

The Cloud

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News and Articles from the St. Cloud Circuit of the LCMS

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What Is It?

By Rev Joshua Reber (Trinity, Clear Lake; Faith St. Cloud; SCSU Campus Pastor)

My biggest dream was to edit a newsletter for a circuit of the LCMS. My mother told me to dream bigger, but accomplishing your lifelong goal at 28 ain't half bad.

So, what's this newsletter? We pastors have been talking about unity for the past year at our Winkels (monthly pastor meetings). Can there be unity if we don't talk? We hope that this newsletter (our initial goal is bimonthly publication) will aid in starting the conversation and make you, a member at a church in our circuit, feel like you're a part of something bigger.

Inside, you'll find theological essays (practical, and dare I say, humorous), a book review, and news from the congregations in our circuit, all of which is written by pastors in our circuit. We hope you find the content edifying, and of course, we welcome your comments. All negative comments should be directed to Rev Bruce Timm (Redeemer, St. Cloud) and all positive ones are welcome to me, the editor.

When to Say No

By Rev David Buchs (Concordia, Fairhaven)

There are a handful of things that choke me up without fail: seeing a father give away his daughter at her wedding, the commemoration of the faithful departed on All Saints' Day, and military honors at a funeral. With military honors, it's that moment after all the silent ceremony and all the attention to folding the flag, when the soldier says: "On behalf of the President of the United States..."

When you arrive at a graveside and you see a uniformed man standing at attention, you know that you are witnessing the burial of a veteran. The presence of that man and that uniform means something – it means that this loved one now laid to rest has served his nation and is worthy of great honor.

Not everyone receives that honor. If any civilian could request military honors at his funeral, then it would become meaningless at all the funerals of soldiers. You wouldn't know, when you hear "Taps," whether it was just sentimental – a nice tune for effect – or whether it was the funeral of one who honorably and faithfully served his nation.

The soldier standing at attention at the graveside bears witness to the fact that the grave is to hold the remains of a veteran. His presence vouches for it, and he can't vouch for it if it's not true. If a civilian requested military honors, the Legion would simply say, "No." It wouldn't be a difficult decision.

The presence of a pastor, vested, book in hand, preaching and praying at a graveside or funeral means something. It means that this loved one has finished his course and kept the faith. Eternal rest in heaven awaits because all his sins have been forgiven for Jesus' sake. That is why a pastor is so often requested. When people see a pastor at a funeral, they think, "My loved one is in heaven." Like the soldier at attention, the pastor's presence vouches for the faith of the deceased. It is customary for the pastor to remain at the graveside until everyone else has left, as a sign of the promise of Jesus never to leave or forsake his own.

But what if that loved one was not a Christian or showed no evidence of faith in Jesus? Should the pastor preside over that funeral? It wouldn't be right for a soldier to stand at attention for the funeral of a civilian or to hand over the American flag to the family of one who never served in the military. In the same way, pastors should only preside at funerals and burials of those they know to have died in the faith.

Pastors, like soldiers, are accountable for their actions. They can only do what they have been authorized to do by God, and that is to give true comfort. There is hell to pay for pastors who mislead people, saying "Peace" when there is no peace (Jer. 6:13-15). The preaching of God's Kingdom is not, "Everything is going to be okay!" Instead, it is, "Repent and believe!"

At this point, let me answer a very sensible objection. Christians might respond, "Isn't it better for people at a funeral to hear God's Word from a faithful pastor than to hear anything else?" I'll be the first to admit that this objection makes a lot of sense. It always makes me think twice because it is generally true. How could there ever be a time when preaching God's Word would do more harm than good?

And yet, there are times in the Scriptures when God goes quiet. They are times when people have been presumptuous and have distorted His Word. They are times when the people have derived false comfort from the mere fact that God was speaking instead of listening carefully to what He was saying.

That's the hazard of a pastor presiding over a funeral when he cannot vouch for the deceased. For him to speak clearly to the situation, he would have to say that, at best, the fate of your loved one is uncertain, and at worst, he has died an unbeliever and is in hell. That's not what people think they're getting when they ask for the pastor. They were hoping for a warm bath, and the only thing he can offer is a cold dunk. It is wiser for him to simply say, "No."

The hard thing about this is that it is a kind of judgment. That's why so many pastors are tempted to agree to preside at any and every funeral. We know so well the question, "Who are you to judge?" But it's a judgment either way. If the pastor conducts the service, it's a judgment of righteousness by faith. If the pastor does not conduct the service, it's a judgment of uncertainty or unbelief. So the question is not "Who are you to judge?" The question is whether the pastor will be honest in his judgment.

Pray for your pastor. Saying "no" is painful, but it is also more and more necessary in our time. Your pastor needs the strength that comes from God to remain faithful. He needs the Holy Spirit so that he never forgets that it is the "no" of God's Law which is the start of repentance. That alone is what makes way for the "yes" of Christ's mercy and forgiveness.

Convention in Review

By Rev Ben Hollingsead (St. Paul's, Eden Valley)

Lutherans from all over the globe gathered in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for the 68th Synodical Convention of the Missouri Synod. Mr. Dan Goetz of Redeemer in St. Cloud and I were privileged to serve as the two delegates for the St. Cloud Circuit. The theme for the six-day Convention was "We Preach Christ Crucified!" (1st Corinthians 15:13). This message of Christ crucified and risen for sinners permeated our five days together from the Opening Divine Service Saturday evening in the sermon given by newly re-elected Synod President Matthew Harrison, to the influential essay "We Preach Christ Crucified-The Redemption of the World" presented by Dr. Juana Pohjola, the Bishop of the Evangelical Mission Diocese of Finland, and in the daily Catechism lessons from Pastor Peter Bender of Peace Lutheran Church in Sussex, WI. This regular spiritual nourishment for our souls strengthened us to conduct the necessary business of the Synodical Convention.

C.F.W. Walther (the first President of the LCMS), in the introduction to his work *Church Fellowship*, states that there is no true unity unless there is doctrinal unity and that we must never compromise God's Word. The delegates to this Convention had to make several difficult but necessary decisions to keep with the conviction of C.F.W Walther to not compromise on God's Word.

The first difficult decision we made was to formally recognize that the LCMS is no longer in fellowship with the Japan Lutheran Church (JLC.). Over the last decade, the Japan Lutheran Church has steadily moved toward rejecting the belief that the Holy Scripture is the final authority for the doctrine and practice of Christ's Church. The JLC, in 2019, rejected the authority of God's Word when they started ordaining women to serve as Pastors, which contradicts God's clear teaching in 1 Timothy 3: 1-13 & Titus 2:1-15 that God calls only men to do the duties of a Pastor. Over the past four years, President Harrison has ministered to the leadership of the JLC and firmly called them to repentance. After these failed attempts in 2021, President Harrison announced that the LCMS and JLC were no longer in fellowship. The resolution, 5-07, "To end altar and pulpit fellowship with the JLC," affirmed this decision formally. The Convention took time to pray for the JLC in hopes that they would repent, and if they did, we prayed that the LCMS would be ready to re-establish fellowship with them joyfully.

After ending fellowship with the JLC, the delegates joyfully voted to confirm that the Synod is officially in full fellowship with five new international Lutheran Church bodies. In

passing Resolutions 5-01 through 5-05, the LCMS officially recognized altar and pulpit fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Sudan & Sudan (ELCSS/S), The Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland (ELMDF), the Lutheran Church of Uganda (LCU), the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine (ELCU), and the Ceylon Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sri Lanka (CELC). After each resolution passed, the representing Bishop of each church body came forward, and the Convention sang the doxology to praise our Heavenly Father for true unity in the doctrine we share.

After addressing international fellowship matters, the Convention had the duty of addressing internal Synodical issues, namely matters regarding Concordia University Texas (CTX), doctrinal and ecclesiastical oversight of the Concordia Universities System (CUS), the Lord's Supper, technology in the church, and affirm the LCMS's position on a variety of social issues we are facing today.

The most contentious debates during the Convention came when floor committee seven that overseas resolutions and overtures regarding the Synod Concordia Universities Education, presented Resolutions 7-03 "To Call Concordia University Texas Leadership to Repentance," 7-04B "To Revise Bylaws to Revisit and Renew Relationship of Colleges and Universities with the Synod," and 7-05 "To Bring Accountability to Concordia Board of Regents and to Improve Doctrinal Fidelity and Amenability to Ecclesiastical Supervision."

Floor committee seven presented Resolution 7-03, "To Call Concordia University Texas Leadership to Repentance." The resolution follows the decision by CTX to separate itself from Synodical governance. Representatives from CTX, the LCMS Texas District, and other delegates made points against this motion. Rev. Dr. Scott R. Murray, chairman of floor committee seven and LCMS third vice-president, Christian Preus of the LCMS Board of Directors, the Presidents of Concordia Seward, Mequon/Ann Arbor, Irvine, Chicago, and St. Paul all spoke of how CTX is in open rebellion by breaking Synodical bylaws, trust with the Synod, and trust with fellow Concordia Universities. After the debate ended on resolution 7-03, the resolution passed with 716 votes out of 999 (71.67%).

Resolutions 7-04B, "To Revise Bylaws to Revisit and Renew Relationship of Colleges and Universities with the Synod," and 7-05, "To Bring Accountability to Concordia Board of Regents and to Improve Doctrinal Fidelity and Amenability to Ecclesiastical Supervision," were both passed by over 80%; this resolution gives the Synod Board of Directors more civil and doctrinal oversight of the CUS. Resolution 7-05 passed with 85.21% of the votes, and this is encouraging because the

resolution aims to reclaim a confessional Lutheran identity over and against the diversity, inclusion, & equity (DIE) agenda we have seen in the last decade. The resolution will allow for academic freedom while maintaining our confessional Lutheran identity. The passing of these three resolutions are victories for our Synod and for the CUS. We must continue to pray for LCMS leadership and the CUS as they implement this new oversight. We pray that CTX will repent and will remain in the Synod without the pains of legal action.

Finally, the Convention took stands to affirm in-person worship, closed communion, and biblical sexuality. We rejected the practice of online communion, and we rejected the neo-Marxist paradigm (often called wokeness) adopted by so many of our Western institutions. We approved resolutions to support the ministry for pro-life efforts and to combat human trafficking here in the United States.

There is still much work to do as a Synod, but we can be proud of the faithful work accomplished at the 68th Synodical Convention of the LCMS. As we walk together as a Synod in the next three years until our next Convention, we must continue to pray for our congregations and pastors to remain faithful to God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions.

Thank you again for the privilege you gave Dan and me to serve as your Circuit Delegates!

Book Review by Rev Joshua Reber

Rediscover the Issues Surrounding the 1974 Concordia Seminary Walkout edited by Ken Schurb (St. Louis, MO: CPH, 2023)

At Concordia St. Paul, I took a 16 week course covering all of church history. An entire week was dedicated to the question, "Did St. Augustine want to have sex?" We spent two weeks to cover the 1974 walkout and Seminex, implying that Seminex was twice as important as St. Augustine's sex life.

One of the assignments was to interview a rostered worker who was active during the walkout. One of the questions we were to ask was, "What good came out of the controversy?" My interviewee said, "Nothing. The only thing it did was divide people." It's a sentiment I've run into over and over again talking to those who remember the 70s. Many see the Battle for the Bible as simply a personality conflict (Preus vs. Tietjen, or maybe Lutherans for Racial Justice would frame it as the Norwegians oppressing the Germans.)

This book aims to discuss the theological issues surrounding the walkout; if you are looking for a retelling of the historical

events, you would be better served by a book like Paul Zimmerman's *A Seminary in Crisis*. Kurt Marquart's *Anatomy of an Explosion* is a less accessible (but by no means inferior) to this collection of essays by 11 authors with an introduction by Synod President Matthew Harrison.

Harrison's introduction identifies the key issue that we are dealing with today (think Concordia University Texas). Herman Sasse warned Missouri to shy away from Bad Boll and the German theologians; Harrison identifies what was at stake in these meetings: doctrines concerning the Bible, the church, and the Lutheran confession; and "the simple honesty of churchmen." The simple honesty of churchmen is at the heart of our current crises.

The first essay, written by Ken Schurb, addresses Gospel Reductionism. Gospel Reductionism is the golden thread in this book - it affects how we see what the Scriptures are, the authority they have, and how church fellowship is had (this last topic is handled fantastically by Cameron MacKenzie). Is the Bible authoritative because it's the Word of God, or does it have authority because of its saving power? It is the former; for a church body to maintain the saving power of the Scriptures, they must maintain the Bible is authoritative because of what it *is*, not because of what it *does*.

The book aims to be accessible to lay people with its discussion questions at the end and its (rather dry) rehashing of basic Lutheran doctrine (see Martin Noland's essay concerning the authority of Scripture and Armand Boehme's essay concerning the historicity of creation and the fall). Perhaps Noland's three citations of Wikipedia articles speak to the goal of making this accessible to the laity, but the irony was not lost on me as Noland appealed to the authority of Wikipedia while trying to convince me of the authority of Scripture.

Professional church workers will be well served by this volume, and perhaps a theologically trained board of elders could handle it. If anyone tries a study of this book in a congregation, I'd be interested in hearing the results - talking about Karl Barth (either Reformed or Lutheran) at length in Bible Study usually results in glazed eyes, but both Barths influenced the Missouri Synod today, whether we know it or not.

The book ends with an essay by John Pless highlighting the careers of the professors who walked out. Theological trajectories are good for us to track - what happens when we start emphasizing or denying a particular doctrine? The professors matured in theological liberalism, and I'm not afraid to say it - they apostatized from the true Christian faith. It'd be worthwhile for us to forecast the direction that our theology is headed, and if needed, by God's grace, we can do a course correction like the Missouri Synod of the 1970s.

Circuit News

Free Conference at Redeemer

Saturday, October 28th. The theme is Lutheran piety. Rev Dr Carl Beckwith (CTSFW Professor) and our own Rev David Buchs (Concordia, Fairhaven) will present. Reminder – the conference is “free” in the sense that the presenters are independent.

Rev David Milz (St. John’s, Kimball) Retires

We thank him for his 29 years of service, and pray for God’s blessings on him and St. John’s as they search for a pastor.

Rev Steve Klemp (Love of Christ, St. Cloud) takes call to Glendale, Wisconsin.

We wish him and St. John’s the best and pray for Love of Christ during this time of transition.

Missionary Jastram from Japan to present at Trinity, Sauk Rapids

September 7 at 7pm. Rumor has it there’ll be cookies and ice cream.

To include your congregational announcements, please email joshua.reber@ctsfw.edu.

Memes of Grace

