconduct, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or serious boundary violations shall automatically initiate an investigation to determine whether the allegations can be substantiated; and be it further

Resolved, That resignation, retirement, transfer, or removal from the roster shall not prevent or end such an investigation; and be it further

Resolved, That district presidents shall be required to complete all investigations regardless of resignation status and issue written findings and final disposition; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod require a clear public designation for any rostered worker who leaves while under investigation, using language that plainly states that the individual resigned or departed during an active investigation; and be it further

Resolved, That when an investigation confirms rostered worker sexual abuse, the outcome and removal from office shall be made public in a way that protects victim identity while ensuring transparency; and be it further

Resolved, That the chairman of the Council of Presidents appoint a task force to revise Bylaw section 2.17 and all related bylaws, manuals, and policies in order to establish a single, standardized set of procedures for all ecclesiastical investigations of sexual misconduct, to be followed uniformly across all districts and over time, and that such revisions shall consider the following recommendations:

- require completion of investigations regardless of resignation;
- mandate public identification when a pastor resigns during an active investigation;
- set required timelines, documentation standards, victim-care protocols, due-process protections, and reporting requirements; and
- prioritize accountability and transparency over institutional protection;

and be it further

Resolved, That this task force include survivors of rostered worker abuse, trauma-informed professionals, and at least three women so that victim perspectives guide the work; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod create systems of oversight, documentation, and review to ensure ecclesiastical supervisors faithfully follow required procedures, and that neglect or refusal to do so shall be subject to review and discipline; and be it further

Resolved, That all rostered workers and seminarians receive regular training in abuse prevention, power dynamics, boundaries, trauma-informed care, and reporting obligations; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm that faithful oversight of the pastoral office includes transparency, accountability, protection of the vulnerable, and truthful witness for the sake of Christ and His Church.

Board of Directors
Minnesota South District

Ov. 10-28**To Require Completion of Ecclesiastical Investigations and Strengthen Response to Clergy Sexual Misconduct/Abuse****Preamble**

This overture seeks to close a critical gap in the Synod’s current supervisory process regarding clergy sexual abuse. Under present bylaws, a pastor under ecclesiastical investigation may resign at any time, thereby halting the process and leaving the matter unresolved. Such resignation denies closure for the victims, weakens

accountability, damages the Church's public witness, and allows the possibility of further harm in future ministry contexts.

By requiring completion of investigations even after resignation, establishing clear public designations, and introducing standardized terminology, and providing for preventive education, this overture aims to protect victims, preserve the integrity of the pastoral office, and strengthen the Church's witness to the world.

WHEREAS, The Office of the Holy Ministry is established by God (Jer. 3:15; 1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9) and entrusted to fallible men who must remain above reproach for the sake of Christ's Church; and

WHEREAS, The Synod, in seeking to be faithful to this high calling, has established ecclesiastical supervisory structures for the oversight and discipline of church workers; and

WHEREAS, Allegations of sexual misconduct, harassment, assault, or other forms of pastoral boundary violations demand serious investigation and just resolution for the sake of the Gospel, the victims, and the Church's witness to the world; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has historically used the term *sexual misconduct* to describe a range of behaviors that, in cases involving pastors or other church workers, constitute *sexual abuse* because of the inherent power imbalance in relationships where spiritual, educational, or institutional authority is exercised; and the absence of precise terminology has hindered appropriate accountability and transparency in ecclesiastical proceedings; and

WHEREAS, Such abuse involves not only moral failure but also the misuse of spiritual authority, which violates the trust inherent in the pastoral office and inflicts deep spiritual, emotional, and psychological harm on victims; and

WHEREAS, Current practice allows a rostered worker to resign at any point during an ecclesiastical investigation, effectively halting the process and leaving the matter unresolved; and

WHEREAS, Such resignation may enable a person credibly accused of abuse or other disqualifying sin to avoid accountability, obscure the nature of the resignation, and attach themselves to other ministries or parachurch organizations without warning or consequence; and

WHEREAS, Victims, congregations, and the broader church are best served by a completed investigation that speaks the truth in love and justice (Eph. 4:15; Micah 6:8); and

WHEREAS, There is currently no mechanism to publicly identify those who have resigned while under ecclesiastical investigation, potentially putting others at risk and undermining confidence in the integrity of the Office of the Holy Ministry; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod direct the chairman of the Council of Presidents to appoint a task force to review current bylaws, manuals, opinions from the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM), and procedures for addressing sexual misconduct, with the purpose of clarifying and revising applicable bylaws and supervisory procedures so that ecclesiastical investigations of alleged misconduct or abuse is completed even if the accused resigns from the roster; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force include a minimum of three women as members so that all potential victims are represented throughout the review and revision process; and be it further

Resolved, That district presidents be directed and empowered, as those entrusted with ecclesiastical supervision, to carry forward all such investigations to completion regardless of resignation status,

ensuring proper documentation, reporting, and closure; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod develop and maintain a publicly accessible classification or designation (e.g., *Resigned Under Ecclesiastical Investigation*) for all rostered workers who resign before the completion of an investigation into credible allegations of misconduct; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force, if deemed appropriate, revise Bylaw section 2.17 in consultation with the Secretary of Synod, the Commission on Handbook, and the CCM to make the process more transparent for both the victim and the accused, and to emphasize pastoral care for victims, their families, and the congregations impacted by sexual misconduct; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod define and distinguish the terms *sexual abuse*, *sexual misconduct*, *sexual harassment*, and *sexual assault* in alignment with recognized pastoral care, legal, and psychological standards, and affirm that clergy sexual misconduct constitutes sexual abuse by virtue of the authority entrusted to the pastoral office; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod require all rostered workers and all students preparing for the ministry to receive regular education and training in clergy-sexual-abuse prevention, boundary awareness, and appropriate pastoral care; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod call upon all district presidents to prioritize the pastoral care of victims and those impacted by clergy sexual abuse, ensuring that justice is pursued with both transparency and compassion; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm that those who hold the Office of the Ministry must live above reproach, and that the Church bears responsibility to exercise faithful oversight for the sake of Christ's name and His beloved flock.

Christ Greenfield, Gilbert, AZ; Circuit 16 (Faribault),
Minnesota South District; Circuit 28, Pacific Southwest District

Ov. 10-29

To Require Completion of Ecclesiastical Investigations and Strengthen Response to Clergy Sexual Misconduct/Abuse

Preamble

This overture seeks to close a critical gap in the Synod's current supervisory process regarding clergy sexual abuse. Under present bylaws, a pastor under ecclesiastical investigation may resign at any time, thereby halting the process and leaving the matter unresolved. Such resignation denies closure for the victims, weakens accountability, damages the Church's public witness, and allows the possibility of further harm in future ministry contexts.

By requiring completion of investigations even after resignation, establishing clear public designations, and introducing standardized terminology, and providing for preventive education, this overture aims to protect victims, preserve the integrity of the pastoral office, and strengthen the Church's witness to the world.

WHEREAS, The Office of the Holy Ministry is established by God (Jer. 3:15; 1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9) and entrusted to fallible men who must remain above reproach for the sake of Christ's Church; and

WHEREAS, The Synod, in seeking to be faithful to this high calling, has established ecclesiastical supervisory structures for the oversight and discipline of church workers; and

WHEREAS, Allegations of sexual misconduct, harassment, assault, or other forms of pastoral boundary violations demand serious investigation and just resolution for the sake of the Gospel, the victims, and the Church's witness to the world; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has historically used the term *sexual misconduct* to describe a range of behaviors that, in cases involving pastors or other church workers, constitute *sexual abuse* because of the inherent power imbalance in relationships where spiritual, educational, or institutional authority is exercised; and the absence of precise terminology has hindered appropriate accountability and transparency in ecclesiastical proceedings; and

WHEREAS, Such abuse involves not only moral failure but also the misuse of spiritual authority, which violates the trust inherent in the pastoral office and inflicts deep spiritual, emotional, and psychological harm on victims; and

WHEREAS, Current practice allows a rostered worker to resign at any point during an ecclesiastical investigation, effectively halting the process and leaving the matter unresolved; and

WHEREAS, Such resignation may enable a person credibly accused of abuse or other disqualifying sin to avoid accountability, obscure the nature of the resignation, and attach themselves to other ministries or parachurch organizations without warning or consequence; and

WHEREAS, Victims, congregations, and the broader church are best served by a completed investigation that speaks the truth in love and justice (Eph. 4:15; Micah 6:8); and

WHEREAS, There is currently no mechanism to publicly identify those who have resigned while under ecclesiastical investigation, potentially putting others at risk and undermining confidence in the integrity of the Office of the Holy Ministry; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod direct the chairman of the Council of Presidents to appoint a task force to review current bylaws, manuals, opinions from the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM), and procedures for addressing sexual misconduct, with the purpose of clarifying and revising applicable bylaws and supervisory procedures so that ecclesiastical investigations of alleged misconduct or abuse is completed even if the accused resigns from the roster; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force include a minimum of three women as members so that all potential victims are represented throughout the review and revision process; and be it further

Resolved, That district presidents be directed and empowered, as those entrusted with ecclesiastical supervision, to carry forward all such investigations to completion regardless of resignation status, ensuring proper documentation, reporting, and closure; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod develop and maintain a publicly accessible classification or designation (e.g., *Resigned Under Ecclesiastical Investigation*) for all rostered workers who resign before the completion of an investigation into credible allegations of misconduct or if a rostered worker is removed due to a substantiated allegation of clergy sexual abuse; and that it be reported publicly; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force, if deemed appropriate, revise Bylaw section 2.17 in consultation with the Secretary of Synod, the

Commission on Handbook, and the CCM to make the process more transparent for both the victim and the accused, and to emphasize pastoral care for victims, their families, and the congregations impacted by sexual misconduct; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod define and distinguish the terms *sexual abuse*, *sexual misconduct*, *sexual harassment*, and *sexual assault* in alignment with recognized pastoral care, legal, and psychological standards, and affirm that clergy sexual misconduct constitutes sexual abuse by virtue of the authority entrusted to the pastoral office; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod require all rostered workers and all students preparing for the ministry to receive regular education and training in clergy-sexual-abuse prevention, boundary awareness, and appropriate pastoral care; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod call upon all district presidents to prioritize the pastoral care of victims and those impacted by clergy sexual abuse, ensuring that justice is pursued with both transparency and compassion; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm that those who hold the Office of the Ministry must live above reproach, and that the Church bears responsibility to exercise faithful oversight for the sake of Christ's name and His beloved flock.

St. Paul, Fremont, WI; Woodbury, Woodbury, MN

Ov. 10-30

To Require Completion of Ecclesiastical Investigations and Strengthen Response to Sexual Misconduct/Abuse by Rostered Church Workers

Preamble

This overture seeks to close a critical gap in the Synod's current supervisory process regarding sexual abuse. Under present bylaws, a minister of religion—ordained and commissioned (rostered worker) under ecclesiastical investigation may resign at any time, thereby halting the process and leaving the matter unresolved. Such resignation denies closure for the victims, weakens accountability, damages the Church's public witness, and allows the possibility of further harm in future ministry contexts.

By requiring completion of investigations even after resignation, establishing clear public designations, introducing standardized terminology, and providing for preventive education, this overture aims to protect victims, preserve the integrity of the Church's ministry, and strengthen the Church's witness to the world.

WHEREAS, The Office of the Holy Ministry is established by God (Jer. 3:15; 1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9) and entrusted to fallible men who must remain above reproach for the sake of Christ's Church; and

WHEREAS, Auxiliary offices to the Office of the Holy Ministry have been established by the Church and entrusted to fallible men and women who must remain above reproach for the sake of Christ's Church; and

WHEREAS, The Synod, in seeking to be faithful to this high calling, has established ecclesiastical supervisory structures for the oversight and discipline of rostered workers; and

WHEREAS, Allegations of sexual misconduct, harassment, assault, or other forms of boundary violations by rostered workers demand serious investigation and just resolution for the sake of the Gospel, the victims, and the Church's witness to the world; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has historically used the term *sexual misconduct* to describe a range of behaviors that, in cases involving rostered workers, constitute sexual abuse because of the inherent power imbalance in relationships where spiritual, educational, or institutional authority are exercised; and the absence of precise terminology has hindered appropriate accountability and transparency in the ecclesiastical supervisory process; and

WHEREAS, Such abuse involves not only moral failure but also the misuse of spiritual authority, which violates the trust inherent in the Church's ministry and inflicts deep spiritual, emotional, and psychological harm on victims; and

WHEREAS, Current practice allows a rostered worker to resign at any point during an ecclesiastical investigation, effectively halting the process and leaving the matter unresolved; and

WHEREAS, Such resignation may enable a person credibly accused of abuse or other disqualifying sin to avoid accountability, obscure the nature of the resignation, and attach themselves to other ministries or parachurch organizations without warning or consequence; and

WHEREAS, Victims, congregations, and the broader church are best served by a completed investigation that speaks the truth in love and justice (Eph. 4:15; Micah 6:8); and

WHEREAS, There is currently no mechanism to publicly identify those who have resigned while under ecclesiastical investigation, potentially putting others at risk and undermining confidence in the integrity of the Church's ministry; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod direct the chairman of the Council of Presidents to appoint a task force to review current bylaws, manuals, Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) opinions, and procedures for addressing sexual misconduct, with the purpose of clarifying and revising applicable bylaws and supervisory procedures so that ecclesiastical investigations of alleged misconduct or abuse be completed even if the accused resigns from the roster; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force include a minimum of three women as members so that all potential victims are represented throughout the review and revision process; and be it further

Resolved, That district presidents be directed and empowered, as those entrusted with ecclesiastical supervision, to carry forward all such investigations to completion regardless of resignation status and to ensure proper documentation, reporting, and closure; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod develop and maintain a publicly accessible classification and designation, "Resigned Under Ecclesiastical Investigation," for all rostered workers who resign before the completion of an investigation into allegations of sexual misconduct/abuse; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod develop and maintain a publicly accessible classification and designation, "Removed for Sexual Abuse," for all former rostered workers who are removed from the roster due to substantiated allegations of sexual misconduct/abuse; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force, if deemed appropriate, revise Bylaw section 2.17 in consultation with the Secretary of Synod, the Commission on Handbook, and the CCM to make the supervisory process more transparent for both the victim and the accused and to emphasize pastoral care for victims, their families, and the

congregations impacted by rostered workers sexual misconduct/abuse; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod define and distinguish the terms *sexual abuse*, *sexual misconduct*, *sexual harassment*, and *sexual assault* in alignment with recognized spiritual care, legal, and psychological standards, and affirm that *sexual misconduct* by a rostered worker constitutes sexual abuse by virtue of the authority entrusted by the Church to her rostered workers; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod require all rostered workers and all students preparing for ministry to receive regular education and training in sexual abuse prevention, boundary awareness, and appropriate spiritual care; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod call upon all district presidents to prioritize the spiritual care of victims and those impacted by rostered worker sexual abuse, ensuring that justice is pursued with both transparency and compassion; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm that those who hold the Office of the Holy Ministry and offices auxiliary to it must live above reproach; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm that the Church bears responsibility to exercise faithful oversight for the sake of Christ's name and His beloved flock.

St. Paul
Manawa, WI

Ov. 10-31

To Certify Accuracy and Trustworthiness of Call Documents

WHEREAS, The Synod Constitution states the following as objectives of the Synod:

- to "provide evangelical supervision, counsel, and care for pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers of the Synod in the performance of their official duties" (Const. Art. III 8); and
- to "provide protection for congregations, pastors, teachers, and other church workers in the performance of their official duties and the maintenance of their rights" (Const. Art. III 9); and
- to "aid in providing for the welfare of pastors, teachers, and other church workers, and their families in the event of illness, disability, retirement, special need, or death" (Const. Art. III 10);

and

WHEREAS, The Constitution defines membership in the Synod as follows: "membership in the Synod is held and may be acquired by congregations and individuals, ministers of religion—ordained and ministers of religion—commissioned, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church who confess and accept the confessional basis of Article II" (Const. Art. V), and "all organized congregations that have joined the Synod hold voting membership" (Const. Art. V A), and "individual members of the Synod, who are nonvoting except for those pastors exercising the vote of a member congregation and installed to a member congregation, are the following: 1. Pastors, ordained ministers, called and installed to a member congregation," etc. (Const. Art. V B; Const. Art V B 1); and

WHEREAS, The Constitution obligates the respective district president, to "sign all examination papers and certificates of

ordination, and, in general, all official papers and documents of their district” (Const. Art. XII 9 d); and

WHEREAS, The Synod Bylaws define Concordia Plan Services (CPS) in the following manner: “Concordia Plan Services is a controlled entity of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod created to manage the Concordia Plans” (Bylaw 1.2.1 [d]); and

WHEREAS, The Bylaws define the term “ecclesiastical supervision” as follows: “the responsibility, primarily of the President of the Synod and district presidents, to supervise on behalf of the Synod the doctrine, life, and administration of its members, officers, and agencies” (Bylaw 1.2.1 [j]); and

WHEREAS, The Bylaws define the relationships of the congregations, national body, districts, and circuits in the following manner: “... the Synod, including its component parts, also serves as the structure through which congregations carry out certain functions that can be performed more effectively and efficiently together with other member congregations” (Bylaws 1.3.3); and

WHEREAS, In some cases, the aforementioned call papers presented to professional church workers who were called to serve calling entities within a district of the Synod have resulted in the professional church workers not receiving the pay and/or benefits noted in the official call papers presented to them by the calling entities; and

WHEREAS, In at least one case of each of the following examples, the pay and/or benefits noted above have included benefits such as a housing agreement, CPS health insurance benefits, CPS pension benefits, as well as CPS disability and survivor insurance, all of which were specified in the original call papers, only to result in the calling entities refusing to provide these benefits that were specified in the original call papers that the calling entities officially presented to professional church workers; therefore be it

Resolved, That district presidents or their designees certify in writing that all the benefits provided in official call papers that are presented by all calling entities within any given district to rostered professional church workers are accurate and trustworthy; and be it further

Resolved, That district presidents or their designees sign a “certificate of authenticity” to provide assurance to the rostered professional church workers that the pay and benefits specified in the official call papers provided by a calling entity within the district are, in fact, accurate and may be trusted to be executed as stated by the calling entity; and be it further

Resolved, That district presidents, or their designees, present the rostered professional church workers with said “certificate of authenticity” before proceeding to install any rostered professional church worker into his/her new place of service; and be it further

Resolved, That district presidents or their designees retain an official copy of the “certificate of authenticity” together with all the official call papers provided by any calling entity to any rostered professional church workers for any called positions within the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That district presidents or their designees, after establishing the above noted “certificate of authenticity,” along with all the processes that may be needed to provide such a “certificate of authenticity,” then advocate with the President of the Synod, the Praesidium, the Council of Presidents, and the Synod Board of Directors to have such a “certificate of authenticity” become a

regular practice for all Synod agencies and recognized service organizations; and be it finally

Resolved, That CPS, as a controlled agency of the Synod, be encouraged to assist the districts and the Synod in preparing such a “certificate of authenticity” for any pay and/or benefits that CPS is involved in providing to any rostered professional church workers through the calling entities of Synod.

Circuit 43 (St. Joseph)
Michigan District

Ov. 10-32

To Allow Pastors to Opt Out of Pre-Call Interviews and/or Contact

WHEREAS, The call to a pastor is a Divine Call extended by a congregation through the guidance of the Holy Spirit; and

WHEREAS, Pre-call interviews and contact can sometimes be perceived as shifting the focus from a Divine Call to a secular hiring process; and

WHEREAS, Providing the ability to opt out respects the pastor’s current ministry and personal discernment process; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod establish a policy allowing pastors to opt out of pre-call interviews and/or pre-call contact initiated by calling congregations.

Wyoming District

Ov. 10-33

To Amend Bylaw 2.10.3 to Allow District Presidents to Share Issues prior to Installation

WHEREAS, A congregation may issue a call to an individual the district president considers, for cause, to be inappropriate; and

WHEREAS, A district president has no clear authority to refuse to authorize installation; therefore be it

Resolved, That the district president may share documentation of serious issues with the congregation and request reconsideration; and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 2.10.3 be amended by the additional stipulation as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Rites of Ordination or Commissioning

2.10.3 The president of the district that will have ecclesiastical supervision of the worker (see Bylaw section 2.12) shall be responsible for the rites of ordination and commissioning of candidates for the ministry called to that congregation, agency, or other calling body.

...

(f) The district president may share documentation of serious issues with a congregation, and request reconsideration, before authorizing installation.

Circuit 3 (Baltimore East)
Southeastern District

Ov. 10-34

**To More Directly Oversee Service
of Ordained Ministers to Congregations
to Which They Have No Formal Call**

WHEREAS, Congregations in vacancy and other circumstances are routinely served by emeritus clergy and other clergy without a call to that same congregation; and

WHEREAS, It may be argued from the condition of acquiring and holding membership in the Synod that is related to a regular call (Const. Art. VI 3) that every minister and congregation agree to observe and respect the individual congregation's right to call a pastor and not to interfere with that pastor's proper authority in matters pertaining to his call; and

WHEREAS, It may be argued from C.F.W. Walther's *The Voice of Our Church on the Question of Church and Ministry*, which the Synod has adopted in convention (2001 Res. 7-17A, "To Affirm Synod's Official Position on Church and Ministry") as the official doctrinal position of the Synod, that according to the good order of the church, clergy are not to meddle in congregations to which they have no call or responsibility for ecclesiastical oversight; therefore be it

Resolved, That called pastors of congregations, circuit visitors, and district presidents with ecclesiastical supervision more directly oversee the service of ordained ministers in congregations to which they have not a call; and be it further

Resolved, That all such service be reported at least to the most immediate ecclesiastical supervisor; and be it finally

Resolved, That any failure of an ordained minister to report such service and any interference in the internal affairs of a congregation to which that minister is not called be fraternally, yet strongly, rebuked by the appropriate ecclesiastical supervisors, and where there is not timely repentance and the concomitant change in the offending behavior, effective disciplinary action be taken for the sake of the unity of the church in accordance with existing procedures.

Circuit 14 (Austin)
Minnesota South District

Ov. 10-35

To Encourage Pastors to Honor Their Own Call

WHEREAS, The first objective of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) is to "conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3–6; 1 Cor. 1:10) ..." (Const. Art. III 1); another is to "provide protection for congregations, pastors, teachers, and other church workers in the performance of their official duties and the maintenance of their rights" (Const. Art. III 9); and

WHEREAS, As a condition of acquiring and holding membership in the Synod, as stated in Constitution Article VI 3, every congregation and minister must agree to observe and respect the individual congregation's right to call a pastor and not interfere with that pastor's proper authority in matters pertaining to his call; and

WHEREAS, Dr. C. F. W. Walther's *Kirche und Amt*, adopted by the Synod in convention as official doctrine (2001 Res. 7-17A "To Affirm Synod's Official Position on Church and Ministry"), further defends the aforementioned rights and is explicitly clear that

pastors are not to meddle in congregations to which they have no call or responsibility for ecclesiastical oversight according to the good order of the church; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Northern Illinois District memorialize the Synod in convention to reaffirm these beliefs; and be it further

Resolved, That ecclesiastical supervisors fraternally, yet strongly, rebuke any pastors (retired, called elsewhere, etc.) interfering with the internal affairs of a congregation to which they are not properly called to preserve the unity of the church's witness.

Northern Illinois District

Ov. 10-36

**To Call for Publication
of Council of Presidents Manual**

WHEREAS, The Council of Presidents (COP) of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is expected to have policies that guide both the corporate work of the council and the individual work of its members (Bylaw 3.10.1.2); and

WHEREAS, Those policies have been codified in a manual distributed to the COP's members, but not available for public viewing; and

WHEREAS, That private manual is often cited to defend the actions and positions taken by district presidents; therefore be it

Resolved, That the COP be required to make public its manual; and be it further

Resolved, That the COP manual be available on the Synod website in the "Document Library"; and be it finally

Resolved, That the manual available online be the most recent iteration, as updated periodically by the council.

Michigan District

Ov. 10-37

To Provide Compensation for Circuit Visitors

WHEREAS, Being a circuit visitor can involve a considerable amount of time; and

WHEREAS, There is no compensation (except for mileage) for these men; and

WHEREAS, Serving as a circuit visitor takes time away from his family, his congregation, and his own personal time; therefore be it

Resolved, That the congregations of the Minnesota North District give the circuit visitor \$50 per diem plus the current IRS mileage reimbursement for any requested visit; and be it further

Resolved, That the Minnesota North District convention memorialize the 2026 Synod convention to address the issue of providing compensation for circuit visitors.

Minnesota North District

Ov. 10-38

**To Amend Bylaw 2.11.2.2 (c)
regarding Candidate Reporting**

WHEREAS, The 2023 Synod convention adopted Resolution 10-06, "To Amend Bylaw 2.11.2.2 regarding Candidate Status," that moved the filing deadline for the required candidate annual report from January 31 to July 31; and

WHEREAS, Annual reports for emeriti remain due on January 31; and

WHEREAS, Many district offices find it more efficient to request and process both candidate and emeriti annual reports simultaneously; and

WHEREAS, Candidates have no greater unavailability during the summer months due to travel, seasonal jobs, or other obligations; and

WHEREAS, The preparation and conduct of both district and Synod conventions coincide with this annual reporting time period two out of every three years; therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 2.11.2.2 (c) be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Candidate

2.11.2.2 A “candidate” member is one who is eligible to perform the duties of any of the offices of ministry specified in Bylaw section 2.11 but who is not currently an active member or an emeritus member.

...

(c) The candidate shall, by ~~July~~January 31, make an annual report to the district president who shall determine the member’s eligibility to remain on candidate status. The candidate’s report shall include current contact information and address the criteria for remaining on candidate status.

...

Board of Directors
Nebraska District

(c) The candidate shall, by ~~July~~January 31, make an annual report to the district president who shall determine the member’s eligibility to remain on candidate status. The candidate’s report shall include current contact information and address the criteria for remaining on candidate status.

...

Board of Directors
Oklahoma District

Ov. 10-39

**To Amend Bylaw 2.11.2.2 (c)
regarding Candidate Reporting**

WHEREAS, Candidates are currently required to file an annual report with their district president by July 31 in accordance with 2023 Resolution 10-06, “To Amend Bylaw 2.11.2.2 regarding Candidate Status”; and

WHEREAS, Many candidates are unavailable during the summer months due to travel, seasonal jobs, or other obligations; and

WHEREAS, In district convention years, the preparation and conduct of several district conventions coincides with the annual reporting time period, making it difficult for already-taxed district offices to attend to the work of requesting and processing these annual reports; and

WHEREAS, Annual reports for emeriti are due on January 31; and

WHEREAS, Many district offices find that it is more efficient to request and process both candidate and emeriti annual reports simultaneously; therefore be it

Resolved, That Bylaw 2.11.2.2 (c) be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

2.11 Continued Eligibility of Individual Members

Candidate

2.11.2.2 A “candidate” member is one who is eligible to perform the duties of any of the offices of ministry specified in Bylaw section 2.11 but who is not currently an active member or an emeritus member.

...

CORRECTION IN REGISTRATION LISTING (For Delegates Only)

It is important that the delegate lists published after the convention in the *Convention Proceedings* be as accurate as possible. Prior to and during the convention, and within two days of the close of convention, please visit the link below to complete FORM XX to report any corrections to your personal listing in the front of this workbook.

forms.lcms.org/form/LCMS/CONV/REGISTRATION-FORM-XX

While the convention is in session only, you may use the lower section of this page as your notice to the Office of the Secretary to report corrections. Remove it from your *Workbook* and deliver it to the *Today's Business* office or hand it to the Secretary at the convention:

John W. Sias, Secretary

(Please note that this form is not to be used when there is a change of delegates. In such cases, necessary documentation is required from the Secretary of the District.)

To the Office of the Secretary:

My personal listing in the front of the 2026 *Convention Workbook* is not accurate and should be corrected as follows (please print):

On page _____, column _____, under district _____,

the present reading: _____

should be changed to: _____

Thank you for making this correction.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

