

The Letter of Concord

Concord Church - LCMS Project

Post Office Box 28205 3201 Hiss Ave.
Baltimore MD 21234 Concord LCMS@Aol.Com

<http://homepage.mac.com/signdovesf/> <http://hometown.aol.com/signdovesf/myhomepage/>

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Congregations of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, the precious Body of Christ,
selected brothers and sisters in the Faith

Beloved of the Lord;

May the Spirit of Truth and Righteousness fill you with Wisdom and Pure Love for all. This letter is nearly a year late. I wanted to see how some things turned out before I wrote again. Also I hoped the first letters might have helped move our beloved LCMS in a God pleasing and God serving direction. The WEB site: <http://homepage.mac.com/signdovesf/> contains earlier Letters of Concord and other materials, more will be added later.

use instead <http://hometown.aol.com/signdovesf/myhomepage/index.html>

The first Letters of Concord focused on relationships between Districts-Synod and Pastors-Teachers and Congregations. What stunned me about Dr. Klass's 1999 Report "Clergy Shortage Study" for the Board of Higher Education was that we were twice as bad as the other denominations he looked at, with so many unhappy ex-staff, deeply hurt families, congregations and schools. Before I return to that with possible solutions, and analysis of the causes, it raises another question.

Is our LCMS theology defective? Why, in the Church that prides itself on pure doctrine and practice of the Gospel, are we so much worse than others that teach and practice improperly? Klass's Report to Synod's leadership, to us all, has been ignored. I was puzzled about this for a long time. Theological position does not seem to be a controlling factor. Klass reported problems to strike without regard for the individual's or District's leanings one way or the other. Indeed those I personally know, are as far as I can tell, in the center and were cut down by Districts in the center or leaning left. I know only one exception.

The location of the problem is at the local church and official theology disputes and positions rarely create and determine internal church conflicts. I have not been around from the beginning of Synod, though my family dates to then. It does seem that internal church conflicts leading to loss of Pastors and Teachers radically escalated since the 1960s. Since other denominations have not been affected as we have, the causes must lie in what occurred inside the LCMS.

Some will say it is the rise of the full time District Presidents and bureaucracy, but other denominations have them too. Local churches don't pay any more attention to the DP than they do to LCMS Theology most of the time. The source of the problems must lay at the congregational level. Long ago in some seminar I learned that the causes of problems lay in 3 areas (ranking from the least likely to most) 1 Wrong person in the job, 2 Poor training so people did not know what to do, 3 Bad organizational structure that made it impossible for normal people doing their normal best to succeed. The seminar also said usually groups misidentify the cause of conflict and think the person is the problem when it is usually the structure that designed in conflict. I am sure that will strike a cord with many, who were in situations where no one could succeed. Many LCMS congregations changed their constitutions since 1960 along a common pattern. Our constitutions are not like what we used to have. They are not like those in other churches. For a long time, I collected congregational constitutions.

You could be asking why if I am correct are not more congregations troubled. I expect it is because congregations don't pay much more attention to their constitutions than they do to the DP or LCMS. As people do in work settings with bad structures they work around them. However when problem makers use the "rules" for control, they set up fall guys. Pastors, teachers, leaders get burned and are unable to deal with the problems, because the rules won't permit it. Bad organizational structure encourages the wrong people to seek to make use of positions for themselves.

Some will claim that it was the loss of the monthly congregational meeting that created the problem, others will point to Pastors who try to be in charge. There is something to be said for both, but other denominations are like that and do not have the problems we have. My first congregation had a constitution we never paid attention to and got along fine. My second was deeply troubled and had a strange constitution. Many urged me to get rid of certain leaders, but I could not see that was the right thing for a Pastor to do, or been an improvement. The constitution would put anyone in the mire. David's situation with King Saul also instructed me. David was already anointed, knew Saul had been rejected, but refused to strike even in self defense. He would not take over the Lord's business. No one or group can or should control God's Church even in His name to His glory. Jesus is the Head, we must make room for His Spirit to lead.

It is the word "Control" and the effort to write rules that support good control, that I believe lay at the root of many of our Congregational, District and Synodical problems. I do not think and suspect others do not think, changing who is in control will "solve" anything. I think that is why so many in Synod seem "on the fence" uninvolved in the struggles. Caiaphas and Annas were very dedicated men of God in their own opinion. They did what they felt necessary to control the direction of God's people for God's glory. Their motives were excellent. They were as fine as the best of our leaders. They thought they knew God's will and exercised the power of their office. Their situation required them to exercise discretion according to their best wisdom, but they were untouched by the Spirit's Wisdom.

Then and today, leaders use the "rules" to conceal their actions and motives to keep from disturbing the "faithful" and ultimately fool themselves. They set up rules so the right people play inside and those prayerfully considered unworthy are relegated outside. We hear people complaining from the outside making jarring cries and nice polite gracious leaders on the inside. We are moved to support tranquility. We are not allowed to learn what leaders determine is "confidential". Confidentiality has a necessary place. It is to protect the innocent from harm and even the guilty from unjust punishment. Our U.S. Judicial system, follows standard practice, accusations must be publicly made, by an accuser, the accused has the right to know who is the accuser and see the evidence, he must have the opportunity to present his defense and the decision is to be made on the basis of the evidence. Synod and District rules do not permit that, and Congregations follow the example.

I work in a correctional setting under strict control, required to obey orders immediately without question. I exercise control with authority. "Control" is legitimate, necessary in this life. God placed obedience in the Ten Commandments. When control is concealed with secret reasons, without apparent regard for Truth, Righteousness, Love, the Spirit of Christ, contrary to clear words of Scripture and Doctrine, disharmony is created, conflict ensues. People then seek positions in order to control by the ways the rules support, partizan politics and deception.

In the Church of Jesus Christ the purpose of investigation of wrongdoing is not punishment but healing, restoration, reconciliation to the glory of God. The Church exists for the Gospel of Divine Love, Forgiveness, Salvation won on the Cross by the blood of Jesus, who paid the ultimate penalty for our sins and gives us the high honor of passing that love, forgiveness on to our erring brothers and sisters. Have you seen this in the LCMS? I am a Correctional Chaplain. I read about "Restorative Justice" and "Dispute Reconciliation". Synod adopted some of that for the "Dispute Reconciliation Process". We

in our wisdom modified the recommendations. We decided everything must be confidential and unrecorded, "Reconcilers" hand picked. They have no published principles or precedents. Those who prefer to continue the conflict rather than make peace, have their words and actions remain confidential. The other party may be forced to abjectly surrender or "make a scene", without any evidence for appeal because there was no evidence.

A Pastor having trouble in his congregation once asked me for counsel. He had been "sharing the love of God, living in the freedom of the Gospel". In that spirit, he had been sleeping with his secretary and told his adult Bible Class. When I mentioned the Commandment about adultery, he responded that was Old Testament Law. The DP tried to smooth things over with the congregation but that didn't last. He served vacancies until a nice church came available. I do not know if he continued to share the love of God. He is also the best friend of the following DP.

We were taught at seminary the Third use of the Law was unlutheran, contrary to the freedom of the Gospel. It was said to turn the Gospel into a new Law, by using the Scripture as a "Guide" on how to live a God pleasing life. We were taught that was to restrict the Spirit of Love and forgiveness. I was surprised later when I found a section in the Lutheran Book of Concord titled the Third Use of the Law and learned it was ancient orthodox teaching everywhere. Pascal in the 1600s wrote a series of letters about a similar error of the Jesuits. They had influence, power, in the royal courts and church. They taught, sin had to be deliberate willful opposition to what the person knew to be God's will. Killing didn't violate the command about murder unless the person intended to commit "the sin of murder". In addition anything the person thought was adequate for repentance was all that was needed. If a man stole money, it was enough if he thought it was enough, to say he was sorry and keep the money. If he didn't intend to "sin", it wasn't even sin! The Pope censured the Jesuit's teachings and they changed their ways.

How do we handle problems? I am not impressed by the power of leaders, organizational structures to bring peace by force. I do have a growing appreciation of the power of loving example and the influence of just rules. Where do we see examples of compassion for those hurt, reaching out to the wounded among us to draw them back in the Spirit of Christ? Where do we see rules promoting justice, requiring complaint be openly made about identifiable error in a way that promotes amendment and restoration? The example we see in Synod and District is using regulations to conceal, and support positions of power. Have you ever heard of our leaders apologizing and repenting, amending - making it up to people who have been hurt? The Roman Bishops have. They actually report increased giving this year. Our leaders give the impression they are sinless and infallible.

This situation is very dangerous for the continuation of the LCMS. We have literally thousands of people across the country burnt, angry, bitter at what has happened to them, their families and congregations. Other denominations are not like this! I know men who would be excellent pastors, they are in effect serving as such now in vacancies. They could seek to be roistered official Pastors but they will not. I know, Synodically trained teachers happily serving in RC Schools, Pastors and Congregations looking for a more Christian denomination. More people have left ministries early than have retired in the last 10 years, 1800+. A reported 300+ were on Candidate Status without being put out on call lists.

This has been a long painful recounting of problems. I was told long ago there is no sense in talking about what is wrong unless you have ideas for improvement. First and foremost, we need to repent, confess to God we have brought shame upon His Glory. We are unworthy sinners. We have walked by hurting brothers and sisters. We have been conceited about our own excellence and have forgotten we also are by nature lost sinners. We need to do this both as individuals and as Synod in both personal informal conversation and formal events (there are formats and precedence). We need to reach out

and restore those who are hurting even if they are not perfect. The mercy we give is the measure of the mercy we will receive. Klass's report detailed the pain inflicted by uncaring brothers in ministry. You might say you haven't done anything wrong. Have you done anything right? Does your hurting brother know you care and are working on his behalf, Christ's behalf, for reconciliation? Or are you going to pray in Jerusalem walking by on the other side of the road?

On a Congregational level, the single most important thing I can think of, is to have open elections, without back room control. I have a friend who is President of a Catholic Parish Council, member of a Board for the Diocese and a colleague who is a Nun. I assumed the Priest controlled the parish. They were appalled. It was beyond their belief that a Priest would control the council or who was elected to it. Our rules opened the door for control from the back room, it is used! It may look messy to hash things out in front of the congregation, but it is their Church. Nothing makes people more likely to leave than back room dealings. There is no reason for congregations to stay in Synod, if Synod is controlled from the back room. As a child I learned election lists with one person for each position were the way Dictators operated. It still smells bad.

On the District and Synodical level, it is worth remembering who crucified Jesus. Bad people, or fine Religious leaders? We are all by nature sinners. Pride is sin. It goes before a fall. Luther, Chemnitz, Walther, Pieper all agreed it was possible to go to hell even if you believed the correct doctrine. Orthodox believe and act correctly. Heterodox are imperfect Christians. Both will be in the Heavenly courts. The unbelievers and the apostate will not be there. The very meaning of the word "hypocrite" includes the fact of correct belief. If the LCMS affirms correct doctrine and uses that to justify unchristian action, it is an Apostate Organization, outside the Christian Church. Just imagine looking on Catholics, Baptists, Pentecostals and other heterodox inside, from the outside with the heathen.

Sam and Frodo went off on a foolish quest. Pascal and Catherine of Sienna wrote letters about entrenched powers in the Church. God blessed and used them to bring amendment to the Church. You can play it safe. Look out for yourself. Will God bless your Congregation and Ministry, will He welcome you into eternal bliss? The "foolish man" in Matt. 7 "believed".

We are Heralds of God to announce His Victory. We are Soldiers of God with weapons of Truth and Love. We are the hands of Love. If we really are a Gospel centered Church, it is not possible for us to have a very large number of hurting people and congregations. Have we forgotten what we are about? Pass this letter on (I only have 20% of Synod's churches on my mailing list) especially give it to any who left in pain. I hope to comfort and strengthen them. They are not alone, forgotten, despised. If you are looking for a Pastor or Teacher, the 2000 who left are the largest source of trained Lutheran staff. Most trained as Pastors, that I know, are earning less now than the average Pastor. If you want, send a tax deductible gift to "Concord Church - LCMS Project". It will help get the message out to more. Send me names to add to the mailing list.

May the Lord of the Church pour out upon us His Spirit of Wisdom, discernment, courage, compassion for the hurt and lost, obedience and zeal. May our lives bring Him glory. "We will all stand before the judgment seat of God. "Let us . . . resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another. Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual up building." Rom. 14.

In Nomine Jesu

Rev. Stephen H. Funck



Ezk. 3:16ff

Soli Deo Gloria

He died for all, so that those who live might
live no longer for themselves, but for him who died
and was raised for them. 2 Cor. 5:15

"LCMS Commission Exonerates Benke"

In its latest ruling (<http://lcms.org/ccm/min012003.pdf>) the LCMS Commission on Constitutional Matters, (CCM) has exonerated Atlantic District President David Benke. Benke was suspended for participating in a prayer service with pagans (Sikhs, Hindus, etc.) in Yankee Stadium the week after 9/11.

The Commission simply ruled that a member of Synod cannot be charged if he is acting with the permission of his supervisor. The CCM also repeated its new interpretation of the LCMS Constitution that a President of the LCMS cannot be charged under By-Law 2.27 while he is in office.

In other words, because Benke acted with Kieschnick's permission he is innocent and Kieschnick can't be charged.

The LCMS is now given a clear understanding of how much authority is in the LCMS President's Office. President Kieschnick has the authority to appoint those who sit on the CCM in order to gain favorable rulings. He also has the authority to appoint all Floor Committee chairmen.

The concentration of power in the LCMS Presidency means that virtually everything is decided directly or indirectly at the Convention by the election of the President.

call for comments on drp

#1 secrecy in later stages,

2 no discipline for reconcilers

power to evade req w/o risk

No means of oversight statistical foundation

DRP totally dependant on DP w/o independant status appointed controlled &

philosophical

non professional dealing with theological edicts

w/o judgment even when scripture doctrine calls for it

refusal to recognize Satan is alive and assulting the church

refusal to acknowledge S&D religious leaders can be evil tools of Satan

seek their own power & position

congregational constitutions 30 years ago foundational changes

open door clique control congregation & pastor sandwich detailed anti spirit specific Rule of St

Benedict

Luke 12: 45 But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk.

46 The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

47 "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows.

48 But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

49 "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!

50 But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!

51 Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.