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:
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;]

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.

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.

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 staff.
Current Assignments

Major assignments on the CTCR’s agenda in the current (2019-2022) triennium include:

- Development of Annotated and Expanded Large Catechism (2019 Res. 12-03A)
- Marriage and Human Sexuality (2019 Res. 1-06A; 2016 Res. 14-03A)
- Beginning of Life Issues (2019 Res. 11-01A)
- End of Life Issues
- Order of Creation/Relationship of Man and Woman (2016 Res. 5-14)
- 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)

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 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 54 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 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. 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

Rev. Dr. Joel D. Lehenbauer
Executive Director
Commission on Theology and Church Relations
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
1333 S. Kirkwood Road
St. Louis, MO 63122
E-mail: ctcr@lcms.org

February 2020
## ROSTER

**COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY AND CHURCH RELATIONS**  
**2019-2022 Triennium**

Membership consists of 16 voting and 4 advisory members.

### COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY FACULTY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Institution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stiegemeyer, Rev. Scott</td>
<td>(Synod Pres.)</td>
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### LAYPERSONS

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Balsters, Mr. Kenneth</td>
<td>(COP)</td>
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<td>Guengerich, Dr. Frederick</td>
<td>(COP)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kilcrease, Dr. Jack</td>
<td>(Convention)</td>
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<td>Pitkus, Dr. Andrea</td>
<td>(Convention)</td>
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### ORDAINED MINISTERS

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title/Institution</th>
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<tr>
<td>Saunders, Rev. Brian</td>
<td>(Dist. Pres. COP)</td>
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### ELECTED BY CONVENTION (5)

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Term Expiry</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dargatz, Rev. Robert</td>
<td>2025 (2nd of 2 potential 6-year terms)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardy, Mr. Timothy</td>
<td>2022 (2nd of 2 potential 6-year terms)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kilcrease, Dr. Jack</td>
<td>2022 (1st of 2 potential 6-year terms)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitkus, Dr. Andrea</td>
<td>2025 (2nd of 2 potential 6-year terms)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pullmann, Rev. Arlo</td>
<td>2022 (2nd of 2 potential 6-year terms)</td>
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### ELECTED BY SEMINARY FACULTIES (4)

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

**St. Louis:**  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Term Expiry</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biermann, Rev. Dr. Joel</td>
<td>2022 (1st of 3 potential 3-year terms)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schumacher, Rev. Dr. William</td>
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**Fort Wayne:**  
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<tr>
<td>Bushur, Rev. Dr. James</td>
<td>2022 (2nd of 3 potential 3-year terms)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masaki, Rev. Dr. Naomichi</td>
<td>2022 (1st of 3 potential 3-year terms)</td>
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### APPOINTED BY PRESIDENT (3)

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

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<th>Term Expiry</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pless, Rev. Dr. John</td>
<td>2022 (1st of 3 potential 3-year terms)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stiegemeyer, Rev. Scott</td>
<td>2022 (1st of 3 potential 3-year terms)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alms, Rev. Paul Gregory</td>
<td>2022 (1st of 3 potential 3-year terms)</td>
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### ELECTED BY COUNCIL OF PRESIDENTS (4)

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

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Term Expiry</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Saunders, Rev. Dr. Brian</td>
<td>2022 (1st of 3 potential 3-year terms)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### EXECUTIVE STAFF

Lehenbauer, Rev. Dr. Joel  
Serina, Rev. Dr. Richard  
Vogel, Rev. Dr. Larry
The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) serves the Synod’s congregations and its president toward the fulfillment of two objectives as stated in the LCMS Constitution. First, the CTCR seeks to assist the Synod 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” (Article III, 1). Second, the CTCR provides LCMS pastors and congregations with “resources and opportunities for recognizing, promoting, expressing, conserving, and defending their confessional unity in the true faith” (Article III, 6). In light of these responsibilities, the commission addressed numerous matters of “theology and church relations” in the past year.

Theology

(All documents listed herein are available online for free download at the link provided.)

This past year marked the close of a triennium. For that reason, the CTCR spent significant time preparing for the 2019 convention. The commission’s report to the convention is published in the Synod’s 2019 Convention Workbook, available online at thelc.ms/2019-workbook. The report describes the documents on theological topics that the CTCR prepared in the past triennium, including the reports and studies published in the past year:

1. **The Royal Priesthood: Identity and Mission** (Sept. 2018) considers the baptismal calling of every Christian as a royal priest, proclaiming God’s saving works, offering ourselves as living sacrifices in thanksgiving and making intercession for others. The royal priesthood’s roots in the Old Testament are explored before its full development in the New Testament is considered. A historical survey of the topic between the end of the NT era and the Reformation paves the way for an exploration of Luther’s profound development of the royal priesthood. The conclusion identifies seven core aspects of the royal priesthood to guide our understanding.

   The report is available in English (thelc.ms/royal-priesthood) and Spanish (thelc.ms/royal-priesthood-sp). There is also a study guide at thelc.ms/royal-priesthood-study.

2. **Immigrants Among Us: A Lutheran Framework for Addressing Immigration Issues** was published in 2011 (thelc.ms/immigrants). The report has been well-received and commended for its solid, biblical approach in framing questions about immigration — an approach that fosters reasonable discussion of matters that too often devolve into animosity and contention. The commission developed a companion to the report: **Immigrants Among Us—A Bible Study and Discussion Guide** (Sept. 2018; thelc.ms/immigrants-sp). This study, like the report, leads users through biblical and confessional principles regarding immigration: (1) love for the neighbor and the fact that all people, including aliens and strangers, are our neighbors; (2) the significant distinction between God’s rule in the church and His rule by civil laws and governing authorities; and (3) the importance of vocation with regard to the matter of immigration. The report and study are not biased toward any particular political orientation nor do they endorse specific recommendations for governmental policy.
The CTCR recently published a report on Baptism: *An Inexpressible Treasure: The Theology and Practice of Holy Baptism* (Nov. 2018) together with an accompanying Bible study (thelc.ms/holy-baptism; thelcs.ms/holy-baptism-study). This report begins by showing how Baptism flows directly from the ministry of Jesus as described in the Gospels, before examining apostolic teaching on Baptism in the epistles, Luther’s exposition of Baptism, and various theological and practical questions in the church today. A section of questions and answers concludes the report and the study.

The way the “virtual world” of social media impacts us today led the CTCR to prepare *A Snapshot of Trending Tools: Christians and Social Media* (Feb. 2019; thelcs.ms/social-media). Social media’s influence on American life seems all-pervasive, but for all its popularity, it is also the subject of ongoing suspicion, complaints and worries since it is largely impossible to restrict it and its messages, whether they are true or false. The report examines social media’s many aspects as it provides guidance for Christians to use social media in ways that are in keeping with our calling as a royal priesthood.

In February 2019, the CTCR adopted *Confession and Absolution—Study Guide* (thelc.ms/confession-absolution). The study guide is based on the CTCR’s *Confession and Absolution* report from 2018. Like the report, the study guide gives significant attention to the needs of pastors for the gift of individual confession and absolution, but then it also shows how beneficial this Means of Grace can be for every individual Christian.

**Church Relations**

When a church body requests recognition of altar and pulpit fellowship with the LCMS, the CTCR assists the president in his role as the Synod’s chief ecumenical officer. The CTCR is responsible to address the request in light of the doctrine and practice of the requesting church. The CTCR’s approval of recognition is required for the request to be proposed to the president and/or the Synod in convention, which makes the final determination regarding such requests.

During the past year, in preparation for the 2019 LCMS convention, the commission approved fellowship requests from four church bodies. The 67th Regular Convention in July recognized fellowship with the Portuguese Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Belgium, the Confessional Lutheran Church of South Africa and the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Denmark.
The LCMS and COVID-19 Vaccine: Facts and Considerations (2021)
To address questions regarding the COVID-19 vaccines, LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison requested that the staff of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, in collaboration with the Office of National Mission's Life Ministry, draft this document.

Communion and Covid-19 (2020)
This opinion and its accompanying Addendum, “One little word can fell him: Ten reasons to question whether ‘online Communion’ is ‘truly good, right and salutary,’” were written in response to discussions regarding online home Communion during the coronavirus pandemic. The opinion examines these issues in light of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, concluding, “As great as the hardship is when we cannot receive Christ’s body and blood, the hardship ought not be ‘resolved’ in ways that promise an uncertain ‘sacrament’ without the absolute assurance that Christ intends.”

The opinion, Addendum and a summary can be found at lcms.org/ctcr.

The Child as a Gift of God (2019)
This paper was commissioned by a 2016 Synod task force on life issues, which was chaired by the CTCR’s executive director. The paper reports that we are not to think of children as our possessions, but in light of our created nature, the new creation into which we are baptized, and God’s promised new creation. Our kinship is not determined by DNA, but by the life we share as the Body of Christ.

In Christ All Things Hold Together: The Intersection of Science and Christian Theology (2015)
This report discusses the complex questions surrounding the intersection of science, faith and Christian theology. It provides theological resources for understanding the nature and purpose of science, historical factors leading to the perception that faith and theology have nothing to do with scientific practice, and the way in which Christians should read biblical texts that have apparent scientific import. A Bible study/discussion guide also is available.

This Bible study discusses the roots of persecution and the way in which Christians might respond with joy and forgiveness, prayer and faithfulness, the proclamation of the Word, and through the use of our rights as citizens. It also examines persecution and suffering as a mark of the church.
Gender Identity Disorder or Gender Dysphoria in Christian Perspective (2014)
This report considers current psychotherapeutic perspectives of the American Psychiatric Association concerning gender dysphoria. It also provides theological reflections grounded in God's Word on the topic of sexual identity and offers suggestions for pastoral care.

The Creator's Tapestry: Scriptural Perspectives on Man-Woman Relationships in Marriage and the Church (2009)
This report provides a scriptural basis for a Christian understanding of man and woman. The topic is considered according to the creedral themes of creation, redemption and renewal as the report discusses God's design for the relationship of men and women within marriage, family and the church. Biblical texts discussed include Ephesians 5; 1 Corinthians 7, 11 and 14; 1 Peter 3; and 1 Timothy 2.

Admission to the Supper: Basics of Biblical and Confessional Teaching (1999)
This report discusses pastoral oversight of the Lord's Supper and the importance of doctrinal unity among those who commune. It offers a study of 1 Corinthians 11:17–34, together with pertinent texts from the Lutheran Confessions, and addresses questions commonly asked about admission to the Lord's Supper. It also responds to the document, “A Declaration of Eucharistic Understanding and Practice.”

Render Unto Caesar … and Unto God: A Lutheran View of Church and State (1995)
This report examines historic Christian teachings about Christians and government, proposing constructive ways in which American Lutherans can participate in creating an appropriate public philosophy and a viable democracy. It also surveys the historical interaction of the Missouri Synod with the state, examines the relationship of church and state according to biblical and doctrinal principles, and suggests practical applications in contemporary settings.

Racism and the Church (1994)
This report uses the African American experience as the primary paradigm for examining the issue of racism in the church, while understanding that racism is experienced by other groups as well. It also defines terms and reviews concepts, provides biblical principles that apply to issues raised by racism, and offers specific counsel for overcoming the sin of racism in the church.

Christian Care at Life's End (1993)
This study responds to our culture's false claim that terminating the lives of the weak and helpless is a “compassionate act.” The report also discusses ethical questions related to euthanasia and assisted suicide; provides terms, definitions, case studies and a Bible study; and suggests ways to care for and support individuals who help those who suffer.

These and other resources can be found in the Commission on Theology and Church Relations document library found here: lcms.org/about/leadership/commission-on-theology-and-church-relations/documents#.
See CTCR Guidelines for Communion statements insert from April 2015 *Reporter* in separate file offered under the Section 10 heading.