



## COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY AND CHURCH RELATIONS

### *The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*

#### **WHAT IS THE CTCR?**

The Holy Christian Church consists of all those—and only those—who trust in God’s Son, Jesus Christ, as their Savior from sin. It is called into being, nurtured, and extended by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel in Word and Sacraments. Because the church’s life is so intimately involved with these means of grace, it must take special care that they are not falsified or distorted in any way as the church reaches out to people living in a particular time or place. A church body that prizes the Gospel will therefore be concerned about theology.

Moreover, because Christians are “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3), a Christian church seeks to deepen and strengthen in every way possible its own internal unity and also its relationship with other Christian church bodies. Such a church body is therefore vitally concerned with proper church relations.

In order to provide leadership in dealing with the Synod’s needs and opportunities in the areas of theology and church relations, the Synod established the Commission on Theology and Church Relations in 1962. Since that time, the Commission has provided reports on a number of significant theological issues and has been the Synod’s primary agency for monitoring the Synod’s ecumenical relationships with other Christians. The CTCR’s reports, along with other theological documents and resources, are available on the CTCR’s website at <http://www.lcms.org/ctcr>.

#### **MEMBERSHIP OF THE CTCR**

The membership of the Commission is carefully chosen so that it is as representative of the Synod as possible. In addition to the president and first vice president of the Synod and the presidents of the Ft. Wayne and St. Louis seminaries (who are advisory members), the membership of the Commission is made up of sixteen voting members: four lay persons, four pastors (two of whom must be parish pastors and one of whom must be a district president), one parish teacher, four seminary professors, one college or university professor, and two others. Five of these members are elected by the Synod convention, four are appointed by the seminary faculties, four by the Council of Presidents, and three by the president of the Synod. Because of his responsibilities, the Director of Church Relations—Assistant to the President also regularly consults with the Commission. Because of its membership and the way it is chosen, the Commission represents a microcosm of the Synod itself.

#### **DUTIES OF THE CTCR**

The major functions and duties of the Commission are stated explicitly in the *Handbook* of the Synod (3.9.5, 3.9.5.2, 3.9.5.2.1, 3.9.5.2.2, and 3.9.5.4) as follows:

- 3.9.5 The Commission on Theology and Church Relations exists to assist congregations in achieving the objectives of Article III 1 and 6 of the Constitution of the Synod and to assist the President of the Synod in matters of church relationships.

[LCMS Constitution, Article III, 1 and 6:

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;
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;]

- 3.9.5.2 The Commission on Theology and Church Relations shall assist the President of the Synod at his request in discharging his constitutional responsibilities for maintaining doctrinal unity within the Synod.

- 3.9.5.2.1 The Commission on Theology and Church Relations shall provide guidance to the Synod in matters of theology and church relations.

- (a) It shall bring matters of theology and church relations through special studies and documents to the membership of the Synod and to conferences.
- (b) It shall refer theological issues and questions to the proper individuals or groups of individuals for additional study.
- (c) It shall suggest and provide studies of contemporary issues, including also current social issues, as they affect the church and as the church may affect such social issues.
- (d) It shall foster and provide for ongoing theological education through institutes, seminars, and other means.
- (e) It shall obtain and study theological treatises, conference papers, and similar documents and studies.

- 3.9.5.2.2 The Commission on Theology and Church Relations shall 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.

- (a) It shall address itself to and evaluate existing fellowship relations for the purpose of mutual admonition and encouragement.
- (b) When a church body applies for formal recognition of altar and pulpit fellowship with the Synod, such recognition shall be proposed at a convention of the Synod only after the approval of the commission.

- (c) When a small, formative, emerging confessional Lutheran church body (identified as such by the President of the Synod as chief ecumenical officer) requests recognition of altar and pulpit fellowship with the Synod, after consultation with the Praesidium and approval by the commission, such recognition may be declared by the President of the Synod subject to the endorsement of the subsequent Synod convention.
- (d) When a mission of the Synod applies for formal recognition as a self-governing partner church, such recognition shall be proposed at convention of the Synod by the Board for Mission Services with the approval of the commission.
- (e) When an entity (e.g., a district, mission, group of congregations, etc.) of a self-governing partner church is established as an independent church body in altar and pulpit fellowship with that partner church body, and subsequently requests recognition of altar and pulpit fellowship with Synod, such recognition may be declared by the President of Synod, after consultation with the Praesidium and approval by the commission, subject to the endorsement of the subsequent Synod convention.

3.9.5.4 The Commission on Theology and Church Relations shall assist 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 specifically as they carry out their responsibilities relating to membership in societies, lodges, cults, or any organizations of an unchristian or anti-Christian character to which the Synod has declared itself firmly opposed.

### **STRUCTURE AND ACTIVITY OF THE CTCR**

The Commission seeks to carry out these functions and duties by meeting together four times during each year. The sixteen voting members of the Commission are assigned by the plenary commission to one of three standing committees:

Committee I — Church Relations / Church and Ministry  
 Committee II — Theology  
 Committee III — Church and Society

The Commission was not established by the Synod to function as a kind of “Roman curia” or “ecclesiastical Supreme Court” that issues final answers to all kinds of questions. Nor is it charged with responsibilities of ecclesiastical supervision or doctrinal review of materials produced by Synod entities. Rather, the CTCR is a service agency of the church that seeks to give the church guidance and direction on theological, ethical, and ecclesial matters that have been referred to it by the Synod itself or its official entities. It does this primarily by preparing documents that address specific theological issues of relevance and concern to the church. In the performance of its tasks, the Commission currently has the services of two full time executives, an administrative coordinator, an administrative assistant, and a part-time assistant to the executive director.

## **CURRENT ASSIGNMENTS**

Major assignments on the CTCR's agenda in the current (2023-2026) triennium include:

- Beginning of Life Issues (2019 Res. 11-01A)
- Pending requests by various church bodies for church fellowship with the LCMS
- Unity in Doctrine and Uniformity and Variety in Practice (2019 Res. 5-11)
- Inter-Christian Relationships (standing assignment)
- Evaluations of Religious Organizations and Movements (ongoing assignment)
- To Aid Small Congregations and Multi-Congregation Pastors and Parishes (2023 Res. 1-02A)
- To Encourage In-Person Worship (2023 Res. 4-06)
- To Articulate Theology and Philosophy of Lutheran Education (2023 Res. 5-10)
- To Address Lutheran Theological Principles of Mission and Ministry (2023 Res. 5-12)
- To Address Uses of Online Technology (2023 Res. 5-13A)
- To Uphold Proper Elements and Reverential Administration of the Lord's Supper (2023 Res. 5-15)
- To Reject All Forms of Racism and Affirm Our Witness to All People (2023 11-02A)
- To Address Abortion and Use of Fetal Tissue in Vaccines (2023 Res. 11-04)
- To Address Relationship between Church and State in an increasingly Hostile Environment (2023 Res. 11-05)

## **ONGOING RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **A. Internal Church Relations**

In any church body, but particularly one with a membership as large as the LCMS, there will be disagreements about various matters. Sometimes these disagreements are on relatively minor matters, but at other times they touch deep issues. One of the tasks of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations is to attempt to provide guidance in addressing the problems that cause such polarization. This is done through providing forums and conferences for the discussion of the most critical issues that are troubling our people.

### **B. Partner Church Relations**

Through the Commission the Synod devotes considerable time and effort to improving and deepening relationships with our partner churches, that is, the 42 churches with which the Synod is in altar and pulpit fellowship. For a list of LCMS Partner Churches, see <http://www.lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=1372>.

In 2008, a new office was created (Director of Church Relations—Assistant to the President), so that full-time attention could be given to the ever-increasing challenges and opportunities in world Lutheranism today. The Executive Director of the CTCR and the Director of Church Relations work closely together with each other and with the President of the Synod in addressing these needs and opportunities.

A meeting of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) is held every three years so that the leaders of the ILC's 50-plus member churches (many of whom are partner

churches of the LCMS) can discuss common problems and seek common solutions that are faithful to the Word of God, see <http://www.ilc-online.org/>.

#### C. Other Lutheran Bodies

The CTCR also monitors the activities of Lutheran church bodies and groups with which the Synod is not in altar and pulpit fellowship. In North America these include the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the North American Lutheran Church (NALC), the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). The Commission also monitors the work of other Lutheran organizations and groups (e.g., Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ [LCMC]). In so doing it seeks: (1) to recognize obstacles to and opportunities for altar and pulpit fellowship; (2) to support and encourage faithfulness to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions; and (3) to consider ways in which we can work with fellow Lutherans in external matters without violating doctrinal integrity.

Internationally, the Commission has regularly reviewed the structure and functions of the Lutheran World Federation and has continued to monitor developments in this organization. CTCR staff members have also engaged in various conversations and meetings with representatives of large and growing Lutheran church bodies such as the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, the Lutheran Church of Tanzania, the Malagasy Lutheran Church, and others. Such contacts have increased significantly recently due to strong opposition by many LWF churches to the Church of Sweden's and the ELCA's sexuality decisions in recent decades.

#### D. Other Christian Churches and Groups

Through the CTCR and the President's office, the Synod takes part in various ecumenical discussions and dialogs. In past years the Synod has participated in discussions with Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, Methodists, the Orthodox, Baptists, the Reformed, and Evangelicals. The LCMS is currently involved in theological discussions with the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA), the NALC, and the WELS and ELS. In addition, theological conversations have taken place with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church on such topics as natural law and the responsibilities of Christians and Christian churches in matters of public policy. The goal of these dialogs is for our churches to gain a greater understanding of and appreciation for one another, to affirm each other insofar as we are able, and "to cooperate in externals" where that is feasible and can be done without theological compromise.

In short, the CTCR is one of the Synod's key agencies for guiding and directing its contacts with other Christians. This contact is important not only to show continued interest in and concern for fellow Christians, but to bear witness to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as we know it in the Holy Scriptures.

#### E. Religious Organizations and Movements

The 2001 Synodical Convention adopted Res. 7-27A "To Combine Commission on Organizations and Commission on Theology and Church Relations." This resolution assigns to the CTCR the responsibility, formerly given to the Commission on

Organizations, to “assist 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 specifically as they carry out their responsibilities relating to membership in societies, lodges, cults, or any organizations of an unchristian or anti-Christian character to which the Synod has declared itself firmly opposed” (Bylaw 3.9.5.4). In carrying out this responsibility, the Commission has constructed a special website providing evaluations from a Lutheran theological perspective of a broad range of religious organizations and movements—both Christian and non-Christian. More than thirty evaluations are now available online.

#### F. Other Responsibilities

1. Approve and Recommend Recognition of Altar and Pulpit Fellowship with Other Church Bodies (Bylaw 3.9.5.2.2)
2. Respond to Requests for Theological Opinions
3. Respond to Expressions of Dissent (Bylaw 1.8)
4. CTCR Sponsored Conferences, Consultations, and Convocations
5. Task Force and Special Assignments

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**ROSTER**  
**COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY AND CHURCH RELATIONS**  
*2023-2026 Triennium*

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*Membership consists of 16 voting and 4 advisory members.*

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**COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY FACULTY**

Paterson, Dr. Mark (Synod Pres.)

**LAYPERSONS**

Frerking, Mr. Bill (COP)  
Guengerich, Dr. Frederick (COP)  
Kilcrease, Dr. Jack (Convention)  
Pitkus, Dr. Andrea (Convention)

**ORDAINED MINISTERS**

Prieto, Rev. Dr. Ely (COP)  
Saunders, Rev. Dr. Brian (Dist. Pres. COP)

**SEMINARY FACULTY**

Biermann, Rev. Dr. Joel (CSSL)  
Bode, Rev. Dr. Gerhard (CSSL)  
Masaki, Rev. Dr. Naomichi (CTSFW)  
Ziegler, Rev. Dr. Roland (CTSFW)

**PARISH PASTORS**

Dargatz, Rev. Robert (Convention)  
Petersen, Rev. Dr. David (Convention)

**TEACHER (Commissioned Minister)**

Gerth, Mr. Joseph (Convention)

**ADVISORY (Ex officio)**

Egger, Rev. Dr. Thomas  
Harrison, Rev. Dr. Matthew  
Lange, Rev. Peter  
Rast, Rev. Dr. Lawrence

**EXECUTIVE STAFF**

Lehenbauer, Rev. Dr. Joel  
Serina, Rev. Dr. Richard  
Vogel, Rev. Dr. Larry

**ADDITIONAL MEMBERS**

Alms, Rev. Paul Gregory (Synod Pres.)  
Pless, Rev. Dr. John (Synod Pres.)

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**ELECTED BY CONVENTION (5)**

2 parish pastors; 1 parish teacher, 2 laypersons  
(6 year terms / max. of 12 consecutive years)

Dargatz, Rev. Robert  
Gerth, Mr. Joseph  
Kilcrease, Dr. Jack  
Petersen, Rev. Dr. David  
Pitkus, Dr. Andrea

**CURRENT TERM EXPIRES**

2026 (2nd of 2 potential 6-year terms)  
2029 (1st of 2 potential 6-year terms)  
2029 (2nd of 2 potential 6-year terms)  
2029 (1st of 2 potential 6-year terms)  
2026 (2nd of 2 potential 6-year terms)

**ELECTED BY SEMINARY FACULTIES (4)**

2 faculty members from each seminary  
3 year terms / max. of 9 consecutive years)

**St. Louis:**

Biermann, Rev. Dr. Joel 2026 (2nd of 3 potential 3-year terms)  
Bode, Rev. Dr. Gerhard 2026 (1st of 3 potential 3-year terms)

**Fort Wayne:**

Masaki, Rev. Dr. Naomichi 2026 (2nd of 3 potential 3-year terms)  
Ziegler, Rev. Dr. Roland 2026 (1st of 3 potential 3-year terms)

**APPOINTED BY PRESIDENT (3)**

1 college/university faculty member; 2 others  
(3 year terms / max. of 9 consecutive years)

Alms, Rev. Paul Gregory 2026 (2nd of 3 potential 3-year terms)  
Paterson, Dr. Mark 2026 (1st of 3 potential 3-year terms)  
Pless, Rev. Dr. John 2026 (2nd of 3 potential 3-year terms)

**ELECTED BY COUNCIL OF PRESIDENTS (4)**

2 ordained ministers (one from COP); 2 laypersons  
(3 year terms / max. of 9 consecutive years)

Frerking, Mr. Bill 2026 (1st of 3 potential 3-year terms)  
Guengerich, Dr. Frederick 2026 (2nd of 3 potential 3-year terms)  
Prieto, Rev. Dr. Ely 2026 (2nd of 3 potential 3-year terms)  
Saunders, Rev. Dr. Brian 2026 (2nd of 3 potential 3-year terms)

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