

The **LUTHERAN** **CLARION**



Lutheran Concerns Association
1320 Hartford Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55116

March 2010
Volume 2, Issue 4

Musings from a Retired Pastor and District President on Scripture, Our Church Fathers and the BRTFSSG*

We turn first to the Word of God.

In St. Mark's Gospel, chapter 9, the evangelist records the question Jesus asked of His disciples: "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?" There was no answer, so Mark tells us: "On the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest." Isn't that strange? Their Lord had just told them about His suffering, death, and resurrection – the very essence of the Gospel they were to preach in all the world as His Apostles. Yet, here they were, arguing as to which one of them was the greatest.

Jesus used the opportunity to catechize His disciples about greatness in the Kingdom. He said: "if anyone desires to be first, He shall be last of all and servant of all." Then the Lord took a little child and set him in the midst of them and explained that greatness in the Kingdom of God is measured in terms of service to those who are in need of our help.

We still have that conversation in the church today. Instead of greatness, we talk in terms of authority, or power, or control. Who has the most authority? Is it the Board of Directors of the Synod? Is it the Commission on Constitutional Matters? Is it the Council of District Presidents? Is it the office of the President of the Synod?

In Mark chapter 10, Jesus again told His disciples about His suffering, death, and resurrection, the very essence of the Gospel they were to preach in all the

"If we as a Synod keep in mind that we are God's fellow workers, then we will not allow ourselves to drift into discussions and debates that have nothing to do with the building of God's Kingdom."

Friedrich Pfotenhauer in 1907, later
President of Synod 1911-1935

world as His Apostles. This time two of the disciples, James and John, asked if they could sit, one on the Lord's right hand and the other on His left hand in His glory. Here is the Lord's response: "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

We turn now to the proposals from the Blue Ribbon Task Force on restructuring the Synod.

In light of the Scripture references from Mark chapters 9 and 10, it is puzzling to read about proposals for the church that seem to suggest power, and control, and authority centered in the office and person of the President of the Synod.

Why are we doing this? Is there an urgent need to fix a glaring defect in our structure? What is it that's so badly broken in the structure of the Synod that we need a massive change in our By-laws? Is there a hidden agenda? The treasurer of the Synod is on record as saying that these proposals will be immaterial to the financial position of the Synod.

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In this Issue of **The Lutheran Clarion**

Musings from a Retired Pastor.....	1
Theological Agreement is Foundation of Synod.....	2
BRTFSSG Task Force: Ambiguity v. Clarity.....	3
Can We Learn History's Lessons in the LCMS?.....	5
2010 LCA Conference A Resounding Success!.....	6
We Need Your Help for Next LCA Conference.....	7

* Blue Ribbon Task Force on Synodical Structure & Governance

Or, are the proposals intended to resolve, or at least address the serious problem of membership losses in the Synod? - 202,696 souls from 2001 to 2008? But weren't such measures as *Ablaze!* and Fan the Flame, together with contemporary worship styles, and Pastoral Leadership Institute, and church growth techniques, and evangelical style with supposedly Lutheran substance intended to fix this? Perhaps someone can explain in simple language the reason for the proposed changes in our structure. Are the changes intended to result in greater effectiveness in the preaching of the Gospel? Are they intended to foster and promote and strengthen our confessional unity based on the Word of God and our Lutheran Confessions?

We turn now to the writings of our church fathers. Perhaps we can learn a lesson from the history of our church body.

In 1853, the major item on the agenda at the convention of the Synod was the matter of restructuring. The question was: shall the Synod restructure itself and form four districts? In his opening address to the convention, President Friedrich Wyneken poured out his heart, literally agonizing over that question. His concern was simply this: are we allowing our conscience to be bound by the Word of God rather than performing a bureaucratic exercise when we restructure the Synod; and, will this restructuring help us to better carry out the great Commission? He said: "It must rest upon our conscience that here this matter does not have to do with human things, but instead with God's things. It is about the sanctification of God's name, the spreading of His Kingdom, about the saving and upholding of immortal souls who have been purchased and called to heavenly salvation by the blood of Christ." (The entire address may be found in *At Home in the House of My Fathers*, page 370, Matthew Harrison, Editor.) This restructuring proposal in 1853 was prompted by the desire to maintain doctrinal discipline and thus maintain the confessional unity which the Synod enjoyed on the basis of God's Word.

In 1907, Friedrich Pfotenhauer, then a Vice-President of the Synod and President of the Minnesota and Dakota Districts, warned against "this papal leaven (which) has permeated also our churches, and we see the result in all manner of regulations and synodical resolutions and how they are administered on the part of church officials and pastors of the Synod. Our flesh and blood also lusts after power, even where God has forbidden it." (From address by Pfotenhauer in *At Home in the House of My Fathers*, page 724,

Matthew Harrison, Editor.) In the same convention address he reminds the Synod: "If we as a Synod keep in mind that we are God's fellow workers, then we will not allow ourselves to drift into discussions and debates that have nothing to do with the building of God's Kingdom."

It would be sad if we ignored the heritage our grandfather's church left us. Do we really believe that Bylaw changes, opinions given by the Committee on Constitutional Matters, power and control in the person of the President of the Synod will ever replace the Word of God as the guide and rule for our existence as a church body?

Jesus said: "I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." How does this happen? Through the preaching of the Word of God, Law and Gospel, and through the administration of the Sacraments according to their institution by Christ.

May our gracious Lord grant to all of us the mind-set that "Thus saith the Lord" must guide and direct all our activities in the church, including the restructuring of the Missouri Synod.

Kyrie Eleison!

Rev. Edwin S. Suelflow, D.D.

President Emeritus, South Wisconsin District



Theological Agreement is the Foundation of the Synod

"Why can't we all just get along? The LCMS is known for its constant internal fighting." This oft expressed opinion points out two characteristics of life as a Synod, one positive and one negative. I will not comment, in this article, on the negative aspect, that of how we fight. There is plenty of sin to go around on all sides regarding how we speak and write about each other. We should be able to "get along" even when we disagree.

I would like to focus on the positive aspect of the statement, and that is our propensity for fighting. Yes, I believe it is a good thing for our Synod to be constantly wrestling with one another about the best ways to proclaim and practice the Gospel. The Holy writer Jude encourages us "...to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints."¹ This contention is to happen not only with unbelievers, but also within a Synod because theological agreement is the foundation of a Synod.

We, in the LCMS, have been blessed with a broad spectrum of theological agreement, as President Kieschnick has often acknowledged. Thank God we are not fighting about the divinity of Christ or the historicity of the resurrection. However, as President Kieschnick has also recently pointed out, there are areas where we need to work toward agreement: (worship, closed communion, the role of women, the office of the public ministry, participating in public ceremonies, etc.). These are profoundly theological matters which need to be resolved among us.

It will never serve the Gospel to rest on our laurels by concluding we have reached an acceptable level of agreement and agree to disagree on the rest. Paul pleads for us to continue talking for the sake of theological agreement. "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment."² The reality of our own sinfulness demands the conclusion that the Church is *semper reformanda*, always being reformed. That means theological discussion is necessary for the health of the Church, and thus the Synod. This truly is a good fight.

This is our history. This is our tradition. This is a unique characteristic of being Lutheran. We keep striving, wrestling, fighting for theological agreement under the Scriptures and Confessions. For example, the Augsburg Confession was written in a well fought fight for the sake of theological agreement. "The desire was also expressed for deliberation on what might be done about the dissension concerning our holy faith and the Christian religion, and to this end it was proposed to employ all diligence amicably and charitably to hear, understand, and weigh the judgments, opinions, and beliefs of the several parties among us **to unite the same in agreement on one Christian truth...**"³ (emphasis added). These words from the Preface to the Augsburg Confession demonstrate that "Lutheranism" was born in the struggle for theological agreement.

Later on, when disagreement erupted among Lutherans the fight continued. "...these controversies deal with weighty and important matters, and they are of such a nature that the opinions of the erring party cannot be tolerated in the church of God, much less be excused and defended. **For that reason necessity requires** that such controverted articles be explained on the basis of God's Word and of approved writings in such a way that anybody with Christian intelligence can see which opinion in the controverted issues agrees

with the Word of God..."⁴ (emphasis added). These words from the preface to the Solid Declaration show that Lutherans are intent on constantly contending for the faith.

On this side of heaven it is necessary to contend for theological agreement. It is the foundation of our Synod. Notwithstanding some godly rules for how we fight, I would be very concerned if the LCMS didn't have a reputation for fighting for theological agreement.

Solo Deo Gloria Terry Forke

1 *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version*. 2001 (Jude 3). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

2 *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version*. 2001 (1 Cor. 1:10). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

3 Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church* (pp. 24-25). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

4 Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (503). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

President Kieschnick's Task Force Recommendation: Ambiguity v. Clarity

This is the second of a three-part series analyzing significant changes to the LCMS Constitution and Bylaws being proposed by President Kieschnick's Task Force on Structure.

Shortly after I was first elected to the LCMS Board of Directors in 1995, I had an interesting conversation with an individual who had been appointed to sit on a number of committees by former President Ralph Bohlmann. We were discussing a particular bylaw that we both agreed was vague and confusing. This individual commented that there are many in Synod who believed that some bylaws should be vague so as to allow flexibility and different interpretations. I found his position novel and perhaps creative, but also quite troubling. It had been my impression for several years that many bylaws adopted during the Bohlmann Presidency were unclear. It never occurred to me that this might have been by design. It was my view at that time, and it remains today, that bylaws should be unambiguous so that all reading the bylaws interpret them the same. This avoids disputes and disagreements, promotes efficiency and equality, and is a far more transparent way of conducting business.

...continued...

The proposition that some bylaws should be deliberately vague seems to have returned in the proposals of President Kieschnick's Task Force on Structure. Many of the phrases, words and ideas that created controversies and inefficiencies in the past, and which were amended and clarified subsequently, can be found in the Task Force's recommendations. Some are somewhat obtuse and may go largely unnoticed.

Others are quite profound and should give rise to great alarm.

For example, phrases such as "if necessary," "when possible," "providing leadership and coordination," "under the leadership of," "together with," "direction from," and "style of leadership and vision" give room for varying interpretations. Many of these phrases seem to be designed to give flexibility. But the nature of a bylaw is to be restrictive. President Kieschnick's Task Force recommendations, therefore, contain many conceptual internal contradictions. Bylaws that restrict simultaneously contain phrases that give flexibility. Doing both at the same time simply does not work. Either the bylaw should be clear in what and who we as a Synod are restricting, or we should give discretion and flexibility by not having the bylaw at all.

Other contradictions in President Kieschnick's Task Force recommendations are less subtle and more clearly destined for confusion and conflict. The current Constitution makes clear that "Synod is not an ecclesiastical government exercising legislative or coercive powers ... with respect to the individual congregation's right of self-government." But the Task Force is proposing an additional provision that mandates the congregations "abide by ... all convention resolutions." Either the Synod does not exercise coercive powers or does. It can't be both ways.

Many of the Task Force recommendations also appear to change the nature of the Synod from an organization created by the member congregations to serve the objectives of the congregations to an organization that exists in-and-of-itself and governs or directs the member congregations. While the Task Force never gives this explanation, it is the effect of many of its recommendations. If adopted, the result would be that some provisions in the Constitution and bylaws would establish the Synod as being subject to the will of the congregations, while other provisions would place the

congregations under the will of the Synod. Again, the result would be confusion and conflict.

There are also many recommendations that require deeper analysis. For example, the Task Force recommends deleting the Board for Pastoral Education, the Board for Human Care Ministries, and the Board for Mission Services, and transferring all of their responsibility and authority to the President. Does this mean the President would carry out the functions that each of these boards now possesses? Exactly what authority would the President have over the seminaries? Would the President have the ability to carry out the current work of Missions and Human Care? Would transferring tens of millions of dollars to the control of the President really be a good idea? Can we realistically expect the President to be as effective in carrying out these ministries? The Task Force uses efficiency as its justification for transferring such enormous power to the President. The result, however, would be the opposite. In addition to the lack of clarity regarding the extent of the power of the President over such matters, the effect would be confusion and inefficiency. Great harm would be caused to our seminaries, Missions, and Human Care if these proposals were adopted.

Christian A. Preus
LCMS Board of Directors (1995-2007)
Partner in Meagher & Geer Law Firm

The Countdown to Houston is Nearly Over Can You Help Us Prepare?

Very soon July 10, 2010, will be upon us. Very soon the mailing list for about 1,300 delegates to the Synodical convention will be available to the public and very soon they must receive pertinent and accurate information about the many watershed items of business which will come before that critical delegation.

Will you help the Lutheran Concerns Association get the important information out to the delegates and to the Synod at large regarding the critical decisions which await us in Houston? Sadly, the official media of Synod has not been available for a well-balanced discussion of the issues. Will you help us get both sides of the issues out to those who need to understand them?

Please send your tax-deductible donations to:
The Lutheran Concerns Association
1320 Hartford Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55115

STRAIGHT AND TRUE OR “BIG TENT”: Can We Learn History’s Lessons in the LCMS?

Last Summer, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America made headlines when it voted to roster sexually active gay clergy. Church officials assured lay people that no congregation would be forced to accept partnered gay pastors and that the ELCA was a big tent. Congregations were free to disagree with the decision and remain in the denomination. Within days, however, congregations around the denomination began the process of fleeing their church body. Others decided to simply withhold funds from the national church. No one knows how many hundreds of congregations and pastors will leave over the next couple of years but media reports freely use the words “schism,” “fissure” and “split.”

Other church bodies that have capitulated toward societal pressures and trends haven’t fared better. Some of them have split while others simply withered. The United Church of Christ, United Methodists and the Episcopal Church have faced precipitous membership declines. They, too, followed the culture and watered down their doctrine in an attempt to embrace a “big tent” approach.

Those of us in the LCMS may look at the mainline churches and think we’ve avoided such theological shenanigans. But is that the case?

The Synod recently held a Model Theological Conference on Worship. As the Conference attendees discussed the liturgy and how to be appropriately sacramental or reverent, a typical response was “So who decides what is appropriate?” But, according to one of the attendees, the question wasn’t earnest so much as rhetorical, indicating a belief that what is right is largely in the eye of the beholder.

While such a post-modern way of thinking has been common in other churches for decades, Missouri Synod Lutherans historically have been able to hold off some of the worst ravages of this individualistic subjectivism. But that is changing under the current Synodical leadership.

When confessional Lutherans complain about precious synodical funds being spent on non-Lutheran consultants who encourage the church to deviate from our teachings, we also hear the rhetorical question: “Who are we to say what is the right approach?” If a Baptist consultant with a half-cooked analysis convinces LCMS district executives that young adults would rather worship over coffee than receive Holy Communion, that shouldn’t get us riled up, we’re told. After all, no one is forcing our congregations to change.

Indeed, while officially the LCMS claims to seek unity in doctrine, practice and worship, the reality is much different. Congregations that honor the Lutheran Confessions are welcomed but so are those that are ashamed to even call themselves Lutheran. In fact, some congregations that hide their Lutheran identity are held up as models of emergent church methodology. While congregations that respect the historic Lutheran liturgy are here, so are those that despise it. And pastors who preach Christ crucified are part of the synod but so are those who dilute the message.

To switch to the “Who decides?” model of doctrinal chaos is to abandon what we have been. And in abandoning what it means to be truly Lutheran – in our worship, in our preaching, in our sacramental administration – we risk disastrous results. It will mean that members will vote usually first with their pocketbooks and then with their feet and leave the denomination in the same way that others have left the mainline churches. That’s because people tend to stay in a church body that knows what it believes and why, as opposed to churches that try to please everybody at any expense.

The other problem of having a church leadership that embraces a “Who decides?” approach is that it shows an ignorance of history. We must engage the culture without being co-opted by it. By God’s grace, we have managed to retain our Lutheran identity against the prevailing cultural pressures of both past and present. The Synod is facing one of its fiercest tests yet. Do we embrace the trends and subjectivity of our post-modern culture even if it’s proved disastrous for other churches? Or do we embrace our objective, sacramental confession of faith that addresses the spiritual needs of all people?

Mollie Ziegler-Hemingway
Writer in Washington, D.C. and
Contributor to *The Wall Street Journal*

We of The Lutheran Concerns Association wish to express our sincere gratitude for the continued support of Balance-Concord, Incorporated, in the publication of *The Lutheran Clarion*. We encourage other Confessional groups within the LCMS to consider financially supporting this effort.

Thank You

2010 LCA Annual Conference A Resounding Success!

Don Hall's Guesthouse in Fort Wayne, Indiana, served as an excellent setting for what turned out to be one of the best Lutheran Concerns Association (LCA) conferences ever. Holding the conference adjacent in time frame to the annual Symposia at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne seemed to bolster attendance and the opportunity to include some of our Synod's best professors from both seminaries on our program and in attendance.

Over 85 people from over twelve LCMS districts from Minnesota South to Florida and from Washington to Virginia attended the LCA conference on January 18th, to hear excellent presenters talk about the issues now facing The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod at the upcoming July 10-17 Synodical convention at the George R. Brown Convention Center in Houston, TX.

The conference began with an opening devotion by the Rev. Dr. Robert Kuhn (Former President of the LCMS and current member of Synod's Board of Directors), with a devotion using the conference theme: "For Such A Time As This" (Esther 4:14b). Dr. Kuhn also contributed pertinent comments from the floor. Our presenters were from Northern Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, English, Georgia-Florida, Missouri, Minnesota South and South Wisconsin Districts. They focused their presentations on the up-coming Synodical convention in Houston, TX, and the critical issues facing our church body at that gathering. Rev. Dr. Frederic Baue's presentation, "The Forgotten Article – Augustana XXVIII" contrasted Matthew 20:25-28, 1 Peter 5:1-3 and Article XXVIII of the Augsburg Confession with the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Synodical Structure and Governance. Highlights were on recommendations 2, 5, 21 "inasmuch as they diminish the role and influence of pastors" and recommendations 3, 6, 10, 11, 15, and 16 "inasmuch as they diminish the role of the congregation." He also offered that recommendations 5, 7, 8, 13, 14, 17, and 18 oppose Scripture and the Confessions by increasing the power of the President of the Synod. Former Synodical Board of Directors member Mr. Christian Preus' analysis of the BRTFSSG recommendations sparked enthusiastic discussion from the floor during the give and take of questions and answers by those in attendance, as did the presentation on the Task Force recommendations by Rev. Jon Furgeson, (Associate Pastor, Peace Lutheran Church, St. Louis County, MO).

Another highlight of the conference was a panel discussion on the need to retain both our residential seminaries. The panel featured Mr. Walter Dissen (Former Member, Board of Regents at Ft. Wayne and St. Louis

Seminaries), Rev. Dr. James Voelz (Professor, and Faculty Dean at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis), Rev. Timothy Rossow (Senior Pastor at Bethany, Naperville, ILL) and Rev. Dr. William Weinrich (Professor, Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, former Acting President of Ft. Wayne, current Rector of Luther Academy, Riga, Latvia, former LCMS Vice President, former Academic Dean, Concordia Theological Seminary and former LCMS Vice President). This discussion prompted spirited interaction between the audience and the panel members. Dr. Weinrich made the point that without our residential seminaries at Ft. Wayne and St. Louis, there would be entire church bodies in Europe and Asia who would not be able to obtain proper theological education for their pastors. He indicated there is simply nowhere else for these men to go to obtain a Confessional Lutheran education.

Rev. Peter Bender (Pastor, Peace, Sussex, Wisconsin, and well-known author of catechetical materials and director of the Concordia Catechetical Academy), gave a practical overview of what being a convention delegate is like and how best to prepare for that role. Rev. Bender offered informative advice on how to prepare for the convention, how the mechanics of speaking from the floor work as well as how to speak precisely and accurately. Elected Synodical delegates attending the conference opined that Pr. Bender's presentation was most helpful. Mr. John Edson offered a presentation entitled "Community Chest or Corporate Overhead: The Truth About Synod Finances." He explained the workings of Synodical finances, how items and monies are categorized and how often interest earned on designated funds for disaster relief is used for Synod's administrative expenses rather than for their designated purposes. Additionally, Mr. Joe Strieter gave a true expose of the poor theology and practice now incorporated in the Synod's "Transforming Churches Network" in the on-going effort to introduce Church Growth methodology and philosophy into LCMS congregations.

Comments received by those in attendance were uniformly positive and encouraging. DVD's of the conference will be available in the near future for presentation to church groups throughout the Synod or can be given as important tools to those elected to serve as pastoral and lay delegates to the Synodical convention.

"[2010 LCA Conference presenters] were from Northern Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, English, Florida, Missouri, Minnesota South and South Wisconsin districts."



We Need Your Help!

If you attended Lutheran Concern Association's (LCA) Annual Conference January 18, 2010, please help us. Your feedback will help us plan the conference for 2011.

LCA exists for the following reasons, as found in paras. (1), (2), (3) and (5) of Article II of the LCA Constitution: to be concerned with problems that face the church; to reveal such problems to all church members, be they doctrinal or administrative; to work for an open, ethical and truthful response to all concerns; and to support a practice of full financial disclosure. For further information, see the LCA Articles of Incorporation, VI (1).

Thus, we try to have top notch and well respected confessional leaders give presentations at our annual conferences. As a review, the following gave presentations this year:

- **Rev. Dr. Fritz Baue** "The Forgotten Article--Augustana XXVIII and How it Opposes the Structure Proposals"
- **Rev. Peter Bender** "What It's Like to be a Convention Delegate"
- **Mr. Joe Strieter** "Transforming Churches--Program and Prescription"
- **John Edson, CPA** "Community Chest or Corporation Overhead--the Truth about Synod Finances"
- **Walter Dissen, Esq., Rev. Dr. Timothy Rossow, Rev. Dr. James Voelz, Rev. Dr. William Weinrich** "The Need to Continue Residential Seminaries at Fort Wayne and Saint Louis"
- **Christian Preus, Esq., Rev. Jon Furgeson** "President Kieschnick's Blue Ribbon Task Force Report on Structure and Governance"

Please comment on how any or all of the presenters were relevant to LCA's purpose and to our time (seven months before the 2010 Synodical Convention). _____

To ALL Our Readers

Since LCA wants to expand participation at its annual conferences it would be helpful and appreciated if you give us your preferences for the 2011 LCA Conference. Please consider transportation, lodging and conference room costs, other events taking place at the same time, number of LCMS members residing near a site and the site most likely to maximize participation:

Preferred City: ☐ Fort Wayne, IN (in the same timeframe as the 2011 Symposia*)
☐ Metro Chicago, IL
☐ Minneapolis, MN (in the same timeframe as the 2011 Association of Confessional Lutherans Conference*)
☐ Saint Louis, MO
☐ Other _____

Do you have suggestions for topics to be presented? _____

Preferred days of the week: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday

Would you participate in an early AM pre-conference (around 7:30am) Bible Study? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Other thoughts and suggestions: _____

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The principal place of business for all matters pertaining to the LCA is:

1320 Hartford Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55116

Other faithful Lutheran individuals who are members of LCMS congregations are invited to submit articles of approximately 500 words for consideration to:

Rev. Richard A. Bolland
1608 NW 78th Street, Kansas City, MO 64118
(816-519-3780; richardbolland@gmail.com)

Articles should be approximately 500 words in length. Inquiries are welcome. Manuscripts will be edited.

The Board of Directors for the LCA:

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Lutheran Concerns Association
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