

*It is written, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" (ESV Ps. 133:1)
"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. . . And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." (ESV Acts 2:42,47)*

July 15, 2010

Dear Congregational Members,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

The Concern

What the Psalmist wrote and the Evangelist Luke recorded for us in the early accounts of the Christian Church remind us of the blessedness of unity Christ gives to His people. Unfortunately, this blessedness of unity is steadily being lost among us in our beloved Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. While discord, strife, and disunity have plagued the Church from its very beginning, even resulting in the many Epistles we now cherish as God's divinely inspired Word, they have come to reach such levels in our fellowship that they can no longer be ignored without great harm to our Synod. No discord, strife, and disunity can remain unresolved without grave consequences to the Church and her ministry and mission, for as Jesus says, "**a divided house falls**" (ESV Luke 11:17).

There was a time when our Synod enjoyed a wonderful and blessed unity of doctrine and practice in her fellowship. That time also corresponds with her greatest growth as a Synod. Hear our first Synod president C. F. W. Walther about those early years; "*What would have happened to the Lutheran Church in America without the orthodox Lutheran Synods? If 25 or 30 years ago a few Lutherans had sat in a corner with their faith there would hardly be an orthodox Lutheran Church in our land today. But there are now thousands of Lutherans here who have come to life in Christ, who circulate confessionally faithful church publications, and who have founded Lutheran Church institutions for education and charity which are now in full bloom. Our gracious God had accomplished all these through the faithful witness to and confession of the truth from the mouths of orthodox Lutheran Christians. And if this is already the fruit in so small an ecclesiastical circle such as ours, how richer could it be in the greater church at large.*" (Theses on Communion Fellowship with Those Who Believe Differently, 1870, Theses, VIII pp. 33-34)

Unfortunately the LCMS has strayed off her orthodox foundations. Some within our fellowship even seek to disassociate our Synod from our grandfather's Church. Corresponding with this we also find our Synod declining in both unity and church membership. Although numbers are not an indication of a church body's orthodoxy we are reminded that when Missouri had her doctrine and practice right, the Synod flourished. In these latter decades when changes in our doctrine and practice have taken more permanent root there has indeed also been a corresponding decline in our unity and growth. We would in part attribute this to the truth that God does not promise to bless our unfaithfulness, but rather our faithfulness to the teachings and practices that hold His promised blessings.

There are errors within the fellowship of our Synod. Unfortunately, attempts to fraternally address these errors through the convention and resolution process have proven unfruitful, failing even to gain consideration on the convention floor. This gives us grave concern, for the current direction of our Synod away from our orthodox foundations has shown that this can only bring us to further decline. Only correction of these errors can help to stem the tide of decline on all fronts.

The Admonition

The correction of error is included in Jesus' work to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8), including the devil's work to falsify God's Word and so cause His people to stumble and sin. We are blessed to have the sure and certain Word of God to reveal our sin and error and lead us back to right understanding and practice, the very evidence that we are indeed the children of God (1 John 3:9-10).

So also do we have the New Testament Epistles that were written largely to rebuke and correct error in the early Church, which also command us to do the same in our time. As disciples of Jesus and His teachings we are responsible to correct errors among us so that we ourselves may not be found teaching and living contrary to God's Word and so profane His name in the Church and in the world.

Error can happen inadvertently and with the best of intentions. However, error remains error and can only come to no good. Therefore right doctrine and practice are the very stuff of Christian faith and life in the Church. Recognizing this, we, as the bearers of Christ's infallible Truth and most blessed Gospel must diligently maintain it among ourselves, lest we not only become a flickering and faltering light in the world, but even more frightful, find that light removed from our church as the Lord clearly warns in His Revelation to St. John (2:1-7).

Along with this, Christian faith and love compel and commend us to their correction. Error is sin, and the very ministry and mission of the Church is to address sin through the public proclamation of repentance and forgiveness in Christ's name (Luke 24:46-48). Correction of error is at the very core of the Gospel's proclamation--error against both God's divine Law and His holy Gospel, the very means through which God saves and applies His salvation to lost sinners.

Therefore, in good faith and as a matter of Christian conscience we cannot stand idly by and watch our beloved Synod decline into further error and disunity. Errors are by their very nature dangerous and destructive to all that is right and true and good. And such things are worth fighting for. It is our sincere contention that the Gospel, the Church, and the very souls they seek to save and preserve to eternity are at stake.

Because of this, in the spirit of Luther, Walther, and other church fathers and grandfathers, we can "do no other" but stand to correct the errors that undermine the orthodox faith entrusted to us and through which God has so abundantly blessed our Synod. If we do not, then we too shall be complicit in the doctrinal indifference that has plagued so many church bodies to their ruin. Consider, for example, the recent erroneous decision of the ELCA to ordain homosexuals, failing not only to help such people in their sin, but even to affirm them in it and therefore to God's eternal judgment!

All errors work in this way and to this end. That is why it is crucial that we address them.

The Plan

It is for this reason that we seek to form an "association of congregations" to work together in a concerted effort to advance the correction of these errors in our fellowship, and remove the discord, strife, and disunity that infects and hinders our common ministry and mission of Christ's Gospel to the world. The reasons for forming an "association of congregations" are as follows:

- *To collectively press upon the Synod the importance, necessity, and urgency of directly addressing these errors.*
- *To collectively make known the unity of concern over these errors.*

- *To collectively produce documentation and resources on what the errors are, why they are errors, what consequences the errors cause, and how to correct the errors and institute biblical practices that hold the promise of God's blessing.*
- *To collectively pool resources for distribution of this documentation and resources.*
- *And to collectively work toward unity of faith between congregations in ministry and missions to the end of faithful proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all nations, that the Holy Spirit may work "when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel" (AC V).*

This endeavor includes speaking publicly and honestly to all members of the Synod and its leadership as we are inspired to do in 2 Cor. 4:1-2 (ESV), **"Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's Word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God."**

In this we seek a public, open, and honest venue in which to address the errors among us. We believe both Scripture and the Confessions of our Church commend us in this matter. In the spirit of unity and the faith of our grandfathers before us we set forth an open statement of the very matters of our concern. Included for your reading is "A Fraternal Admonition to Correct the Errors of Our Beloved Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod." Please visit our web site at <http://www.afraternaladmonition.com>.

The Invitation

In good faith and with sincerity of heart we invite you to consider this endeavor by giving thoughtful and prayerful consideration to the cause for which we seek your fraternal participation. **"For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts"** (ESV 2 Thes. 2:3).

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all!

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A Fraternal Admonition to Correct the Errors of Our Beloved Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod

July 15, 2010

Preamble

"And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship in the breaking of bread and in the prayers." Acts 2:42

C.F.W. Walther, first President of the LCMS, wrote:

"A fellowship in which the Word of God is fundamentally falsified, or in which a fundamental falsification of it is tolerated, is not a true orthodox church, but a false, heterodox church or sect." (*Essays For the Church*, Vol. 1, "Communion Fellowship," Concordia Publishing House, 1992, p. 207)

Presented in this document are concerns over variant teachings and practices by some pastors, congregations, and institutions of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. These errors have largely been ignored and even tolerated by those elected for the supervision of doctrine and practice in our fellowship. Even the Synod itself in convention has adopted resolutions that violate our fidelity as a synod to Holy Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions.

Many attempts have been made to address and correct these errors. Numerous pastors, laity, congregations, respected doctors of the Church, circuits, district pastoral conferences, even sister synods and their pastoral conferences have taken public issue with these errors and the recent "positions" the LCMS has taken in its past conventions, but to no avail. Districts also have sought redress of these errors through resolutions and overtures to the Synod in Convention only to have them never come to the convention floor for consideration.

In addition, various publications and organizations have attempted to address the adoption of worship forms, texts, and ceremonies that come from alien and errant confessions - as to whether this may be done without also adopting their error. Church history and the inseparable correlation between doctrine and practice teach us that how we pray and worship is in fact our faith, our belief, and our confession (*Lex orandi, lex credendi*).

At stake is the very doctrine upon which the Church stands or falls - the genuine confession of justification by grace alone through faith alone for the sake of Christ's death and resurrection alone. As the Lutheran Confessions state, "this article of justification by faith is the chief article of the entire Christian doctrine." [SD III, 6] When this chief article is at stake so also is the evangelical mission of the Church in our midst, and likewise the ongoing presence of the marks of the Church, and thus the LCMS as a light of the true Gospel of Christ.

Therefore we are compelled out of faithfulness to Holy Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions (to which The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod claims fidelity) to seek Biblical reproof and correction of these errors. Our cause is to offer a fraternal critique of our teaching and practice, and to call our much loved Missouri Synod, her pastors, congregations, and institutions to repentance and back to what she has previously claimed as her source and norm of faith and life – Holy Scripture and its correct exposition, the Book of Concord of 1580.

In this process we seek not to contend over the trivial, nor matters merely of denominational custom or tradition, but over those matters that challenge our very fidelity to the changeless faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). It is our intent to hold the LCMS to the Scripturally faithful teaching of the Book of Concord as catholic teaching and not simply something that we, as Lutherans, believe. Thus, when we speak of theological "positions" and the "position of Synod," this should be understood as nothing less than what the Athanasian Creed calls "the catholic (or universally held) faith."

It is our sincere prayer that the LCMS would give serious and fraternal consideration to the words here given according to their benevolent intention. Our mission/purpose is to restore what has been compromised – that is a fellowship of unabashed confessional Lutheran congregations in North America and throughout the world for the sake of our children and grandchildren – and yes, for the life of the world.

May God the Holy Spirit, through the Word of Law and Gospel, call, gather, enlighten and sanctify the Church gathered within the Missouri Synod!

1. Pure Doctrine:

- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions uphold the absolute maintenance of pure doctrine. Today (using outreach as a justification), there are those in the LCMS who claim that we cannot any longer waste time on “incessant internal doctrinal purification.” We reject the toleration of this error.
- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions teach that unity (that is, full agreement) in doctrine and practice is **the** basis for establishing pulpit and altar fellowship. Today some have indicated that the unifying factor among Christians is not absolute agreement on every word and interpretation of doctrine and practice. We reject the toleration of this error.
- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions uphold the Order of Creation as the framework within which both Church and home must function in order for the home and congregation to properly reflect Christ and His bride the Church. Today some in the LCMS insist that if the Synod wishes to remain faithful, we must reevaluate how we interpret God’s Word in its teaching that women not be allowed to exercise the office of the pastoral ministry. We reject the toleration of this error.

2. Holy Communion:

- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions insist that full agreement in every article of doctrine must serve as the standard for admission to Holy Communion at the Lord’s altar in evangelical practice of the Lord’s Supper. Today significant disagreements and many contradictory practices exist in the LCMS regarding admission to the Lord’s Supper where many congregations today regularly welcome non-Lutherans and/or Lutherans from heterodox Church bodies with which the LCMS is not in altar and pulpit fellowship. We reject the toleration of these errors.

3. The Divine Service and Liturgical Offices:

- Holy Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions give witness to the faithfulness of liturgical worship and its power to unify the Church, to faithfully teach God’s people, respect her traditions, and to reflect the unity of the one true God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – whom we worship. Additionally, liturgy serves chiefly for the proper administration of the pure Word and Sacraments (Augsburg Confession and Apology XIV). There the liturgy is confessed not chiefly as our sacrifice to God, but the means whereby He delivers His gifts to us. These same gifts are the marks of the Church (Augustana VII). Some have asserted that the LCMS Constitution Article VI (which reads: “Conditions for acquiring and holding membership in the Synod are the following: 4. Exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymnbooks, and catechism in church and school”) is “nebulous.” We reject this errant conclusion.
- Holy Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions insist that all heterodox doctrine and practice (that is, false teaching) have no part in the worship and life of a Lutheran congregation. Today, however, some LCMS congregations openly and unapologetically employ the teachings of Arminian and Reformed theology by such false teachers as Rev. Rick Warren, Rev. Bill Hybels, Rev. John Maxwell, Rev. Carl George and others. We reject the toleration of these errors and insist that there is no virtue to any false teaching.
- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions declare that the primary action in worship is taken by our gracious God who serves His people with His gifts of Word and Sacrament. Today, the liturgical practices of some LCMS pastors and congregations have been predicated on the false belief that worship is primarily the action of men who are present to serve God. We reject the toleration of this error.
- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions inform us that worship is an expression of the unity of the God who gathers us and the unity of the faith we believe, teach and confess, and that therefore we should “strive for uniformity” in our worship as did the early Lutheran confessors and Dr. C.F.W. Walther in founding the Missouri Synod. Today many LCMS officers, pastors and congregations have insisted that striving for unity and uniformity is an unbiblical binding of the Christian’s freedom and conscience, and that much greater diversity of worship forms would serve the Church better. Unfortunately this has led not to new compositions of Lutheran hymns and liturgical settings but to importing worship forms from alien practices of Methodists, Baptists, Pentecostals and others. We reject these errors.

4. Unionism and Syncretism:

- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions condemn every expression of unionistic worship (that is, joint worship with other Christians with whom we are not in doctrinal agreement), or syncretistic worship (that is, joint worship with those who are not Christian). Yet in our day there are some LCMS officers, pastors and congregations who,

with impunity, have joined in worship services with those with whom we are not in doctrinal agreement, and even with those of non-Christian, false religions. We reject this error.

5. Service of Women in the Church (Order of Creation):

- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions are very clear that life within the Christian congregation should be governed in accord with the doctrine of the Order of Creation. Today the LCMS has condoned, and officially adopted a position in which women may serve as elders, congregational presidents and vice-presidents, may assist with communion distribution, and publicly proclaim the Word of God in worship services by reading Holy Scripture. Such changes within the LCMS represent a capitulation to the culture, deny the third use of the Law, and promote Gospel Reductionism, which our Synod previously rejected. We reject these errors.
- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions clearly teach that women are not to occupy the Office of the Holy Ministry. Yet today some pastors in our Synod have been allowed to remain on our Ministers of Religion – Ordained roster while publicly stating their belief that it is proper to ordain women into the pastoral office – and this without correction or removal. We reject the toleration of this error.

6. The Office of The Holy Ministry:

- Holy Scripture, in such passages as Romans 10:15; Hebrews 5:4; I Corinthians 12:28; Numbers 16; Jeremiah 23:21; and Acts 1:15-26, and the Lutheran Confessions declare in the Augsburg Confession, Article XIV: “Our churches teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call.” At the Synodical convention in Wichita, Kansas (1989) the unbiblical category of “lay ministers” was established. This has resulted in laymen, neither ordained nor rightly called, errantly serving LCMS congregations. Even now some Lay Ministers continue to serve in Word and Sacrament “ministry” to the congregations of Synod. We reject this error.
- While there may be different routes to prepare a man to serve in the pastoral office, this violation of Augustana XIV was furthered by the establishment of Distance Education Leading to Ordination (DELTO) in which laymen not properly called and ordained continue to provide Word and Sacrament Ministry to LCMS Congregations. We reject this error.
- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions insist in Article XIV that the administration of the Sacraments be retained only by those properly called to administer them. The only means for “licensing” a man to serve as minister of Word and Sacrament is the divine call to the Office of the Holy Ministry and nothing else. Today many vicarage supervising pastors of the Synod illicitly insist that their vicars consecrate and administer the Lord’s Supper to home bound members of their parishes and even in Divine Services. The consciences of many vicars are thereby burdened by this demand. We reject this error.
- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, as well as Dr. C.F.W. Walther, clearly teach that the Office of the Holy Ministry and the royal priesthood of the baptized are distinct from one another. The notion promoted by some that “everyone is a minister” distorts both the use of the term “ministry” in the Lutheran Confessions as well as the royal priesthood of the baptized so that what any Christian does is measured against the ministry of Word and Sacrament, and the doctrine of vocation is lost. We reject this error.

7. Unbiblical Removal of Pastors from their Calls:

- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions insist that a called pastor must be found guilty of persistently holding to false doctrine, falling into gross moral failure, or unwilling and/or unable to complete the duties of his office in order to be biblically removed from his call. Today there have been many LCMS congregations which have “fired” their pastors for no biblical cause. We reject the toleration of this error.
- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions call for proper due process (I Timothy 5:17-22) for any pastor whose congregation is seeking his deposal. Today some LCMS congregations have deposed their pastor without this due process, claiming that their pastor is an “at will employee.” We reject the toleration of this error.
- Holy Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions declare that the Christian congregation alone has the authority to extend a call to a pastor. Today some LCMS district presidents have wrongfully inserted themselves into the call process by denying information to calling congregations on some pastors whom that congregation was considering for a call, and by removing names from a call list without biblical cause, and this frequently without providing any reason for either action. We reject these errors.

- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions call on all Christians to deal with sin in accord with Matthew 18:15-17. Today some LCMS district presidents and/or their circuit counselors have interfered in the ministry of a properly called pastor by talking with members and hearing complaints without the pastor present and/or without the pastor's knowledge. We reject this error.
- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions insist that no call to serve as a pastor should be temporary (that is, limited by time). Today the practice of issuing "temporary calls" is well established within the LCMS. We reject this error.

8. The Church's Mission and Her Evangelistic Task:

- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions identify the mission of the Church as proclaiming the Word of God in all its truth and purity and administering the Sacraments in accord with Christ's institution. Today some in the LCMS have misidentified the mission of the Church as the completion of the so-called Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) which is the result of the Church doing her mission, not the mission itself. We reject the toleration of this error.
- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions insist that God knows His elect, and that not one of these will be lost. Today some in the LCMS teach that it is indeed possible to increase the population of heaven, and therefore decrease the population of hell, if we are doing our evangelistic task properly. We reject the toleration of this error.
- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions insist that it is the power of the Holy Spirit alone (working through Word and Sacrament) which brings about conversion in the life of an unbeliever. Today some in the LCMS teach that our zeal, passion, and intentionality for the evangelistic task are necessary to effect such conversions. We reject the toleration of this error.
- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions declare that pure doctrine clarifies and supports the Gospel, while false doctrine obscures and hinders the Gospel. Today some in the LCMS, for the sake of growing the church numerically, receive those who are uninstructed, or marginally instructed in the faith into membership in LCMS congregations, thus bringing people with false beliefs into the life of the church. We reject this error.
- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions identify the marks of the Church as the Word of God taught in all its truth and purity and the Sacraments administered in accord with Christ's institution. Today many in the LCMS have advanced numerical growth as a sign of the "legitimacy" of a congregation, essentially making numerical growth a mark of the Church. We reject the toleration of this error.

9. Ecclesiastical Supervision:

- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions insist that a Christian is personally responsible for his own sinful actions. Today the Commission on Constitutional Matters has issued a binding opinion that if a Synodical worker has his or her ecclesiastical supervisor's permission for something they have done, they cannot be held accountable for their actions even if such actions constitute false doctrine and/or errant practice. The Synod in convention has been prevented from correcting this error by convention floor management which disallowed the consideration of overtures which had been submitted specifically to correct those errors. We reject the toleration of this error.
- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions teach that the local congregation and its pastor are the full manifestation of the Church in that location, and therefore have the right and obligation to discipline its workers, and conduct the ministry of Word and Sacrament without interference from extra-congregational, man-made institutional authority. Recently the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) issued a binding opinion (2004) stating that District Presidents may assert their right to take control of a congregation, bypassing the pastor, duly elected boards, and the voters' assembly to do so. We reject this error.
- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions expressly teach a practice of Closed Communion. Today some District Presidents fail to provide ecclesiastical supervision when this practice is violated. We reject the toleration of this error.

10. Dispute Resolution:

- Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions declare that all things within the Christian congregation should be done in a spirit of Christian love, be ordered ethically, and in accord with God's Word. Today the Dispute Resolution Process of the LCMS has placed a man-made Constitution and Bylaws, convention resolutions, and CCM opinions above Scripture and the Confessions, and has therefore failed to provide either a fair hearing or justice to aggrieved members of the Synod. We reject this error.