The LUTHERAN CLARION

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LCMS Licensed Lay Deacons - A Good Solution to the Problems

One of the thorniest problems to face the LCMS in recent years has been the outgrowth of the 1989 synodical resolution "To Adopt Recommendations of Lay Worker Study Committee Report as Amended."[1] This resolution authorized the districts of the synod to train and supervise "licensed lay deacons" to serve in various capacities, including autonomous, regular Word and Sacrament ministry. In other words, such autonomous, regularly-serving "deacons" are really functioning as pastors without the name of "pastor," without synod-wide recognition or supervision, and without ordination. As many have complained, this practice is contrary to Article Fourteen of the Augsburg Confession, which states "It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call."[2]

> **It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call.**
> Augsburg Confession, Article XIV

Why did the Missouri Synod approve such a practice contrary to its own confessions? In its early history, the Missouri Synod expressly rejected the licensing of ministers in its Constitution, which licensing was common practice in other Lutheran synods in America.[3] We cannot judge the motives of those who were behind the 1989 resolution, but we can understand their concerns. I grew up in the American West. I know that starting and supporting any congregation in the inter-mountain West is a real challenge. In most small towns, you may have one or two Lutheran families, if any, and the drive to the next town might be two hours or more. My great-uncle[4] served some of these towns, as did my vicarage supervisor.[5] It has always been a challenge to find enough folks to support such congregations. It is even more difficult now that the mining and forestry businesses have declined or ceased in many places in the West.

It isn't only the American West that has such challenges. The American South, large portions of Texas, and much of the East Coast have large areas where Lutherans are few and far between. How can we serve such places with the Gospel and Sacraments, when there are not enough Lutheran folks with enough financial resources to support a full-time pastor?

The "2013 Resolution 4-06A Task Force" has studied these challenges thoroughly and has issued its report and recommendations to the 2016 convention.[6] One of the most helpful parts of the report is Appendix A,[7] which breaks down the actual work-situations of licensed lay deacons in the LCMS into eight categories. Categories 7 and 8 are the nearly 200 licensed lay deacons who are NOT performing pastoral functions, so there should not be any real concern about these persons. The other six categories total 331 deacons, who do perform pastoral functions regularly or part-time, either supervised or unsupervised.

The Task Force has eight specific recommendations.[8] This includes special consideration for, and support of, the LCMS Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT), Center for Hispanic Studies (CHS), and Cross-Cultural Institute for deacons and congregations that can be served by these institutes.[9] The circa 149 deacons that aren't qualified for those institutes, and which are regularly performing pastoral functions, will be urged to either colloquize through a special process for men 55 years of age or older (Recommendation One)[10] or enter either: a) the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program, b) an alternate route to ordination, or c) a regular seminary program (Recommendation Two).[11] No new deacons will be licensed by districts for Word and Sacrament ministry after January 1, 2018.[12]

The Task Force recommendations still leave unaddressed about 182 part-time deacons performing some or all pastoral functions. For the future, the SMP program will be the normal way that synod fills the need in those congregations that are served part-time.[13]

The recommendations include funding mandates to make all these proposals a concrete reality. Both of our seminaries support this Task Force and its recommendations. Overture 13-04[14] from the Fort Wayne seminary

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has the most important specifics included, and is in my opinion, the most desirable of the overtures to be adopted as a resolution by this convention to solve most of these problems without endangering the life of any congregation.

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1 See *Convention Proceedings: 57th Regular Convention, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Wichita, Kansas, July 7-14, 1989* (Saint Louis: LC-MS, 1989), 111-113 (Resolution 3-05B).
2 See Theodore Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 36.
3 See C. S. Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 154, see also p. 252.
4 My great uncle was the Rev. Theodore E. Hoelter, who to my knowledge served congregations in: Kamloops, BC.; Calgary, AB; Reno, NV; Visalia, CA; Las Vegas, NV; and Santa Cruz, CA.
5 My vicarage supervisor was the Rev. Arnold Obermeier, First Vice-President of the Colorado District, who to my knowledge served congregations in: Durango, CO; Sterling, CO; and Stoneham, CO.
6 For the official report and related documents and video, see: http://www.lcms.org/convention/task-force-updates/resolution-4-06A ; accessed May 19, 2016.
7 See "2013 Resolution 4-06A Task Force Report to the Synod," p. 30; available at web-page listed in note 6.
8 See ibid., pp. 15-28.
9 See ibid., Recommendation 3, pp. 21-22.
10 See ibid., Recommendation 1, pp. 15-21.
11 See ibid., Recommendation 2, pp. 19 & 21.
12 See ibid., Recommendation 1, p. 19.
13 See ibid., Recommendation 1, p. 20.
14 See *Convention Workbook: 66th Regular Convention, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, July 9-14, 2016* (Saint Louis: LC-MS, 2016), 437-438.

Extra *Clarion* Issues for 2016 Convention—Please Help!

With the 66th Convention of the LCMS coming up July 9-14, 2016, in Milwaukee, WI, the ***Clarion*** editors published two extra issues (April and June). We want to keep everyone, particularly the delegates, informed on the matters that will be brought before the convention.

We sure could use your help with the expense of this as we urge delegates to uphold God's Word and doctrine during the convention.

If you can help with the costs, there's an enclosed envelope so you can mail your check to Lutheran Concerns Association, 149 Glenview Drive, New Kensington PA 15068-4921. Do it now. **Thank you!!**

Reconciliation, Adjudication, and Appeal Pre-July 1992— A Gold Standard Trashed (Part II)

In **Part I**, Mr. Dissen began the discussion on the pre-1992 Adjudication system and how it was better than the current system. Why was it scrapped? Several reasons. Among them was that Synod officials could not control the Commission on Appeals. Mr. Dissen quotes extensively from the 1992 Handbook to illustrate this. If you missed **Part I**, you can download a copy at www.lutheranclarion.org.

You will note that the 1983 bylaws made NO reference to a "win-lose" attitude. In a doctrinal dispute, however, it would seem that MOST often there in fact is a correct Biblical/Confessional position and an incorrect one. Surely Synod must not buy into a satanic, secular position of inclusiveness and accommodation.

A pastor who years ago was a plaintiff/complainant in a case in his District was very recently contacted by me to secure his view of the new Dispute Resolution system of the Synod. He opined that given the same set of facts today, he would not enter the Dispute Resolution system of the Synod. Why? He feels the Dispute Resolution system used today lacks the will or desire to reach a decision that a particular doctrinal position/holding or specific act(s) is wrong. Instead, he feels there is a desire to have parties to a case conclude the matter by having the positions simply accepted. A similar view was expressed by another pastor who was a party to a case under the 1983 Rules of Procedure. I very recently contacted a person who had served on both the Synod's Commission on Adjudication and the Synod's Commission on Appeals. He also has served as an advisor to a party to a case under the present Dispute Resolution Process. His view is that today the outcome of a complaint depends on who the reconciler is or who is on the panel if the matter goes before a panel. He also felt there needed to be an accurate transcript of the hearing if the matter goes before a panel. He also felt there needed to be an accurate record of the hearing evidence presented and that if there is an audio recording that all the evidence presented should be made available to the parties. This will be touched upon later. Contact was also had with another pastor who was a party to a case under the 1983 Rules of Procedure. I had no clue before the contact as to what the position of these men would be. How prevalent the attitudes are would take considerable research contacting the Synodical Secretary and District Presidents to ascertain all cases and parties and then going to all parties with carefully considered and standard questions. Reconcilers and case panels would also have to be similarly contacted. Keep in mind that under the old Adjudication System as well as under the new Dispute Resolution there is very little awareness of cases, let alone full decisions and pleadings, for decisions are sealed. More on that later if I do not overlook it for it is

my intent to have available for you to peruse some weekly *Ohio State Bar Association Reports* reported as Ohio Supreme Court decisions where disciplinary action was a possibility or was taken against attorneys licensed to practice in Ohio. These are reported cases the same as any other case certified for publication and very much a public record anyone can access. Not all states, Missouri being one, follow the Ohio practice. In my opinion the Ohio practice is commendatory.

2013 Bylaw 1.10.2 and 1983 Bylaws 8.01 and 8.07 both set out the purpose and exclusiveness of remedy of the bylaws. Wording varies but the purpose is stated to be resolution of disputes among (1) members of the Synod (2) the Synod itself, (3) a district or an organization owned and operated by the Synod, (4) persons involved in excommunication and (5) lay members of congregations of the Synod holding positions with the Synod itself or with districts or other organizations owned and controlled by the Synod. "It shall be the exclusive remedy to resolve such disputes that involve theological or ecclesiastical issues except those covered under Bylaw 1.10.3 (Exceptions: expulsion from membership, property rights, fraud or embezzlement and contractual arrangements of all kinds.)"

"The changes in the Dispute Resolution process are huge. First, note that the Dispute Resolution Panel or Review Panel, NOT a party to the case, decides the wording of the question. The wording of the question … can well determine the outcome of the case."

Both the 2013 and the 1983 bylaws provide that a party to a case to which the bylaws apply may not render the provisions inapplicable by terminating membership. More may be said later on the 2013 Dispute Resolution process where parties could stipulate to be bound by decisions on property rights and contracts, etc., under Dispute Resolution but doing that would be unwise in my opinion for very obvious reasons.

The 2013 bylaws made huge changes to dispute resolution so there are now more definitions of terms and a more complex system to hopefully resolve disputes. NOW there are definitions of an Administrator, an Appeal Panel, a Blind Draw, Complainant, Dispute Resolution Panel, Face-to-face meeting, Formal Efforts, Hearing Facilitator, Informal Efforts, Parties, Persons Involved, Reconciler, Reply of Respondent, Respondent, Review Panel, Statement of the Matter in Dispute and Witness. Contrast that to 1983 where there are definitions for Synod, Organizations owned and controlled by the Synod, Members of the Synod, Position and Party to a case.

The 2013 Dispute Resolution bylaws in 1.10.5 at the informal stage require a face-to-face meeting of the parties to attempt to resolve their dispute in the manner of Matt. 18:14 and may involve the use of a reconciler. BEFORE being able to proceed to formal reconciliation, the complainant must meet and consult with his higher ecclesiastical supervisor to seek advice also so it can be determined whether this is the appropriate bylaw procedure. A district president may become involved at this stage and may seek an opinion of the CCM and/or the CTCR. Under 1.10.6 (b) the district president "must follow any opinion received from either the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) or the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR)…" Also see bylaw 1.10.18.1 (h) which provides that if the case is before a Dispute Resolution Panel and a party desires an interpretation from the CTCR and/or the CCM the party shall have the right to such an opinion BUT the request "must be made through the Dispute Resolution Panel or Review Panel, which shall determine the wording of the questions." Under (1), "Any opinion must be followed by the Dispute Resolution Panel or Review Panel." Contrast this to the 1983 bylaw 8.51 f., "in the event that questions of interpretation of the Synod's Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions or questions of interpretation of theological issues arise, the Commission on Adjudication or the Commission Appeals, at the request of either party, shall seek the advisory opinion of the Commission on Constitutional Matters on questions of interpretation of the Synod's Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions and also that of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations questions of interpretation of theological issues."

The changes in the Dispute Resolution process are huge. First, note that the Dispute Resolution Panel or Review Panel, NOT a party to the case, decides the wording of the question. The wording of the question is certainly material and can well determine the outcome of the case. Under the prior system, a party to the case would prepare his question for submission and the opposing party would have opportunity to submit his comments thereon. Neither the Commission on Adjudication nor the Commission on Appeals drafted or re-drafted the question(s) submitted. Going by memory, it is my recollection that the CCM did in fact re-word a question saying this is what the CCM understood the question(s) to be. That alone was inappropriate in my view (and seemingly also of a majority of the Com-

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mission on Appeals) as that could have a profound effect on any decision. A very real disagreement arose between the CCM and the COA for the CCM asserted that an "advisory opinion" must be followed and the COA held that an "advisory opinion" meant just that.

On May 24, 1990, the Commission on Appeals adopted a 31-page document, "The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Commission on Appeals, in the matter of: Opinions of the Commission on Constitutional Matters and Adjudication Decisions of the Commission on Appeals" which was sent to the Synod's Board of Directors and which responded to the 13 questions President Bohlmann posed to the CCM and to the CCM's response.

"Question 8. Bylaw 8.51 f. provides for an 'advisory opinion' from either the Commission on Constitutional Matters or the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, depending on the nature of the question. What is meant by 'advisory' in this context, and under what conditions would a Commission on Constitutional Matters interpretation be merely 'advisory'?"

"CCM Response to Question 8. Bylaw 3.533d states emphatically and without qualification that opinions rendered by the Commission shall be binding on the question decided unless and until they are overruled by a synodical convention. Consequently, an opinion rendered by the Commission on Constitutional Matters given to the Commission on Appeals or Commissions on Adjudication is binding and advises them of what is the official interpretation. They are then obliged to apply that interpretation to the facts as they determine them to be. As stated previously, only one body is authorized to give a final binding interpretation."

"COA Response to Question 8. The CCM never answered the question—what does an "advisory opinion" in Bylaw 8.51 f. mean? The CCM answered that its rulings 'advise' in a binding way the Commission on Adjudication or the Commission on Appeals what they must do, and that Bylaw 3.533d makes its opinions binding. Bylaw 8.69 declares finality of adjudication decisions, any provisions in the Bylaws to the contrary notwithstanding, and this overrides Bylaw 3.533d."

"The COA now answers Question 8 that the CCM failed to answer. Bylaw 8.51f states such CCM opinions are only 'advisory.' The word 'advisory' and the phrase 'advisory opinion' have well-accepted meanings. 'Advisory' is defined in Black's Law Dictionary as 'counseling, suggesting, or advising, but not imperative or conclusive.' 'Advisory opinion' is, in turn defined in Black's Law Dictionary as follows: 'Such may be rendered by a court at the request of the government or an interested party indicating how the court would rule on a matter should adversary litigation develop. An advisory opinion is an interpretation of the law without binding effect..'"

"An advisory opinion is one which adjudicates nothing and binds no one…." Brimmer v. Thomas, 521 P. 2d. 574, 579 (Wyo. 1974), citing several decisions."

"The conclusion is unmistakable that opinions of the CCM and the CTCR rendered on referral from a Commission on Adjudication or the Commission on Appeals are not binding, but are exactly what Bylaw 8.51 f. says they are—advisory. The COA thus rejects the position of the CCM stated in its response to Question No. 8."

The COA's response, of which the response to Question 8 was but a part, went to Synod's Board of Directors and was made available to the Synod itself. It should be apparent that many hours of time went into preparing the response. The COA then had four practicing attorneys on it as well as a pastor who previously practiced law. The pastors thereon were excellent theologians: Alan Barber, Harlan Harnapp, Victor Hellman, Edward Saresky and Marcus Strohschein. (Rev. Harnapp and Rev. Leonard Buelow were the two pastors who filed charges against Dr. John Tietjen and served on Floor Committee 3 at the 1973 New Orleans Convention of Synod.)

I would also add a comment as to questionable, in my view, procedures sometimes occurring that reflected on practice in the Synod. As Chairman of the COA for a period of years, I once received an inquiry from the THEN secretary of the synod inquiring when the COA would be submitting a question for an "advisory opinion". The question had yet to be received by me. When the COA later went through the entire record of the case, the record showed the particular District President had made a trip to St. Louis to consult with the Secretary of the Synod in submitting a question. As I recall, the District used legal counsel. The use of legal counsel is to be commended in my view. More on that later if time permits.

"Can any mentally competent person really deny that the old adjudication system in fact gave every party to a case full opportunity to present a case?"

"And, what kind of a system do we have without a truly accurate verbatim record of a case?"

A reconciler (Bylaw 1.20.4 (1)) is a member of the Synod or of an LCMS congregation who is appointed to be available to assist parties to a dispute. A dispute resolution panel (1.10.4(e)) is three persons who are reconcilers selected according to the bylaws and one person who is a non-hearing facilitator selected under the bylaws. An appeal panel (1.10.3(b)) is three district presidents selected under the bylaws. District reconcilers (1.10.10.3) are four in number appointed by each district's board of directors, no more than two of which shall be ordained members of the Synod. Synod's reconcilers (1.10.10.3) are members of the roster of the reconcilers of ALL the districts. See the 2013 Handbook. Contrast this to bylaw 8.15 of the 1983 Synodical bylaws which provided for election of seven members to each district Commission on Adjudication as well as the Synod's Commission on Adjudication and

nine members to Synod's Commission Appeals. A district and a Synod Commission on Adjudication had to have not more than four ordained "clergymen" and three laymen, two of whom needed to be lawyers. On the Commission on Appeals it was five "clergymen" and four laymen, at least two of whom had to be lawyers. In my opinion, election is far more preferable whether by a district or a Synodical Convention.

Now may be a good time to look at "disqualification" of a reconciler or panel member. In my two terms on the Commission on Appeals there were several requests for "disqualification" that were, in my opinion, very well handled by the COA. In my view there have been instances where such disqualification requests were blatantly offensive from both a Christian and a secular view. In all such instances the request and the statement of the particular COA member challenged was given to the entire COA and the challenged COA member was excused while the rest of the COA considered the matter. In at least one such instance the Federal as well as the State Judicial Code of Conduct was put before the remainder of the COA. In none of these instances was a member of the COA found to be disqualified by the COA and as I recall each vote was unanimous. Present bylaw 1.10.6 states that the "standard" shall be actual partiality or the appearance of partiality." Neither is defined for that seems to be up to the panel to decide under 1.10.16.1. 1983 bylaw 8.21 on "disqualification" provided in part, "At the outset of any proceeding before a Commission on Adjudication or the Commission on Appeals, a member of the commission may be disqualified from acting in such proceeding if the member has a conflict of interest. Disqualification may be by the voluntary act of the member himself, by the respective Commission on Adjudication, or by action of the Commission on Appeals (1) on its own initiative or (2) on the complaint of any party to the proceeding. Given the 1992 Dispute Resolution process that Synod now has there is no Commission on Adjudication or Commission on Appeals to make a decision on disqualification as there used to be.

"...on matters relating to doctrine at a minimum, why should not the issues, the record and the entire decision not be public?"

Under 1.10.6.4 of the 2013 Bylaws at a formal reconciliation meeting, the reconciler listens to each party and with the approval of the reconciler each party may bring in one or two persons to the meeting "so that every word may be established by their testimony." NO formal record is to be made thereof. Has anyone present today ever read the well known 1972 "Blue Book" report of the Synodical president to the Synod on what the Fact Finding Committee (FFC) ascertained as a result of interviewing every member of the then St. Louis Seminary faculty? And behind the "Blue Book" was what? Well, probably more than a half of a file cabinet drawer of transcripts of FFC interviews of those faculty members together with revisions some faculty members sought after reading their copy of their transcript. [I have the transcripts.]

If the reconciler does not resolve the matter, bylaw 1.10.7 *et seq*. takes over and the parties appear before a dispute resolution panel in a private hearing. Each party may have one adviser but it is expressly provided that the adviser "shall not address the panel or participate 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." Unless I missed it, there is no requirement for an accurate voice recording or a true transcript of the case. Contrast this to the Rules of Procedure of 1983 established by the COA under the Synod's bylaws, Section F 3, 12 and 16. "3. There is no requirement that a party be represented by an attorney in any proceeding before a Commission. Such representation, however, is encouraged as it will usually expedite the disposition of the case, save the time of the parties, witnesses, the Commissions and reduce the expenses. If a party is not represented by an attorney, the Commission hearing the case shall so act as to permit the party to develop his case to the fullest extent under the circumstances." "12. All testimony shall be taken down or recorded on a high quality tape recorder and transcribed by typewriter. If tape recording is used, the equipment must be of such high quality that each and every word of the testimony and rulings made with reference thereto can be clearly heard and understood. All recording tape of a testimony before a commission must be preserved as part of the record." "16. Any party may have not more than two advisers. If an adviser is not a member of a congregation of the Synod, he shall be limited to discuss procedural issues only and not engage in doctrinal matters." Can any mentally competent person really deny that the old adjudication system in fact gave every party to a case full opportunity to present a case? And, what kind of a system do we have without a truly accurate verbatim record of a case?

Our Synod has a 30-page Standard Operating Procedures Manual, Dispute Resolution, Bylaws Section 1.10, 2014 Handbook. The last version is the one revised December 2013, updated August 2014. At least this was true about two months ago. You can go online, print it and spend many hours reviewing it, actually studying and thinking through the process. General Regulations, e.g., commences at page 8 and ends at page 14.

Under G. Panel Hearings, it is provided, "Witnesses intended to provide expert testimony (*viz*. actual testimony)

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shall be identified as such when their names are provided to the panel, thereby providing opportunity for the panel to judge whether such testimony will be necessary and helpful to reach a decision." Why should a hearing panel be empowered to determine whether expert testimony "will be necessary or helpful to reach a decision?" That it seems should be left to the party proffering an expert witness for such testimony could have considerable weight.

Under I., as well as under the old Adjudication system, publicity regarding a case is prohibited, with exceptions, for the hearings are private However, on matters relating to doctrine at a minimum, why should not the issues, the record and the entire decision not be public? If we are a confessional church, should not the whole church be attuned to what is being believed, taught and confessed for does not that affect the whole church ultimately? Think about the effect of a "little leaven." We rightly still observe the Reformation but what would have happened if the Biblical position of Martin Luther been kept in house or to a select group because a synod official had the power to determine what information about a case should be released. Consider also personal conduct. If for example, the Ohio Supreme Court and the Ohio State Bar Association, both certainly secular, consider that misconduct in the legal profession needs to be publicly addressed and set out, why should not the "church" also do so? We need to think of what has occurred in the Roman Catholic church where multiple U.S. dioceses entered bankruptcy proceedings or where at one time in the Synod an errant pastor or teacher would conveniently get moved from one District to another. In this connection I recall the sainted former Montana District President George Wollenberg some years ago telling us on the Concordia Theological Seminary Board of Regents on which he served that he let every Montana District rostered church worker and every person on a call list to the District know that with regard to certain transgressions it was ONE strike, not three, and you were gone.

Under "Z. Records. All Dispute Resolution Panel, Appeal Panel, or Review Panel records of disputes in which a final decision has been rendered by the panels shall be forwarded to the Office of the Secretary of the Synod for placement 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." Contrast that to 1983 Bylaw "8.51 n. All records of cases in which a final decision has been rendered by the Synodical Commission Adjudication or the Commission on Appeals shall be sealed and opened only with the approval of the Commission on Appeals during the first 25 years from the date of closing." Please note that how presently, subject to the exception, the sealing of the noted records is for perpetuity whereas previously the noted records were provisionally sealed for 25 years. As mentioned earlier, the COA did open the sealed record in what commonly is called the "Herman Otten Case" and after review thereof unanimously decided that the Rev. Herman Otten was the prevailing party because of the stipulation by Concordia Seminary, which was represented by legal counsel, that Concordia Seminary would bear the burden of proof and there had been a tie vote on appeal.

Earlier, reference was made to the Standard Operating Procedures Manual of the present Dispute Resolution System. That Manual sets out in detail page after page how the process flows or proceeds. Finally at page 30, in Appendix A is the form: Decision of Dispute Resolution Panel/Review Panel.

One hopes that this panel discussion today has provided needed history and information on adjudication/dispute resolution in the Synod but what is really needed is much actual serious study on this matter and then focusing on making multiple changes for the better. This will not be easy or quick for the subject does not have a lot of sparkle and glitz.

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Board of Regents, Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis
Board of Trustees, Concordia Theological Foundation

Where have all the Missouri DNA Strands Gone?

Quite by accident I came across a video online titled, "*The Real LCMS: Strands of DNA from the movement called 'Missouri.'*" The five strands identified and presented were: People, Self-sacrifice, Multiplication, Truth and Creativity. This is a 44 minute video of a presentation made at the 2015 Lutheran Society for Missiology Banquet by Rev. Mike Newman, an LCMS Texas District official. (https://vimeo.com/119789356)

In summary, the presentation focused on the five strands of DNA evident in "Missouri" from its inception through the 1960's. The main takeaways for me were two things:

1. During this time the LCMS was growing at a much faster rate than the general population, often at a rate of two or three times, expressed in percentages.
2. What and how we were doing evangelism and outreach was working, but we quit doing it by the end of the '60's.

These two points struck a responsive chord in my thinking since I had started attending an LCMS church in late 1959, in the San Francisco Bay area, becoming a confirmed member in 1961. I vividly recall statements that the LCMS was the fastest growing Christian denomination in the country. We were also attending Lutheran Hour Rallies.

Other denominations have suffered bigger losses in U.S. membership over the last several decades than the LCMS and they have been subject to greater internal stress on a variety of liberal/progressive topics. Each adoption of a liberal policy usually signals a corresponding loss in mem-

bership. Consider the United Methodists, who have a large percentage of memberships located in African countries that are voting in their 2016 General Conference. See the *Wall Street Journal* article "A Methodist Culture—War Showdown," Houses of Worship, May 13, 2016 ,for more on this situation. The bottom line is their U.S. memberships are down by 4 million, which are offset by an increase of 5 million conservative memberships located in Africa. Without knowing this fact one would think the United Methodist church is growing in the U.S. and it isn't. Meanwhile, the United Church of Christ is projecting a loss of 80% of their U.S. membership over the next 30 years. The lesson learned here is the inclusion of the secular culture into a denomination weakens the theology of that denomination, which puts your denomination on the fast track to nothingness.

"...there have been some periods of stability based on who was the President of Synod, but those periods did not last. ...here we find a similarity with secular politics, where the conservative administration stems the tide, but does not undo to any great degree the prior liberal administration's laws and policies."

So what has happened to the LCMS? True, in the 60's the social culture was changing, with much of that change originating in the Bay Area. We were eye witnesses to "Haight Ashbury," Vietnam War protests, contemporary worship struggles, etc., all of which flowed into the California-Nevada-Hawaii District Convention in the mid and late 60's. My wife and I also served on the District Youth Committee for several years before leaving the Bay area in 1970. At all levels there were radical elements infecting the LCMS leadership and weakening the collective DNA. These radical influences, by youth and clergy, drew attention from the main elements of Synod and refocused them on how to deal with these outside influences.

Not to be forgotten was the impact on LCMS theology going on in the 60's by the Historical-Critical method. This was running rampant in some of our colleges and at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, culminating in the "walkout" at Concordia Seminary in 1974 and the creation of Seminex, followed shortly by Evangelical Lutherans in Mission (ELIM). Another forgotten fact was in the early 70's, Synod adopted the Presbyterian generated (Coral Ridge Ministries) evangelism program called **Evangelism Explosion**. Decision theology was introduced in this manner, notwithstanding later attempts to "Lutheranize" it in the late 80's. I taught and participated in both of these efforts and can attest to their ineffectiveness. While the laymen won the "Battle for the Bible" at that critical time of Seminex, I contend that the LCMS leadership had already lost the battle for evangelism and outreach. Thus this period more or less completed the breakage of all the strands of DNA mentioned in the first paragraph. No one has successfully repaired the linkages to that historical DNA since that time.

Thus, the LCMS leadership has never regained all the ground lost to the liberal/revisionist influences of the 50's and 60's. True, there have been some periods of stability based on who was the President of Synod, but those periods did not last. I contend that here we find a similarity with secular politics, where the conservative administration stems the tide, but does not undo to any great degree the prior liberal administration's laws and policies. So over time the trend goes in the wrong direction.

There is a chance for this trend to change in a positive direction at the upcoming Synodical Convention. It could be a significant year when the convention outcome is coupled with the fact that in 2016, Synod is implementing a Scripture-based evangelism and outreach effort. This will be a return to personal witnessing via one's vocations, sowing the seeds of the Gospel. In the writer's opinion, that is roughly a 42-year span where officially the stance of Synod on evangelism and outreach was theologically incorrect during both liberal and orthodox administrations.

To say at this point that our outreach efforts must change because the culture is changing is a false premise and denies the fact that in the early days of the LCMS there were significant cultural changes. Have we forgotten the wide spread availability of electricity and telephones, plus the advent of the automobile and decent roads, railroads, etc.? The list is much bigger, but you get the idea. These are all significant cultural impacts, but they did not stem the growth of the LCMS. It demonstrates that cultures change, but God's Word does not. We are still the vessels and sowers and the Holy Spirit will reap when and where He chooses, not man. Luther understood this point well, as he states in the explanation of the Apostles Creed,

"*I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.*"

The LCMS faces no small task, but it is possible to reconnect those elusive DNA strands and not just neutralize, but abolish the revisionist theology ideas and secular influences that severed them in the first place. May God will it so.

Mr. Valgene White, McMinnville, Oregon

[Mr. White has been active in congregational life serving on multiple congregational boards, as lay delegate to multiple District Conventions and in forming Confessional Lutherans for Christ's Commission. He also started two high tech data companies.]

LCMS Convention July 9-14, 2016

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