



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 Assistant to the President for Church Relations 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.

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
- 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 staff.

CURRENT ASSIGNMENTS

Listed below are some of the most significant assignments on the Commission’s agenda at the present time:

Committee I

- 1. Study and Guidance on Confession and Absolution (2013 Res. 4-13)
- 2. Study on Priesthood of All Believers (2007 Res. 1-03; 2016 Res. 5-13)
- 3. Study on Doctrine of Justification (2016 Res. 5-10)
- 4. Bylaw Proposal re Fellowship with Mission Starts of Partner Churches (2017 OTP Request)

5. Inter-Christian Relationships/Article VI of LCMS Constitution (1981 Res. 3-03A; 1992 Res. 3-14; 2010 Res. 8-30B)
6. Study Resources for 2017 Celebration of Reformation (2007 Res. 3-02; 2013 Res. 3-15)
7. Promote Confessional Lutheranism Worldwide (2010 Res. 3-02)
8. Work with ILC in Preparation of “Study Resources” for 2017 Celebration of Reformation (2007 Res. 3-02; 2013 Res. 3-15)
9. Church Fellowship Requests

Committee II

1. Address Women in Combat (2013 Res. 2-12A; 2016 Res. 5-11A)
2. Relationship of Man and Woman/Order of Creation (1995 Res. 3-10; 2010 Res. 3-06; 2013 Res. 4-11A; 2016 Res. 5-14)
3. Marriage and Human Sexuality (2010 Res. 3-07)
4. Women Teachers of Theology (2012 OTP Request)

Committee III

1. Study Guide for *The Natural Knowledge of God in Christian Confession and Christian Witness* (CTCR 2016)
2. Update Synod’s Catechetical Materials (2013 Res. 3-13A)
3. Study of Baptism—Doctrine and Practice (2013 Res. 4-08A)
4. Monitor Evaluations of Societies, Lodges, Cults, and Religious Organizations (2007 Res. 3-08—ongoing work)
5. Provide Assistance Regarding Bioethics (1977 Res. 3-26—ongoing work)
6. Evaluation of Trail Life USA and American Heritage Girls Statements of Faith (2016 Res. 16-06 and Request of SWD President)
7. Explore Development of Annotated and Expanded Large Catechism (2016 Res. 5-12)
8. Prepare Materials to Facilitate Affirming Right of Clergy Regarding Performance of Weddings (2016 Res. 14-04)

ONGOING ASSIGNMENTS

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 38 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 35 member churches (most 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 CORE, 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 of 2009.

D. Other Christian Churches and Groups

Although the LCMS is not a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) or the National Council of Churches (NCC), the Commission makes an effort to keep abreast of the latest developments within these groups. At the request of the President and the CTCR, the CTCR's executive staff participates in meetings of groups such as the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and the Common Ground Christian Network (CGCN).

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. CTCR Sponsored Conferences, Consultations, and Convocations
2. Theological Opinions
3. Recognition of Altar and Pulpit Fellowship and Partner Church Relationships (Bylaw 3.9.5.2.2)
4. Expressions of Dissent (Bylaw 1.8.2)
5. Task Force and Special Assignments

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ROSTER
COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY AND CHURCH RELATIONS

2016 - 2019 Triennium

Membership consists of 16 voting and 4 advisory members.

COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY FACULTY

Phillips, Dr. C. Matthew (Synod Pres.)

LAYPERSONS

Balsters, Mr. Kenneth (COP)

Kilcrease, Dr. Jack (Convention)

Pitkus, Dr. Andrea (Convention)

Yow, Jr., Dr. Jesse (COP)

ORDAINED MINISTERS

Cripe, Rev. Terry (Dist. Pres. COP)

Gibbs, Rev. Dr. Jeffrey (COP)

PARISH PASTORS

Dargatz, Rev. Robert (Convention)

Pullmann, Rev. Arlo (Convention)

SEMINARY FACULTY

Bartelt, Rev. Dr. Andrew (CSSL)

Fickenscher II, Rev. Dr. Carl (CTSFW)

Bushur, Rev. Dr. James (CTSFW)

Oswald, Rev. Dr. Jeffrey (CSSL)

TEACHER (Commissioned Minister)

Hardy, Mr. Timothy (Convention)

ADVISORY (Ex officio)

Harrison, Rev. Dr. Matthew

Meyer, Rev. Dr. Dale

Mueller, Jr., Rev. Dr. Herbert

Rast, Rev. Dr. Lawrence

EXECUTIVE STAFF

Lehenbauer, Rev. Dr. Joel

Vogel, Rev. Larry

ADDITIONAL MEMBERS

Egger, Rev. Thomas (Synod Pres.)

Ziegler, Rev. Dr. Roland (Synod Pres.)

ELECTED BY CONVENTION (5)

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

Dargatz, Rev. Robert

Hardy, Mr. Timothy

Kilcrease, Dr. Jack

Pitkus, Dr. Andrea

Pullmann, Rev. Arlo

CURRENT TERM EXPIRES

2019 (1st of 2 potential 6-year terms)

2022 (2nd of 2 potential 6-year terms)

2022 (1st of 2 potential 6-year terms)

2019 (1st of 2 potential 6-year terms)

2022 (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:

Bartelt, Rev. Dr. Andrew

Oswald, Rev. Dr. Jeffrey

2019 (3rd of 3 potential 3-year terms)

2019 (3rd of 3 potential 3-year terms)

Fort Wayne:

Fickenscher II, Rev. Dr. Carl

Bushur, Rev. Dr. James

2019 (3rd of 3 potential 3-year terms)

2019 (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)

Egger, Rev. Thomas

Phillips, Dr. Matthew

Ziegler, Rev. Dr. Roland

2019 (3rd of 3 potential 3-year terms)

2019 (1st of 3 potential 3-year terms)

2019 (3rd 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)

Balsters, Mr. Kenneth

Cripe, Rev. Terry

Gibbs, Rev. Dr. Jeffrey

Yow, Jr. Dr. Jesse

2019 (1st of 3 potential 3-year terms)

2016 (2nd of 3 potential 3-year terms)

2019 (1st of 3 potential 3-year terms)

2019 (3rd of 3 potential 3-year terms)