

## An Expanded View of the LCMC by an LCMS Pastor

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There was a resolution passed without much fanfare at the 2010 Convention of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod in Houston. It was numbered 3-02A “To Support Confessional Lutheranism at Home and Abroad”.<sup>1</sup> The resolution cited in one of its resolves: “That the LCMS commend groups such as Word Alone, Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC), Lutheran CORE, and others for their courage and faithfulness in opposing the ELCA’s recent decision”.<sup>2</sup> I voted for that resolution in good conscience. I could not have voted the same for the original 3-02 which stated that the LCMS commend such groups “for their courage and faithfulness in maintaining their confessional identity by opposing the ELCA’s recent decision”.<sup>3</sup> This statement in my honest review is not currently applicable to LCMC.

This paper is supposed to be a view of the LCMC from the standpoint of an LCMS pastor. I do note the irony of presenting such a paper at a Free Conference. Not everything I will have to say could or would be said officially by the LCMS. In researching and writing this work I have discovered that much of this paper could be contemplated in relation to the LCMS as well. This is important to note as there will be both commendation and criticism of LCMC. The criticism must not be viewed as coming from a pastor in a perfect church body, but a church body deeply suffering from internal struggle. The LCMS, as admitted by our previous Synodical President Kieschnick and our new Synodical President Harrison has issues of its own to deal with, something which one of later speakers will discuss with us. LCMS arrogance has no place in this paper.

Since I wrote my first paper on this topic, LCMC has more than doubled.<sup>4</sup> It currently has a membership of 559 congregations, 506 of which are in the United States.<sup>5</sup> My first paper was written in the fall of 2009 while congregations of the ELCA were beginning to take their votes on leaving the ELCA and joining another Lutheran fellowship. As I struggled with the decisions of the ELCA and also contemplated the effect upon the congregation I serve and the community of which is a part, I realized that for many congregations the decision of the ELCA would at least involve internal congregational struggles and may cause a good many sheep or even whole flocks to seek other pastures. Noticing the vast chasm between the ELCA at 20 years old and the LCMS, I realized that organizations like CORE and WORD Alone would gain, and church bodies like LCMC would also receive a number of wounded sheep from the ELCA decision. It was time to start to understand these more “moderate” Lutherans. There is an even greater case for this today, a year later, because LCMC has grown and the North American Lutheran Church has organized.

LCMC was originally formed in conjunction with the WORD Alone network, which sought to reform the ELCA from the inside. The formation of the LCMC was official on March 25, 2001.<sup>6</sup> The LCMC was a reaction in great measure to the ELCA and Episcopal Church fellowship agreement and the implied change in polity (the ELCA passage of Called to a Common Mission “CCM”). The LCMC says in a promotional pamphlet “We are not a revised version of any Lutheran church body. We are not a traditional denomination at all, but an association of confessional evangelical Lutheran congregations and pastors.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 64<sup>th</sup> Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, *Today’s Business Issue* 2, 359-360.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. lines 43-45.

<sup>3</sup> 64<sup>th</sup> Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, *Today’s Business Issue* 1, 65.

<sup>4</sup> LCMC claims to have gained 341 new congregations since August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009 – [www.lcmc.net](http://www.lcmc.net)

<sup>5</sup> Current Statistics are available at [www.lcmc.net](http://www.lcmc.net)

<sup>6</sup> See LCMC timeline on website [www.lcmc.net](http://www.lcmc.net).

<sup>7</sup> From a pamphlet entitled “Consider Your Options” released after August 2009.

That being said, LCMC describes itself in legal documents as a “Lutheran Church Body”.<sup>8</sup> It has its own constitution, by-laws, and articles of incorporation. It performs the same functions as other Church bodies, confesses much of the same as other Lutheran church bodies and also does the things that other bodies do. LCMC is not traditional, but reflects the trends against organizational structures in our culture. An interesting example of this non-traditional organization is that a fourth of the congregations belong to another church body.<sup>9</sup> It can be assumed that the majority of these congregations are in the ELCA, although other documents do mention involvement of LCMS congregations.<sup>10</sup> In view of the LCMS exclusive stance on congregational membership, that such claims are made should cause great concern within the LCMS.

LCMC is organized into Districts and Chapters. Districts are defined as “amazingly flexible partnerships between congregations.”<sup>11</sup> Each congregation is free to join as many districts as they would like or may choose to not belong to a district. Districts are organized “around geography, theology, values, shared interests, congregational characteristics, worship styles, etc.”<sup>12</sup> The Districts’ names themselves attest to this new way of organization. The names of the Districts of the LCMC are: Augustana, Cross Alone, Epiphany, Evangelical Renewal, Heartland, North East, Northwest, Texas, Great Lakes, Florida, and Southern California. A chapter appears to be a smaller unit for congregations who do not choose to be a part of any District.

A survey of the different districts of the LCMC reflects the diversity of beliefs and practices allowed in the LCMC. The Evangelical/Renewal District lists as one of its key values “passionate worship” and speaks in very non-Lutheran language.<sup>13</sup> It uses the language of more reformed or American “evangelical” sources, even stating its first value as “It’s about Jesus”, but then describing Him not as Savior, but as the head who “calls the shots”.<sup>14</sup> There is a strong emphasis on our work of following Him in relation to the Great Commandment. It sounds more like a non-denominational document than a Lutheran one. The Cross Alone District has a respectable Lutheran confession in its “Charter of Freedom”<sup>15</sup> and “Describing Ourselves”.<sup>16</sup> The Augustana District and its confession make it appear to be a traditional Lutheran district, even adding to LCMC’s statement of faith in its own constitution in order to “supplement and further explicate” the LCMC constitution.<sup>17</sup> The Heartland District also seems to be a more traditional Lutheran district in its constitution and bylaws.<sup>18</sup> The Epiphany District appears to be organized to provide instructional materials.<sup>19</sup> The Northeast District is heavily focused on discipleship, even using the language of “seekers” and “believers”.<sup>20</sup> The variety of districts further emphasizes the ELCA origin of most of these congregations. As more congregations join LCMC, the diversity will probably increase as well.

LCMC has a national convention each year. The representation at a convention is similar to that of the United States House of Representatives, using average worship attendance for a congregation to determine how many delegates they can send to convention.<sup>21</sup> Each congregation gets at least 2 delegates

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<sup>8</sup> Lockridge Grindal Mauen P.L.L.P., Minneapolis to Board of Trustees, Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ, Apple Valley, 11 December 2001, found at: <http://www.lcmc.net/pdf/lcmcstatus.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> “Consider Your Options” a pamphlet found on the LCMC website.

<sup>10</sup> For an example see “Intro to LCMC” written and provided by the Epiphany District of the LCMC.

<sup>11</sup> “Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ Questions and Answers” found on the LCMC website, question 9.

<sup>12</sup> “Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ Questions and Answers”, question 9.

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.lcmc-erd.net/values/files/erd-brochure-2010.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.crossalone.us/2006/HereWeStand/CharterOfFreedom.php>

<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.crossalone.us/2006/HereWeStand/DescribingOurselves.php>

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.augustanadistrict.org>

<sup>18</sup> See <http://churchofthemaster.com/lcmcconstitution.htm>

<sup>19</sup> See <http://epiphanydistrict.com/>

<sup>20</sup> See <http://www.lcmc-ne.org/>

<sup>21</sup> A good theological question could come from looking at using “worship attendance” numbers instead of “baptized membership” for representation.

and congregations with more than 500 may receive an additional delegate for each 250 average worship attendees.<sup>22</sup>

At this point, it would appear that LCMC has a lot in common with what some were proposing for the LCMS through the work of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Synod Structure and Governance. The BRTFSSG proposed making circuits more flexible in their formation and even suggested a similar form of delegate representation for the LCMS National Convention. The suggestions only hint to some of the diversity that already exists in the LCMS. In fact, the CrossAlone District of LCMC points out the diversity and difference between formal documents and other anecdotal evidence of the LCMS. They state that the LCMS is “torn by an internal struggle between the 52% conservatives and 48% ultraconservatives”.<sup>23</sup> The most recent LCMS convention may change those percentages, but the fact is that CrossAlone is correct in making comment about the internal struggle going on in the LCMS. This summer the LCMS convention had a choice on how to respond to internal struggle. Either it would respond in the way it always has, by repenting and returning to the Scriptures, or by making things more flexible internally.

This is one of the good things that LCMC has done. It has caused perhaps some intra-Synod searching as to what we have become in the LCMS. An outside voice of criticism is always a good thing for any church body. In a way, this is a corporate use of our theology concerning that external Word of God and sinners. How much did the Synodical Conference serve as an inter-Synodical checks and balances for mutual accountability between sister synods? How much of the drift within its former members is the result of no longer having criticism from outside? Perhaps this is an area where LCMC may have a helpful voice, or provide a helpful example (in some respects a good voice/example and in some respects a bad voice/example).

The first commendable thing about LCMC is that they left the ELCA (or at least a large portion of their congregations have). Some congregations which have joined LCMC without leaving ELCA may be doing so for legal reasons to retain their property rights. The congregations of LCMC have broken with all of those ties that develop between the life of a congregation and a larger Church body. This is not an easy task for any congregation, but those congregations in LCMC have done so. Their courage in standing for something is commendable in an age marked with a lack of convictions. The fact that this separation from the ELCA is nearly a decade old also helps LCMC. Many congregations chose to leave before the ELCA was known for its stand on gay clergy. This will always be a problem for the newly formed NALC, whose formative issue was the ordination of non-celibate gay clergy in the ELCA. LCMC will not carry such a reputation to any who learn about the history of LCMC, although with the massive influx of member congregations since the 2009 ELCA decision, it will certainly be a challenge to maintain their identity around their formative issue over and against the issue of gay clergy.

The confessional stance of LCMC is similar to the ELCA when it was formed. LCMC subscribes to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism.<sup>24</sup> There is no mention of whether this acceptance has any reservations. The other confessional documents in the 1580 Book of Concord are considered “further valid expositions of the Holy Scriptures”.<sup>25</sup> I acknowledge that a church does not need to subscribe to the entire 1580 Book of Concord in order to be an orthodox Lutheran church, but given the ELCA roots of LCMC, there is a good amount of skepticism in regards to what that means for the other confessional documents in the Book of Concord. There is legitimate concern about whether these other documents of the Book of Concord are just being winked at. Those other confessional documents served to restate the true doctrine of the Augsburg Confession in the face of those with another confession who

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<sup>22</sup> See Constitution of LCMC, section 5.02

<sup>23</sup> “The DNA of the LCMS” found at <http://crossalone.us/2006/thednaofthelcms.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Their subscription from their constitution: “2.05. We believe, teach, and accept the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism as true witnesses to the Word of God, normative for our teaching and practice. We acknowledge that we are one in faith and doctrine with all churches that likewise accept the teachings of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.”

<sup>25</sup> From the LCMC “Our Statement of Faith” found on the LCMC website. Also found in section 2.06 of the LCMC Constitution.

claimed Augsburg as their own through careful wordplay. The phrase “further valid expositions of Holy Scripture” sounds very close to such careful wordplay. As the other documents of the Book of Concord stand, they are also “normed” norms, which have the authority of God’s Word behind them. Lutherans can judge the truth of something from the Smalcald Articles as much as the Augsburg Confession. The similarity of the confessional stances of the ELCA and LCMC causes concern for the future of confessional Lutheranism within LCMC. Does the similarity in these stances reflect a lack of seriousness toward doctrinal subscription or Lutheran identity?

There is a singular focus in the work of the LCMC, mission. From a document “*What is LCMC?*” that focus is expressed in this way: “LCMC has one primary mission: that of sharing the life-giving Gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>26</sup> This mission is worked out through church planting, missions, and training leaders. The By-Laws state the purpose of LCMC as “to support our common mission to bear witness to the good news that sinners are put right with God by faith alone in Jesus Christ, to resist any corruption of this gospel, and to serve and support fellow congregations who seek to do likewise.”<sup>27</sup> This is a commendable statement. A small criticism is that LCMC may fall into the temptation of finding unity in action instead of unity in doctrine. Unity based upon what a group does demonstrates a misunderstanding of the article of justification.

LCMC follows three major points of confession.<sup>28</sup> First, they state “We are free in Christ.” This is then related to Romans 6 and the freedom found in Christ. Second, they state “We are accountable to one another.”<sup>29</sup> LCMC is congregational, but also accountable. LCMC defines the church as “where the people of God are gathered together around Word and Sacrament.” Another LCMC pamphlet states “We believe that it is primarily here [church of people around Word and Sacraments] that faith is born and nurtured and lives are changed by the power of the Spirit.”<sup>30</sup> The local congregation is the visible form of this. The by-laws define a congregation as “a community of baptized persons, gathered around Word and Sacrament.”<sup>31</sup> The third point of confession is “We are rooted and grounded in the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.” Scripture’s inspiration is confessed. Inerrancy is not. Other key parts in this section deliberately state “we reject the notion that science, personal experience, tradition, or other human endeavors have equal footing with the Bible.” LCMC documents state that these things “contribute to our conversations and deliberations, but the Bible must be our final authority in matters of faith and practice.”<sup>32</sup> All of this is commendable.

In reading the literature of LCMC, there are five major emphases which I have gleaned:

1. Congregational Polity (in reaction to the ELCA and ECUSA)
2. Christian freedom and mutual congregational accountability
3. Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, including an emphasis on Law and Gospel in preaching.
4. Mission-mindedness
5. Priesthood of believers

Most of these five things are commendable as they stand. Congregations are indeed the place where God has chosen to place the means of grace to create and sustain the church. The resistance of LCMC to the requirement of Episcopal Bishops to be a part of ELCA ordinations is a good thing in agreement with the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope.<sup>33</sup> Also commendable is the effort to live out

<sup>26</sup> “What is LCMC?” A booklet found on the LCMC website.

<sup>27</sup> See “Bylaws of Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ” section 3.01

<sup>28</sup> These three points seem to be a great emphasis as they can be found throughout LCMC literature and websites.

<sup>29</sup> The use and emphasis of freedom and accountability may be related to Dr. Luther’s “free lord” and “dutiful servant” in his treatise on Christian Liberty.

<sup>30</sup> “Consider Your Options” a pamphlet found on the LCMC website.

<sup>31</sup> Bylaws of LCMC, section 1.02

<sup>32</sup> “What is LCMC?” A booklet found on the LCMC website.

<sup>33</sup> “However, since the distinction of rank between bishop and pastor is not by divine right, it is clear that an ordination performed by a pastor in his own church is valid by divine right.” Melancthon *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, par 65

congregational lives between freedom and binding love toward the neighbor. Affirming Law and Gospel preaching is always a good idea for a church body. Also, the proclamation of the Gospel to the lost is very important. The emphasis of the priesthood of believers is less commendable, because there are underlying problems with this emphasis as I will explain later. As these five points find expression in LCMC, it will take time to determine whether they work well or not. Because of their congregational focus, each congregation may express things quite differently from others. No doubt the tension between freedom and binding love will be like that drunken peasant on a horse, constantly trying to find the perfect balance, but never quite being able to sit straight on it.

Commendations being one thing, there are some very serious criticisms which need to be heard by LCMC. The ones which are addressed in this paper are the authority of the Scriptures and the hermeneutic used to interpret them, the ordination of women, reactionary congregationalism, fellowship both within LCMC and with other churches, the seminary education of their clergy, the office of the ministry, the danger of diversity, and what to do with leftovers from the ELCA that have not been addressed. All of these criticisms need to be read and heard in the spirit of humble correction as from those who wish LCMC the greatest good, so that they would be able by God's grace to remove the poisons of false doctrine from within them. May these words be received as a word of correction from outside.

### *SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY AND HERMENEUTICAL PROBLEMS*

First, LCMC documents express their faith in the Scripture as the "sole rule and norm".<sup>34</sup> This is good. This good statement is undermined when the Scriptures concerning the office of ministry being given only to men are either dismissed or mishandled to the point where they do not mean what they say. There are no public statements regarding other modern "litmus tests" for the authority of Scripture like creation, Jonah, Virgin Birth, Resurrection, to name only a few. Does this reflect an indifference to doctrine? If that is true, it is in keeping with the historical critical method, Gospel reductionism, and false ecumenism which are very prevalent in the ELCA. Here the pure congregationalism of LCMC hurts it. There is simply not much of a system set up to make a centralized statement of faith concerning these things.

The authority of the Scriptures is still an issue in LCMC. Nowhere in the official documents of LCMC is the inerrancy of the Scriptures affirmed. There is no effort to analyze how the ELCA came to the place to which it has now fallen. Hopefully this effort is forthcoming, but any effort to figure it out must look at the way in which the ELCA handled the Scripture. LCMC appears not to have fully dealt with this deadly poison in their church. No doubt, the most obvious errors of the ELCA will be avoided among LCMC, but the underlying cause of how one looks to the Scriptures will manifest itself in a whole different set of symptoms.

### *ORDINATION OF WOMEN*

The ordination of women is strongly affirmed in the documents of LCMC. The Northwest District puts it best when it states in its comparison of the ELCA and LCMC that: "ELCA and LCMC are the only viable Lutheran Church bodies in the United States that affirm the call of women to be pastors."<sup>35</sup> Apart from the trap of "viability", there is no expressed interest in analyzing why only the ELCA and LCMC have women pastors. Many Lutherans have rightly suggested that there is a logical progression from women pastors to gay pastors. This is the nature of any apostasy, that is, a constant falling from the truth, further and further from it. Why has the logical progression not been noticed by LCMC theologians?

This is where the firm statements on Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions fall apart in LCMC. There are simple passages of the Scriptures which state that the pastoral ministry is given only to males, and specific men at that. The position of LCMC allowing for women to be pastors squashes the authority of

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from Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 340.

<sup>34</sup> From the LCMC "Our Statement of Faith" found on the LCMC website.

<sup>35</sup> "How Does LCMC Compare with the ELCA?" document found at <http://www.nw-lcmc.net/Variou/Comparison.pdf>

Scripture under the boot of reason, experience and culture. The old poison of historical criticism mixed with a little Gnostic heresy allows for such deaf ears to the clear Word of God.

It is interesting that I find an ally here with Bishop Herbert Chilstrom, the first presiding bishop of the ELCA. He criticizes all those who are leaving the ELCA over gay pastors in his article “Questions for those leaving the ELCA”.<sup>36</sup> His article states that the issue of women’s ordination is actually the formative principle for the new bodies of LCMC and the NALC. Professor John Brug of the Wisconsin Synod seems to agree that the female clergy issue was very important in the formation of LCMC.<sup>37</sup> The fact is that there are many Lutheran Church bodies, but none of the larger ones outside of the ELCA accept women pastors. As the Northwest District puts it, LCMC is the only other viable place for women to be pastors in a Lutheran church. Could it be that LCMC actually cherishes the false teachings of women’s ordination so much that it had to form its own body over it? The Epiphany District of LCMC says this about reasons for forming LCMC: “Third, LCMC supports and upholds the pastoral ministries of the men and women called to serve the church. This is a large part of the reason why LCMC needed to be created. We could not deny the call of so many women as pastors – which other Lutheran bodies do.”<sup>38</sup>

Another difficulty that LCMC will have to address is that the same arguments for gay clergy were used for female clergy. Bishop Chilstrom argues this in another one of his open letters.<sup>39</sup> LCMC has accepted female clergy and rejected gay clergy. In doing this, LCMC has at one point confirmed a false hermeneutic and at another point condemned it. This sort of inconsistency is not good for a church body. LCMC theologians need to look at how they can come to the one conclusion but not the other, especially when the same arguments were used for both. They should look to the Scriptures with the simple hermeneutic which allowed them to condemn practicing homosexual clergy and apply the same simple interpretation to the issue of female clergy. To leave things as they are is only confusing.

The practice of allowing women to serve in the Office of the Ministry is not apostolic. In fact it is in direct opposition to the apostolic Church.<sup>40</sup> This false teaching will forever serve as a wedge to any discussions regarding full fellowship with church bodies which hold to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions on this point. By continuing to allow female clergy, LCMC has willingly shut the door to real ecumenical activity with those churches that have the same “Lutheran” name. In real ecumenical activity, it would make most sense to begin discussion with those who hold a similar confession and share a common heritage. The ELCA never followed that logic, but sought fellowship with non-Lutherans at the expense of creating further distance with other Lutherans. LCMC appears to be doing the same with its stance on female clergy. At a time when Lutheranism could have begun a long overdue conversation under the Scriptures, LCMC has declared that they do not want to talk. Sadly, if there can be any work together with LCMC, it will always be limited or seasoned by the division caused by their un-apostolic ordination of women.

### REACTIONARY CONGREGATIONALISM

Already expressed is the lack of information concerning many articles of the faith. This lack of public confession is in large part due to the congregational nature of LCMC. There will be very few official statements by which LCMC can be judged in the future. These things have been intentionally placed back into the congregation. The confession of the faith will boil down to localized expressions, each of which varying from congregation to congregation, pastor to pastor. There is nothing inherently wrong with the strong focus on congregationalism, but there are some things to consider. How will LCMC as a whole deal

<sup>36</sup> Available on the Internet, but first read in *Mankato Free Press* (Mankato), 29 August 2010.

<sup>37</sup> John Brug, *WELS and Other Lutherans*, 2d ed. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2009), 234.

<sup>38</sup> “Intro to LCMC” written and provided by the Epiphany District of the LCMC, page 10.

<sup>39</sup> “An Open Letter Response to the CORE Open Letter” as found in <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/religion/2304933/posts>

<sup>40</sup> Robert Preus, ed., *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics*, vol. IX, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance* by Kurt Marquart (St. Louis: The Luther Academy, 1990), 166.

with one or two very vocal congregations and their differing expressions of the faith? Pure congregationalism will cause this rather large church body to have very little voice in the public sphere. In the current mobile society in which we live, how will loyal LCMC parishioners find things when they move to another area and seek out the nearest LCMC congregation? This is a problem which LCMS laity have struggled with for a generation now. Added to the struggles related with pure congregationalism, the increase of diversity will only serve to cause difficulties for parishioners who travel or move to new areas and try to find a similar expression of the faith.

All of this emphasis on the congregation may bring out other problems which can be found in other highly congregational bodies. In fleeing from the tyranny of bishops has LCMC run headlong into mob rule? Will pastors be simply hirelings? Will pastors receive support in matters of doctrine? Will congregational conflict lead to the First Lutheran and Second Lutheran churches being across the street from one another, as we often see among Baptist congregations that fight and divide? This leads to what I perceive as a problem within the internal fellowship of LCMC.

### *FELLOWSHIP INSIDE AND OUT*

LCMC's purely congregational nature creates other problems. As hinted at earlier, there is such diversity allowed within the church body and such amazing flexibility of congregational focus that one may wonder what is *not* going to be accepted, apart from those formative issues with the ELCA (Episcopal Structure, Homosexuality). LCMC is what I would call an "umbrella church" which allows for all sorts of things so long as the members can nod their heads to a very general confession of faith. There is a possibility of removal from LCMC through its Board of Trustees, to be ratified by the National Convention.<sup>41</sup> But the fact that the statements of faith of both the ELCA and LCMC are nearly identical ought to cause alarm to anyone relying on the statement of faith to exclude heresy from within LCMC.

This "umbrella church" is the non-traditional part of LCMC. It reflects the current age's low view of doctrine. It may also reflect the longstanding problem of the lack of church discipline within church bodies. This "umbrella" is also likely a fruit of the false ecumenism of the ELCA which does not focus upon honest agreement in all articles of the faith, but celebrates the diversity of differing confessions. In the end, this lowest-common-denominator, reduced Lutheranism will only fade into the gray area of generic Protestantism.

There is also real concern that the LCMC formed only during the Episcopal full communion discussion. Why not earlier? Does LCMC believe that fellowship with the Reformed Church of America, the United Church of Christ, and the Presbyterian Church – USA were good things? Do LCMC congregations still hold to those full communion agreements? If so, LCMC has departed from Scripture and historic Lutheranism concerning fellowship. Similarly, does LCMC support the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification? If so, LCMC has departed from Scripture and historic Lutheranism concerning salvation.

The fellowship problems of the larger body will also manifest in the local congregation. What is required for localized full communion within LCMC congregations? Will they be allowed to cooperate with any and all other denominations in their midst? This is becoming a more dangerous practice in that the "god of America" is gaining a very devoted following. If the same fellowship practices are allowed which the ELCA embraced, it will not be long before any localized Lutheran identity is engulfed by the spirit of the age.

It is also worth noting that communion fellowship is not mentioned in the documentation of LCMC. In general practice, LCMC does as the ELCA does, so it is safe to assume that the open communion of the ELCA will continue. This again is another overlooked symptom of the errors of the ELCA, which unless it is checked will only cause more problems in the future.

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<sup>41</sup> Bylaw 1.05 of "By-Laws of Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ"

In the previous paragraph I noted that the “in general practice, LCMC does as the ELCA does”. This is a symptom of LCMC’s lack of public statement of faith on specific questions. If LCMC is silent as a body, what are others to believe about them in their silence? Local pastors and congregations could be a source of information about LCMC beliefs, but sadly it will more likely be a statement of LCMC beliefs in that place and at that time only.

### *SEMINARY EDUCATION BY BAPTISTS*

LCMC does not require educated clergy. It is true that a congregation maintains the right to set any man before them and ordain him to preach, teach, and administer the Sacraments. Most pastors will agree that a formal education is best, given the breadth and depth of situations that one encounters in pastoral ministry. This is why Lutheran pastors have traditionally been educated, for the task of being a pastor is no light thing. LCMC, while affirming the right of a congregation to call anyone they choose, also accepts training from multiple institutions.

Some of these institutions deserve mention. The Institute of Lutheran Theology is an online school meant to train candidates for ministry in Lutheran churches.<sup>42</sup> The move into an exclusively online curriculum has advantages and disadvantages. With the congregational focus of LCMC, an online option for training may work well with “home-grown” pastors. Lutheran churches in general have not applied what Jesus taught about a prophet in his hometown to the home-grown pastor concept.<sup>43</sup>

There is an option for continuing education for those pastors who did not receive a formal education in LCMC. Beyond the River Academy uses a mentor type of model to help train pastors who are already serving. The saying “better late than never” is apt for such an effort. Beyond the River seeks to improve the theological education of the clergy of LCMC and is commendable for that goal.

There are other institutions which are listed on the LCMC website as accepted seminaries.<sup>44</sup> These include Bethel Seminary in St. Paul, historically a Baptist seminary. The Master’s Institute is another school option in St. Paul which states that it is Lutheran, but the website uses some rather charismatic language. Another option is Faith Evangelical Seminary in Tacoma which identifies itself as Lutheran and also prepares students for other denominations as well.

One institution I would like to highlight is Sioux Falls Seminary. This seminary was formerly called North American Baptist Seminary. It was the official seminary for the North American Baptist church, made of German Baptists from New York and now scattered across the northern United States. It is still considered a Baptist seminary. I have personal experience and exposure to the teachings of this seminary, since I, a lifelong member of an LCMS congregation, attended there in 2004-2005 working on a Master of Arts Degree in Christian Leadership. The seminary at that time trained men and women to be pastors for up to 26 denominations. The professors there are largely “evangelical” in the American sense of the word. While I attended, classes were taught mostly by members of the American Baptist Church, a moderate Baptist church body. That means that the primary doctrinal courses were taught by those who believe Baptist teachings. The seminary trained men and women to become ELCA pastors. To be qualified for ELCA ordination at the time a student had to take three extra courses on Lutheran history, doctrine, and practice. Do we as Lutherans have such small differences with Baptists that three courses would be required to make a Lutheran pastor from one otherwise trained to be a Baptist? What will these poorly or even falsely trained pastors do to the congregations of LCMC?

### *OFFICE OF THE MINISTRY VS. PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS*

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<sup>42</sup> The website of the Institute of Lutheran Theology is at: <http://www.ilt.org>

<sup>43</sup> In light of LCMC efforts, as well as the LCMS SMP Program, an analysis of Matthew 13:53-58; Luke 4:16-30; Mark 6:1-6 may be a late attempt to question the validity of the home-grown pastor concept.

<sup>44</sup> For the complete list: <http://lcmc.net/seminaries>



Perhaps a poorly trained clergy will not upset LCMC due to the heavy focus on the laity. One of the focus points of LCMC is the priesthood of believers.<sup>45</sup> The priesthood of believers is emphasized first and foremost in their constitution under the topic “Ministry”.<sup>46</sup> There is a good emphasis on vocation in the distinction between the public ministry of Word and Sacrament and the daily ministries of the baptized members of the congregations. This distinction is somewhat lost in their documents however. One document states “LCMC makes it a point to celebrate the Priesthood of All Believers at every level.”<sup>47</sup> The same document states “all the people are ministers of the church called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.”<sup>48</sup> Another document hints that lay people are qualified and even should lead communion.<sup>49</sup> This is in clear violation of Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession and the confessional statement of LCMC regarding the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. The plain simple fact of the matter is that the LCMC is reacting to the ELCA and the Episcopal Church. Despite their claims to be a forward looking church body<sup>50</sup> that is not reacting, their publications reveal something quite different.

Overemphasis on the priesthood of believers causes a misunderstanding of the Office of the Ministry. While the one is put into a place where God did not intend, the other which by divine mandate is supposed to hold that place is moved out. There are a few great dangers involved in the efforts to lift up the laity. First, there is the obvious rebellion against the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions on this point. Encouraging such practices that make hearers into preachers is a form of spiritual abuse, robbing hearers of the blessing of being where God has placed them. Another danger is that there may be members whose consciences are burdened by such actions. Finally, pitting clergy against laity will serve to divide the church even further. As stated before, this problem is in reaction to the clericalism of the Episcopal Church and the ELCA. An unbalanced reaction is just as much an error as the thing reacted against.

#### *DIVERSITY AND UNITY*

Diversity has become a virtue for most of the world. The key word there is *the world*. The church has always cherished unity in doctrine, and uniformity in practice has always been a laudable goal for which to strive. Certainly there is always a measure of flexibility in practice due to localized situations, otherwise I would be speaking to you in Hebrew right now, but the question for Lutherans, and in particular LCMC is when does diversity become harmful to the Gospel? Where is the point on which to stand and go no further? Will diversity of practices allow things to come in from false spiritualities as long as we slap a big cross on it? By that I mean: can we have the things of other faiths as long as we convert them to being Lutheran? This is dangerous ground, but ground on which diversity cries out with all of its being to go ahead and dive right in. The problem with such willing diversity is that it allows one to dive right into apostasy.

The current struggle to allow for diversity really borrows from the attitudes of false ecumenism and its predecessor unionism. The foul smell of doctrinal indifference fills the void left by the lack of LCMC statements on various articles of the faith. In allowing for such diversity to take place, LCMC is allowing unionism in its midst. The end of unionism is never good. The recent ELCA apostasy has demonstrated the final result of unionism, that the long tolerated false doctrine claims dominance over any hint of orthodoxy. In the end, even a heterodox Lutheran identity is lost. LCMC should take note in its embrace of diversity that the seeds of this same poisonous tare have taken root already among them.

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<sup>45</sup> Note that the phrase “Priesthood of Believers” is not always the best to use in Lutheran Theology. A brief treatment of the phrase can be found in: Albert Collver, “Origin of the Term Laity” *Logia: A Journal of Lutheran Theology* XIX, no. 4 (Reformation 2010), 9.

<sup>46</sup> See Constitution of LCMC, section 3.01

<sup>47</sup> “Intro to LCMC” written and provided by the Epiphany District of the LCMC, page 8.

<sup>48</sup> “Intro to LCMC” written and provided by the Epiphany District of the LCMC, page 9

<sup>49</sup> “The Crisis Happening in the Lutheran Church: Issue 3: Worship and Preaching” published by the Epiphany District of LCMC, page 12.

<sup>50</sup> “Intro to LCMC” written and provided by the Epiphany District of the LCMC, page 11.

A note for those of the LCMS who studied the report of the Blue Ribbon Task Force that its suggested revision of Article III of the LCMS Constitution removed the “strive for uniformity in church practice” and instead said that the mission and purpose of the Synod was “Encouraging a common understanding and appreciation of a variety of responsible practices which are in harmony with our common confession of faith.”<sup>51</sup> Practice is not always free of side-effect upon doctrine. The temptation to embrace such diversity is strong in America today, and the Church must pray to God that He would hold us firm against such powerful temptation.

### *LEFTOVERS*

There may be many other issues which have not yet been discovered in LCMC that will become problems. By simply removing themselves from the apostasy of the ELCA, LCMC congregations have not rid themselves of the diseases that rotted the ELCA. The sins of the father will be passed onto the sons and so forth. Unless LCMC deals with some of these issues I believe that Lutherans in a number of years will be struggling the same way with LCMC as they now do with the ELCA.

One of the questions which has been asked of LCMC and now NALC is “why not join another church body?” There is no shortage of Lutheran acronyms in America today. It is a sad truth that false doctrine has divided the Church so. Why has LCMC separated unto itself? For sure, one of the chief reasons was to have a church body called Lutheran and embracing the ordination of women. LCMC has not determined to fully involve itself in a deep doctrinal review of its beliefs and practices. There are too many pet doctrines which are embraced to allow for it to join with another organization. In the end, as I suspected at the beginning of my research of LCMC, the jump from the ELCA and its open apostasy into a more conservative body like the LCMS is just too far and thus a middle body had to be created.

### *SO WHAT TO DO*

As a LCMS pastor, there are some suggestions to engage LCMC congregations and pastors in your area. Certainly there is not enough agreement in doctrine to participate in pulpit and altar fellowship, but that doesn’t mean that we can’t work together at some level. I would suggest that we prayerfully await the forthcoming LCMS President’s work on cooperation in externals with theological integrity.<sup>52</sup> While we wait, there are other things that can be done. First of all, we can commend them for taking that first, hard step in leaving the ELCA. Secondly we can engage with them in regards to preaching Law and Gospel. The LCMS has a rich heritage of Law and Gospel preaching. Our rich heritage is worth sharing. Perhaps a book reading group could form with local Lutherans to study Walther’s “Law and Gospel”. I can personally attest to the value of having a Book of Concord reading group involving Lutheran pastors of all varieties. These efforts to have the truth of God’s Word rub off on all who participate will help all who are involved. One of the last things which will benefit LCMS clergy is that LCMC should cause us to get much more precise in our study of the Scriptures. We need to study and teach why it is that women pastors are unscriptural and anti-apostolic. We need to be able to articulately express the Truth in the face of a church body which is more “moderate” or “centrist” than the ELCA. Lastly, we need to take heed to any doctrinal drift that has been revealed within our own ranks. The example of LCMC has shown the difficulty in removing false teachings even when leaving a church body. It is even more difficult while staying in that church body.

### *OUTLOOK*

Despite this, I am hopeful. The hope I have is that the Word of God will have its way with LCMC congregations and the church body as a whole. I hope that they will see the underlying false teachings which led to the symptoms that caused their departure from the ELCA. The hope I have is that LCMC will serve as a warning to other churches like my own LCMS, that our days of flirtation with the world would

<sup>51</sup> 64<sup>th</sup> Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, *Today’s Business Issue 1*, 159.

<sup>52</sup> The 2010 National Convention of the LCMS in resolution 3-03A has set a deadline of July 2011 for this work to be released.

end and that we too would go and sit beneath the shade of Scripture once again. May God have mercy upon all those who claim the name "Lutheran." The drift from the Truth is a human achievement; the return to the Truth takes the gracious intervention of God.