



# Rocky Mountain District

The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod

- A Culture of Personal Evangelism
- Healthy Ministries
- New Ministries
- Spiritual Growth
- Theological Unity

May 29, 2009

Easter VII, Friday

Dear Delegates to the RMD Convention,

Greetings in His name.

Attached is the report of the RMD President's Theological Task Force on Church Polity (PTTFCP) which I promised to you by June 1. I formed this task force with the purpose of helping you in your responsibility as a RMD convention delegate to offer evangelical input to Synod's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Synod's Structure and Governance (BRTFSSG). The BRTFSSG will be seeking your input on Friday morning of the district convention.

It is my prayer as well that the PTTFCP report will be helpful as you consider the various resolutions that will come before the floor of the convention that will deal with the BRTFSSG proposals.

If you have any specific questions on the PTTFCP report, please contact the chairman, Pastor Andrew Dimit or myself at the District Office.

Take note as well of the appendix entitled "A review of scriptural and confessional issues that pertain to church structure and governance." This will be of help as you attempt to think biblically on the topic of structure and governance.

I thank the Lord for the six members of this task force (listed below). They have spent hours and hours in study and debate. They did not always agree. May their work bear at least some fruit in our time together at the RMD convention.

The Rev. Andrew Dimit  
Mr. James Tuell  
Dr. Alfonso Diaz  
The Rev. Warren Graff  
The Rev. Tim Runtsch  
The Rev. Allen Anderson

This report is available also on the District's website.

Cordially in Christ,

Rev. Randall L. Golter, President  
Rocky Mountain District

"Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest" (John 4:35).



22 May 2009

From: The Rocky Mountain District President's Theological Task Force on Church Polity  
To: Delegates to the 2009 Rocky Mountain District Convention

At the 2009 Rocky Mountain District convention you will receive a presentation of approximately twenty proposals for changes to the structure and governance of the LCMS from the Synodical President's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Structure and Governance (BRTFSSG). In addition, you will receive certain resolutions based on these proposals from the appropriate floor committees.

The BRTFSSG has established a website, [www.lcmsfuture.org](http://www.lcmsfuture.org), where you may review "up-to-the-minute" information about the work of the BRTFSSG, including study documents, current and previous district convention reports, expanded proposal details, and proposed wording changes to constitutional amendments.

We have been appointed by District President Randall Golter to provide information that will help you to assess the proposals and make well-informed decisions when resolutions come before you.

Our review of the proposals follows, with one page for each proposal. We have utilized the proposals as they existed on May 3, 2009. Some proposals may have been revised since that date. Included are 1) brief clarifications of the proposals, 2) information on what the proposed changes may mean for synod, districts, circuits and congregations, and 3) questions that we believe should be considered during the further work of the BRTFSSG in advance of the 2010 synodical convention. We have endeavored in our review to highlight what we believe are important matters of polity, theological integrity and church unity.

Following the review of the proposals, you will find a brief review of scriptural and confessional issues that pertain to church structure and governance.

We have studied the proposals and debated them at length; so also will the whole synod. We commend our report to you in the certainty that your own study of the BRTFSSG's proposals and amendments, under the scrutiny of faith and reason, will lead you to give a clear statement of your own conclusions to the representatives of the BRTFSSG, when you meet with them at the district convention in June 2009.

The members of the President's Theological Task Force on Church Polity are grateful to have labored on your behalf, for the church of Christ serves Christ best when it seeks the unity for which He prayed, and for which He was crucified and raised from the dead.

We remain, with you, servants of Christ,

The Rev. Allen Anderson  
Dr. Alfonso Diaz  
The Rev. Andrew Dimit, Chairman

The Rev. Warren Graff  
The Rev. Timothy Runtsch  
Mr. James Tuell

## **Proposal 1 – Affirm in Our Governing Documents the Mission and Purpose of Our Synod**

Reaffirm, clarify, amplify, and strengthen our constitutional language regarding:

- Reasons for existence (the current Preamble)
- Confession (Article II)
- Mission and purpose (Article III)
- Conditions of membership (Article IV)
- Relation of the Synod to its members (Article VII)

For the full text of the proposed constitutional amendment, please see [www.lcmsfuture.org](http://www.lcmsfuture.org)

### *Clarifying comments*

- Present Article II understands the Confession as a place to state the ruling norm for walking together as a synod. The proposed Article II understands the Confession as a place to confirm Jesus Christ alone as Savior of the world.
- Present Article III identifies tasks for the Synod to accomplish and the measure of success is whether tasks are accomplished. Proposed Article III identifies mission and purpose whose success may be difficult to measure.
- Proposed Article VII B and VIII C moves selected language to the Constitution that is presently contained in the Bylaws.

### *What does this mean?*

- A one-sentence Confession of Faith (Article II) is incorporated into the Constitution. All current confessional documents are collected separately as the “confessional basis” for the Confession of Faith.
- The Synod adopts a mission and purpose (Article III.A), with previous “Objectives” reclassified as means for “accomplishing and fulfilling” (III.B) the mission and purpose.
- A new relationship, “Members to the Synod”, is introduced in Article VII.B, by movement of some language concerning agreement and dissent (Bylaws 1.6-1.8) to the Constitution.

### *Open questions*

- If the task of the BRTFSSG was to study structure and governance, might recommendations to change the Constitution be beyond the scope of their charge?
- If a separate Confession of Faith (Article II) must be included, should it not also include important terms like “by grace alone,” and the full Trinitarian name of God?
- Might the mission and purpose of the synod (Article III) become confused with, and/or separated from, the mission of individual congregations?
- Is it wise and necessary to have separate conditions for acquiring and retaining membership in Article VI?
- Does the use of the term “collective will” in the proposed Article VII.B.2 introduce a new and potentially inflammatory term, since outside the church this term often carries ideological implications of internal coercion?
- Why is some pertinent information contained in Bylaws 1.6-1.8 to be moved to the Constitution (Article VII.B.4), while portions of the same bylaws were not?

## **Proposal 2 – Emphasize the Importance of Doctrinal Resolutions and Doctrinal Statements**

- Doctrinal resolutions of special significance and doctrinal statements will require a two-thirds vote at Synod convention
- Reaffirm, clarify, amplify, and strengthen Constitution (Article VIII) and Bylaws to enhance doctrinal unity

### *Clarifying comments*

- Doctrinal resolutions currently generally require only majority vote in convention, prior to submission to congregations for ratification.

### *What does this mean?*

- Doctrinal resolutions, if adopted, will be more reflective of the consensus of synod.

### *Open questions*

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### **Proposal 3 – Clarify the Categories of Membership in Our Synod**

Revise Article V of the Constitution to reflect that:

- Congregations are the voting members of the Synod
- Ministers of Religion (ordained and commissioned) are members of the Synod who are eligible to serve as delegates of congregations to conventions of the Synod and its districts
- Laypeople, although not “rostered” members of Synod itself, are closely linked to Synod through their affiliation with member congregations of the Synod and are eligible to serve as delegates to conventions of the Synod and its districts

#### *Clarifying comments*

- Largely necessitated by the proposed change in the status of commissioned ministers in Proposals 4 and 5.

#### *What does this mean?*

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#### *Open questions*

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**Proposal 4 – Redefine Congregational Representation to District Conventions, Including Commissioned Members**

Voting delegates for congregations at both district and national conventions shall be:

- One of the called pastors of the congregations, and
- One lay person or minister of religion – commissioned

*Clarifying comments*

- Removes the exclusion of “rostered” individuals serving as voting delegates.
- Congregations, at their discretion, may choose to be represented at district conventions by only “rostered” individuals.

*What does this mean?*

- May be expanding the sphere of one interest group (professional church workers) at the expense of another (laity).
- May lead to apathy among lay people.
- May cause the loss of the historical 50/50 representation of professional church workers and laity at district and national conventions.

*Open questions*

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### **Proposal 5 – Determine Equitable Congregational Representation to District Conventions**

- Congregations with a pastoral vacancy are entitled to a vote by the vacancy pastor and one non-ordained vote
- Multiple-congregation parishes being served by one or more pastors are entitled to one pastoral vote, with each congregation in the parish have one non-ordained vote
- Congregations with more than 1,000 confirmed members are entitled to two additional votes, at least one being a layperson

#### *Clarifying comments*

- The size and composition of a congregation's delegation to district conventions will be determined by membership numbers reported to the district for this purpose.
- Some pastors serving vacancies will cast two votes at district conventions.

#### *What does this mean?*

- With its combined provisions, this proposal may alter the current 50/50 representation of professional church workers and laity at district and national conventions, in either direction.
- The meaning of "confirmed membership" must be carefully determined, so that representation is based on common and universal practices of enumeration and record-keeping.

#### *Open questions*

- Would other criteria be a better unit of measure for apportionment of voting delegates?
- What procedures will ensure accurate and standardized counts of confirmed membership?

### **Proposal 6 – Determine Congregational Representation to National Conventions**

- Determine each district's number of delegates according to that district's exact percentage of the total number of congregations and confirmed members in the Synod
- Allow each district in convention to determine how these delegates would be elected
- Whichever method or system a district uses to choose its delegates, it would choose an equal number of ordained and non-ordained delegates

#### *Clarifying comments*

- Current procedures assure each geographic circuit of congregations two delegates at synodical conventions; the proposal gives each district complete discretion over procedures for determining representation of its total confirmed membership, though not necessarily its congregations or circuits.

#### *What does this mean?*

- Each district may have differing methods of electing and / or selecting delegates.
- Common practices for verifying and updating confirmed membership will be required.

#### *Open questions*

- Will synodical unity of purpose be compromised when various methods are used by districts to select delegates?
- If a district chooses only at-large delegates, might some regions be routinely unrepresented at synodical conventions?



### **Proposal 7 – Establish a Fixed Number of Delegates to the National Convention**

- Establish a fixed number of total voting delegates to the national convention at approximately 650
- Amend the Bylaws to delete the “advisory delegate” category from the national conventions and reduce the number of “advisory representatives”

#### *Clarifying comments*

- Main impetus is cost savings estimated at \$1.6 million per national convention.

#### *What does this mean?*

- Elimination of advisory delegates may cause the loss of history, experience and expertise.
- Elimination of advisory delegates may lead to significant congregational cost savings.
- Reduction in the number of total delegates may reduce congregational and circuit representation.

#### *Open questions*

- Will congregations continue to be assessed for the cost of national conventions or will the cost be assessed to the district or some other means?
- Will former advisory representatives be allowed to address the convention?
- Is there another reasonable method to reduce the number of voting delegates?
- Is 650 delegates the optimal number to represent 6000+ congregations at a national convention?

### **Proposal 8 – Amend the Process of Submitting Overtures to National and District Conventions**

- Encourage the submission of overtures from congregations to their district convention through circuit forums and to the synod convention through their district conventions
- While all overtures submitted would still be considered, resolutions from circuit forums and district conventions would receive priority at district and Synod conventions, respectively

#### *Clarifying comments*



#### *What does this mean?*

- A lone, but important voice may go unheard.
- May exclude the individual congregation from having a direct voice at the national convention.

#### *Open questions*

- Might this prioritizing of overtures already be occurring in practice?
- Does this concern rise to the level which needs to be codified in Bylaws?
- Will policies for submitting overtures to circuits or districts be standardized?

### **Proposal 9 – Amend the Frequency of District and National Conventions**

Hold the district and national conventions in a four-year cycle:

- Year 1: Circuits may hold theological convocations
- Year 2: Districts may hold theological convocations
- Year 3: District conventions are held
- Year 4: Synod convention is held

#### *Clarifying comments*

- Will reduce the number of conventions over time and therefore will save money over time.
- Change in convention cycles must correspond with terms of office if elections are done in convention.

#### *What does this mean?*

- Urgent matters may require special conventions or special handling or may not be handled in a timely fashion.

#### *Open questions*

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### **Proposal 10 – Restore Circuits to Their Primary Purpose**

- Allow districts to establish visitation circuits (or congregational “clusters”) according to mission, geography, demographic criteria, or other factors determined by the district
- Circuit counselors would not be elected but rather appointed by district presidents with the concurrence of the district board of directors, praesidium, and in consultation with the congregations of a given circuit

#### *Clarifying comments*

- Prior to approximately 1900, voting delegates at synodical conventions came directly from congregations, not the circuit. Eventually voting delegates were elected at the circuit level.
- Circuits will no longer be voting units, rather visitation units.
- Common confession still required.
- Each district will organize circuits by its own criteria.

#### *What does this mean?*

- Circuits may be organized by mission and ministry, ethnic, cultural or demographic orientation, or similar size or challenges, or other criteria.
- Organization by commonalities may increase conversation by similarly situated congregations and clergy.
- Geographical identities may be lost.
- Loss of geographical circuits may lead to less engagement and conversation between local congregations and clergy.

#### *Open questions*

- How does this enhance the common confession and mission of the local church and the whole church?
- Will groupings by non-geographical criteria increase or decrease unity in the church?
- What criteria will be used to dissolve or re-organize circuits as the groupings become irrelevant or unnecessary?
- How will congregations and church workers move into or out of circuits?

### **Proposal 11 – Consider Future District Configuration**

Under convention-adopted criteria, the 2010 Synod convention direct the Council of Presidents to submit to the next Synod convention a recommendation with respect to number, function, and configuration of districts, including impact on funding the national Synod

#### *Clarifying comments*

- Could decrease the number of districts from 35 to a number between 15 to 25 districts of a more similar size, but could also result in a greater number of smaller districts.
- Current proposal does not guarantee that any particular district will remain intact.
- Since Proposal 7 contemplates selecting voting delegates by district not by circuit, this proposal would equalize voting representation by district at national conventions.

#### *What does this mean?*

- Reallocation or relocation of district facilities and staff
- Individual congregations may be grouped with new and different congregations
- May cause administrative turmoil for an indeterminate period of time.

#### *Open questions*

- Will district reconfiguration precede circuit reconfigurations to avoid multiple circuit reconfigurations?
- How long will the process take?
- What will be the cost of this proposal and who will bear the cost?
- What efficiencies will be realized?
- Do 15 to 25 districts provide the optimal structure?
- What criteria will be used to determine the number and configuration of new districts?
- Will unity in the church be maintained by a reconfiguration of districts?

### **Proposal 12 – Provide Collaborative and Efficient National Synod Structure**

- Implement process for Quadrennial Synod Priorities and Goals
- Realign national Synod ministries into two Mission Commissions (International and National)
- Provide coordination with district for certain ministries
- Transfer some responsibilities to districts
- Transfer most Board of University Education and Board of Pastoral Education responsibilities to regents and Board of Directors of synod

#### *Clarifying comments*

- Designed to reduce or eliminate administrative overlap, repetition, and redundancies.

#### *What does this mean?*

- Intended to decentralize the responsibility for many functions from the synod to the districts.
- Could lead to diversity in practice across districts.

#### *Open questions*

- What specific responsibilities will be transferred to districts?
- What will these changes mean to the uniformity of worship and practice?
- Does this proposal enable church workers to serve only specific districts or the entire synod?
- Will doctrinal and theological oversight of universities and seminaries remain with the local district president?

## **Proposal 13 – Involve the Totality of Congregations in the Election of Synod President and First Vice-President**

### *Clarifying comments*

- Current system resembles an Electoral College method of election.

### *What does this mean?*

- Every congregation would have a vote.
- Congregations may have more investment in outcome.
- Officers may be more empowered.
- Officers may have more accountability to congregations.

### *Open questions*

- Will this election be conducted apart from the synodical convention?
- By what modes and methods will this election be conducted, and how will the costs be borne?

**Proposal 14 – Set up Five Geographical Regions in the Synod**

**Proposal 15 – Elect Synod Vice Presidents Regionally**

*Clarifying comments*

- Currently vice presidents are elected at large and have the responsibility to serve the President.

*What does this mean?*

- Vice Presidents will represent their regions to the President and Board of Directors.

*Open questions*

- What criteria will guide the drawing of regions?
- What will be the relationship between a regional VP and the DPs in his region?



## **Proposal 16 – Amend the Composition of Synod’s Board of Directors**

17 members comprised of:

- 5 laypersons (one elected from each region)
- 5 clergy (one elected from each region)
- 1 commissioned minister
- President of Synod
- 5 at-large laypersons appointed by the elected BOD members to obtain specific skill sets
- First Vice President, Secretary, and Vice President-Finance/Treasurer are non-voting members

### *Clarifying comments*

- Current Board of Directors comprises 15 elected members, 13 elected at large; this proposal reconfigures the board according to regions, and includes a non-elected, appointed contingent, selected according to vocation.

### *What does this mean?*

- A requirement for specific skill sets would likely improve the overall performance and competence of the Board.
- Appointed members, by virtue of their non-election, are not directly accountable to the synod.

### *Open questions*

- What specific reasons recommend that approximately one-third of the Board be not directly accountable to the church as a result of their appointment rather than election?
- Could the nomination and election process be revised to attain the desired skill sets, rather than adopt an appointment process?

### **Proposal 17 – Provide Consistency of Terms of Office and Term Limits**

- Elect or appoint all Synod and district officers and board and commission members to four-year terms
- Have no term limits for district presidents
- Have no term limits for any nationally elected board and commission members
- Districts may determine limits for their board and commission members and other officers

#### *Clarifying comments*

- Currently some elected synod positions are for three and six year terms.
- Four-year terms of office would be appropriate if Proposal 9 is enacted.

#### *What does this mean?*

- Longer terms of office may lead to less accountability.
- Term limits tend to increase accountability; removal of term limits may decrease accountability.

#### *Open questions*

- In Proposal 6, districts are specifically given latitude to determine their own methods and policies; why are they not afforded the same latitude in this proposal?

### **Proposal 18 – Priority of Synod Governing Documents**

Add an article to the Constitution such as the following: “The Synod in convention may adopt Bylaws that are consistent with and do not contradict the Constitution of the Synod, which controls and supersedes the Bylaws and all other rules or regulations of the Synod. Bylaws, which may be adopted, revised, or eliminated by a simple majority vote of a Synod convention, are binding regulations for the Synod and its conduct and governance.”

#### *Clarifying comments*

- The Constitution does not currently refer to or provide for bylaws.

#### *What does this mean?*

- Currently, bylaws passed by simple majority may carry a force of authority equal to the constitution.

#### *Open questions*

- Is this a simple statement of clarification, or is there a specific point of confusion concerning priority of constitution and bylaws that is resolved by this proposal?

### **Proposal 19 – Expand the Certification Process of Pastoral Candidates**

- In a collaborative effort with the seminaries, expand the responsibility for the final certification of pastoral candidates to include congregations being served, their district presidents, and circuit counselors
- This process would follow policies developed by the COP in consultation with the seminaries and currently in use in the Specific Ministry Pastor program
- Seminary faculties would continue to certify seminary graduates' satisfactory completion of initial requirements for pastoral ministry

#### *Clarifying comments*

#### *What does this mean?*

- With universal application of Specific Ministry Program procedures, certification standards, and fulfillment of the standards by candidates, will be determined district by district (in some situations, congregation by congregation), across the synod.

#### *Open questions*

- Will “districts, circuit counselors and congregations” develop local certification standards, or conform to standards to be applied to all candidates for pastoral ministry?
- Once certified and placed, what guidelines will govern the movement of ordained ministers into other congregations or districts (i.e., will current SMP guidelines apply, or will they undergo revision)?
- Will this proposal affect, in the long term, the right and/or the ability of congregations to call any certified ordained minister (i.e., will congregations be required to call only those ordained ministers who have met local or district certification standards)?

## **Proposal 20 – Consider a New Name for Our Synod**

Rename our church body to clarify our identity as a distinctive Lutheran church within the USA

### *Clarifying comments*

- Renaming the synod would necessitate changes in signage, stationary, incorporation papers, constitutions, etc., by essentially all congregations, districts, universities, seminaries and synod.

### *What does this mean?*

- A name change may strengthen our common witness in the name of Christ.
- A name change may cause a temporary loss of recognition and identity, and will necessitate a rigorous “re-branding” program.

### *Open questions*

- What is the estimated cost to the synod, districts and congregations?
- What actions will reduce or forestall a loss of identity during “re-branding”?
- What are the expected effects upon, and responses from, congregation members, church workers, and registered service organizations?

Appendix: A review of scriptural and confessional issues that pertain to church structure and governance.

Beyond the establishment of local congregations and the office of the public ministry, the Holy Scriptures do not prescribe any structure or polity for the congregations of Christ's church; neither do the Holy Scriptures prescribe any structure or polity for relationships between or among those congregations.

Congregations enjoy with one another an organic unity in Christ through the Word and the Spirit. They recognize this unity (i.e., they establish church fellowship) through the confession of a common faith, and all structure or polity is subordinate to and in service of that common confession. Article VII of the Augsburg Confession speaks of this unity of the church in terms of the "marks of the church", that is, "that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word."

Because the Scriptures make no prescription for structure or polity, neither do the Confessions. In fact, the Confessions make it clear that polity and structure can vary widely among congregations, and among congregations in association with one another: Martin Luther, in Article IV of the Smalcald Articles, after asserting that the Church has one head, Jesus Christ, said that the temporal, external structures by which churches draw themselves together voluntarily (even attaching themselves to distant bishops), are secular governments (that is, humanly, not divinely instituted). Philip Melancthon, in the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, calls attention to the early decision by the Council of Nicea to set up different governing structures in the East and the West. In clear demonstration of this confessional principle concerning polity, while neither the LCMS nor its districts use episcopal structure or terminology, we are welcoming to our convention this year Bishop David Tswaedi of the Lutheran Church in South Africa, which is divided into regional dioceses.

Consequently, the Theological Task Force on Church Polity (TTFCP), in its consideration of the BRTFSSG's proposals and amendments, has not sought to determine whether the BRTFSSG has proposed the best possible polity, or the most effective polity, for the LCMS. Rather the TTFCP has endeavored to present to you, the convention delegates, our reasoned evaluation of the proposals as good-faith attempts to order the Synod affairs for the greater strength and coherence of the Synod as an association of congregations with a common confession of faith, and as an association of congregations seeking to work together to proclaim and confess that faith to the world that is in unbelief. We believe that any changes to the Synod's structure and governance must preserve the Synod's theological and confessional integrity, and should enable the Synod to be a good steward of the treasures and blessings, human and material, that the congregations of the Synod receive as gifts from God, and then commend to the Synod for use in their common name and authority.