

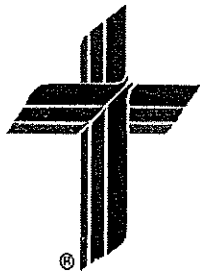
My biggest disappointment about the church's current conversation on restructuring

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27).

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has been in conversation for several years about the reshaping of its structure, its constitution, and its bylaws. Many, many hours by our brothers and sisters in Christ have been invested to see where improved stewardship could be brought to bear on the polity of our beloved Missouri Synod.

Regional gatherings of all the delegates to the 2010 synodical convention were conducted during the winter months of 2009 and 2010. Each of those who attended—leaders and participants—is to be commended for a yeoman's effort. Gathering the delegates was a good thing. Getting minds engaged on the restructuring suggestions early on was necessary.

I must confess to you that I am disappointed about what has not happened. It was my sincere desire that a deeper conversation would have ensued, one that got beyond the reshuffling of the furniture. (Remember, reshuffling the furniture is necessary if one cannot even walk through the living room! If the Word is being "choked" [Mark 4:19] by structure, it needs to be changed!)



The conversation, though, has not delved into the more serious and necessary aspects. What is the Church? What does it mean to be Church, not only in this post-church age but for all time? It seems to me that if we don't get to this deeper level of collegial study and discussion, how the furniture is shuffled won't matter!

Our Lord makes Church very simple: "My sheep hear My voice." He speaks; His sheep hear His voice and follow Him. We should not limit His sheep to those already within the Church. "And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:16). The Shepherd gathers and keeps gathering sheep by His voice; the more sheep the better is Jesus' take. Only His final coming will end the gathering.

I spoke to the delegates at the Rocky Mountain District convention a year ago (June 2009) about two

churches—a confessional fellowship versus an institutional fellowship (church):

(The) Missouri (Synod) used to be viewed first, foremost, and primarily as a confessional fellowship. A confessional fellowship is a group of churches where each congregation has been called into existence by the living voice of Jesus through the Holy Scriptures. The Holy Spirit "calls, gathers, and enlightens" these Christians as He applies the very wounds of Christ through the means of grace—the Word and the Sacraments. The Word binds congregations together in a confessional fellowship; nothing else does. This, then, is the foundational and the core binding of a congregation.

And further:

The One who causes this centripetal movement to the center, bringing all His children home from wherever they are scattered, bringing individual sheep and whole flocks into *koinonia* at pulpit, font, and rail—Church Fellowship—is also the One who causes a centrifugal scattering, dispersing His own out into the world. He scatters His churches—pastors and laity—into a world that He has declared justified through His saving work, a world justification. "In Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19).

And the psalmist scribes the Lord's words in Psalm 117, "Praise the LORD, all heathen!" For God to use "heathen" there—as Luther translates it (Luther's Works: American Edition 14:9)—means that God has become the heathen's God, and that He expects and foresees their conversion by His Word through His Church.

The other church, the institutional fellowship, looks like this:

Over time—and I have never seen this written anywhere—it is my conjecture that the longer a church body remains in existence, the more the church acts, speaks, and conducts business as an institutional but not as a confessional church. No longer are circuit meetings and conventions dominated by the Word as applied to each other and beyond.

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CONVERSATION; COMMUNICATION

DISAPPOINTMENT ABOUT CURRENT CONVERSATION

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Pure teaching is no longer loved and desired and considered as essential for the life of the church and her mission. Church officials are tempted to persuade apart from or without the Word. Individual churches see the bigger church not by what we gladly and boldly confess together but by the common products offered and received.

These churches then act with a silo mentality, operating as retail outlets with a loose and lifeless connection to a corporation. Competition is bred among the franchises for the greatest production. Corporate headquarters laud those who are successful according to certain standards of production. Each is out for its own needs, and those needs take precedence over the needs of the church down the street. Success is viewed as moving up the corporate ladder. The enemy is the other, as it is all about me, myself, and I. And the lost fall off the radar screen. This may seem like an extreme portrayal, but does it not have some truth in it?

Does any of this ring true to you? I wonder if there is still time to get to the heart of the matter. Restructuring will happen, but it may not happen the way we would expect. Financial collapse of the LCMS structure may well be the Lord's way of restructuring.

Could it be that what God has in mind is for His Church to get back to the basics of what Church really is: His Voice proclaimed through His preachers from pulpit, font, and rail, and through the lips of His laity out in their daily grind of life under the cross?

Perhaps this is not the time for restructuring but instead for rethinking, deep thinking, theological thinking, pondering His mind (Phil. 2:5-11) as it applies to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Consider these topics for a start: repentance, faith, Word of God, the Confessions, and the absolute joy of participating in the Triune God's mission of bringing the lost into His fold.



Rev. Randall Golter
District President



New look for district Web site

Have you checked out the redesigned district Web site? After a few delays, it was launched in early May. Many, many thanks to Laura Raben and her father, Vern Raben, for their tireless efforts and long hours of work to create the Web site's new look and user-friendly navigation.

The new design also makes it easy to sign up for the district's online newsletters, including the color version of *Peaks and Valleys*. Over the next few months, more pages and content will be added to the site.

Last summer and fall, the district's communications team conducted surveys to discover how best to serve the members of the district. The vast majority suggested that electronic communication was most desired and recommended that improvements be made to the district's Web site. It is the team's hope that the redesigned Web site not only fulfills those recommendations but also will evolve to be an even greater communication tool for the Rocky Mountain District.

You can access the Web site at www.rm.lcms.org or www.ignitingchurchandcultureforchrist.org.

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When possible, send photos digitally,
in JPEG format, 300 dpi.