

The Letter of Concord

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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. In the last letter I suggested that the changes since 1960 in congregational constitutions lead to an increase in conflict between Pastors and Congregations and within Congregations. I feel the present conflicts in Synod are deeply affected, indeed basically have been created by changes in the Synodical Constitution since 1960. In large bureaucratic structures it is very tricky to write rules and make changes that actually bring about improvement without creating new if not worse problems elsewhere. If Satan wants to destroy (and he does) a frontal assault usually is ineffective. He most effectively leads us to make minor improvements until we are turned around heading in the wrong direction.

The LCMS had missions and seminaries in India and China directed by a man and his secretary-daughter from a room in his home. We expanded into Philippines, Ceylon, Japan, Hong Kong Macao, Taiwan, New Guinea, hundreds of missionaries, with an office of 4. One of whom, my grandfather, O. H. Schmidt, spent 1/3 of his time overseas and 1/3 traveling the US promoting missions. All of the great growth in LCMS expansion across this country came before we had large numbers of full time leaders for support and direction.

We all have heard of "Murphy's Laws". There are many others about bureaucratic growth and protection of personal interest. We are by nature sinful. All people look out for their own interests and interpret their actions as being "really" for the good of the whole. If the rules promote conflict, in time all the appeals to the Love of God and the Spirit of Christ will be brought to failure by our human realities. That is why rule changes have to be well thought out to avoid unpleasant results. Since the problems always involve people, the normal solution is to eliminate the "people who are wrong" which usually means the ones easiest to cast off - guilty or not. One of Murphy's Laws should be about the preference for the quick solution that can't help.

An aside: The US Supreme Court ruled around 1960 that a man could not be confined for being inebriated. The end result is it became legal to be a heroin addict. Now an addict cannot be required to be in treatment unless jailed as a criminal. Addiction and crime skyrocketed. They also ruled that it was wrong to use the mentally ill to work in the institutions without pay. The end result it was too expensive keep the mentally ill in hospitals. Before the rulings it was possible to require alcoholics and addicts to be in treatment programs. The cooks, grounds keepers, etc. were trained as occupational therapists. Mental Hospital patients went from 500,000 to 50,000 and now there are over 400,000 mentally ill in jails and prisons without treatment, at higher cost. Rulings that seemed wise created disaster. No one knows how to reverse the situation.

Chemnitz around 1600 wrote a book for use by superintendents in the twice a year visitation of pastors in a question and answer style like Luther's Small Catechism. It is sold by CPH as "Ministry, Word, and Sacraments, An Enchiridion". Can you imagine twice a year, District leaders sitting down face to face with each Pastor to help him develop in Ministerial understanding and ability. Just think how many problems would be avoided, careers saved. The old Statistical Reports for the Districts were very detailed about the actual work the pastor and church were doing.

In our structure, theology, the members own the Congregation and the Congregations own the Synod. The Synod creates, owns, the Districts as the way to have contact with the Congregations. Structures, in the social realities of this age and society, are unable to enforce denominational rules. People move to another denomination. Some old big denominations have 10% of their old membership. Even the Roman Catholics have gone to great lengths to empower their membership. The result, many feel they, not the Priest or Bishop, run their parish and have little inclination to “obey” any Pope. The RC reported an increase in membership and money last year. The way it feels in the pew apparently is not the way it sounds in the media.

In our structure, as it has developed, it often appears that Districts manage, own, the Congregations and Pastors. Also that Districts are independent self governing bodies. In reality, it is congregations who own Districts but indirectly through their ownership of Synod. There is a locked in power struggle between District on one side and Synod and congregation on other sides. Pastors are under the power of the District. Just electing the “right” people will do no current or long term good, if the foundations of the conflict are not addressed. If the basement leaks praying won’t help, unless you want drought.

Several other factors add to the discord within our Synod, to the discredit of the Gospel of reconciliation and the Good News of Peace in Christ. Rules have been set up to give the appearance of Peace, to limit the possibility of open conflict. However conflict in the open can be settled (or at least the stubborn lover of conflict unmasked) while conflict driven into the shadows only abides. Striving for the appearance of Peace makes real Peace unobtainable. If we elect a Board of Directors, Synodical President and District Presidents all of the same mind and they force the Appearance of Peace by stifling all dissent, we will just lead to the descent of the LCMS into the abyss of self destruction.

The way we implemented the DRP, Dispute Resolution Process, made real reconciliation of serious disputes unlikely. Everything is secret, the time of process is in actually very limited. Evidence is no weightier than hearsay. Deception, lies cannot be uncovered. The Process works to the advantage of the powers that be that know the game. No evidence, no transcript, no rules. Anything the good people want goes. It is a recipe for ongoing conflict or victory for the bully. The rules are fine for initial conversations among people abiding in the Spirit of Christ. Unfortunately when serious problems occur, one or both are distant from that Spirit. When there is an appeal, if not before, matter must be put on record, names and events revealed (unnamed people with secret complaints cannot be allowed), documentary evidence, transcripts made (I never said that). Records need to be kept, revealing which reconcilers settle matters and which just lead to further bitterness. There is a Theological / Philosophical problem at the core. We set up the DRP to be blind to sinfulness of our nature and that Satan is assaulting the people of God. The DRP acts as if everyone wants to be nice.

The way we implement the office of the LCMS President creates conflict. He has amazing power. Among them, the LCMS President appoints those who sit on the Commission on Constitutional Matters, thus has influence to gain favorable rulings. He also appoints all Floor Committee chairmen, thus controls what is brought to the convention floor. He controls what resolutions are published in the convention workbook, shaping the understanding and knowledge of the delegates before they come. 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. The LCMS President has more real power than the Pope! Canon Law places the Roman Pontiff under some strict limitations. He has more power than the US President. “Power corrupts” and the use of power is antagonistic to peace in the Spirit of Christ.

The LCMS Board of Directors has the highest authority, over everything outside the Voting Convention. As the news media often shows, BODs are usually very reluctant to act in opposition to the leader/CEO unless forced by gross circumstances. Usually leaders cover for one another. I am personally aware of a situation where a three District President Appeal Board found for another DP when he had ruled on a situation in which he was personally involved. The DPs saw nothing wrong with their fellow DP’s action even though he violated the clear words of the LCMS Constitution and the standard ethic of society.

I would suggest: that the CCM and CTCR, be made elected lifetime positions to remove them from political influence (a phase in time is needed so one convention does not have total control); that Floor Chairman be selected some other way, that rule be established that any identical resolution passed by 10 Congregations be printed in the Workbook as is, that any resolution passed by a District be presented to the floor of the Convention as is. We need a competent, DRP free from "Political influence." The proposals are ideas for consideration not finished products.

The 35 districts are too many for close identification with Synod as a whole and as a group jealous of their joint independence and separation from Synodical direction and control. Districts both to the right and left cooperate to protect their "turf" vs. Synod. Synodical leadership faces a large fairly united District leadership and all are stymied. Yet many Districts have too many Congregations and Pastors to know and understand. Districts are both too many and too large. That is why many have subdivided themselves. In my District we have three full time area directors. I must admit that I have never heard of any problem with congregation or pastor that was solved or helped by one of them. I am not sure that is because they are inept or if it is not part of their "job description". At any rate they could so assist, be trained how and supervised to do so.

Following is an idea I think would foster unity and reduce conflict: Congregations gathered into circuits and a circuit counselor (historically in the LCMS informally called "bishop") are basic in any structure. A full time "superintendent" for 5 or 6 circuits would visit each Pastor and Church each year (since he is actually to assist maybe better called "auxiliary bishop"). The 100+ such men, supported by 6 National area offices each with a Synodical VP would make a team working on identical projects - supporting the local churches and pastors while the VP supports them on Synod's behalf. A Council of those 6 plus a VP For Missions, a VP for BHE, First VP and President total 10, a good number around a table. The total involved is about what we have, now but with 6 not 35 offices (Since "superintendents" would do most of their work on the road - internet, laptop and teleconference would be their office). The 100 would be unable to foment rebellion and the 9 National VP's would have the clout needed to keep a Synodical President in check.

I am sure there are other ways to "solve" the issues. The most popular and most likely is just ignore it and pray. God will not be impressed by such "Faith". We can not "tempt God" by designing a constitution that permits deception and abuse of power and then pray to God to prevent natural sinners from acting naturally. "Simul justus et peccator" is true even for Church leaders. The Spirit is given to the Church as a whole. Scripture, Doctrine and History show that leaders in power are often wrong and must be corrected, reformed, by those outside of power. Leaders lead the people into evil. The people as well as the leaders are punished for the people are responsible for following. "People get the leaders they desire."

Yes I know this does not "solve or cure" our conflict. There are issues that must be faced and resolved. Satan and our human nature are using our structural weakness to shield and foster the warfare that is plaguing us to grave injury of our witness and our existence. We must set up a stable foundation that supports a structure that promotes unity and is conducive to peace. We are Heralds of God to announce His Victory. Luke 12: 47f "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. 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." Do you think the Head of the Church judges us to be the wonderful Church, we think we are? It may be that those defective denominations beneath us, will be judged more faithful to the Gospel of reconciling love than we will be.

One of the greatest of our ongoing tragedies is the unusually large number of people who have left the called staff rosters. Reports often suggest that it is the effective Pastor or Teacher who is eliminated. As one Pastor wrote me "competence, at times, seems a bit threatening". We have a shortage of pastors and teachers because many have been driven away. If you are looking for someone they are all around. If you know of someone who was wounded tell him about a fellow with a name of some prominence in LCMS circles, Marxhausen. He is working with a group to support such people and hopefully restore them. "If Shepherds are searching for lost SHEEP, Who is looking for lost SHEPHERDS? We Are!" at <http://pastorinresidence.net>.

If you want, send a tax deductible gift to "Concord Church - LCMS Project". It will help get the message out to more. Pass this on to others and send me names to add to the mailing list. The earlier letters and many other items are on the Web site.

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