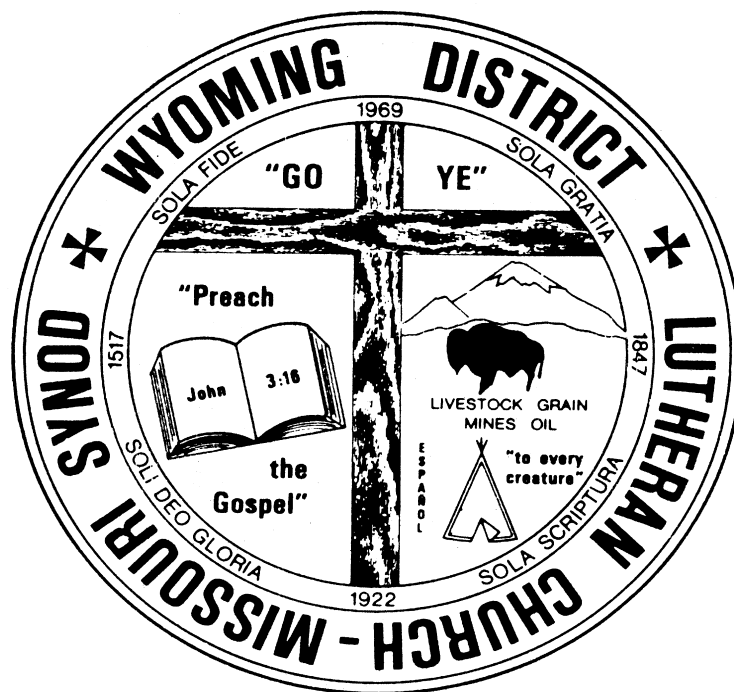


21st Convention
WYOMING DISTRICT
of the
LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

“Spiritual Warfare”



2025 CONVENTION PROCEEDINGS

May 1-3, 2025 • Casper, Wyoming

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Part 1

Convention Information

CONVENTION PERSONNEL

CONVENTION CHAIRMAN

Rev. John Hill, President
Wyoming District - LCMS

CONVENTION MANAGER

Mr. Jeff Snyder, Casper

CONVENTION PAGES

Mr. David Preus, Casper
Mr. Bridger Allred, Casper
Mr. Noah Waterbury, Casper

CONVENTION PLANNING COMMITTEE

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Rev. Jonathan Lange, Evanston
Rev. Darrell Debowey, Laramie
Rev. Paul Cain, Sheridan
Rev. Ted Bourret, Potter
Mr. Jeff Snyder, Casper

REGISTRATION AND CREDENTIALS

Mrs. Tiffany Hoff, Casper
Rev. Darrell Debowey, Laramie

HOST CONGREGATION

Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
1240 S. Missouri
Casper, WY 82609
Rev. Jon C. Olson

SYNODICAL REPRESENTATIVES

Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison, President
The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod

CONVENTION PARLIAMENTARIAN

Rev. Dr. Jamison Hardy, President
Concordia University System

RESOLUTIONS COMMITTEE

Rev. Paul Cain, Sheridan
Rev. Jeffery Grams, Scottsbluff
Rev. Patrick Baldwin, Rawlins
Rev. Jacob Benson, Lovell
Mr. Nevin Lawrence, Torrington
Mr. Chance Hall, Bridgeport
Mr. Brian Joachim, Green River
Mr. Jerry Goetsch, Cheyenne
Mr. Nathanael Hahn, Casper

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

Rev. Dan Holthus, Casper
Rev. Darren Pflughoeft, Lusk
Rev. Travis Sherman, Gordon
Mr. Ken Steffens, Sidney
Mr. Landis Benson, Worland

REVIEW COMMITTEE #1

BOD/PASTORS CONFERENCE MINUTES

Rev. Travis Berg, Lander
Rev. Zachary Viggers, Gillette
Mr. Joe Cook, Casper
Mr. Landis Benson, Worland

REVIEW COMMITTEE #2

CMS/CCS MINUTES

Rev. John Preus, Cheyenne
Rev. Allan Wierschke, Hay Springs
Mr. Gregory Schmall, Bayard
Mr. Dylan Ohman, Laramie

ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

Rev. Richard Neugebauer, Gering
Rev. Allan Wierschke, Hay Springs
Mr. Bob Berry, Cody
Mr. Ben Backus, Scottsbluff

THE WYOMING DISTRICT

DISTRICT STAFF

Rev. John Hill, District President
Mr. Jeff Snyder, Business Manager/LCEF VP
Mrs. Tiffany Hoff, Executive Assistant

HONORARY DISTRICT PRESIDENTS

Rev. Richard Boche, Cheyenne
Rev. Dr. Ron Garwood, Cody

OFFICERS OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH - MISSOURI SYNOD

Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison
Rev. Peter K. Lange
Rev. Benjamin T. Ball
Rev. Dr. Scott R. Murray
Rev. Nabil S. Nour
Rev. Christopher Esget
Rev. Dr. John C. Wohlrabe Jr.
Rev. Dr. John W. Sias

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First Vice-President
Second Vice-President
Third Vice-President
Fourth Vice-President
Fifth Vice-President
Sixth Vice-President
Secretary

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Rev. Paul Cain, Sheridan
Rev. Jonathan Lange, Evanston
Rev. Ted Bourret, Potter
Rev. Darrell Debowey, Laramie
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Rev. Kenneth Mars, Cody
Mr. Steve Coniglio, Riverton
Mr. Blake Pieper, Hay Springs
Mr. Marty Finch, Casper

President
First Vice-President
Second Vice-President
Third Vice-President
Secretary
Treasurer
Pastor-at-large
Commissioned Member
Lay Member
Lay Member

CIRCUIT VISITORS

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Rev. Scott Firminhac, Torrington
Rev. Jon C. Olson, Casper
Rev. Jared Korb, Worland
Rev. Daniel Mulholland, Fort Bridger
Rev. Joshua Scheer, Cheyenne

Chimney Rock Circuit
Pine Ridge Circuit
Powder River Circuit
Yellowstone Circuit
Headwaters Circuit
High Plains Circuit

COMMISSION ON MISSION SERVICES

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Rev. Patrick Baldwin, Rawlins
Mr. Chuck Hall, Cheyenne
Mr. Larry Rice, Glenrock
Mrs. Terri Denniston, Torrington
Rev. Patrick Baldwin, Rawlins
Rev. Paul Cain, Sheridan

Chairman
Chairman-Elect
Campus Missions
Ethnic Missions
LWML District President
Missions Support
CMS Advisor

COMMISSION ON CONGREGATIONAL SERVICES

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Vacant
Mr. Josh Witkop, Casper
Rev. Jon C. Olson, Casper
Mr. Jeff Snyder, Casper
Rev. Jonathan Lange, Evanston
Rev. Joshua Scheer, Cheyenne
Rev. Richard Mueller, Alliance
Rev. Zachary Viggers, Gillette
Rev. Jonathan Lange, Evanston

Chairman
Chairman-Elect
Adult Ministry/Leadership
Evangelism
LCEF
Marriage, Life, & Family
Stewardship
Student Aid & Recruitment
Youth/Outdoor Ministry
CCS Advisor

DISTRICT RECONCILERS

Rev. Kenneth Mars, Cody
Rev. Jon C. Olson, Casper
Mr. Ronald Mischnick, Alliance
Mr. Kyle Rice, Casper

MEMORIAL LIBRARY

Mr. Ken Temme, Casper
Mrs. Tera Rice, Glenrock
Rev. John Hill, Casper

ARCHIVIST

Mrs. Tera Rice, Glenrock

DISTRICT LEGAL CONSULTANT

Mr. Larry Harrington, Casper (outgoing)

CONSTITUTIONS CHAIRMAN

Rev. Jonathan Lange, Evanston

MINISTERIAL GROWTH AND SUPPORT (CONTINUING EDUCATION)

Rev. Mark Mumme, Laramie

ROSTER OF VOTING LAY DELEGATES

<u>CONGREGATION</u>	<u>LAY DELEGATE</u>	<u>ALTERNATE LAY DELEGATE</u>
Chimney Rock Circuit #1		
Mount Calvary, Bayard**	Gregory Schmall	John Schmall
St. Paul's, Bridgeport	Chance Hall	
Zion, Chappell**	Brayden Neustel	
Faith, Gering	Keegan Harkins	Mike Sindt
Salem, Gurley**	<i>See St. Paul's, Potter</i>	
St. Paul's, Potter**	Robert Hilpert	Stephen Geu
St. James, Scottsbluff**	<i>See Mt. Calvary, Bayard</i>	
St. John's, Scottsbluff	Ben Backus	
St. Paul's, Sidney**	<i>See St. Paul's, Potter</i>	
Trinity, Sidney**	<i>See Zion, Chappell</i>	
Pine Ridge Circuit #2		
Immanuel, Alliance	Ronald Brown	Timothy Narjes
Our Savior's, Chadron**	<i>See Grace, Gordon</i>	
Bethlehem, Crawford**	Edward (Buzz) Tollman	Gary Witt
Grace, Gordon	Barb Schaer	Ben Schaer
Redeemer, Harrison**	<i>See Bethlehem, Crawford</i>	
Zion, Hay Springs**	<i>See St. Paul, Rushville</i>	
St. Paul's, Lusk		
Trinity, Morrill**	<i>See Our Savior, Torrington</i>	
Our Savior, Torrington**	Nevin Lawrence	Rick Arntt
St. Paul, Rushville**	Jennifer Fiscus	
Powder River Circuit #3		
Prince of Peace, Buffalo		
Mount Hope, Casper	Joe Cook	
Trinity, Casper	Josh Witkop	
Zion, Douglas**	Allen Gorrel	
Trinity, Gillette	Thomas Shepherd	
Our Redeemer, Glenrock**	<i>See Zion, Douglas</i>	
Bethlehem, Moorcroft**	David Wagner	
Immanuel, Sheridan	Scott VanDorsten	Justin Carlson
Mt. Calvary, Sundance**	<i>See Bethlehem, Moorcroft</i>	

Multi-congregational parishes have only **one lay vote and **one** pastoral vote.

† Indicates that the Alternate Lay Delegate served as the Voting Delegate for said Congregation

A solid line through a name indicates that the lay delegate did not attend Convention.

CONGREGATION**LAY DELEGATE****ALTERNATE LAY DELEGATE****Yellowstone Circuit #4**

Christ the King, Cody	Bob Berry	Rick Smiley
Zion, Emblem		
Grace, Greybull	John Olin	
St. John's, Lovell	Ralph Fink	
Immanuel, Powell	Morgon Grover	August Brandt
St. Paul's, Thermopolis	John Kissel	Jeff Dittmer
St. Luke's, Worland	Richard Scott	Landis Benson †

Headwaters Circuit #5

Mt. Calvary, Dubois	Susanna Gehrt	
Christ Our Savior, Star Valley**	Steve Trogden	Ron Campbell
Our Saviour, Evanston**	<i>See St. Paul, Kemmerer</i>	
Shepherd of the Valley, Ft. Bridger	Chuck Robbins	
Emmanuel, Green River**	Brian Joachim	Paul Sprick
Redeemer, Jackson**	<i>See Christ Our Savior, Star Valley</i>	
St. Paul's, Kemmerer**	Brandon Theule	Cris Hopkin
Bethel, Lander	Jim Luchsinger	
Peace, Marbleton**	Rick McCaslin	Zachary Heward
Our Savior's, Pinedale**	<i>See Peace, Marbleton</i>	
Christ, Rawlins	Leslie Schmidt	Steven Young
Trinity, Riverton	Scott Christensen	
Trinity, Rock Springs	<i>See Emmanuel, Green River</i>	
Platte Valley, Saratoga		

High Plains Circuit #6

Immanuel, Burns**	Paul Mistarka	
King of Glory, Cheyenne	Matt Huckfeldt	
Our Savior, Cheyenne	Jeremy Goetsch	Merle Ziegelman
Trinity, Cheyenne	Kenneth Eppich	
St. John's, Kimball**	<i>See Immanuel, Burns</i>	
St. Andrew's, Laramie	Dylan Ohman	
Zion, Laramie	Ronald Christensen	
Grace, Pine Bluffs**	<i>See Zion, Grover</i>	
Trinity, Wheatland		
Zion, Grover, CO**	Mark Weisbrook	

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† Indicates that the Alternate Lay Delegate served as the Voting Delegate for said Congregation

A solid line through a name indicates that the lay delegate did not attend Convention.

ROSTER OF VOTING PASTORAL DELEGATES

<u>CONGREGATION</u>	<u>PASTORAL DELEGATE</u>	<u>ALTERNATE</u>
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Chimney Rock Circuit #1

Mount Calvary, Bayard**	Rev. George Naylor
St. Paul's, Bridgeport	Rev. Peter Preus
Zion, Chappell**	Rev. Neil Carlson
Faith, Gering	Rev. Richard Neugebauer
Salem, Gurley**	<i>See St. Paul, Potter</i>
St. Paul's, Potter**	Rev. Ted Bourret
St. James, Scottsbluff**	<i>See Mt. Calvary, Bayard</i>
St. John's, Scottsbluff	Rev. Jeffery Grams
St. Paul's, Sidney	<i>See St. Paul, Potter</i>
Trinity, Sidney**	<i>See Zion, Chappell</i>

Pine Ridge Circuit #2

Immanuel, Alliance	Rev. Richard Mueller
Our Savior's, Chadron	<i>See Grace, Gordon</i>
Bethlehem, Crawford**	<i>Vacant</i>
Grace, Gordon	Rev. Travis Sherman
Redeemer, Harrison**	<i>See Bethlehem, Crawford</i>
Zion, Hay Springs**	<i>See St. Paul, Rushville</i>
St. Paul's, Lusk	Rev. Darren Pflughoeft
Trinity, Morrill	<i>See Our Savior, Torrington</i>
Our Savior, Torrington	Rev. Scott Firminhac
St. Paul, Rushville**	Rev. Allan Wierschke

Powder River Circuit #3

Prince of Peace, Buffalo	Rev. Roger Mullet
Mount Hope, Casper	Rev. Andrew Richard
Trinity, Casper	Rev. Jon Olson
Zion, Douglas**	Rev. Jonathan Durkopp
Trinity, Gillette	Rev. Zachary Viggers
Our Redeemer, Glenrock**	<i>See Zion, Douglas</i>
Bethlehem, Moorcroft**	Rev. Norman Wacker
Immanuel, Sheridan	Rev. Paul Cain
Mt. Calvary, Sundance**	<i>See Bethlehem, Moorcroft</i>

Multi-congregational parishes have only **one lay vote and **one** pastoral vote.

† Indicates that the Alternate Pastoral Delegate served as the Voting Delegate for said Congregation

A solid line through a name indicates that the lay delegate did not attend Convention.

CONGREGATION**PASTORAL DELEGATE****ALTERNATE****Yellowstone Circuit #4**

Christ the King, Cody	Rev. Kenneth Mars	
Zion, Emblem	<i>Vacant</i>	
Grace, Greybull	<i>Vacant</i>	
St. John's, Lovell	Rev. Jacob Benson	
Immanuel, Powell	Rev. Daniel Harrington	
St. Paul's, Thermopolis	Rev. Samuel Needham	
St. Luke's, Worland	Rev. Jared Korb	

Headwaters Circuit #5

Mt. Calvary, Dubois	Rev. Gregory Sonnenschein	
Christ Our Savior, Star Valley**	Rev. David Bott	
Our Saviour, Evanston**	<i>See St. Paul, Kemmerer</i>	
Shepherd of the Valley, Ft. Bridger	Rev. Daniel Mulholland	
Emmanuel, Green River**	Rev. Andrew Hill	
Redeemer, Jackson**	<i>See Christ Our Savior, Star Valley</i>	
St. Paul's, Kemmerer**	Rev. Jonathan Lange	
Bethel, Lander	Rev. Travis Berg	
Peace, Marbleton**	<i>See Our Savior, Pinedale</i>	
Our Savior's, Pinedale**	<i>Vacant</i>	
Christ, Rawlins	Rev. Patrick Baldwin	
Trinity, Riverton	Rev. Stephen Kieser	
Trinity, Rock Springs**	<i>See Emmanuel, Green River</i>	
Platte Valley, Saratoga	Rev. Randolph Schnack	

High Plains Circuit #6

Immanuel, Burns**	Rev. Ellery Steffensen	
King of Glory, Cheyenne	Rev. Mark Maas	
Our Savior, Cheyenne	Rev. Joshua Scheer	Rev. Marcus Baikie †
Trinity, Cheyenne	Rev. John Preus	
St. John's, Kimball**	<i>See Immanuel, Burns</i>	
St. Andrew's, Laramie	Rev. Mark Preus	
Zion, Laramie	Rev. Mark Mumme	
Grace, Pine Bluffs	<i>Vacant</i>	
Trinity, Wheatland		
Zion, Grover, CO	<i>Vacant</i>	

Multi-congregational parishes have only **one lay vote and **one** pastoral vote.

† Indicates that the Alternate Pastoral Delegate served as the Voting Delegate for said Congregation

A solid line through a name indicates that the lay delegate did not attend Convention.

ROSTER OF ADVISORY DELEGATES ORDAINED

Rev. David Anderson, Cheyenne
 Rev. Lee Wisroth, Powell
 Rev. Ralph Jaeger, Laramie
 Rev. Lowell Kayser, Colorado Springs, CO
 Rev. Paul Beyer, Casper
 Rev. Richard Boche, Cheyenne
 Rev. Ralph Morris, Gering
 Rev. David Boehnke, Casper
 Rev. David Caspersen, Cheyenne
 Rev. Sam Christensen, Riverton
 Rev. Philip Found, Bayard
 Rev. Philip Grovenstein, Powell
 Rev. Harold Hintzman Jr., Cheyenne
 Rev. Dan Holthus, Casper
 Rev. Darrell Debowey, Laramie
 Rev. Daniel Praeuner, Ranchester

Rev. Albert Kasten Sr., Chappell
 Rev. Don Rieman, E. Aurora, NY
 Rev. Lee Rupert, Maplewood, MN
 Rev. Marvin Temme, Cheyenne
 Rev. Terry Wiley, Thermopolis
 Rev. Michael Wittrock, Chadron
 Rev. John Christensen, Thermopolis
 Rev. Chrstopher Curry, Casper
 Rev. Dr. Christian Preus, Casper
 Rev. Dr. Harold Ristau, Casper
 Rev. Thomas Obersat, Paige, TX
 Rev. Dr. Ron Garwood, Cody
 Rev. Kevin Rose, Pinedale
 Rev. Jim Martin, Cheyenne
 Rev. John Rasmussen, Cheyenne

ROSTER OF ADVISORY DELEGATES COMMISSIONED

Mrs. Dixie Ailts, Gillette
 Mrs. Tiffany Baikie, Cheyenne
 Mrs. Karen Bergquist, Riverton
 Mrs. Darcia Boche, Torrington
 Mrs. Bonnie Bourret, Potter
 Mrs. Shirley Bundschuh, Rolla, MO
 Mrs. Elizabeth Carlson, Sheridan
 Mrs. Garnet Dwyer, Cody
 Miss Stanna Funk, Gering
 Mrs. Jennifer Kaelberer, Cody
 Mrs. Cecelia Postma, Riverton
 Miss Tarayca Walters, Casper
 Mrs. Leah Wierschke, Rushville,

Mrs. Susan Tucker, Riverton
 Mrs. Diane Christensen, Thermopolis
 Miss Brianna Erdman, Mankato, MN
 Miss Natasha Bonine, Ravenna, NE
 Miss Anna Hahn, Casper
 Mr. Nathanael Hahn, Casper
 Miss Hannah Engwall, Casper
 Mrs. Jill Mueller, Alliance
 Mrs. Cheri Rae Pollum, Cheyenne
 Mr. Lukas Sollberger, Cheyenne
 Mr. Steve Coniglio, Riverton
 Dr. Caleb Karges, Casper
 Deac. Melissa Harrington, Powell

SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVES

Rev. Dr. Jamison Hardy, President
Concordia University System

Rev. Charles Ferry, Asia Region
LCMS Office of International Mission

Kathleen Luther, CLS Executive Director
Seminary Support

Shawn Kowal
Concordia Plan Services

Jeffrey Snyder, Gail Kanneg, and Tyler Fewins
Lutheran Church Extension Fund

Dr. Caleb Karges
Luther Classical College

TR Halvorson
Synoptic Text

Rev. Dr. Harold Ristau, President
Luther Classical College

Rev. Terrilyn Denniston, President
Wyoming District LWML

Rev. Daniel Burfiend, Advancement Officer
Concordia Theological Seminary FW

Alicia Hinton
LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces

Rev. Dr. Daniel Harmelink
Concordia Historical Institute

Kirk Meyer
Kloria Publishing House

Kantor Steven Hoffman
Special Guest Musician

STATE OF THE DISTRICT REPORT

Dear delegates and guests,

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

My report to you this afternoon comes to you in two parts. I'll take about 20 minutes now to reflect with you briefly on the past quadrennium and outline the major needs and initiatives taking place in the district. A little later I will deliver an essay to you.

I make the Apostle Paul's words to the Philippian congregation my own: "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy" (Philippians 1:3-4). My joy in serving you increases daily as I get to know your congregations and pastors and observe you growing in the grace of God and in love and all good works. All our dear Christians are forgiven sinners. They are dearly loved by God and very precious. I will repeat here what I have said to many of you in your congregations: You have a very rare and precious gift. A faithful congregation with a faithful pastor is not easily found on earth, and we have sixty such congregations in the Wyoming District. God be praised for His mercy and love to us!

I. A Few Reflections on the Past Quadrennium

We last met in convention four years ago while we were coming out of the international Covid crisis. For all the anxiety, sickness, and even a few deaths in our congregations, this crisis was a very valuable gift of God to us, a fulfillment of God's promise to work all things for our good. We have learned something about obeying God rather than our own fears or government edicts that contradict God's commandments. We have been taught to consider and prepare ourselves for opposition and even persecution of Christians and of the Christian church. We are learning to love more deeply and actively the community of brother and sister Lutherans which God's Word creates and nourishes with His Word and sacraments. And we have learned to hold even more dearly the Word of God and sacraments as our most precious possessions on earth, especially after they were almost taken away from us for a while. We will be forever grateful that God has disciplined and taught us these things in His gentle school of affliction.

One bittersweet event that took place since we last met in convention was the suspension of our mission on the Wind River Reservation. The draconian Covid restrictions and deeply felt fears on the Reservation were the presenting causes for this decision. The Sunday School at the mission became impossible, services and Bible Studies at the nursing home and jail were stopped and were difficult to restart, and worship services at the mission also ceased and were restarted only with difficulty. It was determined that we could serve our Lutheran

members on the Reservation as effectively with the three congregations surrounding the Reservation as we could with a separate mission station.

I want to thank Pastor Sonnenschein and Rachel publicly on behalf of the Wyoming District for their service. We had given him what became an impossible task, and Pastor Sonnenschein carried it out faithfully with great spiritual anxiety and sorrow. I am very pleased to announce that his labors, and those of his predecessors, were not in vain. Our members from the Reservation are still attending church at Lander or Riverton. It is my intention to work with the local congregations to continue efforts to serve our neighbors on the Reservation by finding ways to incorporate them into our congregations, to provide them not only the Gospel, but also help in modeling and building Christian families, fostering the growth of love and all virtues according to God's Word.

II. Congregations and Pastors

The major task of the Wyoming District President, with help from our Circuit Visitors and Vice-Presidents, is to visit and care for our congregations and their pastors. All of my work as District President in congregations, in district leadership, and in Synod is oriented to the spiritual wellbeing of our congregations. I teach, encourage, and defend our doctrine for this purpose. I seek to foster love, forgiveness, zeal, and peace in our parishes. I uphold, support, and advise our pastors. I provide counsel and encouragement in the care of the physical and financial needs of our congregations and their pastors.

Usually, the most urgent task is providing help when a parish is vacant. This task is getting more difficult. You should know that we are not graduating enough men from the seminary to give well-formed and qualified pastors to our congregations. For example, we received only one candidate for the four requests from the seminaries this week. We are deeply thankful for the one! The shortage of pastors in the Synod is not critical yet, but the need is great.

I have been at pains to explain to our congregations that when a faithful pastor considers a call, he will make a wise decision to ensure the physical and financial well-being of his family. It matters a lot what the parish offers to provide for housing, benefits, and salary. I am well aware of how these financial obligations put pressure on our parishes.

As you know, the reality is that the membership in most of our congregations is declining and aging. The causes are many, beginning with the shrinking population on our farms, ranches, and small towns. Economic opportunities may be lacking for young families. The LCMS marriage and birth-rate has also imitated the decline in the culture around us for decades. There simply aren't many young families or young children to catechize or evangelize. And to our grief, many of our children and grandchildren have not continued faithful in the Lutheran Church, or even the Christian faith. Government (or public) schooling does not encourage or

help our children to love God's Word. The broad culture around us disdains God's pure Word and doctrine and violates the consciences of our children and families and neighbors as a matter of course. The result is that the ground upon which we sow the seed of God's Word is often spiritually unreceptive pavement or rocks or weeds. Too few of our young people continue steadfast in our churches as they grow up. What that means for our congregations is that the critical mass of members we need to support a pastor financially is not always there.

But let me pause to offer a word of encouragement. Look at what you have! As a faithful, Lutheran congregation with a sound and caring pastor, you have a rare and precious treasure that is needed by everyone in your community. God put your congregation in your community to fulfill His own good and gracious purposes. It is His divine will that God's Word be preached purely where you live. God hears your prayers as you and your congregation intercede for your neighbors. I urge our congregations not to live or make decisions out of fear or despair or anger, but with the confidence that God will provide what is needed for this day and for our future. We believe that God will provide our future, come what may. We hope to have the privilege, by God's grace, of still being present and active as congregations in our communities when our children and grandchildren, and their neighbors, come looking for the rare and precious treasure of His pure Word.

The reality of recent years and into the near future is that many of our congregations must realign into two- or three-point parishes in order to take care of their pastor's family. It doesn't hurt our pastors to do a little extra work and travel some extra miles, as long as the congregations are willing to make some accommodations to keep his work and travel-load reasonable. After all, our pastors also need to look to their family needs and health. The rule is this: When the pastor offers a worship service or a Bible Class, show up! You show up! That's the rule.

It is now the case that just over half of our congregations are in a multi-point parish. One fourth of our congregations, 15 of the 60, have made some sort of change in parish alignment in the past four years. We will continue to need this kind of openheartedness and flexibility in the years to come. We have also learned that there is a limit to how much a pastor can do, depending on the health and stamina of the pastor and his family needs. But none of this is new to our district. This is how our congregations were started many years ago. I just recently saw the statistics that in 1973 (right after the District came into existence), we had 39 pastors serving 61 congregations. In 1994, it was 45 pastors serving 68 congregations. The number today is 48 pastors serving 60 congregations, including some semi-retired pastors and college faculty. God will provide.

That brings us to the central point here, and one which is addressed in part by a proposed resolution. The Holy Scriptures teach us that it is the responsibility and privilege of our congregations to take care of the pastors they have called, with their families. God has

commanded us to do this. The pastor is to receive all of his worldly support from the parish. Exceptions are only by the common consent of pastor and parish. When a young pastor with a family receives a call to our congregations, he generally owns almost nothing except some clothes, books, and a run-down car. It is likely that he and his wife have school debt. The congregation must not only pay the pastor enough to provide an average, comfortable living to the pastor, but also enough to pay off school debts, replace the aging car, support his wife and children, provide for buying a house someday in the future, and set aside money for retirement. And it is often the case in our district that the pastor needs to make enough to travel 1,000 miles once or twice a year to see parents and other family. We ask a lot of our pastors. God commands us to take good care of them.

I know that I am preaching to the choir here, but it is important to say aloud that the congregation has a moral, godly obligation to care for the pastor and his family and not balance the congregation's meager budget on his wife's back. The pastor and his wife may choose for her to work. That's their choice. But her first call and duty is to take care of your pastor and their children. These are the considerations that I put before our congregations as we discuss their future. Our decisions about parish alignment are shaped by God's commandment here and our own joyful desire to have and care for good pastors.

III. Education

Rather than bemoaning the demographic challenges of our congregations and their aging membership, the District has put a lot of energy into encouraging the Christian education of our children and young people. We presently have five classical Lutheran schools in the district, including schools that offer high school. The number of homeschool families in our congregations continues to increase also. These labors are done in direct obedience to God's Word concerning the duty of parents and of the Church. But it is also an enormous blessing to our District congregations.

Let me explain. Like getting married and having children, the sound, Christian education of our children is an expression of optimism, of hope for the future. Education is about the future. That's even true of your adult Bible Class, which you attend because you wish to grow in faith and in all good works. Congregations that don't have active and rich attendance to their pastor's Bible Class are probably dying. If we don't plant the seed of God's Word there can be no life. If we do not tend and water the young plants that spring up, they cannot mature or bring forth fruit. The sound Lutheran education of our children in home and school and church is a labor and devotion of deep hope for the future of our congregations. It is also essential to our long-term well-being as Christ's Church in this place.

It is in perfect continuity with and service to our classical Lutheran schools and homeschools that many of our pastors, congregations, and laity have joined their resources to establish and support a new Lutheran college in our midst. We have long desired a college that is

uniquely classical in content, Lutheran in its doctrine and practice, oriented toward piety and service in our congregations and homes, and small enough to foster a culture of Lutheran life together as the students learn together, live together under God's Word, and mature into pious and fruitful men and women in their homes and in our congregations.

I called Luther Classical College unique because it is positioned to give a kind of education that we are no longer able to replicate elsewhere. Let me put this in context. It has been my joy to watch our Concordia Universities emerge from a time of ever-deeper conformity to the norms and expectations of the world around us into a renaissance unlike anything I have seen in my lifetime. They are all giving much more emphasis to our pure Lutheran doctrine. They are all striving to make their worship more recognizably Lutheran. They are eliminating the woke, LGBTQ blight that had begun to creep into their student culture. They are working hard to increase the percentage of LCMS students, and especially church workers, in their student population. Many of our congregations, pastors, and laity have supported, or even attended, our Concordia's, especially Concordia Nebraska. Please continue to pray for them, support them, and if it's the right fit, send your children and grandchildren to them.

But our Synod needs Luther Classical College, its curriculum, its culture, and its graduates. We need it. It is our joy this year to welcome the first cohort of students to Luther Classical College. We pray for our Lord's blessings on the college, its faculty and staff, and its students. God grant that they become a rich blessing in their homes, in their congregations, in our District, and throughout the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. They say that a rising tide lifts all ships. God grant that Luther Classical College be one of the rich causes of this rising tide of excellence in the Lutheran education of our young people in parochial schools, college and universities, and in our seminaries.

IV. Building Community

One of the things we learned during the Covid shut-down is that forced isolation is a form of spiritual warfare against Christians. One thinks of Jesus when He was isolated in the wilderness for 40 days being tempted by the devil. District leadership chose to focus on community during this time. Over the past quadrennium Roundup articles were an opportunity to meditate on God's gift of community, that God forms us into communities in our households, among our neighbors and towns, and in our congregations. This is God's doing.

The Church, in particular, is a community. To become a Christian is to be incorporated into a body, a community, a congregation. This is, in part, a defensive move on God's part. He uses the community of the Church to defend us with God's Word and sacraments. He does this by the ministry of a pastor. He joins us to congregation members whose church attendance, praying, singing, and mutual love are an encouragement and bond, as St. Paul calls it. Our fellow members hold us accountable to God for our habits and way of life. The community of

the congregation picks us up when we fall or become discouraged. The members of the congregation, beginning with the pastor, provide models and images of a pious life under God's Word, that we may imitate their faith and godliness. Christian men teach and encourage each other, and especially the young men, how to be and live as Christian husbands and fathers. Christian women teach and encourage each other, especially the young women, how to be and live as Christian wives and mothers. Reread the Epistles and see for yourself that this is God's purpose and plan for the Christian communities of our congregations.

But God gives us our Church communities not only to defend and form us, but also to make more Christians and separate them from "this evil and adulterous generation" (Matthew 12:39). Any renewed outreach on the Reservation must take our Lord's plan for Christian communities into account. God has designed the Christian life to be lived out in the community of a congregation. Christian congregations are to be a place of cultural transformation from the world's way of living into God's way of living. This requires the formation of these communities and the incorporation of new Christians into this new way of life.

It has become clear to me that our failure to establish a thriving congregation on the Reservation is related to our inability to overcome the cultural hostility to God's Word. Christianity changes people, their lives, their habits, their families, their aspirations. We Christians are to be culturally separate from all that contradicts Holy Scriptures. But what we see on the Reservation is true for any place in the District. In 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, where the Holy Spirit commands us not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers, He quotes Isaiah 52:11, "Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty." We cannot and must not leave the world itself or our civil communities and neighbors, but we must separate ourselves from an ungodly and idolatrous culture which does not know God or His will for man.

The Wyoming District, because it is small and we have family relations scattered throughout our congregations, has always enjoyed a certain amount of common affection and life together. In this quadrennium we have sought to nourish, strengthen, and increase these opportunities and bonds across the District. Our Evangelism Convocation every February is something of a church family reunion, including whole families with youth and children. The Youth Camp in Lander has become another such opportunity for our youth. To these opportunities we have added the thriving and growing Homeschool Conference, the Uinta County Family Camp in the Headwaters Circuit, the Family and Youth gatherings in Nebraska, and others I have failed to mention.

God grant us, my dear brothers and sisters, with our congregations, this blessing under God's Word: that

we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:13-16)

God grant this for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Rev. John E. Hill, President
Wyoming District LCMS

OFFICIAL ACTS OF THE PRESIDENT

DISTRICT ROSTER CHANGES

March 2, 2021 - March 1, 2025

CONGREGATIONS

Formations of Multi-Congregation Parishes

Name	Name	Date
Salem, Gurley & St. Paul's, Potter	St. Paul's, Sidney	1/23/2022
Our Savior, Torrington	Trinity, Morrill	9/22/2024
Grace, Gordon	Our Savior's, Chadron	11/24/2024
Grace English, Pine Bluffs	Zion, Grover	1/28/2025

Dissolution of Multi-Congregation Parishes

Name	Name	Date
Grace, Greybull	Zion, Emblem	12/12/2024
Trinity, Wheatland	Zion, Grover & Grace English, Pine Bluffs	12/31/2024

ORDAINED MINISTERS

TRANSFERS FROM OTHER DISTRICTS: Pastors

Name	From	To	Date
Jacob Benson	New England District	St. John's, Lovell	3/12/2021
John Christensen	Minnesota North	Emeritus	8/15/2021
Travis Berg	Iowa East	Trinity, Cheyenne	2/28/2022
Zachary Viggers	Iowa West	Trinity, Gillette	10/31/2022
Roger Mullet	Indiana	Prince of Peace, Buffalo	6/22/2023
Albert Kasten, Sr.	Rocky Mountain	Emeritus	8/23/2023
Harold Ristau	LC-Canada	Mount Hope, Casper	4/1/2024
Daniel Harrington	Indiana	Immanuel, Powell	4/1/2024
Stephen Kieser	Texas	Trinity, Riverton	10/26/2024
Thomas Obersat	Texas	Mount Hope, Casper	1/1/2025

TRANSFERS FROM OUR SEMINARIES/COLLOQUY: Pastors

Name	From	To	Date
Ellery Steffensen	Fort Wayne	St. John's, Kimball	

		& Immanuel, Burns	7/8/2023
Peter Preus	Fort Wayne	St. Paul's, Bridgeport	7/7/2024
Andrew Hill	Fort Wayne	Trinity, Rock Springs & Emmanuel, Green River	7/20/2024

CHANGES WITHIN THE DISTRICT: Pastors

Name	From	To	Date
Peter Bertram	Our Savior's, Chadron	Emeritus	5/30/2022
Kenneth Mars	St. John's, Kimball Immanuel, Burns	Christ the King, Cody	8/28/2022
Travis Berg	Trinity, Cheyenne	Bethel, Lander	6/25/2023
Lee Wisroth	Immanuel, Powell	Emeritus	7/24/2023
Darrell Debowey	Zion, Laramie	Emeritus	2/15/2024
James Martin	Trinity, Rock Springs Emmanuel, Green River	Emeritus	5/27/2024
Mark Mumme	Trinity, Riverton	Zion, Laramie	7/14/2024
Kevin Rose	Our Savior's, Pinedale Peace, Big Piney	Emeritus	1/1/2025

CHANGES WITHIN THE DISTRICT (Dual Parish Pastors): Pastors

Name	From	Joined	Date
Ted Bourret	St. Paul's, Potter Salem, Gurley	St. Paul's, Sidney	3/13/2022
Scott Firminhac	Our Savior, Torrington	Trinity, Morrill	9/22/2024
Travis Sherman	Grace, Gordon	Our Savior's, Chadron	11/23/2024

TRANSFERS TO OTHER DISTRICTS: Pastors

Name	From	To	Date
Jared Tucher	Trinity, Gillette	Indiana	10/1/2021
Gerald Heinecke	Prince of Peace, Buffalo	Mid-South	5/23/2022
Scott Shields	Chaplain, Juneau, AK	Northwest	5/26/2022
Noah Fremer	Bethel, Lander	South Wisconsin	5/30/2022
Peter Bertram	Emeritus	Kansas	6/1/2022
Paul Nus	Candidate	Ohio	9/27/2022
Lynn Christensen	Chaplain, Japan	Nebraska	11/1/2022
Kenneth Humphrey	Trinity, Morrill	Nebraska	8/28/2023
Allen Strawn	St. Paul's, Bridgeport	South Wisconsin	1/27/2024
Rene Castillero	Immanuel, Sheridan	Southern Illinois	5/20/2024
James Rockhill	Bethlehem, Crawford & Redeemer, Harrison	Iowa East	6/1/2024

Jais Tinglund	Zion, Emblem & Grace, Greybull	Pacific Southwest	6/1/2024
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CALLED TO GLORY: Pastors

Name	Date
Francis O. Koessel	11/25/2022
Fred F. Schroeder	1/3/2024
Thomas C. Jacobsen	3/7/2024
Richard L. Keuck	2/27/2025

REMOVED FROM THE ROSTER: Pastors

Name	By	Date
Duane Simonson	Voluntary Resignation	2/7/2022
Shawn Kumm	Voluntary Resignation	1/10/2022

COMMISSIONED MINISTERS

TRANSFERS FROM OTHER DISTRICTS: Commissioned

Name	From	To	Date
Nathanael Hahn	South Wisconsin	Mount Hope, Casper	8/29/2021
Diane Christensen	Minnesota North	Candidate	12/15/2021
Jesse Moore	Rocky Mountain	Candidate	1/11/2022
Melissa Harrington	Indiana	Candidate	4/1/2024
Caleb Karges	Pacific Southwest	Mount Hope, Casper	1/26/2025

TRANSFERS FROM OUR CONCORDIAS: Commissioned

Name	From	To	Date
Natasha Bonine	Concordia, Seward	Trinity, Riverton	8/22/2021
Hannah Engwall	Concordia, Mequon	Mount Hope, Casper	8/29/2021
Lukas Sollberger	Concordia, Seward	Trinity, Cheyenne	9/12/2022

CHANGES WITHIN THE DISTRICT: Commissioned

Name	From	To	Date
Tarayca Walters	Mount Hope, Casper	Candidate	9/1/2021
Jesse Moore	Candidate	Immanuel, Alliance	9/11/2022
Steve Coniglio	Trinity, Riverton	Emeritus	6/30/2023
Natasha Bonine	Trinity, Riverton	Candidate	8/15/2024
Brianna Erdman	Trinity, Riverton	Candidate	9/10/2024

TRANSFERRED TO OTHER DISTRICTS: Commissioned

Name	From	To	Date
Christa Doyle	Trinity, Rock Springs	Nebraska	8/10/2021

Audrey Partipilo	Trinity, Riverton	Indiana	6/8/2023
Roxanne Humphrey	Candidate	Nebraska	8/28/2023

REMOVED:

None

CALLED TO GLORY: Commissioned

Name	Date
Carol Caspersen	3/21/2021

ANNIVERSARIES

ORDAINED

In the Year of Our Lord 2022

Name	Years of Service
Richard Neugebauer	35
Mark Maas	35
John Christensen	35
Ralph Jaeger	30
Andrew Richard	10
Norman Wacker	10
Travis Sherman	10
Kevin Rose	10

In the Year of Our Lord 2023

Name	Years of Service
David Boehnke	55
John Rasmussen	55
Marvin Temme	50
Richard Boche	50
Ralph Morris	45
Donald Rieman	45
Ron Garwood	40
Lee Wisroth	40
Paul Beyer	30
Daniel Praeuner	30
Terry Wiley	30
Dan Mulholland	25
George Naylor	25

Lincoln Winter	25
Darrell Debowey	20
David Bott	20
Joshua Scheer	15
Jared Korb	10

In the Year of Our Lord 2024

Name	Years of Service
David Caspersen	55
Allan Wierschke	30
James Martin	25
Darren Pflughoeft	25
Dan Holthus	25
Gregory Sonnenschein	15
Samuel Needham	15
Jacob Benson	5
Roger Mullet	5

In the Year of Our Lord 2025

Name	Years of Service
Harold Hintzman Jr	50
Phillip Grovenstein	40
Richard Mueller	35
John Hill	35
Jonathan Lange	35
David Anderson	35
Jeffery Grams	30
Paul Cain	25
Mark Mumme	25
Kenneth Mars	20
Ryan Mills	20
Marcus Baikie	15
Mark Preus	15
Shaun Daugherty	15

COMMISSIONED

In the Year of Our Lord 2022

Name	Years of Service
Jill Mueller	35

Elizabeth Carlson	25
Steve Coniglio	25
Caleb Karges	5

In the Year of Our Lord 2023

Name	Years of Service
Garnet Dwyer	60
Cheri Pollom	30
Karen Bergquist	15
Anna Hahn	5

In the Year of Our Lord 2024

Name	Years of Service
Shirley Bundschuh	45
Jesse Moore	15
Breanna Erdman	5
Hannah Engwall	5

In the Year of Our Lord 2025

Name	Years of Service
Cecelia Postma	40
Leah Wierschke	30
Stanna Funk	25
Tarayca Walters	25
Dixie Ailts	20
Tiffany Baikie	20
Nathanael Hahn	5

CONGREGATIONS

In the Year of Our Lord 2022

Congregation	Number of Years
Trinity, Cheyenne	130
Zion, Chappell	105
Trinity, Casper	105
Zion, Douglas	75
Grace, Greybull	75
St. Paul's, Thermopolis	75
Bethel, Lander	70
Mount Hope, Casper	60

Prince of Peace, Buffalo	50
Our Redeemer, Glenrock	50
Our Saviour, Evanston	40
Shepherd of the Valley, Fort Bridger	40

In the Year of Our Lord 2023

Congregation	Number of Years
Immanuel, Sheridan	120
St. James, Scottsbluff	115
Immanuel, Burns	115
St. Paul's, Lusk	110
Trinity, Wheatland	110
St. Paul's, Potter	105
Bethlehem, Crawford	105
Trinity, Riverton	105
St. Paul's, Bridgeport	80
Christ, Rawlins	75
Our Savior, Cheyenne	65
Faith, Gering	60
St. Andrew's, Laramie	60

In the Year of Our Lord 2024

Congregation	Number of Years
St. Paul, Rushville	135
Zion, Emblem	125
Our Savior's, Chadron	100
Redeemer, Harrison	95
Zion, Hay Springs	95
Trinity, Gillette	95
St. Paul's, Kemmerer	80
Mount Calvary, Bayard	70
Redeemer, Jackson	65
Bethlehem, Moorcroft	50
King of Glory, Cheyenne	35

In the Year of Our Lord 2025

Congregation	Number of Years
Salem, Gurley	115
St. Paul's, Sidney	110
Our Savior, Torrington	90
St. Luke's, Worland	75

Trinity, Rock Springs	75
Mount Calvary, Dubois	70
Our Savior's, Pinedale	65
Peace, Marbleton	60
Emmanuel, Green River	60
Christ Our Savior, Etna	15

FINAL CREDENTIALS REPORT – MAY 3, 2025

Voting Delegates	71
Advisory Delegates	14
Guests	16
Synod Officials and Staff	11
Vendor Guests	9
Excused absences	4

Part 2

Convention Minutes and Elections Tabulations

CONVENTION MINUTES

THURSDAY, MAY 1

12:30 P.M. Opening Worship

At 12:28 P.M., District President John Hill gathered the delegates with the hymn, “He Is Arisen! Glorious Word” (LSB 488).

At 12:30 P.M., Rev. Paul Cain, District First Vice-President, officiated the opening service of the Convention with the order of Vespers from *Lutheran Service Book* 229 (hereafter LSB). Worship began with the delegates singing the hymn “To God the Holy Spirit Let Us Pray” (LSB 768). The delegates chanted Psalm 92 and sang the hymn, “Speak, O Lord, Thy Servant Heareth” from *The Lutheran Hymnal* 296 (hereafter TLH). The appointed Scripture reading was 1 Peter 1:13 – 2:3.

The following is a summary of Rev. Cains’ sermon: The Christian life is spiritual warfare. In spiritual warfare it is good to hear the Word of God. In Ephesians, the armor of God is defensive except for the Sword of the Spirit. Spiritually gird your loins with the Word of God, that is, when engaged in, or preparing for, spiritual warfare, use the Sword of the Spirit—be in the Word of God and prayer. Do good works because God commands them, not because they save. Jesus saves; He redeems us with His suffering and death and with His blood.

The service concluded with the Canticle and prayers.

1:05 P.M. Formal Opening; Credentials Report

At 1:05 P.M., Rev. President John Hill called the Convention to order. Rev. Darrell Debowey, District Secretary, gave the credentials report:

Voting Delegates:	71
Advisory Delegates:	14
Guests:	16
Synod Officials and Staff:	11
Vendor Guests:	9
Excused absences:	4

Pres. Hill directed delegates to the Convention Workbook (hereafter, Workbook), Tab 1, p. 5, “Convention Rules.” Pres. Hill requested the Convention to adopt these rules for use throughout the Convention. It was moved and seconded to adopt the rules. The motion was **adopted** unanimously.

Pres. Hill directed delegates to Workbook Tab 1, pp. 3-4, “Convention Agenda.” Pres. Hill requested the Convention to approve the agenda as presented. It was moved and second to adopt the agenda. The motion was **adopted** unanimously.

A quorum being present, Pres. Hill declared the 21st Convention of the Wyoming District to be in session in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1:10 P.M. Announcements

Pres. Hill introduced the following individuals:

Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison, LCMS President (will join the Convention on Friday)

Rev. Dr. Jamison Hardy, Convention Parliamentarian, CUS President

Rev. Charles Ferry, LCMS Office of International Mission, Asia Region Director

Rev. Darrell Debowey, Wyoming District Secretary

Mr. Jeffrey Snyder, Wyoming District Business Manager, Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) Vice-President, and Convention Manager

Mrs. Tiffany Hoff, Wyoming District Office Manager and Administrative Assistant

Kantor Dr. Steven Hoffman, Convention Organist

Convention Pages: Mr. David Preus, Mr. Bridger Allred, and Mr. Noah Waterbury

Pres. Hill asked the members of the Wyoming District Board of Directors to stand:

Rev. Paul Cain, First Vice-President

Rev. Jonathan Lange, Second Vice-President

Rev. Ted Bourret, Third Vice-President

Rev. Darrell Debowey, Secretary

Rev. Kenneth Mars, Pastor-at-Large

Mr. John Schmall, District Treasurer

Mr. Steven Coniglio, Commissioned Member (*in absentia*)

Mr. Blake Pieper, Lay Member

Mr. Marty Finch, Lay Member

Pres. Hill asked the Wyoming District Circuit Visitors to stand:

Rev. Richard Neugebauer, Chimney Rock Circuit

Rev. Scott Firminhac, Pine Ridge Circuit

Rev. Jon C. Olson, Powder River Circuit

Rev. Jared Korb, Yellowstone Circuit

Rev. Daniel Mulholland, Headwaters Circuit (*in absentia*)

Rev. Joshua Scheer, High Plains Circuit (*in absentia*)

Pres. Hill asked the Wyoming District Commission Chairmen to stand:

Rev. Travis Sherman, CMS Chairman

Rev. David Bott, CCS Chairman

Pres. Hill noted that various vendors and organizations have set up information tables in the north ballroom.

1:15 P.M. Conference Business

Pres. Hill asked Rev. Jon Olson, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Casper, Wyoming, and host of the Thursday evening Divine Service, to give instruction and guidance for this evening's Divine Service at Trinity Lutheran Church. Rev. Olson had no instructions for the delegates.

Pres. Hill pointed out the places in the convention hall where the voting delegates were seated, and where advisory delegates and guests were seated. He instructed delegates who want to speak to the Convention, to use one of the two floor microphones and to introduce themselves by name and location. Pres. Hill also stated that delegates will be limited to two minutes at the microphone.

Pres. Hill stated that electronic devices are permissible, but he asked that they be placed in silent mode so as not to distract other delegates. Also, he requested that delegates should not text or message other delegates while the convention is in session.

Pres. Hill asked the delegates to turn in their mileage forms to Mr. Snyder.

Pres. Hill noted that copies of the Lutheran Service Book and The Lutheran Hymnal, owned by the Wyoming District, will be used throughout the Convention. Hymns will be sung two or three minutes before the beginning of session as a way to call delegates back to the convention hall.

1:25 P.M. Elections Committee

At 1:25 P.M., Pres. Hill invited Rev. Richard Neugebauer, Chairman of the Elections Committee, to the podium.

Rev. Neugebauer gave greetings to the Convention delegates and guests. There being no floor nominations, the committee **moved** adoption of the slate for District President as presented:

Rev. John Hill

On behalf of the Elections Committee, there was a motion and second to elect Rev. John Hill by acclamation. The motion was **adopted**. Rev. Neugebauer led the Convention in prayer. Rev. John Hill was elected by unanimous acclamation. Rev. Neugebauer announced that **Rev. John Hill** was elected District President. The convention sang the Doxology. Pres. Hill thanked the delegation.

Pres. Hill asked for a motion to adopt the slate for District First Vice-president consisting of

Rev. Paul Cain

Rev. Jeffery Grams

Rev. Jonathan Lange

Rev. Jon C. Olson

There was a motion and second to ratify the slate for District First Vice-President. The motion to ratify the slate was **adopted** unanimously. Rev. Neugebauer led the Convention in prayer. After the ballots were collected, Pres. Hill declared the election for District First Vice-President closed.

1:28 P.M. State of the District: President John E. Hill

At 1:28 P.M., Pres. Hill presented his report to the Convention. A full report can be found on page 10 of the Convention Proceedings

1:50 P.M. Greetings

At 1:50 P.M., Pres. Hill invited the following guests to bring greetings to the Convention:

Rev. Dr. Jamison Hardy brought greetings from the Concordia University System.

Rev. Daniel Burfiend (CTSFW Advancement Officer) brought greetings from the two LCMS seminaries.

Rev. Dr. Harold Ristau brought greetings from Luther Classical College.

Mrs. Terri Denniston brought greetings from the Wyoming District LWML.

Rev. Charles Ferry brought greetings from the LCMS Office of International Mission, Asia Region.

2:09: Elections Committee

At 2:09 P.M., Pres. Hill invited Rev. Neugebauer to the podium. Rev. Neugebauer announced the result of the election for District First Vice-President:

Rev. Paul Cain	32
Rev. Jeffery Grams	7
Rev. Jonathan Lange	15
Rev. Jon C. Olson	17

Rev. Neugebauer announced that a majority was not achieved. A second ballot for District First Vice-President was distributed to the delegates with Rev. Jeffery Grams' name removed from the ballot:

Rev. Paul Cain

Rev. Jonathan Lange

Rev. Jon C. Olson

Rev. Neugebauer led the Convention in prayer. After the ballots were collected, Pres. Hill announced that the second election for First Vice President was closed.

2:12 P.M. Nominations Committee

At 2:12 P.M., Pres. Hill introduced the members of the Nominations Committee:

Rev. Dan Holthus,

Rev. Darren Pflughoeft

Rev. Travis Sherman

Mr. Ken Steffens

Mr. Landis Benson

Pres. Hill then directed the delegates to the “Nominations Committee Report” (pages 156-162 in the Workbook). He thanked those individuals who allowed their names to stand for election and service in the District. He then reviewed the rules for making nominations from the floor, including getting the nominee’s permission.

Pres. Hill provided a brief summary of the order of elections that will take place during the Convention.

Second and Third VP: Caucus, then elect, then rank

Circuit Visitors

Board of Directors: Secretary, Pastor-at-Large, Layman

CMS and CCS Chairmen-Elect

2028 Nominating Committee Slates

Pres. Hill noted that there is also a vacancy that needs to be filled on the Circuit Visitors, and there may need to be an additional circuit visitor vacancy to fill, depending on the results of the regional vice-presidential elections.

2:17 P.M. Anniversary and Service Awards: Rev. Ted Bourret, Third Vice-President

At 2:17 P.M., Pres. Hill invited Rev. Ted Bourret, District Third Vice-President, to the podium for the Anniversary and Service Awards. Rev. Bourret directed the delegates to Workbook Tab 2, pp. 64 – 67, “Anniversaries” (2022 – 2025).

Rev. Bourret noted that there was a name missing in the Workbook: Rev. John Christensen, 35 years. He then read aloud the various anniversaries celebrated by various District Pastors. Rev. Bourret led the Convention in a prayer of thanksgiving for their service and asked for a round of applause.

Rev. Bourret read aloud the various anniversaries celebrated by various District Commissioned Ministers. Rev. Bourret led the Convention in a prayer of thanksgiving for their service and asked for a round of applause.

Rev. Bourret read aloud the various anniversaries celebrated by various District Congregations. Rev. Bourret led the Convention in a prayer of thanksgiving for these congregations and asked for a round of applause.

2:31 P.M. Elections Committee

Rev. Neugebauer returned to the podium to announce the result of the election for District First Vice President:

Rev. Paul Cain	36
Rev. Jonathan Lange	18
Rev. Jon C. Olson	16
Abstain	1

Rev. Neugebauer announced that **Rev. Paul Cain** was elected District First Vice President.

2:32 P.M. Caucus—District Regions; Advisory—Ordained

At 2:32 P.M., Pres. Hill provided the following instructions for the election of regional vice-presidents: Two Regions will caucus during the break in order to secure nominations for their region's vice-president: Region 1 (Eastern)—Chimney Rock & Pine Ridge circuits; and Region 3 (Western)—Yellowstone and Headwaters circuits. The chair of each caucus is the region's current vice-president (Eastern VP: Rev. Ted Bourret; Western VP: Rev. Jonathan Lange). Each caucus may nominate up to three pastors for their regional vice-president. The Convention will then elect the vice-president for each region.

Pres. Hill also announced that Advisory—Ordained will also caucus to elect an advisory delegate and alternate for the 2026 LCMS Convention to be held in Phoenix, Arizona. Chair of this caucus was Rev. Debowey. The Advisory—Ordained caucus elected Rev. Paul Beyer as Advisory Delegate—Ordained, and Rev. John Christensen as Alternate Advisory Delegate—Ordained.

Pres. Hill dismissed the Convention to form their respective caucuses; he declared the Convention to be in recess until 3:15 P.M.

2:35 P.M. Break

3:15 P.M. Elections Committee

At 3:12 P.M., Pres. Hill called the delegates back to the convention hall with the hymn, “I Know My Faith Is Founded” (LSB 587).

At 3:15 P.M., Pres. Hill invited Rev. Neugebauer to the podium to announce the slates for vice-presidents for the Western and Eastern regions of the Wyoming District.

The ballot for the Western Region Vice-President (Headwaters and Yellowstone circuits) consisted of the following nominees:

Rev. Patrick Baldwin

Rev. David Bott

Rev. Jonathan Lange

The ballot for the Eastern Region Vice-President (Pine Ridge and Chimney Rock circuits) consisted of the following nominees:

Rev. Neil Carlson

Rev. Jeffery Grams

Rev. Allan Wierschke

Rev. Neugebauer led the Convention in prayer. A question was asked about biographies for the nominees. Rev. Neugebauer directed the Convention to turn to Workbook section 6 for biographies of the nominees.

After the ballots were collected, Pres. Hill declared the elections for regional vice-presidents closed.

3:25 P.M. President’s Report (Essay): Pres. John Hill

At 3:25 P.M., First Vice-President Cain invited Pres. Hill to read his essay titled, “Jesus Christ Governs the Church by the Word of God.” The printed essay can be found on page 85.

4:19 P.M. Elections Committee

At 4:19 P.M., Pres. Hill invited Rev. Neugebauer to the podium to announce the results of the elections for Regional Vice-Presidents.

Rev. Neugebauer announced the results of the election for Western Region Vice-President:

Rev. Patrick Baldwin	13
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Rev. David Bott	9
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Rev. Jonathan Lange	44
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Rev. Neugebauer announced that **Rev. Jonathan Lange** was elected as the Western Region Vice-President.

Rev. Neugebauer announced the results of the election for Eastern Region Vice-President:

Rev. Neil Carlson	20
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Rev. Jeffery Grams	34
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Rev. Allan Wierschke	12
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Rev. Neugebauer announced that **Rev. Jeffery Grams** was elected as the Eastern Region Vice-President.

4:22 P.M. Resolutions Committee

At 4:22 P.M., Pres. Hill invited Rev. Paul Cain, Resolutions Committee Chairman, to the podium.

Pres. Hill introduced and thanked the members of the Resolutions Committee:

Rev. Paul Cain

Rev. Jeffery Grams

Rev. Patrick Baldwin

Rev. Jacob Benson

Mr. Nevin Lawrence

Mr. Chance Hall

Mr. Brian Joachim

Mr. Jerry Goetsch

Mr. Nathanael Hahn

(A secretarial note. Amendments to resolutions will be indicated in the following manner: words or phrases removed will be ~~struck through~~, words or phrases that are added will be underlined.)

Rev. Cain presented **Resolution 03**.

The committee **moved** adoption.

**To thank the CTCR for its clear response to Wyoming District Res. 2021-1-01
and to forward its response to appropriate publishing arms of the LCMS**

Resolution 03

(Overture 03)

WHEREAS, The 2021 Convention of the Wyoming District noted that “the 2017 Explanation [of Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation], while it teaches that ‘I will enjoy being with Christ in His new creation, in body and soul, forever.’ (p. 225, q. 224), yet avoids speaking of the immortality of the soul and the Christian’s soul dwelling with Christ upon death, and so breaks with the pattern of words (2 Tim 1:13) used by all previous synodical Explanations”; and

WHEREAS, The 2021 Convention of the Wyoming District noted that “the Synod’s newest systematic theology teaches, ‘What does the scriptural understanding of body and soul mean for the “immortality of the soul”? It denies this view, if by soul one means, as is usually intended, a separate principle that a human being has or receives’ [Samuel H. Nafzger, ed., *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 1:285, and see footnote 68]”; and

WHEREAS, The 2021 Convention of the Wyoming District believed that “the 1969 Commission on Theology and Church Relations position paper, *A Statement on Death, Resurrection, and Immortality*, rejects the immortality of the soul, claiming that, ‘The Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions compel us: ...To reject the teaching that the soul is by nature and by virtue of an inherent quality immortal’ (III, 6, e). The paper does not, however, affirm that, like the angels, the soul is immortal by the ongoing and active will of God”; and

WHEREAS, The Wyoming District in convention asked President Hill to invite the contributing author of Nafzger’s *Systematic Theology* to come to the Wyoming

District and “to give a defense of calling the soul ‘personal identity’ instead of soul;” which invitation went unanswered; and

WHEREAS, The Wyoming District in convention asked the CTCR to answer the following question: “Does the Synod, in its teaching, affirm that man has in any way an immortal soul, deny this, or leave it as an open question?”; and

WHEREAS, The CTCR formally responded to this inquiry in a February 2, 2024, letter to the Wyoming District that stated, in part, “the Commission answers in the affirmative: the LCMS does hold to the biblical doctrine of the immortality of the soul”; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Wyoming District in convention thank the CTCR for its unambiguous answer; and be it further

Resolved, That the Wyoming District in convention ask LCMS’s doctrinal review to distribute the answer of the CTCR to all reviewers serving the LCMS president in reviewing articles for publication; and be it further

Resolved, That the Wyoming District express its special concern that doctrinal reviewers be alert not only for overt denials of this Biblical doctrine, but also for errors of omission when it is appropriate to express the immortality of the soul for a full confession of the faith; and be it further

Resolved, That the Wyoming District forward the letter of the CTCR to Concordia Publishing House; and be it further

Resolved, That the Wyoming District in convention formally ask Concordia Publishing House to reconsider Nafzger’s Systematic Theology especially in its substitution of the term “personal identity” where “soul” would better maintain “the form of sound words,” and, where appropriate, to amend this substitution in future editions; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Wyoming District in convention formally ask Concordia Publishing House that in all future editions of the synodical explanation of the Small Catechism, to make explicit confession of the soul’s dwelling with Christ upon death—as it was made in all editions of the synodical explanation prior to the 2017 edition.

Pres. Hill invited discussion on the Resolution. There was no discussion, but a question was asked regarding how long it will take to remove the errors that have been published in Synod publications. Pres. Hill answered that he will work with the District Secretary to forward this Overture to Synod as quickly as possible.

The motion to ratify Resolution 03 was **adopted** unanimously.

4:30 P.M. Elections Committee

At 4:30 P.M., Pres. Hill invited Rev. Neugebauer to the podium for the election of District Second Vice-President. Rev. Neugebauer announced that the candidate who receives the most votes will be designated Second Vice-President and Constitutions Chairman, and that the remaining candidate will be designated Third Vice-President. The nominees were:

Rev. Jeffery Grams

Rev. Jonathan Lange

After the ballots were distributed to the Convention, Pres. Hill declared the election for Second Vice-President closed.

4:35 P.M. Conference Business and Announcements

At 4:35 P.M., Pres Hill recommended the book, *The Magdeburg Confession*, translated by Rev. Dr. Christian Preus, to the Convention. The book was for sale at the registration desk.

Pres. Hill introduced the Convention Vendors:

Seminaries: Kathy Luther and Rev. Daniel Burfiend

LMCS Ministry to the Armed Forces: Alicia Hinton

Wyoming LWML: Terri Denniston

LCEF: Jeff Snyder, Gail Kanneg and Tyler Fewins

Concordia Plan Services: Shawn Kowal

CHI: Rev. Dr. Daniel Harmelink

LCC: Dr. Caleb Kargas

Kloria Publishing: Kirk Meyer

Synoptic Text: TR Halvorson

4:38 P.M. Elections Committee

At 4:38 P.M., Rev. Neugebauer came to the podium to announce the results for the election for District Second Vice President:

Rev. Jonathan Lange	47
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Rev. Jeffery Grams	19
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Rev. Neugebauer announced that **Rev. Jonathan Lange** was elected as Second Vice-President of the District with **Rev. Jeffery Grams** as Third Vice President of the District.

4:40 P.M. Closing Prayer: Rev. David Bott, Chairman, CCS

At 4:40 P.M., Pres. Hill invited Rev. David Bott to the podium to lead the Convention in the Litany, LSB pages 288 – 289. The appointed Scripture reading was 1 Peter 2:4-12. The Convention sang the hymn “Built on the Rock the Church doth Stand” (TLH 467).

At 4:57 P.M., Pres. Hill asked the High Plains Circuit to caucus and declared the Convention to be in recess.

During the High Plains Circuit caucus, chaired by Rev. Debowey, **Rev. Mark Mumme** was elected as High Plains Circuit Visitor.

FRIDAY, MAY 2

8:00 A.M. Call to Order, Announcements

At 7:58 A.M., Pres. Hill gathered the delegates with the singing of “O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe” (LSB 666).

At 8:00 A.M., Pres. Hill called the Convention to order.

8:03 A.M. Matins: Rev. Ted Bourret, District Third Vice-President

At 8:03 A.M., Rev. Ted Bourret, District Third Vice-President, led the Convention in the Order of Matins (LSB 219). Worship began with the delegates singing the hymn, “If Thou But Trust in God to

Guide Thee” (LSB 750). The delegates also sang the hymn, “I Walk in Danger All the Way” (LSB 716). The appointed Scripture reading was 1 Peter 5:1-11.

The following is a summary of Rev. Bourret’s sermon: Pastors, “Shepherd the flock of God that is among you.” The apostle Peter reminds pastors of the responsibility to care for God’s people. Spiritual warfare consists of suffering with the expectation of eternal glory. Do not be surprised, as you serve Christ’s people, that there will be “dangers all the way.” The second of May is the day the Church commemorates Athanasius, who faithfully defended orthodoxy against heterodoxy, but he suffered exile five times. In serving Christ, we often retreat from the battlefield; however, cast your cares on Christ—He care for you, He forgives you; He gives you courage in the midst of spiritual warfare.

The service concluded with the Canticle and prayer.

8:41 A.M. Elections Committee

At 8:41 A.M., Pres. Hill asked the delegates to turn in their mileage forms. He then welcomed Synod Pres. Matthew Harrison, who arrived for the Convention.

Pres. Hill announced the result of the caucus of the High Plains circuit. The circuit elected Rev. Mark Mumme as its circuit visitor.

Pres. Hill asked the delegation to turn to page 156 and announced the slate of Circuit Visitors:

Chimney Rock (#1):	Rev. Richard Neugebauer
Pine Ridge (#2):	Rev. Scott Firminhac
Powder River (#3):	Rev. Jon Olson
Yellowstone (#4):	Rev. Jared Korb
Headwaters (#5):	Rev. Travis Berg
High Plains (#6):	Rev. Mark Mumme

Pres. Hill noted that the convention may change the slate by amendment. A motion was made and seconded to ratify the slate of Circuit Visitors. The motion was **adopted** unanimously, constituting an election.

Rev. Hill invited Rev. Neugebauer to the podium for the Board of Directors elections. Rev. Neugebauer began with prayer.

Pres. Hill requested that delegates turn to page 156 for biographies. He noted that there was one name on the ballot for District Secretary, Rev. Zachary Viggers. (Rev. Jeffery Grams, who was elected Third Vice-President of the District, was dropped from the ballot.) He asked for nominations from the floor and there were none.

On behalf of the Elections Committee, Rev. Neugebauer moved to elect Rev. Zachary Viggers by acclamation. The motion was **adopted**. Rev. Neugebauer announced that **Rev. Zachary Viggers** was elected as District Secretary.

Pres. Hill asked the delegates to ratify the slate for Pastor-at-Large on the Board of Directors. There was a motion and second. The motion was **adopted** to ratify the following names for Pastor-at-Large on the Board of Directors:

Rev. David Bott

Rev. Kenneth Mars

Rev. Allan Wierschke

Pres. Hill asked the delegates to ratify the slate for Layman on the Board of Directors. There was a motion and second. The motion was **adopted** to ratify the following names for Layman on the Board of Directors:

Mr. Landis Benson

Mr. Benjamin Craig

Mr. Blake Pieper

Rev. Neugebauer's committee distributed the ballots containing the slates for *Pastor-at-Large* and *Layman* on the Board of Directors. After the ballots were collected, Pres. Hill declared the elections for these positions closed.

8:56 A.M. Resolutions Committee

At 8:56 A.M., Pres. Hill invited Rev. Jeffery Grams, Resolutions Committee Chairman *pro tem*, to the podium.

Rev. Grams presented **Resolution 06: Concerning the Practice of In Vitro Fertilization (IVF)**.

The committee **moved** adoption.

Pres. Hill invited discussion on the resolution. There was a question regarding the rigidity of the resolution. Rev. Grams answered that this resolution is necessary because it is immoral to treat a human embryo as a commodity, and the freezing of embryos has become problematic. Rev. Jonathan Lange spoke in favor of the resolution as written.

There was a motion and second to amend the “resolveds” by inserting “Wyoming District” in place of “LCMS.”

Pres. Hill called the orders of the day and announced that the Convention will return to this resolution at a later time.

9:15 A.M. Synod Report I: Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison, LCMS President

At 9:15 A.M., Pres. Hill introduced the Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison, President of the LCMS, and invited him to the podium.

Pres. Harrison introduced his report with, “We are Book of Concord Lutherans.” He spoke with great enthusiasm about the Book of Concord and its contents. As he went through the Augsburg Confession article by article, Pres. Harrison pointed out that we are a conservative reformation: we retain the lessons, the *ordo*, closed Communion, the Scriptural teaching on Baptism, etc.

He also said, “We are the Church Catholic, done right.... We must be who we say we are.”

He then described the activities of the LCMS. He stated that sustained church planting takes place when mother churches start daughter churches.

He pointed out some of the challenges facing the LCMS: The Lutheran Church in Australia has adopted women’s ordination; SELK is voting on women’s ordination—some are in favor, some are against. However, there are many good things that are happening. There are church plants in Rome and Jerusalem; things are going very well in eastern Europe. The LCMS is in conversation with church bodies throughout the world; he mentioned that the LCMS is in talks with a small synod in Ethiopia. And talks are underway with many of our partner churches to get them out of the Lutheran World Federation.

Pres. Harrison stated that he has asked the CTCR to publish studies on many issues facing our churches.

10:00 A.M. Break

At 10:00 A.M., Pres. Hill declared the Convention to be on break.

10:22 A.M. Announcements, Synod Report II (with Q and A): Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison, LCMS President

At 10:19 A.M., Pres. Hill summoned the delegates with the singing of “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” (LSB 656).

At 10:22 A.M., Pres. Hill welcomed Pres. Harrison to the podium. Pres. Harrison continued with the questions and answers part of his report.

President Harrison’s report was received with applause.

11:00 A.M. Essay I with Q and A: Rev. Dr. Harold Ristau

At 11:00 A.M., Pres. Hill invited Rev. Dr. Harold Ristau to the podium to present the first part of his essay, “Recovering the Pastor as *Seelsorger*: A Crucial Weapon for Spiritual Warfare within the Three Estates.” His biography is on page 16 of the Workbook. His essay can be found on page 100 of the Convention Proceedings and a link to his PowerPoint presentation is on the district website (wylcms.org/2025convention).

11:57 A.M. Announcements

At 11:57 A.M., Pres. Hill declared the Convention to be in recess for lunch until 1:30 p.m.

11:57 P.M. Lunch

1:32 P.M. Opening Devotion: Rev. Travis Sherman, Chairman, CMS

At 1:28 P.M., Pres. Hill gathered the delegates with hymn.

At 1:32 P.M., Pres. Hill invited Rev. Travis Sherman, Chairman of the CMS, to the podium to lead the Convention in Responsive Prayer. The worship began with “Jesus, Grant That Balm and Healing” (LSB 421). The appointed reading for the service was 1 Peter 2:13-25. Upon the conclusion of the Scripture reading, the delegates prayed Responsive Prayer 1 (LSB 282–284).

1:43 P.M. Essay II with Q and A: Rev. Dr. Harold Ristau

At 1:43 P.M., Pres. Hill asked the delegates to turn in their mileage forms. He then invited Rev. Dr. Harold Ristau to the podium to continue with the second part of his essay.

2:34 P.M. Elections Committee

At 2:34 P.M., Pres. Hill invited Rev. Neugebauer to the podium to report on the results of the elections for Pastor-at-Large and Layman on the Board of Directors.

Board of Directors, Pastor-at-Large

Rev. David Bott	12
Rev. Kenneth Mars	40
Rev. Allan Wierschke	13
Abstained	1

Rev. Neugebauer announced that **Rev. Kenneth Mars** was elected Pastor-at-Large on the Board of Directors.

Board of Directors, Layman

Mr. Landis Benson	29
Mr. Benjamin Craig	9
Mr. Blake Pieper	28

Rev. Neugebauer announced that there was not a majority for Layman on the Board of Directors. A second ballot for Layman on the Board of Directors was distributed to the delegates consisting of the following names:

Mr. Landis Benson

Mr. Blake Pieper

Rev. Neugebauer instructed the delegates that the next elections will be for the following:

The Chairman-elect for the Commission on Congregational Services (CCS)

The Chairman-elect for the Commission on Mission Services (CMS)

Rev. Neugebauer announced that there was one nominee for Chairmen-elect for the Commission on Congregational Services:

Rev. Roger Mullet

On behalf of the Elections Committee, Rev. Neugebauer moved to elect Rev. Roger Mullet by acclamation. The motion was **adopted**. Rev. Neugebauer announced that **Rev. Roger Mullet** was elected Chairmen-elect for the Commission on Congregational Services.

Rev. Neugebauer presented the ballot for Chairman-elect of the Commission on Mission Services:

Rev. Samuel Needham

Rev. John Preus

There was a motion and second to ratify the ballot for Chairman-elect of the Commission on Mission Services. The motion was **adopted**.

Rev. Neugebauer presented the two slates for the 2028 District Convention Nominating Committee. He instructed the delegates that they were to vote for one slate, not individuals. The two slates were as follows:

Slate #1

Rev. Daniel Harrington

Rev. Neil Carlson

Mr. Ronald Brown

Mr. Robert Hilpert

Rev. John Christensen

Slate #2

Rev. Peter Preus

Rev. Andrew Hill

Dr. Timothy Narjes

Mr. Josh Witkop

Rev. Ted Bourret

Pres. Hill noted that the biographies of the nominees are on pages 160 to 162 of the Workbook.

There was a motion and second to ratify the 2028 District Convention Nominating Committee ballot. The motion was **adopted**. Rev. Neugebauer led the convention in prayer and ballots were distributed.

After the ballots were collected, Pres. Hill declared the elections closed.

2:47 P.M. Resolutions Committee

At 2:47 P.M., Pres. Hill invited Rev. Paul Cain, Resolutions Committee Chairman, to the podium.

Pres. Hill directed the delegates to return to **Resolution 06**. There was motion and second to ratify Resolution 06. Motion **failed**.

After an explanation of changes made by the Resolutions Committee to Resolution 06, Rev. Jeffery Grams presented **Resolution 06a**.

The committee **moved** adoption.

Concerning the Practice of In Vitro Fertilization (IVF)

Resolution 06a

(Overture 07)

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture teaches that human life is a sacred gift from God, who is the Creator of all life (Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 139:13-16); and

WHEREAS, Scripture affirms that man is made in the image of God and that this image is bestowed upon each person at conception (Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:41-44; Genesis 9:6); and

WHEREAS, Christ sanctified and redeemed even human embryos in his incarnation and conception of the Holy Spirit and Virgin Mary, His shed blood upon the cross, His resurrection, and His ascension to the right hand of the Father (Luke 1:35; Matthew 1:20-23); and

WHEREAS, The tradition of the Christian Church, in accordance with the creation order revealed in Holy Scripture, has consistently upheld the sanctity of human life and the dignity of procreation as an act that belongs within the marital union between a man and a woman (Genesis 1:27-28; Hebrews 13:4; Matthew 19:4-6). This is also found in the early Christian document *Didache* 2.2 "You shall not murder a child by abortion, nor kill a child at birth"; and

WHEREAS, The practice of In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) involves the creation of human embryos outside the womb often resulting in the destruction or indefinite freezing of embryos, which contradicts the biblical teaching on the sanctity of human life and proper context for procreation; and

WHEREAS, The practice of IVF undermines biblical understanding, reducing the child to a product of human will and technological manipulation rather than seeing and receiving the child as a gift from God (Genesis 30:2; Psalm 127:3); and

WHEREAS, The use of IVF introduces a separation between the procreative and unitive aspects of marriage, thereby undermining the integrity of the marital union as God intended it (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:31-33; LC I, 206-209); and

WHEREAS, The practice of IVF often involves surrogacy, which is the rental of another woman's womb, also undermining the integrity of the marital union as God intended it; and

WHEREAS, IVF commodifies human life, treating embryos as objects to be used, purchased, stored, or discarded, rather than recognizing them as persons created in the image of God (Gen. 9:6), deserving of dignity and protection and all the rights thereof; and

WHEREAS, IVF commonly uses gametes (sperm and eggs) taken from a third party thus violating the one flesh union and depriving the child of his natural right to his biological mother and father; and

WHEREAS, The desire for children is good, right, and godly, but Scripture teaches that sinful means may not be used to procure a good end; therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Wyoming District affirm children conceived by IVF are created in the image of God; and be it further

Resolved, That the Wyoming District condemn the practice of In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) as contrary to the teachings of Scripture, the tradition of the Church, and the sanctity of human life and the one flesh union; and be it further

Resolved, That the Wyoming District urge its members to uphold the biblical understanding of procreation as a sacred act within the marital union, rejecting practices that treat human life as a commodity or a product of human will; and be it further

Resolved, That the Wyoming District commit to educating its members about the ethical and theological problems and spiritual dangers surrounding IVF and surrogacy, encouraging them to seek alternatives that respect the sanctity of life and the God-given dignity of all human beings; and be it further

Resolved, That pastors of the Wyoming District be exhorted to provide pastoral counseling and absolution for those who have engaged in the practice of IVF; and be it further

Resolved, That the entire pastorate of the LCMS be encouraged to do the same, and be it finally

Resolved, That the Wyoming District send this resolution to the Synod convention as an overture.

Pres. Harrison spoke in favor of the resolution, reminding the Convention of what the 2017 Catechism states regarding IVF. Another delegate spoke in opposition to the resolution. The District Secretary and another delegate spoke in favor of the Resolution.

A motion was made and seconded to amend the resolution by inserting a new first “Resolved”: “That the Wyoming District affirm children conceived by IVF are created in the image of God.”

The amendment was **adopted**.

The main motion to ratify the amended Resolution 06a was **adopted**.

3:04 P.M. Break

At 3:04 P.M., Pres. Hill declared the Convention to be on break.

3:18 P.M. Essay III with Q and A: Rev. Dr. Harold Ristau

At 3:15 P.M., Pres. Hill gathered the delegates with the singing of the hymn, “Thine Honor Save, O Christ, Our Lord” (TLH 265).

At 3:18 P.M. Pres. Hill invited Rev. Dr. Ristau to the podium to continue with part three of his presentation.

4:12 P.M. Elections Committee

At 4:12 P.M., Pres. Hill invited Rev. Neugebauer to the podium to report the results of elections for the Layman on the Board of Directors, the CMS Chairman-elect, and the Slate for the 2028 District Convention Nominating Committee.

Rev. Neugebauer reported the following election results:

Board of Directors, Layman

Mr. Landis Benson	27
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Mr. Blake Pieper	40
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CMS Chairman-elect

Rev. Samuel Needham	31
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Rev. John Preus	36
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Slate #1	21
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Rev. Daniel Harrington

Rev. Neil Carlson

Mr. Ronald Brown

Mr. Robert Hilpert

Rev. John Christensen

Slate #2	42
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Rev. Peter Preus

Rev. Andrew Hill

Dr. Timothy Narjes

Mr. Josh Witkop

Rev. Ted Bourret

Rev. Neugebauer announced the following individuals to be elected: **Mr. Blake Pieper**, Board of Directors, Layman; and **Rev. John Preus**, CMS Chairman-elect. Rev. Neugebauer declared **Nominating Committee Slate #2** to be elected.

Rev. Neugebauer thanked the members of the Elections Committee:

Rev. Allan Wierschke

Mr. Bob Berry

Mr. Ben Backus

Rev. Neugebauer asked permission to destroy the ballots. Pres. Hill granted permission.

Pres. Hill thanked the volunteers, along with Jeff Snyder and Tiffany Hoff, for their help with the Convention.

Pres. Hill announced that the offering from the Divine Service was \$1022. There was a suggestion to give it to the Frederick the Wise Fund. Pres. Hill also suggested giving the offering to the District President emergency fund. Pres. Hill stated that it would be best to let Trinity Lutheran Church decide what they wanted to do with the offering.

4:18 P.M. Minutes Review Committee Reports

At 4:18 P.M., Pres. Hill invited Rev. Travis Berg to the podium to give a summary of findings from Review Committee #1. Rev. Berg greeted the Convention and stated that his committee was responsible for reviewing the minutes taken during Wyoming District BOD meetings and minutes taken during District Pastors/Teachers Conferences. The finding was that both sets of minutes were accurate and concise. However, Rev. Berg reported that the BOD minutes lacked any quorum declarations, and that the Pastors Conference minutes were unclear distinguishing formal and informal reports. The committee recommended that a standard minutes template be adopted for use by the BOD and the Pastors Conference Committee.

Pres. Hill also introduced the members of Review Committee #1:

Rev. Travis Berg

Rev. Zachary Viggers

Mr. Joe Cook

Mr. Landis Benson.

Pres. Hill invited Rev. John Preus to the podium to give a summary of findings from Review Committee #2. Rev. Preus reported that his committee was responsible for reviewing the minutes taken during CMS and CCS meeting. He reported that his committee found everything to be in order.

Rev. Preus also introduced the members of his committee:

Rev. Allan Wierschke

Mr. Gregory Schmall

Mr. Dylan Ohman.

4:22 P.M. Treasurer's Report: Mr. John Schmall

At 4:22 P.M., Pres. Hill invited Mr. John Schmall, District Treasurer, to the podium to present the Treasurer's Report.

Mr. Schmall asked the delegates to remember to submit their mileage reimbursement forms by the end of business this day. He also informed the delegates that room 162 is a hospitality room, stocked with refreshments.

The following chart is reproduced from the Workbook, page 120:

Three Year Summarized Budget Comparison				
	Actual Expenses			Projected Expenses
	2022	2023	2024	2025
Synodical Budget Pledge Higher Education, World Missions, Congregational Services & Administration, etc.	\$150,000.00	\$150,000.00	\$150,000.00	\$150,000.00
District Mission Projects Program Administration, District Mission Work, Campus Ministry, Subsidized Congregations, & Institutional Ministries	\$255,629.00	\$231,907.00	\$148,930.00	\$156,233.00
Student Assistance Student Aid & Recruitment, Schwieger & Fern Preis Scholarship, LWML Scholarship, Jensen & Splittergerber Scholarships	\$39,939.00	\$23,500.00	\$45,851.00	\$39,292.00
Congregational Services Program Administration, Adult Education, Outdoor & Youth Ministry, Evangelism, Stewardship, Human Care & Family Ministries	\$31,717.00	\$25,478.00	\$31,840.00	\$30,375.00
Ecclesiastical Administration President's Office, Vice Presidents and Circuit Counselors, Reconcilers, District Board of Education, DP Discretionary Fund	\$181,370.00	\$182,806.00	\$194,925.00	\$225,626.00
District Administration Financial & General Office, Board of Directors, Properties, Synod/District Conventions, Workshops, Pastors Conferences, Continuing Education, LCEF, Memorial Library, etc.	\$211,503.00	\$295,243.00	\$229,106.00	\$284,363.00
Debt Servicing	\$22,053.00	\$18,408.00	\$17,615.00	\$20,063.00
Total Expenditures (minus depreciation)	\$892,211.00	\$927,342.00	\$818,267.00	\$905,952.00
Total Income - (Actual & Projected)	\$863,429.00	\$824,276.00	\$878,106.00	\$831,735.00
Operating Surplus / (Deficit)	(\$28,782.00)	(\$103,066.00)	\$59,839.00	(\$74,217.00)
Assets/Investments for Expenditure Offset	\$55,402.00	\$107,572.00	-\$4,470.00	\$76,143.00
District Capital Surplus (cumulative)	\$26,620.00	\$4,506.00	\$55,369.00	\$1,926.00

In his report, Mr. Schmall explained the various District expenditures highlighted in the above chart:

Synodical Budget Pledge: The District's contribution to Synod.

District Mission Project: The District's support of St. Andrew's Campus Ministry and the two subsidized congregations.

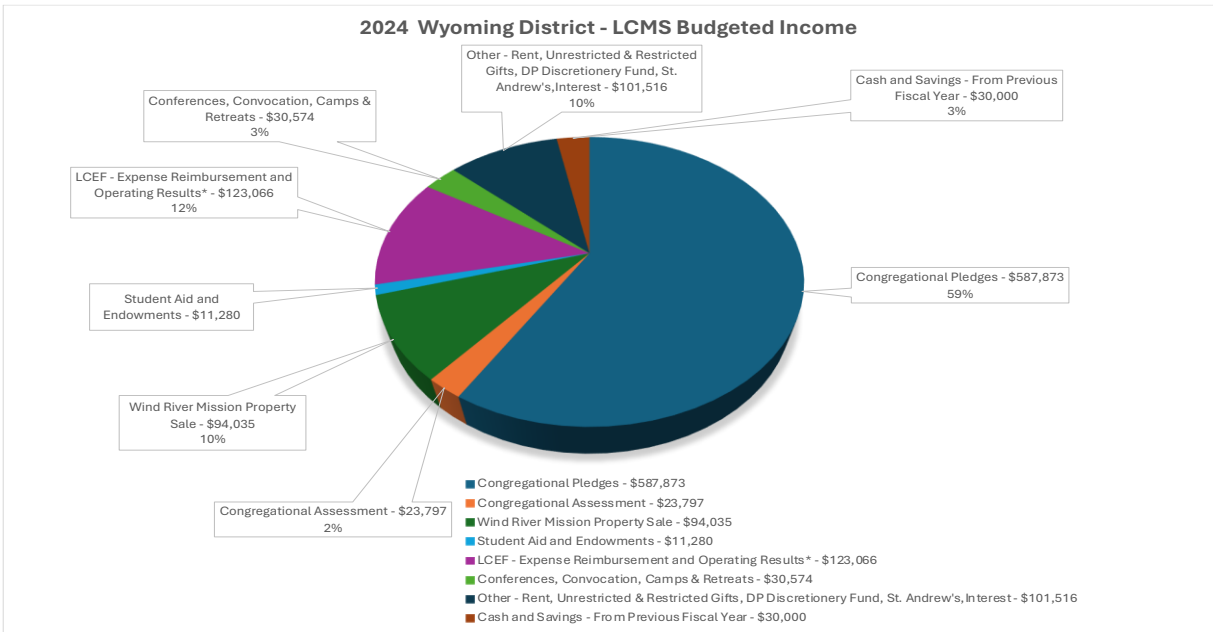
Student Assistance: The District's expenditures for scholarships, debt reduction assistance, and student recruitment. Mr. Schmall announced that debt reduction assistance forms are due October 1.

Congregational Services: The District’s expenditures for adult education, youth and outdoor ministries, Tell the Good News about Jesus Convocation, stewardship and other district ministries.

Ecclesiastical Administration: The District’s expenditures for the President’s office, Circuit Visitors, District Reconcilers, Education, and the District President discretionary fund.

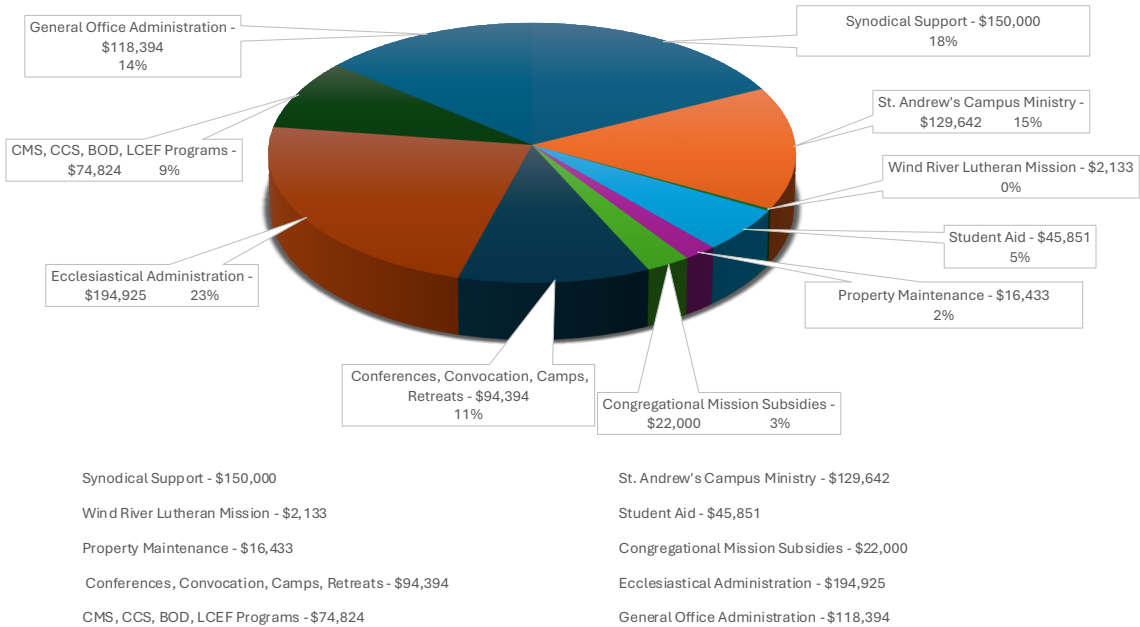
District Administration: The District’s expenditures for the Board of Directors, District properties; for conventions, workshops and conferences; for continuing education, LCEF, and other District administrative interests. Under this heading, Mr. Schmall also reported that there is about \$130,000 left to pay on the St. Andrew’s parsonage loan.

In addition to the above information, Mr. Schmall presented the following budget diagrams as a visual presentation of District Income and Expenditures:



Regarding District income, Mr. Schmall reported that the majority of the District’s income comes from District congregations and LCEF reimbursements.

2024 Wyoming District - LCMS Budget Expenditures



Regarding District expenditures, Mr. Schmall reported that the majority of the District's expenditures are for synodical support, ecclesiastical administration, and mission support.

Pres. Hill thanked Mr. Schmall for his report.

4:31 P.M. LCEF Vice-President's Report: Mr. Jeffrey Snyder

At 4:31 P.M., Pres. Hill invited Mr. Jeffrey Snyder, LCEF Vice-President, to the podium to give his report.

Mr. Snyder reported that he has worked for LCEF for 28 years. LCEF is the second largest source of income for the Wyoming District.

Mr. Snyder reported that there were only two large loans made by LCEF since the last Convention: St. Andrew's parsonage purchase and Zion, Laramie's remodel project. LCEF has helped with other congregational needs, as well.

Mr. Snyder reported on the loan that Luther Classical College had requested last year from LCEF through the District. He stated that Rev. Bart Day, President and CEO of LCEF, was

concerned about granting the loan due to the ambiguity of Synod Bylaws regarding the permissibility of such a district action, and his concern that if the loan would have been recalled, it would have been an undue burden on the District to pay back such a large sum.

Mr. Snyder announced the results of the raffle for gifts from LCEF. The first gift was for a \$100 gift card, and the second was for a \$50 gift card.

4:43 P.M. Resolutions Committee

At 4:43 P.M., Pres. Hill invited Rev. Paul Cain, Resolutions Committee Chairman, to the podium.

Rev. Cain presented **Resolution 04**.

The committee **moved** adoption.

Relation of LCC and the Wyoming District

Resolution 04

(Overture 05)

Preamble

Wyoming District schools and educators were pioneers in the young classical Education movement in The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS), beginning in the late 1990s. Three of the first conferences of the nascent Consortium for Classical Lutheran Education (CCLE) were held in the Wyoming District at St. Andrew’s Lutheran Church and Campus Center in Laramie (2003) and Trinity Lutheran Church and School in Cheyenne (~~2017~~ 2011) and Martin Luther Grammar School in Sheridan, Wyoming (~~2011~~ 2017). Presently, all five of the district schools have adopted classical Lutheran education as their guiding pedagogical principle. Numerous homeschool families in the district have also pursued the high goals and standards of classical Lutheran education.

From the beginning, schools in the classical Lutheran education movement in the Wyoming District and throughout the Synod sought to find and recruit classically educated pastors, teachers, and headmasters. For the past quarter-century Lutheran schools and Lutheran parents have contemplated the need for a

Lutheran classical college in which sound Christian doctrine, philosophy, history, literature, the classical languages, and the mathematical arts are thoroughly integrated and incorporated into the life of the home, church, and community. Classical Lutheran leaders who attempted to start such a college in the early years discovered that the time was not right. The right time has now come.

In 2020, pastors, laymen, and congregations of the Wyoming District and across The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod organized a Board of Regents for the new Luther Classical College (LCC). This year, 2025, LCC will hold classes for its first cohort of students. The college has been hosted and sponsored in various ways by Mount Hope and Trinity Lutheran Churches in Casper. The college will be located permanently on property adjacent to both Mount Hope and the Wyoming District’s Lutheran Ministries Center. Each congregation supplies a pastor and elder to serve on the LCC Board of Regents (BOR). The pastors and elders of each congregation supply the list of candidates for the BOR, thus retaining congregational sponsorship of the college. LCC’s pastors receive divine calls and LCC’s commissioned teachers receive teacher calls from one of the two Casper congregations. The Wyoming District President is also a member of the BOR; he advises the President, BOR, Mount Hope, and Trinity in the appointment and election of faculty; and he provides ecclesiastical oversight, encouragement, and counsel to LCC through its President and BOR.

LCC is sponsored and funded by hundreds of supporting LCMS congregations nationwide and more than a thousand individual LCMS donors. LCMS families are sending their young men and women to LCC to receive a robust classical Lutheran Education. All the faculty and staff are members of LCMS congregations. The pastors and commissioned teachers on the faculty and staff are members of the Wyoming District and are under the ecclesiastical supervision and care of the Wyoming District President.

Luther Classical College is a congregational college, that is, a college organized by, supported by, and supporting the congregations of the LCMS. In its doctrinal commitments and Lutheran culture it complements the Synod’s Concordia Universities, but it is not a member or part of the Concordia University System (CUS). LCC is not governed by the LCMS and has no legal or financial connection to the Synod. From the time of its organization, however, LCC has been seeking a formal ecclesiastical relationship to Synod. Its mission fully supports and advances the divinely instituted objectives of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod.

LCC is bound to the Holy Scriptures as the inerrant, inspired Word of God and to the Lutheran Confessions as a true exposition of Holy Scriptures and a correct exhibition of the doctrine of the Lutheran Church. LCC is guided by these commitments:

Luther Classical College educates Lutherans in the classical, Lutheran tradition and prepares them for godly vocations within family, church, and society, fostering Christian culture through study of the best of our Western heritage. (LCC Mission Statement; lutherclassical.org)

The college will provide a conservative, classical Lutheran education to Lutheran students. Paramount will be the promotion of Christian culture, a stress on the priority of Christian marriage, family, and piety, and a cultivation of confessional Lutheran theology, liturgy, hymnody, and identity. With courses using the “great books” of the past for the core curriculum, the college will offer Latin, history, theology, literature, logic, rhetoric, music, geometry, biology, and mathematics, all within a purposefully Christian and Lutheran framework.

WHEREAS, At its October 27, 2020 meeting, the Wyoming District Board of Directors (BOD) approved this resolution:

Be it Resolved that the Board of Directors (BOD) of the Wyoming District LCMS support the effort to found Luther Classical College (LCC) on the campus of Mount Hope Lutheran Church, Casper, Wyoming, as described in its Prospectus; and be it further

Resolved that the BOD affirm the Wyoming District President’s ecclesiastical oversight of LCC and its rostered workers; and be it finally

Resolved that the BOD encourage the congregations of the Wyoming District to respond positively to the LCC Call for Support as they are able.

And,

WHEREAS, At its May 3, 2024 meeting, the Wyoming District Board of Directors resolved:

that the Wyoming District BOD support the work of LCC as a mission effort of the district in all aspects possible: theologically, materially, and with encouragement coupled with due diligence, in order to ensure faithfulness in all areas.

And,

WHEREAS, Because LCC is sponsored by Wyoming District congregations, is governed by Wyoming District congregations and Regents, is located in the Wyoming District at our Casper congregations, is visited diligently by the Wyoming District president for the maintenance of true ecclesiastical concord (Preface to The Book of Concord, 24), and serves the congregations of the

Wyoming District by teaching her students and returning them for life and service to the congregations of the Wyoming District; therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Wyoming District in convention affirm the resolutions and actions of the BOD in supporting Luther Classical College; and be it further

Resolved, That the BOD continue, in its care for congregations and workers and in advancing the educational mandates given to the district, to help and support LCC with the resources God provides it; and be it further

Resolved, That the Wyoming District affirm and support the District President's duties

- to provide ecclesiastical supervision to LCC and its pastors and teachers,
- to encourage and counsel LCC's BOR and administration with God's Word,
- to advise the LCC President and BOR in the College's search for and appointment of faculty,
- to advise Mount Hope and Trinity in the calling of LCC faculty,
- to assist the LCC President in the college's interactions with LCMS entities and agencies, and
- to serve ex officio on the BOR of LCC;

And be it further

Resolved, That the congregations of the Wyoming District and their members be encouraged to pray for LCC, send their young people to LCC as students, and provide financial gifts and support to LCC as they are able; and be it further

Resolved, That the Wyoming District commend LCC for preparing future husbands and wives, congregation members, workers, seminary students, teachers, musicians, and the like for godly service in their homes, congregations, and communities; and be it finally

Resolved, That, most importantly, the Wyoming District recognize and give thanks to God that Luther Classical College serves the congregations of the Wyoming District in obedience to God's Word (Matthew 28:19-20; Ephesians 6:1-4; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 78:1-8).

Pres. Hill relinquished the chair; Rev. Jonathan Lange assumed the chair. He asked for discussion on the resolution. There was no discussion.

The motion to ratify Resolution 04 was **adopted**.

(Secretary's note: At the request of the Resolutions Committee, a correction was made to line 10 on page 1 where the dates were reversed: 2017 should have been 2011, and 2011 should have been 2017.)

Rev. Cain presented **Resolution 05**.

The committee **moved** adoption.

Appeal for a Recognized Ecclesiastical Relationship between LCC and the LCMS

Resolution 05

(Overture 04)

Preamble

The classical Lutheran education movement in The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) began in the late 1990s with a few schools and the gathering of a small number of educators in what has become the Consortium for Classical Lutheran Education (CCLE, a Recognized Service Organization). As the classical education movement gained momentum nationally, LCMS Lutherans sought to develop a uniquely Lutheran curriculum and educational philosophy, distinct from the many Reformed, Roman Catholic, Baptist, and secular versions of the classical liberal arts. In the LCMS, Lutherans discovered that the Western Christian educational tradition had already been richly and thoroughly adapted by Lutheran leaders (e.g. Luther and Melancthon) in the Lutheran Reformation and again in the United States of America at the beginning of the LCMS under C.F.W. Walther's leadership. Current classical Lutheran educators have sought to build on this tradition.

Today, this movement in the LCMS continues to grow rapidly among Lutheran schools and homeschools. In the LCMS this movement is supported by new classical offerings in our Concordia University System schools, by the biennial "Lutheranism and the Classics" conference hosted by Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, and by the CCLE. Recent CCLE conferences have been attended by over 500 participants. The number of CCLE accredited schools

surpassed 20 schools in 2024. Numerous homeschools throughout the Synod have embraced the Western tradition of classical education.

From the beginning, schools in the classical Lutheran education movement throughout the Synod have sought to find and recruit pastors, teachers, and headmasters who have received an education that combines a thorough knowledge of Scriptures and the Confessions of the Lutheran church with the skills and knowledge appropriate to the Western Christian liberal arts tradition. For the past quarter-century Lutheran schools and Lutheran parents have contemplated the need for a Lutheran classical college in which sound Christian doctrine, philosophy, history, literature, the classical languages, and the mathematical arts are thoroughly integrated and incorporated into the life of the home, church, and community. Classical Lutheran leaders who attempted to start such a college in the early years discovered that the time was not right. The right time has now come.

In 2020, pastors, laymen, and congregations of the Wyoming District and across The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod organized a Board of Regents for the new Luther Classical College (LCC). In 2025, LCC holds classes for its first cohort of students.

The college has been hosted and sponsored in various ways by two Wyoming District congregations in Casper, Wyoming (Mount Hope and Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Churches). Each congregation provides Regents to the LCC Board of Regents (BOR), calls for rostered church workers, and has a role in the nomination of Regents.

The Wyoming District President is a member of the BOR; he advises the LCC President, BOR, Mount Hope, and Trinity in the appointment and election of faculty; and he provides ecclesiastical oversight, encouragement, and counsel to LCC through its President and BOR.

As of January 2025, LCC has been sponsored and funded by hundreds of supporting LCMS congregations nationwide and more than a thousand individual LCMS donors. LCMS families are sending their young men and women to LCC to receive a robust classical Lutheran education. All the faculty and staff are members of LCMS congregations. The pastors and commissioned teachers on the faculty and staff are members of the Wyoming District and are under the ecclesiastical supervision and care of the Wyoming District President.

Luther Classical College is a congregational college, that is, a college organized by, supported by, and supporting the congregations of the LCMS. In its doctrinal commitments and Lutheran culture it complements the Synod's Concordia Universities, but it is not a member or part of the Concordia University System

(CUS). LCC is not governed by the LCMS and has no legal or financial connection to the Synod. From the time of its organization, however, LCC has been seeking a formal ecclesiastical relationship to Synod. Its mission fully supports and advances the divinely instituted objectives of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod.

LCC is bound to the Holy Scriptures as the inerrant, inspired Word of God and to the Lutheran Confessions as a true exposition of Holy Scriptures and a correct exhibition of the doctrine of the Lutheran Church. LCC is guided by these commitments:

Luther Classical College educates Lutherans in the classical, Lutheran tradition and prepares them for godly vocations within family, church, and society, fostering Christian culture through study of the best of our Western heritage. (LCC Mission Statement; lutherclassical.org)

The college will provide a conservative, classical Lutheran education to Lutheran students. Paramount will be the promotion of Christian culture, a stress on the priority of Christian marriage, family, and piety, and a cultivation of confessional Lutheran theology, liturgy, hymnody, and identity. With courses using the “great books” of the past for the core curriculum, the college will offer Latin, history, theology, literature, logic, rhetoric, music, geometry, biology, and mathematics, all within a purposefully Christian and Lutheran framework.

WHEREAS, LCC is a thoroughly Lutheran micro-college with joyful commitments to Holy Scriptures, the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, and the doctrine of the LCMS; and

WHEREAS, LCC fulfills the divine commandment to teach Lutheran young people the pure doctrine of Holy Scriptures and a pious Christian life in devotion and vocation (Matthew 28:19-20; Ephesians 6:1-4; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 78:1-8); and

WHEREAS, LCC not only conforms to the Confession of the LCMS (Constitution Article II) but also advances the objectives of the LCMS to “aid congregations to develop processes of thorough Christian education and nurture and to establish agencies of Christian education such as elementary and secondary schools and to support synodical colleges, universities, and seminaries” (Constitution Article III.5); and

WHEREAS, LCC is sponsored by LCMS congregations, is governed by LCMS Regents, is located in LCMS congregations of the LCMS Wyoming District, is visited diligently by the Wyoming District President for the maintenance of true ecclesiastical concord (Preface to The Book of Concord, 24), and serves the congregations of the LCMS by teaching her students and returning them for life and service to the congregations of the LCMS; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Wyoming District in convention petition the Synod President and Secretary to work with the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) to write a proposed amendment to the Bylaws of Synod that creates a regular process for establishing formal ecclesiastical relations between a micro-college sponsored by LCMS congregations and the LCMS; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod President and Secretary consider proposing limitations in these Bylaw amendments that include the following:

- that the micro-college be an undergraduate school restricted to a student population of 400 or less;
- that the micro-college offer instruction primarily through in-person classes;
- that the entire faculty and administration of the micro-college be members of the LCMS or members in good standing of LCMS congregations;
- that the micro-college receive regular ecclesiastical visitation with a visitation team to include, in addition to the district president of the LCMS district in which the micro-college resides, one representative each from the President of Synod, the President of the CUS, a CUS president or member of the theology faculty, and a seminary faculty member;
- that the doctrine and practice of the micro-college in all its faculty, teaching and preaching, worship practices, and campus culture be thoroughly Lutheran in accord with LCMS doctrinal commitments;
- that the micro-college be clearly separate from Synod legally and financially in a way similar to the requirements established for RSOs; and
- that the micro-college not prepare or posture itself to prepare pastors for ordination or laymen to carry out the functions of the pastoral office, nor certify for membership on the roster of Synod teachers and other church workers;

And be it finally

Resolved, That this resolution be sent as an overture to the 2026 LCMS convention as the record of the Wyoming District's appeal regarding LCC's ecclesiastical relationship with the LCMS.

Rev. Lange asked for discussion. There was a question regarding the rationale for the term, "micro-college." Pres. Hill stated that we are trying to describe parameters for LCC that "would carve out a space for us" in the spectrum of higher education. Another delegate supported the resolution because he stated that the LCMS needs a LCMS "Hillsdale."

There was a motion and second to call the question. The motion was **adopted**.

Resolution 05 was **adopted**.

Rev. Lange relinquished the chair; Pres. Hill resumed the chair.

5:23 P.M. Announcements

At 5:23 P.M., Pres. Hill gave instructions about this evening's banquet. He asked the delegates to clear their tables in preparation for the banquet. He announced that prior to the banquet, there would be a cash bar available in the foyer. Then at 7 P.M., food would be provided in the foyer and dinner would be held in the convention hall.

5:28 P.M. Vespers: Rev. Darrell Debowey, District Secretary

At 5:28 P.M., Rev. Debowey, District Secretary, led the Convention in the Order of Vespers (LSB 229). Worship began with the delegates singing the hymn "Rise Again, Ye Lion-Hearted" (TLH 470). The delegates chanted Psalm 4 and sang the hymn "Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands" (TLH 458). The appointed Scripture reading was Hebrews 13:1-21.

The following is a summary of Rev. Debowey's sermon. Daily, God calls us to be faithful to Him; to struggle against the many idols of this world that come between us and God. This is spiritual warfare because behind every idol is a demon, a spiritual force of evil that doesn't want us to keep the Commandments or honor God's Name. But Christ has redeemed us from our sin and idolatry, and it is through Him that we can "let brotherly love continue," and that we can continually offer up sacrifices of praise to God.

Following the sermon and the singing of the Magnificat (LSB 231-232), the service concluded with prayer.

Following the conclusion of Vespers, Pres. Hill declared the Convention to be in recess.

SATURDAY, MAY 3

8:00 A.M. Call to Order

At 7:58 A.M., Pres. Hill gathered the delegates with the singing of “Rise, Ye Children of Salvation” (TLH 472).

At 8:00 A.M., Pres. Hill called the Convention to order.

8:05 A.M. Memorial Service: Rev. Marvin Temme

At 8:05 A.M., Pres. Hill invited Rev. Marvin Temme, Pastor Emeritus, to the podium to open the District Memorial Service. Rev. Temme used the Funeral Service in LSB (p. 278). After the singing of the hymn, “The Strife is O’er, the Battle Done” (LSB 464), Rev. Temme remembered four pastors who had entered glory during the recitation of the Baptismal Remembrance: Rev. Francis Koessel, Rev. Fred Schroeder, Rev. Thomas Jacobson, and Rev. Richard Keuck. The delegates spoke Psalm 16. The appointed readings for the service were 2 Kings 2:1-14, 2 Timothy 4:4-6, and Matthew 28:1-15. Following the Scripture readings, the delegates sang the hymn, “Jesus Christ, My Sure Defense” (TLH 206).

The following is a summary of Rev. Temme’s sermon: With 2 Kings 2:1-14 as his text, Rev. Temme used the passing of the mantle from Elijah to Elisha as the theme for his message. Elijah’s ministry ended as he was called to glory and his mantle fell to the ground. Elisha picked up the mantle—it was now his to bear; he was now the Lord’s prophet. Though these four pastors have passed into glory, the ministry of the Word continues; the old War Horses may be gone, but their work has been passed onto the new pastors that have entered the field. They wield the Sword of the Spirit that destroys the power of the devil. As soldiers of the cross, we need not doubt the outcome—the war has been won; Christ is victorious. Christ didn’t need war horses or chariots to destroy sin, death, and the devil—He died and rose again to defeat our enemies.

The service concluded with prayer and the singing of the hymn, “Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart” (LSB 708).

8:50: Announcements

Pres. Hill asked the delegates to return their name tags and lanyards at the end of business. He announced that there were still 20 *Magdeburg Confession* books available at the registration table. He announced that there will be a Continuing Education class at Our Savior in Cheyenne this August and that mileage reimbursement checks were available.

8:52 A.M. Resolutions Committee

At 8:52 A.M., Pres. Hill invited Rev. Cain to the podium. Rev. Cain announced that only the "Resolveds" from each resolution would be read.

Rev. Cain directed the delegates to **Resolution 9a**.

The committee **moved** adoption.

Appeal to Memorialize District Visitation by the Synod

Resolution 09a

(President's Report, pp. 17-58)

Preamble

The LCMS defines ecclesiastical oversight as

"The responsibility, primarily of the district president, to monitor; to make inquiry and receive a response thereto; to make suggestions; to bring concerns to the attention of a higher authority, namely the Synod status granting office, as relates specifically to the ecclesial relations of a recognized service organization operating within his district, and the impact and/or reflection of its work on the mission and ministry of the church. (Bylaw 1.2.i).

So also, the LCMS defines ecclesiastical supervision as

"The responsibility, primarily of the President of the Synod and district presidents, to supervise on behalf of the Synod the doctrine, life, and administration of its members, officers, and agencies. Such supervision, subject to the provisions of the Synod's Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions, includes visitation, evangelical encouragement and support, care, protection, counsel, advice, admonition, and, when necessary,

appropriate disciplinary measures to assure that the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod are followed and implemented. Thus, ecclesiastical supervision is also the presenting, interpreting, and applying of the collective will of the Synod's congregations. Ecclesiastical supervision does not include the responsibility to observe, monitor, control, or direct the day-to-day activities of individual members of the Synod, whether in the conduct of their work or in their private lives (cf. Bylaw 2.14.1 [a]). Further, those constitutional articles and bylaws pertaining to ecclesiastical supervision shall determine the full definition of ecclesiastical supervision (LCMS Bylaw 1.2.j).

While the LCMS does not, strictly speaking, practice an episcopal form of governance, there remains an evangelical and biblical form of governance that places pastors under the supervision of their district president, and district presidents under the supervision of the President of Synod. That supervision is enacted by way of visitation (ἐπισκοπῆς, Luke 19:44).

It is the Evangelical Lutheran position that forms of governance are adiaphora, but as the LCMS Constitution and Bylaws are a human institution (1 Peter 2:13), Christians who have willingly aligned themselves with the LCMS are duty-bound to submit to the authority of the LCMS insofar as the LCMS remains faithful to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

The shared ordination vows of pastors, as well as the confirmation vows of laypersons, demonstrate that there is an earnest desire to walk together as Synod. There are, however, theological differences among pastors and laypersons that extend far beyond those topics that may be relegated to adiaphora.

Concerning supervision and oversight Martin Chemnitz, in his *Enchiridion* (1574) writes:

Now, when this little book was to be published, I then dedicated and addressed it first to you, reverend heads of the monasteries of this duchy, because the reformation of the monasteries was directed to this end, that the prelates should gradually be drawn in and used in the consistory, for visitation, for examinations, and for synods, etc. and because the examinations of pastors in the first visitation were for the most part held in the monasteries, so that this little book might publicly testify what kind of doctrine it is regarding which pastors were examined toward the beginning of the reformation, which [doctrine] also Your Reverences embraced and still profess. Moreover, at the same time I also addressed you, the superintendents, general and special, and all pastors of the churches of this duchy, to testify publicly, confirm thoroughly, and firmly preserve Christian, salutary unity in pure doctrine, against all pernicious corruptions, among

the ministers of the churches in the duchy and in the city of Brunswick, as this very model of pure, incorrupt doctrine resounded by divine grace in all these neighboring and other nearby churches of Saxony, in thesis and antithesis, till now and still resounds, as the chief points are explained in a simple manner in this manual. And since God has given His special grace and blessing, so that the Christian declaration of the disputed points of religion - which [declaration] was incorporated in the church order of the duchy of Brunswick, from which also this manual was for the most part drawn - is approved and praised as correct by many leading churches, not only nearby but also far away, I could not object when the printer wanted to issue this little book anew, and I have also improved it in some places. And I hereby want the first, previous dedication of this little book to Your Reverence and Honor to be repeated and confirmed.

May the faithful and most merciful God rule, teach, bless, and keep us in pure doctrine and unity of the Spirit, so that we may one and all, by the grace and help of the Holy Spirit, according to the teaching of Paul, hold steadfastly to the Word, which is salutary and sure, refute those who contradict, Tts 1:9, and endeavor to keep—besides pure doctrine—Christian, brotherly, unity and the bond of peace, Eph 4:3. Let us guard against unnecessary, vexatious division and schism, Ro 16:17. Let us not give way or place, even in the least, to the wolf and to tares of false doctrine, Jo 10:12, but, as Luther says, do both faithfully and diligently: feed the sheep and drive away the wolf. Amen. Written at Brunswick, August 6, A.D. 1574

Martin Chemnitz

Lord Superintendent

It is well-established by the LCMS that visitation is a duty of district presidents and the President of Synod:

Constitution

Article III Objectives

The Synod under Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, shall—

1. Conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3-6; 1 Cor. 1:10), work through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom. 16:17), and heresy;
2. Strengthen congregations and their members in giving bold witness by word and deed to the love and work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and extend that Gospel witness into all the world;

3. Recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth;
4. Provide opportunities through which its members may express their Christian concern, love, and compassion in meeting human needs;
5. Aid congregations to develop processes of thorough Christian education and nurture and to establish agencies of Christian education such as elementary and secondary schools and to support synodical colleges, universities, and seminaries;
6. Aid congregations by providing a variety of resources and opportunities for recognizing, promoting, expressing, conserving, and defending their confessional unity in the true faith;
7. Encourage congregations to strive for uniformity in church practice, but also to develop an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith;
8. Provide evangelical supervision, counsel, and care for pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers of the Synod in the performance of their official duties;

Article XI Rights and Duties of Officers

A. In General

1. The officers of the Synod must assume only such rights as have been expressly conferred upon them by the Synod, and in everything pertaining to their rights and the performance of their duties they are responsible to the Synod.
2. The Synod at all times has the right to call its officers to account and, if circumstances require it, to remove them from office in accordance with Christian procedure. ...

B. Duties of the President

1. The President has the supervision regarding the doctrine and the administration of
 - a. All officers of the Synod;
 - b. All such as are employed by the Synod;
 - c. The individual districts of the Synod;
 - d. All district presidents.

2. It is the President's duty to see to it that all the aforementioned act in accordance with the Synod's Constitution, to admonish all who in any way depart from it, and, if such admonition is not heeded, to report such cases to the Synod.
3. The President has and always shall have the power to advise, admonish, and reprove. He shall conscientiously use all means at his command to promote and maintain unity of doctrine and practice in all the districts of the Synod.
4. The President shall see to it that the resolutions of the Synod are carried out. ...

Article XII

The district presidents shall, moreover, especially exercise supervision over the doctrine, life, and administration of office of the ordained and commissioned ministers of their district and acquaint themselves with the religious conditions of the congregations of their district. To this end they shall visit and, according as they deem it necessary, hold investigations in the congregations. Their assistants in this work are the circuit visitors, who therefore shall regularly make their reports to the district president. District presidents are empowered to suspend from membership ordained and commissioned ministers for persistently adhering to false doctrine or for having given offense by an ungodly life, in accordance with such procedure as shall be set forth in the Bylaws of the Synod.

Bylaw 1.9.2

Before materials stipulated in Bylaw 1.9.1 are published, they shall be submitted to (a) doctrinal reviewer(s). Reviewers shall make a careful evaluation of the doctrinal content of all items submitted. Materials are to be reviewed in a prompt manner and completed in no longer than four weeks. Exceptions shall be arranged by mutual agreement between the reviewer(s) and the originating entity.

- a) The primary responsibility for doctrinal supervision and review lies with the President of the Synod (Constitution Art. XI B 1).

Bylaw 4.4.3

The district president shall, in accordance with the Constitution of the Synod, in his ministry of ecclesiastical supervision, visit the congregations of the district.

- a) He shall arrange in advance for an official visit to each congregation of his district at least once every three years and otherwise as he deems it necessary. He may call upon the circuit visitors and vice-presidents to assist him with the triennial visitation of congregations.

- b) In his official visits he shall seek to bring about to the greatest possible degree the achievement of the Synod's objectives as expressed in Article III of its Constitution.
- c) He shall conduct his official visits in an evangelical manner.
- d) He shall come to the pastor and the congregation as a brotherly advisor, reminding them of the joy of serving in the mission and ministry of the church.
- e) In his visits he shall include fraternal discussion in regard to worship and communion attendance; participation by the congregation in missions and the work of the church at large; the congregation's evangelism and education endeavors; its cultivation of sound stewardship principles; all aspects of compensation for professional church workers; the need for maintenance of purity of doctrine; the strengthening of the bond of Christian fellowship; and the provision of resources, opportunities, and assistance so God's people can grow in their faith, hope, and love. ...

WHEREAS, All pastors of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod make the same vows upon their ordination and installation concerning pure doctrine; and

WHEREAS, It is the duty of district presidents to carry out ecclesiastical oversight and supervision per the bylaws of Synod; and

WHEREAS, It is the duty of the President of Synod to carry out ecclesiastical supervision per the bylaws of Synod; and

WHEREAS, It is the duty of Synod in convention to exhort the men who hold such offices to do their duty; and

WHEREAS, Christians are called to submit to all human institutions (1 Peter 2:13); and

WHEREAS, Hebrews 13:17 teaches that submission to leaders is to be done out of love and respect with the confession that such leaders watch over the souls of those under them and will have to give an account to Christ at judgment day; and

WHEREAS, Pastors must therefore give an account for the souls in their congregations (Hebrews 13:17; Acts 20:28); and

WHEREAS, District presidents must therefore give an account for the pastors in their district; and

WHEREAS, The Synod President must therefore give an account for district presidents; and

WHEREAS, Proverbs 10:17 teaches that paternal discipline is a blessing to the one being disciplined. Proverbs 23:13-14, Hebrews 12:5-6, & 12:11 also teach this lesson; and

WHEREAS, God desires that all people - including pastors - would repent when their error is made known to them (Ezekiel 33:11; Matthew 18; 2 Peter 3:9); and

WHEREAS, No one lights a lamp and then hides it (Luke 8:16); therefore, be it

Resolved, That congregational pastors and district presidents be open and transparent with their ecclesiastical supervisors concerning their doctrine and practice; and be it further

Resolved, That the President of Synod be encouraged to visit each district at least once during each triennium for the sake of theological review, pastoral counseling, and reproof where necessary; and be it further

Resolved, That district presidents allow their leaders to visit them "with joy and not with groaning," (Hebrews 13:17); and be it finally

Resolved, That this resolution be sent as an overture to the 2026 LCMS convention

Pres. Hill called for discussion. Pres. Harrison clarified for the Convention that there is already in place a resolution that requires the Synod President to visit every district. Pres. Hill mentioned that the District was officially visited by Synod officials in March.

The motion to ratify Resolution 9a was **adopted**.

Rev. Cain directed the delegates to **Resolution 2b: To Uphold the Scriptural Teaching of the Church as One Chosen Generation in Spite of the Existence of Various Earthly Races**

The committee **moved** adoption.

Pres. Hill called for discussion. A delegate spoke on the second and third *whereas* statements (line 10 and 13), stating his opposition to removing "race" from these statements. He stated that it is acceptable to use the term *race* and he gave examples of how *race* was used in Scripture. Another delegate wanted more information about "racism" in the Synod. Rev. Lange stated that the meaning of "race" has changed in the last 150 years due to evolutionary theory and that he supported the resolution. Another delegate questioned the necessity of the resolution. In response, one of the committee members spoke of the value of the resolution, especially the final resolved on page 1. Another delegate stated his desire to change lines 30 to 32 to provide new wording for that resolved, but made no motion. Another delegate spoke to lines 8 through 13 on page 2. He questioned the use of "superiority." He requested to add "spiritual" to the resolved, but made no motion. Another

delegate returned to the microphone to provide more Scriptural uses of the term "race." Another delegate spoke against the resolution because there was so much tension in the issue of race that this resolution does not "resolve." Pres. Hill mentioned that it might serve the convention well to table this resolution.

There was a motion and second to table action on the resolution to later in the day or at a future pastors conference. The motion to table discussion on the resolution was **adopted**.

Rev. Cain directed the delegates to **Resolution 1a**.

The committee **moved** adoption.

For the Church of Christ to Stay and Do Her Duty

Resolution 01a

(Overture 06)

WHEREAS, God commands, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8); and

WHEREAS, Our Lord and Savior proclaims, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4); and

WHEREAS, The apostle Peter declares, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29); and

WHEREAS, The Scriptures admonish Christians to "consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb. 10:24-25); and

WHEREAS, Christian liberty should not be determined by someone else's conscience (1 Cor. 10:29); and

WHEREAS, The Large Catechism teaches that the Sacrament of the Altar is essential to the Christian faith, "A great number of people who hear the gospel, now that the pope's nonsense has been abolished and we are freed from his compulsion and commands, let a year, or two, three, or more years go by without receiving the sacrament, as if they were such strong Christians that they have no need of it. Others let themselves be kept and deterred from it because we have taught that none should go unless they feel a hunger and thirst impelling them to

it. Still others pretend that it is a matter of liberty, not of necessity, and that it is enough if they simply believe. Thus the great majority go so far that they become quite barbarous and ultimately despise both the sacrament and God's Word" (Large Catechism V 41 [Kolb-Wengert]; cf. AC VII, AC XXIV; 1932 Brief Statement); and

WHEREAS, During the years 2020, 2021, and 2022, responses to the COVID-19 pandemic included the cancellation of public, communal, in-person worship services, by congregations, pastors, and affiliated educational institutions; and

WHEREAS, Online or virtual worship is not a substitute for corporate worship (Heb. 10:24-25; LCMS 2023 Convention Resolution 5-08A); and

WHEREAS, These responses taught God's flock and the world at-large that public, communal, in-person worship is non-essential (while allowing grocery stores, liquor stores, and cannabis dispensaries to remain open); that such public worship of God by those who wish to do so can be forbidden by the consciences of others who do not wish to gather in public worship; that public opinion or government demand can forbid public worship; and

WHEREAS, Great societal distress over the COVID-19 pandemic ought to have instead compelled the Church to keep her doors open instead of close them, faithful in her vow to "intend to continue steadfast in this confession and to suffer all, even death rather than fall away from it" (LSB Rite of Confirmation); therefore be it

Resolved, That we commend the desires of faithful pastors to care for their flocks in a time of pandemic, granting charity and a wide latitude of understanding to our brothers in the Public Office of the Holy Ministry due to the emergency nature of the situation at that time confronting us all; and be it further

Resolved, That pastors and congregations recognize that not offering public worship was sinful, even if done in ignorance, and ~~to~~ repent where necessary; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod President and the Council of Presidents ~~repent for not encouraging~~ publicly encourage pastors, congregations and educational institutions of Synod to stay and do their duty by holding public worship services during ~~the COVID-19 pandemic~~ any pandemic for those who ~~wished~~ wish to attend; and be it further

Resolved, That in the future, the Synod President and the Council of Presidents should give proper concern and understanding to the doctrine of the two Kingdoms especially as it relates to resistance to government tyranny (cf. 1932 Brief Statement, Church and State), and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod President and the Council of Presidents and those who assist them be counseled and urged to instruct our pastors and congregations on the basis of Holy Scripture's example and exhortation to gather and meet together and also celebrate the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42; Hebrews 10:25) on the basis of the examples found in Augsburg Confession Articles VII and XXIV, and be it finally

Resolved, That in the future the Church should stay and do Her duty and not abandon Her people in such a crisis and instead exhort pastors and congregations not to abandon the holy, faithful people of God even if it should bring persecution, but rather that the sheep be gathered together accompanied by their pastors, comforted by the Word of God, by the sacraments, by fellowship, and by prayer.

Pres. Hill called for discussion. A delegate stated that we cannot "resolve" another's repentance (line 11-12, page 2). He suggested deleting this line, but made no motion. Pres. Harrison spoke of the tyranny of many state governments against the church. He stated that the responses to tyranny were perhaps incorrect, but we were all dealing with the unknown, and many in the Synod, including himself, did things that were, in retrospect, wrong.

There was motion and second to amend the resolution by removing lines 11-14 (third *Resolved*, page 2). The motion to amend was **defeated**.

There was a motion and second to amend the resolution: by striking "repent for not encouraging" and inserting "publicly encourage" (page 2, lines 11-12,); by striking "during the COVID 19 pandemic" (page 2, line 13); and to change "wished" to "wish" (page 2, line 14).

There was motion and second to amend the amendment by striking out "the COVID 19 pandemic" and inserting in its place "any pandemic" (page 2, line 13).

The motion to amend the amendment was **adopted**.

Discussion continued on the original motion to amend the resolution. A delegate stated that further modifications were necessary to lines 11-14, but made no motion. Another delegate spoke against the resolution in general due to the way in which the Synod pastors and leadership were blindsided by tyrannical government authorities.

The original motion to amend the resolution was **adopted**.

Discussion on the now amended resolution continued. A delegate spoke against the resolution in general—"we are trying to control too much with this resolution." Another delegate spoke in favor of the resolution because the church could have done a better job of handling the response to the pandemic: "this resolution will better prepare us for the next pandemic." Another delegate spoke against the resolution because, "there wasn't a single pastor who did all the right things during the pandemic." Another delegate spoke in favor of the resolution by pointing to line 32-37 and lines 5-8 (p. 2) as an answer to those who were against the resolution.

There was a motion and second to send the resolution as amended back to the Resolutions Committee. Motion **failed**.

Discussion continued.

There was a motion and second to amend lines 9-10 (page 2) by striking "to repent" and inserting in its place "to repent where necessary." The motion was **adopted**. (The Resolutions Committee offered to change "to repent" to "repent" as a grammatical correction.)

There was a motion and second to close debate. The motion was **adopted**.

The motion to ratify Resolution 1a as amended was **adopted**.

9:48 A.M. District Administrative Team (DAT) Report and Ingathering

At 9:48 A.M., Rev. Hill invited Rev. Jonathan Lange to the podium to give instruction on the DAT form that was about to be distributed to the delegates. Pres. Hill asked the delegation to fill out the form during the break and return it to Rev. Lange.

9:52 A.M. Break

At 9:52 A.M., Pres. Hill declared the Convention to be on break.

10:15 A.M. Commission on Congregational Services (CCS) Report

At 10:13 A.M., Pres. Hill gathered the delegates with the singing of the hymn, "Lord Jesus Christ, with Us Abide" (TLH 292).

At 10:15 A.M., Pres. Hill invited Rev. David Bott, Chairman of the CCS, to the podium to give the CCS report.

(Secretary's note: The CCS Report is found in the Workbook, Tab 5, pages 134 - 149.)

Rev. Bott recognized the following CCS Members:

Mr. Josh Witkop, Adult Ministry/Leadership

Rev. Jon Olson, Evangelism

Mr. Jeff Snyder, LCEF

Rev. Joshual Scheer, Stewardship

Mrs. Terri Denniston, LWML

Rev. Jonathan Lange, Marriage, Life and Family

Rev. Zachary Viggers, Youth and Outdoor Ministry

Rev. Richard Mueller, Student Aid and Recruitment

Rev. Bott summarized some of the Commission's activities:

The LWML's grant work that helps with convocations and meetings,

Rev. Jonathan Lange's work as advisor to the CCS, and his dedication to Marriage, Life and Family issues, especially with bills at the state house of Wyoming.

Rev. Richard Mueller's work with Student Aid and Recruitment. Rev. Bott reported on scholarships that are available for church work students, and he mentioned that student loan debt retirement applications are due in October. He also mentioned that the Wyoming District LLL scholarship fund is now available to the District for scholarships.

Rev. Bott thanked Rev. Olson for his work on the TTGNAJ Convocations, and for his work on Elder workshops and training.

Rev. Bott reported that Rev. Scheer evaluates resources for stewardship instruction, and he has resources to address the growing gambling issue. He also worked to establish a fund for helping congregations and pastors in times of need (the Frederick the Wise Fund).

He reported on the work of Mr. Snyder and LCEF.

He reported that Rev. Viggers has worked to acquire ways to store camp supplies; in addition the Lutheran Youth Camp has worked to improve dietary options for campers with diet restrictions.

He reported on Mr. Witkop's work in the area of adult ministry. He highlighted the following retreats sponsored by the District: Family retreats, Homeschool Retreat, Father-Son Retreat, and a new retreat: Camp Titus Retreat for Mothers and Daughters.

Pres. Hill thanked Rev. Bott and announced that Rev. Roger Mullet is the new CCS Chairman-elect.

10:32 A.M. Commission on Mission Services (CMS) Report

At 10:32 A.M., Pres. Hill invited Rev. Travis Sherman, Chairman of the CMS, to the podium to give the CMS report.

(Secretary's note: The CMS Report is found in the Workbook, Tab 4, pages 126 - 132.)

Rev. Sherman reported that the CMS is responsible for oversight of the District's missions and supported congregations.

Rev. Sherman recognized the following CMS members:

Rev. Patrick Baldwin, Mission Support Facilitator, Chairman-elect

Mr. Chuck Hall, Campus Ministry Facilitator

Mr. Larry Rice: Ethnic Ministry Facilitator

Mrs. Terri Denniston: LWML

Rev. Paul Cain is the advisor to CMS.

Rev. Sherman summarized some of the Commission's activities:

Wind River Lutheran Mission (WRLM). Rev. Sherman reported on the suspension of WRLM. He especially thanked Rev. Gregory and Rachel Sonnenschein for their years of work on the Mission. Rev. Sherman reported that the District still has property on the reservation for the possibility of opening a future mission. Rev. Sherman also commended Mr. Larry Rice for all his work to support the WRLM and to care for the mission's property after it was suspended.

St. Andrew's Campus Ministry: Rev. Sherman reported that Rev. Mark Preus reports to the CMS. Rev. Sherman noted that work on the campus is going well.

Mission Supported Congregations: Rev. Sherman reported that the District supports two congregations: Our Saviour Lutheran Church, Evanston, WY (Rev. Jonathan Lange); and Platte Valley Lutheran Church, Saratoga, WY (Rev. Randolph Schnack)

LWML: Rev. Sherman reported that CMS works with Mrs. Denniston and the LWML to define areas that are a priority for mission support.

Frederick the Wise Fund: Rev. Sherman invited Rev. Patrick Baldwin to report on this Fund. Rev. Baldwin reported that this fund has been set up to help struggling congregations support their pastor in times of financial emergencies or in times of need for pastoral respite (vacation and pulpit supply support).

Pres. Hill thanked Rev. Sherman and announced that Rev. John Preus is the new CMS Chairman-elect.

Pres. Hill introduced those that serve on the Commission for Ecclesiastical Services:

Rev. Jonathan Lange, Constitutions Chairman

Mr. Larry Harrington, outgoing Legal Counsel who has served the Wyoming District for 40 years

Rev. Mark Mumme, served as Continuing Education Chairman

Rev. Andrew Richard, Education Executive

Mr. Ken Temme oversees the Memorial Library Committee

Mrs. Tera Rice, District Archivist.

Pres. Hill thanked outgoing Board of Director members, Rev. Ted Bourret and Rev. Darrell Debowey. He also thanked outgoing Circuit Visitors: Rev. Dan, Mulholland, Rev. Andrew Dimit, and Rev. Joshua Scheer.

Rev. Roger Mullet, Chairman of the Pastors Conference Committee, announced from one of the floor microphones that District Pastors Conferences conduct business as part of their meetings, and that any resolutions not addressed by this Convention may be taken up at a future pastors conference. He also announced that Rev. Dr. Jon Bruss, CTSFW President, will speak at the 2025 Fall Pastors Conference.

10:47 A.M. Resolution Committee

At 10:47 A.M., Pres. Hill invited Rev. Paul Cain, Resolutions Committee Chairman, to the podium.

Rev. Cain directed the delegates **Resolution 7a**.

The committee **moved** adoption.

**To Encourage Struggling Congregations to Provide Financially For their
Pastors**

Resolution 07a

(Overture 02)

WHEREAS, The life of the Church comes solely from Christ's Word and Sacraments, and her pastors are the men called by God to administer these vital gifts to her; and

WHEREAS, Luther's Small Catechism Table of Duties regarding what the hearers owe their pastors cites 1 Cor. 9:14, Gal. 6:6-7, 1 Tim. 5:17-18; 1 Thess. 5:12-13, and Heb. 13:17; and

WHEREAS, Congregations are called to care financially for their pastors (1 Timothy 5:18, "For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages'"); and

WHEREAS, Financial burdens of congregations (especially small congregations) are increasing due to decreased active membership and rising costs, especially insurance; and

WHEREAS, Jesus instructs His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23), and bearing the cross is therefore part of the life of all Christians; and

WHEREAS, Christians are called to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2); and

WHEREAS, Our Lord promises to provide for His Church (Matthew 6:31-33) and will never let her fall (Matthew 16:18); therefore be it

Resolved, That congregations be encouraged to prioritize the care of their pastors and pastors' families financially, according to the current district guidelines, both in salary and in benefits, even in the midst of financial struggle; and be it further

Resolved, That congregations strive to bear one another's burdens, especially the burdens of providing for a pastor and his family through both direct assistance and other means such as entering into ministry sharing agreements or into multi-parish agreements; and be it finally

Resolved, That congregations not be condemned, by others or by themselves, for being unable to meet district compensation recommendations despite their best efforts to do so.

Pres. Hill invited discussion on the resolution. A delegate spoke in favor of the resolution and encouraged congregations to follow District salary guidelines.

The motion to ratify Resolution 7a was **adopted**.

Rev. Cain directed the delegates to **Resolution 2c**.

The committee **moved** adoption.

To Uphold the Scriptural Teaching of the Church as One Chosen Generation in Spite of the Existence of Various Earthly Races

Resolution 02c

(Overture 01)

WHEREAS, The word "race," can broadly be used to refer to the entire human race all of whom are descended from Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:20 "And Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living."); and

WHEREAS, The word "race" has also come to refer to various bloodlines/lineages, which the Scriptures acknowledge (Acts 17:26 "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings," also Genesis 10, Deuteronomy 18:9-14, Acts 2:5-12); and

WHEREAS, The Apostle Peter, using the language of Isaiah ("My chosen people," 1 Pet. 2:9, speaks of the Church as a people not in reference to a single earthly race but rather to the chosen people of God, the sons of Abraham by faith; and

WHEREAS, As those of the Church, the chosen generation we are given to proclaim not the doctrines of the world, but rather the words of the Prophets and Apostles which proclaim Jesus Christ crucified for all nations; therefore be it

Resolved, That we reject any racism in the Church, that is, exclusion of another from the Body of Christ or hate of a brother in Christ because of his race (1 John 3:15, Matthew 5:21-22), or the deeming a neighbor as sub-human because of his

race (Genesis 1:27, Proverbs 14:21)—these acts break the Fifth Commandment; and be it further

Resolved, That we recognize and affirm our Lord's promise to the Church that we are a "chosen lineage" or "chosen generation" (1 Pet. 2:9), which is the lineage of all those called into the Promise; and be it further

Resolved, That we rejoice that as the Church, the lineage of the promise, we are given to "proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9), a proclamation to be proclaimed to all nations (Matt. 28); and be it further

Resolved, That we affirm that the Church denounces anyone who excludes another from the Body of Christ or hates a brother in Christ because of his race, or deems a neighbor as sub-human because of his race; and be called to repentance with the hope and the prayer that the Lord restore ~~them~~ him to the Church, the chosen lineage of the promise; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Wyoming District in convention memorialize the Synod to affirm that the Church denounces anyone who excludes another from the Body of Christ or hates a brother in Christ because of his race, or deems a neighbor as sub-human because of his race; and be called to repentance with the hope and the prayer that the Lord restore them to the Church, the chosen lineage of the promise.

Pres. Hill asked the permission of the delegates to accept this resolution as a substitute for Resolution 2b, which had been tabled earlier in the day.

Pres. Hill invited discussion on Resolution 2c. Two delegates spoke in favor of the resolution.

The motion to ratify Resolution 2c was **adopted**.

(With the Committee's permission, the Secretary made a grammatical correction to line 34 (fourth "Resolved"), changing "them" to "him.")

Rev. Cain directed the delegates to **Resolution 8a**.

The committee **moved** adoption.

To Commend Faithful Resources on Atonement and Justification Against Antinomianism

Resolution 08a

(President's Report, pp. 17-58)

WHEREAS, The error of antinomianism destroys the Doctrines of Justification and Atonement in Christ, therefore be it

Resolved, That the Wyoming District in convention commend for reading by LCMS pastors and laity faithful resources on Justification and Atonement in Christ:

- Article IV of the Augsburg Confession and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession,
- Formula of Concord, Articles I-VI
- *Without the Shedding of Blood* by Rev. Dr. David Scaer, published by Ad Crucem
- Recent titles by Synoptic Text Information Services such as but not limited to:
 - *Atonement in Confessional Lutheran Theology*: Franz Pieper
 - *Atonement in Confessional Lutheran Theology*: Chorus of Voices
 - *Atonement in Lutheran Orthodoxy*: Baier-Walther
 - *Atonement in Lutheran Orthodoxy*: Johannes Quenstedt, 2nd ed.
 - *Atonement in Lutheran Orthodoxy*: Abraham Calov
 - *Vicarious Satisfaction in Lutheran Catechisms, Confession, and Hymns*

Pres. Hill invited discussion the Resolution. There was none.

The motion to ratify Resolution 8a was **adopted**.

Rev. Cain directed the delegates to **Resolution 10**.

The committee **moved** adoption.

To Allow Pastors to Opt Out of Pre-Call Interviews and/or Contact Resolution 10

WHEREAS, the Call to a pastor is a Divine Call extended by a congregation through the guidance of the Holy Spirit; and

WHEREAS, pre-call interviews and contact can sometimes be perceived as shifting the focus from a Divine Call to a secular hiring process; and

WHEREAS, this option respects the pastor's current ministry and personal discernment process; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Wyoming District of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod in convention assembled hereby petitions The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod to establish a policy allowing pastors to opt out of pre-call interviews and/or pre-call contact initiated by calling congregations.

Pres. Hill invited discussion the Resolution with the note that this resolution goes to the Council of Presidents. Some delegates questioned the need for this resolution and spoke against its ratification. Another delegate was strongly in favor of the resolution.

The motion to ratify Resolution 10 was **adopted**.

Rev. Cain directed the delegates to **Resolution 11**.

The committee **moved** adoption.

To Encourage President Hill to Publish His Essays

Resolution 11

WHEREAS, The Reverend President John Hill has established himself as an ~~excellence~~ excellent theologian, speaker, and essayist; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Hill's devoted service to the Wyoming District has limited the reception of his essays to the Wyoming District; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod is always in need of good, written materials on faithful expressions of Lutheranism; therefore be it

Resolved, That the 21st Convention of the Wyoming District of the LCMS encourages President Hill to submit a collection of essays to an editor with the eventual goal of hardbound publishing before the end of calendar year 2025.

Pres. Hill invited discussion the Resolution. There was no discussion.

The motion to ratify Resolution 11 was **adopted**.

(With the Committee's permission, the Secretary made a grammatical correction in the first "Whereas," deleting "excellence" and inserting "excellent.")

Pres. Hill expressed his gratitude for the Resolutions Committee and their work.

11:02 A.M. Unfinished Business

At 11:02 A.M., Pres. Hill announced that there was no further Convention business.

11:03 A.M. Closing of Convention: Matins and Installation of Officers

At 11:03 A.M., having no further business to consider, it was moved and seconded to adjourn the Convention. The motion to adjourn was **adopted** unanimously.

Pres. Hill declared the 21st Convention of the Wyoming District to be closed in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

11:22 A.M. Matins (Pres. John Hill) and Installation of Officers (Pres. Matthew Harrison and Pres. John Hill)

At 11:22 A.M., District President John Hill officiated the closing service of the Convention following the order of Matins (LSB 219), with Synod President Matthew Harrison as preacher. Worship began with the delegates singing the hymn, "Come, You Faithful, Raise the Strain" (LSB 487). The delegates also sang the hymn, "Awake, My Heart, with Gladness" (LSB 467). The appointed Scripture reading was from John 20:19:31.

A summary of Pres. Harrison's sermon follows: Regarding spiritual warfare, people have been taught that the Bible is mythology. But it's not mythology, it is a true witness of our salvation. Our faith is historical, it is absolutely grounded in history. There also exists a plethora of Scriptural manuscripts. The Bible has been translated into many languages around the world and these translations are fantastic. The Word of God is true—Jesus rose from the grave. The Word creates faith and condemns unbelief. In this text, Jesus institutes the Office of Holy Ministry to deliver the Gospel and to absolve sins.

After the delegates sang the Te Deum (LSB 223-225), the service continued with the Installation of Officers, listed as follows:

Installed by LCMS President Matthew Harrison:

District President: Rev. John Hill

Installed by Wyoming District President John Hill:

District Vice-Presidents: Rev. Paul Cain, Rev. Jonathan Lange, Rev. Jeffery Grams

Circuit Visitors: Rev. Richard Neugebauer, Rev. Scott Firminhac, Rev. Jon Olson, Rev. Jared Korb, Rev. Travis Berg, Rev. Mark Mumme

Board of Directors: Rev. Kenneth Mars, Rev. Zachary Viggers, Mr. Blake Pieper

Chairmen-Elect for the CCS and CMS: Rev. Roger Mullet and Rev. John Preus, respectively.

The service concluded with prayer and the delegates singing the hymn, "Lord Jesus Christ, the Church's Head" (LSB 647).

12:20 P.M. Adjourn, and Formal Convention Closing

At 12:20 P.M., the Wyoming District Convention stood adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rev. Darrell Debowey, Wyoming District Secretary

Part 3

Essays to the Convention

Christ Governs His Church by the Word of God
by President John E. Hill

Recovering the Pastor as *See/sorger*: A Crucial Weapon for
Spiritual Warfare within the Three Estates
by Rev. Dr. Harold Ristau

ESSAY 1 BY PRESIDENT JOHN HILL

CHRIST GOVERNS HIS CHURCH BY THE WORD OF GOD

Jesus Christ governs His Church by the Word of God. That is the theme of my essay. It is a simple and obvious theme, one that even the young children can understand. But it is sometimes the simplest themes that escape us, and so I invite you to meditate with me on this beautiful and comforting doctrine.

Jesus Christ governs His Church by the Word of God. We will take the theme in three parts, that Christ governs all things in heaven and on earth, that He governs the Church, and that He governs His Church by the Word.

Part One: Jesus Christ Governs All Things in Heaven and on Earth

When Jesus was teaching God's Word in the temple in the days before His Passion, the chief priests and elders of the people challenged Him with this question, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?" (Matthew 21:23). They were questioning the divine authority of the Father and His incarnate Son. The resounding answer of Holy Scriptures to this challenge is embedded in our Creed, "I believe in one God, the Father almighty,... and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, who was begotten of the Father from eternity, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made..., and so on. Jesus Christ is "the head of all rule and authority" (Colossians 2:10) because He is the one true God, because "in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9).

God is the Maker and Ruler over all things. This is a self-evident truth. He made all things; He owns all things; He governs all things; He judges all things, now and at the end. Jesus, the Son of Mary, is true God from eternity. He is the Creator, Owner, Ruler, and Judge of all. For this reason He quoted Psalm 110 to those who would soon crucify Him: "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" The Psalm continues, "The LORD sends forth from Zion Your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of Your enemies" (Psalm 110:1-2). David owes homage to a Lord who rules at the right hand of God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, the LORD God of Sabaoth.

And what is a lord? What does a lord do? A lord owns all that he governs, and he governs all that he owns. He rules, directs, supplies, and cares for all those under his authority. The divine Son of David is Lord and King. King David himself was a mere subordinate king, as he confesses here in Psalm 110. He does not own the Kingdom of Israel. He takes his marching orders from the true Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Timothy 6:15), David's Son according to the flesh (Romans 1:4).

Jesus is the Lord, who created, sustains, and rules over all things. The Law by which He governs and by which all things work is from Him and expresses His eternal and unchanging will. Sun, moon, and stars, with their seasons; the waters and the dry land; plants, birds, fish, cattle, and all living things obey Him in His law. He is their Lord and King. And He is the Creator and Lord of Man also.

In our homes, Jesus is the Marriage Lord, the Marriage-Bed and Family Lord, the Home Lord. He is the Paterfamilias, the Father of the household. He created man male and female on the 6th day of creation, made them in His own image and likeness, gave them dominion over the earth and its creatures, and blessed them to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. He is the one who instituted the marriage of man and woman, brought them together under one easy and gentle yoke, and made them one flesh. He brings about the conception of children in the womb—fearfully and wonderfully—and brings them to birth. He is a mighty Lord, who does all these things.

Jesus is the Father of fathers in the household. To Him belongs the spiritual authority and rule in the home. This spiritual authority and duty He has delegated to earthly husbands and earthly fathers, who are helped in this task with earthly wives and earthly mothers. “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4)—of the Lord, because He has ordered your house in this way, and He will be the true teacher and true instructor.

As the Father of fathers in the home, Jesus establishes the rule and governance of our families. He alone has the authority to educate our children, and He delegates this task to fathers and mothers. He alone has the authority to feed, clothe, defend, and medicine our children, and He does so with fathers and mothers as His principle agents. He alone provides and owns the property and finances of the household—everything, and has placed these goods into the stewardship of earthly husbands and wives. He alone has the right to establish the culture and rules of our homes, because He is the Paterfamilias, the one who built and populated our homes and gave them to us in trust.

Jesus governs our homes and marriages. This simple and obviously true assertion is set against all the lies that are spoken to us by Satan. Satan would turn marriage into a social construct, a mere man-made living arrangement. He would defy the blessedness of our creation as male and female and pervert it to the destruction of our humanity and our household happiness. He would provoke the destruction of marriage through unchastity and marital lovelessness, through unauthorized divorce and malicious desertion. He would turn fathers against children and children against fathers. He would deceive men and women into setting career, money, personal autonomy, and easy living against marriage, children, and the care of others. He would bring about the prophetic curse of Jesus, “And the love of many will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12).

The Lordship of Jesus is always personal. What is in your heart, your mind, and your lifestyle? Do you act as a self-created, autonomous being with a self-chosen identity and behavior? Or do you own Jesus Christ as the Father and Ruler of your life, so that you conform to His Word and order in all things, including your household?

In our communities and nation, Jesus is King over all those who exercise any authority or power on earth. He is the President over President Trump. He is the Governor over Wyoming Governor Gordon, Nebraska Governor Pillen, and Colorado Governor Polis. Jesus is the divine Legislator over our federal and state legislatures, city councils, and county commissioners. He is the Supreme Judge over every judge, every court, and every magistrate in the land. If they have authority, it is because He has given it to them and will require an accounting at their hand. If their laws are just, it is because they conform to His justice.

He is the King of kings and Lord of lords, because He instituted and established their authority under His own divine and eternal will and law. "Have dominion," He said to Adam—before sin, I might add (Genesis 1:26, 28). "Whoso sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed," he added after the Flood (Genesis 9:6). Earthly authority is a delegated authority. It originates in God the Creator and has its source in Him. As the centurion confessed, "I too am a man under authority" (Matthew 8:9).

In consequence, every earthly ruler, judge, or magistrate is a minister of justice under the Author and Lord of Justice.

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his praise, for he is God's minister for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the minister of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. (Romans 13:1-4)

Every civil magistrate or ruler is a minister of God. A minister is a servant whose office operates under the command and jurisdiction of another. Jesus gives His civil ministers limited power and authority to govern on His behalf. God's magistrate governs a small and clearly defined part of God's earthly realm, and no more.

God's civil minister is to govern lawfully, that is, in accordance with God's own unchanging and eternal law. This is what divine justice requires. The law behind all just, earthly laws is God's own Law. All constitutions, all laws, all earthly customs, and the like are to flow from and be expressions of the divine and eternal will of God. God praises good works in our civil

communities, and He commands earthly rulers to do the same. God condemns evil works and avenges injustice with His own condemnation and wrath. He commands earthly rulers to do the same with justice and mercy, according to God's will. God gives earthly peace for the wellbeing of our households and communities and churches, and He commands earthly magistrates to do the same under His will.

And because our earthly rulers are God's ministers, we are to honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them. We are to pray for them. We are to pay our taxes and fulfill our obligations to them. We are to do good works and help them in their need. We are to seek the wellbeing of our communities, our neighbors and their families. The command the Prophet Jeremiah wrote to the exiles in Babylon applies to us Christians,

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jeremiah 29:5-7)

And not only is our welfare bound up with obedience to this command from our Lord and Ruler. It is by honoring God's civil ministers that we honor and confess the Lordship of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given and commanded all these things.

And when earthly rulers forbid what God clearly commands or command what God clearly forbids, then we must say with the Apostles: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). No civil magistrate and no earthly father has all authority in heaven or on earth. As Jesus said to Pontius Pilate, "You would have no authority over Me at all unless it had been given to you from above" (John 19:11). Likewise, it was not defiance, but obedience, that led Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to say to King Nebuchadnezzar, the world's most powerful ruler,

"O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." (Daniel 3:16-18)

I am describing a reality, a truth. Jesus governs our homes and our nation. This is not a template or mandate for the Church to assume the rule over our homes or civil government (see AC XXVIII.1-4, 12-18). The Church has no such command. "My kingdom is not of this world," Jesus says (John 18:36). The Kingship he establishes by His death and resurrection is of a different kind. Let civil government remain, with its own unique function given to it by God. There is no uniquely Christian civil government, as such, only lawful government.

Nor does our description of the Lordship of Jesus exercised in civil government give us a template or rationale for insurrection or rebellion. To the contrary! Because Jesus is the Power behind the throne; because His eternal and unchanging will stands beneath and behind and within all just laws and every just government; because our honor and obedience to earthly fathers in the home and in the state is honor and obedience to the Everlasting Father and the Lord of Lords—we render this honor and obedience more freely and more joyfully than any non-Christian son or daughter or citizen could ever render. For we give that honor from the heart, just as we forgive those who trespass against us from the heart and love both our brothers and our enemies from our hearts. We render honor and obedience to the authorities appointed by God as to God Himself, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Part Two: Jesus Christ Governs the Church

This is the doctrine that prompted this essay. We daily sing the *Te Deum*, praying this petition at the end of the canticle: “O Lord, save Your people and bless Your heritage, govern them and lift them up forever.” We repeat it in the Collect for Grace, that all our doings be ordered by God’s governance. On Judica Sunday we prayed that God’s people be governed and preserved evermore both in body and soul. We pray in the Litany that God would rule and govern His holy Christian Church. Our prayer for God’s governance of the Church serves as a warning to me, as District President, that I do not govern the Church. It is also a comfort to me, that I do not govern the Church. Jesus is the Lord of the Church. He governs His Church. It is to Him that we make our petitions on behalf of His Church.

Prayer is good place for us to start. Prayer is an act of submission, an exercise of our subordination to a ruler. The ancient prayer of the church, *Kyrie eleison*, “Lord, have mercy,” was always recognized as the petition of a suppliant to a ruler. We acknowledge Jesus our Lord, like all the kings of earth in Psalm 2; we “kiss the Son” in our prayer and thereby render due homage to Him. We place our thanksgiving and praise, supplications and intercessions, before a mighty Lord and King, a Governor with the mercy and power to hear and help us.

The great prophecies of Christ in the Old Testament often speak of Him as king and ruler. Psalm 2, in which the Father says to the Son, “You are My Son. This day have I begotten You,” is all about Christ as the Ruler of the world, against whom the kings of the earth rage and to whom they must pay homage. Psalm 110 speaks of the Son seated at the right hand of the Father as Ruler over the world. In Isaiah 9:6–7 we hear:

For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. (Isaiah 9:6–7)

The incarnate Son of God, Child of Mary, is divine Wisdom in the flesh, our Wonderful Counselor. He is the Mighty God who was with the Father from eternity, through whom and for whom all things were made, who upholds all things by the Word of His power (John 1:1-3, Hebrews 1:3). Jesus is the Everlasting Father, not as the First Person of the Trinity but as the one who exercises Fatherhood over all powers and authorities in home and state and Church. He is the Father of fathers, just as He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the Prince of Peace, the King who makes peace by the blood of His cross (Colossians 1:20).

In how many ways can we describe Christ's governance over His Church? Jesus is our President, the one who presides in the Church at every baptism, every sermon, every Lord's Supper, every absolution. He is the Head of every congregation and church body. He is our true Bishop, who visits His Christians and His Church with His Word and Holy Spirit, with grace and mercy, with comfort and help, with strength and power, with joy and peace. He is our Good Shepherd (Psalm 23, John 10), the Great Pastor of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant, whom the God of peace and reconciliation brought again from the dead, to give us every good thing (Hebrews 13:20-21).

Jesus is the Lord of the Church. In the New Testament "Lord," *Kyrios*, often translates the Old Testament Hebrew *Yahweh* or Jehovah—the Lord God of Armies. Everything we say about Jesus as the LORD God of Sabaoth turns out to mean what we confess of His Godhead, His Lordship, and His Kingship over all creation and over the Church and over the world to come. Just as we are careful to speak of God the Father as the first and prototype Father, after whom every fatherhood in heaven and earth is named (Ephesian 3:15), so we confess that Jesus is the first and prototype Lord, after whom all lords and rulers and governors and kings receive their title.

In Ephesians 1 the Holy Spirit teaches us that the Lordship of Jesus is in all things directed to us, His Church. God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ

raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:20-23)

It used to bother me that in the *Large Catechism* Luther not only kept the explanation of the Second Article of the Creed short, but that he focused on this one word, "Lord." It seemed to me to focus on the law, on God's power and might, and not on His saving work. But I was missing the point. Luther was teaching people who had earthly lords and kings as a part of their daily life. He was intent on teaching them and us exactly what constitutes the Lordship of Jesus in the Church. Luther wrote,

Let this be the summary of this article, that the little word "LORD" simply means the same as Redeemer, that is, He who has brought us back from the devil to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and keeps us there. The remaining parts of this article simply serve to clarify and express how and by what means this redemption was accomplished—that is, how much it cost Christ and what He paid and risked in order to win us and bring us under His dominion [His Lordship]. That is to say, He became a man, conceived and born without sin, of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin, so that He might become Lord over sin; moreover, He suffered, died, and was buried so that He might make satisfaction for me and pay what I owe, not with silver and gold but with His own precious blood. And He did all this so that He might become my LORD. (LC II.31)

As you see, Jesus' Lordship in the Church is of a different kind from lordship in the city or the home. As man, He still retains His divine power and might, though He laid down the exercise of that power during the work of His obedience and passion. But His Lordship was for the redemption of the Church. Listen to these samples of our salvation history in the Scriptures: "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). "They crucified the Lord of Glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8). "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him" (John 20:13). "Thomas answered Him, 'My Lord and my God!'" (John 20:28). "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Jesus Christ is Lord. He alone governs the Church. But His Lordship is yet challenged by demons and sinners. The history of the Church is strewn with cast-aside, would-be lords of the Church. First in line is Satan, who presumptuously promised to delegate all rule and governance to Jesus if only Jesus would fall down and worship him. "Begone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God and Him only shall you serve'" (Matthew 4:10). The kind of Lord that redeems sinners and gathers to Himself a Church is one that goes first to the cross to redeem sinners, paying the price of their redemption with His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. There is no other Lord of the Church.

The Lordship of Jesus, the Son of David, was challenged by His own countrymen. The Pharisees, with their numerous bylaws to the Holy Scriptures, ruled that Jesus should not heal on the Sabbath (Luke 6:7, 13:14, 14:1). His question to them forced a deeper consideration of the divine commandment: "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath or not?" (Luke 14:3). Jesus embeds a rebuke in the question: "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?" (Luke 6:9).

Then there were those within the Church that sought to govern it. The Apostles disputed among themselves as to who would be the lord and ruler over each other in the Church. Jesus rebuked them and gave them this instruction, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with

you. Rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves" (Luke 22:25-26). Jesus became His Church's Lord by serving and giving His life as a ransom for sinful man. Those who hold office in the church must lead after His pattern.

The enemies of Jesus sought to create a conflict between His authority and that of Caesar, or civil government. The Pharisees, with the Sadducees and Herodians, asked, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" Jesus answered, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:17, 21). And at Jesus' trial before Pontius Pilate, the chief priests and officers of the people explicitly rejected Jesus in favor of Caesar, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar." When Pilate protested, they cried out, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:12, 15). They rejected Jesus as the Ruler of God's people in favor of civil government.

What we see in the Gospels is still true today. There are, first of all, those who would make the pope the lord and head of the Church, "the supreme external monarchy of the entire world, in which the Roman pontiff must hold unlimited power" (Ap VII/VIII.23). The opponents of Christ call the pope the vicar of Christ and the rock upon which Christ builds His Church, in the shrine of whose heart is all truth. It is a lie. The Holy Spirit says that the pope is the "man of lawlessness..., the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against everything divine and worthy of reverence, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). The papacy is a false lord.

Caesar, what we call civil government, also seeks lordship over the Church. It may claim to grant the Church the right to exist and require it to submit to its laws. Think here of the civil government that forced the Lutherans and Calvinists into the ungodly Prussian Union. Think of states and school districts that have attempted to control our parochial schools or tear from parents their divinely given authority to "bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Think of the worship restrictions imposed on congregations, or the denial of spiritual care to our members in hospitals and nursing homes, under Covid. Think of China's recent restrictions on Christian churches. In these kinds of cases, Caesar has usurped authority which God gave to His Church, and not to Caesar.

Christ governs His Church. He has not given to civil government the authority to set times, places, persons, forms, doctrines, rituals, and offices for the Church. Not even bishops or pastors can impose these sorts of the things on the Church without the Church's consent (Ap XXVIII.15-16). The duty of civil government, under the Lordship of Christ, is to maintain justice and peace in our communities so that the Word of God may have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people, the Church. Christ rules in civil government and the world for the sake of the Church (Ephesians 1:21-23).

And just like the Apostles in the Upper Room, so also today the Church and her members suffer the temptation to take lordship for themselves. Pastors, in particular, can be sorely

tempted to rule the Church like a Gentile lord, rather than as a servant of Christ (1 Corinthians 4:1). To us pastors the Holy Spirit repeats Christ's teaching (see AC XXVIII.76-78):

Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, doing visitation, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God [meaning Jesus] would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering [that is, not lording] over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:2 -3)

But it is not just pastors who suffer this temptation. Boards of Elders, voters assemblies, or so-called autonomous congregations can act like Gentile lords. They can conduct themselves as though they possess sovereign rule over the Church of God. To all the Church the Holy Spirit admonishes,

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:3-5)

And now we come to this occasion, a convention of the Church. Conventions and synods of the Church can also behave like Gentile lords over the Church. Leaders, delegates, elected boards, commissions, and the like can behave as though the power of numbers and wealth and institutions and political force, perhaps bound together with so-called "covenants of love," give them the right to govern our Lord's Church. There can hardly be a more pious pride or arrogance! How quickly we Christians can put our pious desires, our obedience to good order and love, our zeal for the growth of the Church, or any other such good, above our Lord Jesus Christ in His Church!

What we say of the pope we also say of anyone who acts as a governor and lord of the Church above our one Lord, Jesus Christ: "The pope is not the head of all Christendom 'by divine right' or on the basis of God's Word, because that belongs only to the one who is called Jesus Christ" (SA II.iv.1). So we sing, "Thou only art holy; Thou only art the Lord; Thou only, O Christ, art most high in the glory of God the Father" (*Gloria in Excelsis*). In the Church we hold and confess only one Lord, Jesus Christ.

Part Three: Jesus Christ Governs the Church by His Word

The question here is this: How does Jesus exercise His Lordship and govern His Church? Compare the Church to the other two estates. The estates of marriage and civil government are also instituted and governed by God, as we reviewed earlier. They are also obviously true and divinely given institutions within the creation, as natural law and reason testify. Luther calls these estates the "only two temporal governments on earth" (Martin Luther, *On the Councils and the Church*, 1539, AE 41.177).

These two temporal estates also have a relationship to the Church. Through the household estate God provides people for the Church. By the estate of civil government He defends and protects the Church from temporal enemies. In both these temporal governments, God rules through natural law, that is, through law and justice as it is accessible to human reason. (The Christian marriage and home, of course, are ruled explicitly by the Word of God, because God addresses Christians directly concerning His will to sanctify their households by His Word and prayer.) But the government of the Church is essentially different from these temporal estates, because neither the Church nor her Lord's saving will are accessible to man's reason. Natural and civil law do not rule the Church or her life, nor does the law of the household. Here is where the Bible comes in.

Now, we have many things to say about the Holy Scriptures. They are God's Word. God's Word is true as He is true. The Holy Scriptures are the true expression of God's own character. He made man in His own image, gave him the gift of language, and then spoke to him. The written Word of God is His speech to us.

The Bible is therefore God's own Word. It is God's will, put into writing, because "men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). We confess in the Nicene Creed that the Holy Spirit "spoke by the prophets." Like their Author, Holy Scripture is entirely free of error or deception. It is always reliable. It is always clear, because God intends to be understood by man. It is full and sufficient to teach us everything we need to know as Christians. Because He has commanded us to use His written Word for teaching, rebuke, admonition, discipline, and consolation, we know that God Himself will do and perform these works in us as we hear God's Word, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest it.

God has founded the Church upon Holy Scriptures—the Apostles and Prophets—with Jesus Christ as the Cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20). Luther says that "God's Word cannot be without God's people, and conversely God's people cannot be without God's Word" (*On the Councils and the Church*, 150). "My sheep hear My voice," says our Good Shepherd. "They will listen to My voice. So there will be one flock, one Shepherd" (John 10:27, 16). By His Word Jesus calls sinners to faith, gives them the Holy Spirit, and thus creates and gathers the Church. By His Word He sustains, nourishes, grows, comforts, and defends His Church. By His Word He establishes divine fellowship, the communion of saints, with Himself. We confess in the Apology,

We know that the Church exists among us who rightly teach the Word of God and rightly administer the sacraments; it does not exist among those who not only try to destroy the Word of God with their edicts, but who also butcher those who teach what is right and true. (Ap XIV.4)

Today, however, we are considering the Biblical doctrine that our Lord Jesus governs His Church by His Word. And let us be clear here. When we refer to the Church, we are not

speaking only of some invisible ideal, a Church known only to God according to the unseen faith of the heart. Nor are we speaking only of particular congregations and parishes in isolation. It is the will of Jesus Christ to rule also over those expressions and entities of the Church in which congregations and their pastors share in common the teaching and confession of the doctrine of Holy Scriptures, where they practice altar and pulpit fellowship between each other, where they work together to provide a common defense of their doctrine, send missionaries into new communities and nations, educate their children and adults, and provide for the welfare and future of congregations and their ministry. In other words, we are speaking also of circuits and districts and Synod, the confessional fellowship or communion of congregations. Jesus rules the Church in all her manifestations with His Word alone.

Luther preferred to call the Church in this broader sense, "Christendom." He says that Christendom is "the empire of the church" (*On the Councils and the Church*, 133-134), which Christ rules by the Word of God. Our thesis is taught in the great passage at the end of Matthew's Gospel,

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
(Matthew 28:18-20)

Here we see Jesus fully exercising His divine authority for the Church. The crucified and risen Man is God and Ruler over all things in heaven and on earth for the sake of His Church. His Lordship over the Church is enacted in the making of disciples and in His promise to be present as Lord in His Church to the end of the ages. The means by which He rules is Baptism, by which sinners are admitted into the Church, and the teaching of His Word, by which He rules and guides them always. As Luther taught us, the Lordship of Jesus is summarized in His work of redeeming man. This redeeming Lordship is exercised through Baptism and the Word.

We find a similar bestowal of authority and office in the other three Gospels. His divine authority is exercised in the Church always and only through the Word and sacraments. In Mark it is the command to preach the Gospel to the whole creation and to administer saving Baptism (Mark 16:15-16). In Luke it is the command to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins to all the nations in Jesus' name (Luke 24:47).

In John's Gospel, as we heard on Sunday, Jesus ordains legal, or official, representatives to do the work which He commissioned them to do, that is, to bestow His peace and forgiveness to repentant sinners and to retain the sins of the unrepentant (John 20:21-23; see Matthew 16:19 and 18:18). The forgiving or retaining of sins is, of course, a spoken application of

Christ's atonement, on the one hand, or of the condemnation of the law, on the other. What is given as a divine right to the whole Church is to be exercised publicly, also by divine right, by those ministers and stewards which He Himself calls and appoints to this task.

Our Lord's church-ministers represent His person and authority in their commission to teach His Word. Ephesians 4 teaches us that Jesus ascended to heaven as Lord and gave Lordly gifts to men, the gifts of His ministers, pastors, and teachers of His doctrine. They are sent to restore the saints with His righteousness and holiness, to perform the work of the ministry of His Word, and to edify the body of Christ by His Gospel (Ephesians 4:7-12). Christ Himself does this work through this ministry.

Our Lutheran Confessions appeal to Luke 10:16, where Jesus tells His preachers, "He who hears you hears Me, and he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me." But the commission is limited to what Jesus instituted. Our Confessions make the critical observation (Ap XXVIII.18) that this mandate to Christ's ministers is not a "commission with unlimited authority" (*mandatum liberum*), but a "caution about something prescribed" (*cautio de rato*). In other words, the authority which God gives to His ministers in the Church is a limited authority, limited to the Word and doctrine which Jesus delivers to them in Holy Scriptures.

Although Christ delegates, He does not relinquish or compromise His authority in doing so. The divinely delegated authority of the Church and her ministers is limited to the Word of God alone. This divine limitation is expressed in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus as the command to preach sound (or healthy) doctrine and to charge other preachers not to "teach a different doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:3). To teach or practice false doctrine is to defy Jesus' authority and introduce a different, that is, a false lord into the Church. The Church must teach and govern her doctrine and life by Christ's doctrine, and Christ's alone. Everything else in the Church is in the realm of love, which is also given and governed by Christ in His Word. But doctrine brooks no compromise, while love teaches us to serve, accommodate, suffer, and even relinquish our personal rights for the sake of our fellow Christians and the Church.

We Lutherans have always been at pains to confess that ministerial authority is given to pastors for the sake of Christ's governance of the Church. Augsburg Confession Article XXVIII summarizes this point.

Consequently, according to divine right it is the office of the bishop [or pastor] to preach the gospel, to forgive sin, to judge doctrine and reject doctrine that is contrary to the gospel, and to exclude from the Christian community the ungodly whose ungodly life is manifest—not with human power but with God's Word alone. (AC XXVIII.21, German text)

“With God’s Word alone”: God has not instituted coercive power in His Church. Yet we must govern our affairs in good order for the sake of God’s Word. Therefore, when coercive power is granted to district and Synod presidents, Boards of Directors, and other such agencies of the Church by the collective congregations of the Church, it must be received and exercised with humility. Human power, like the wrath of man, does not accomplish the righteousness of God. Christ “came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). The Lordship of Christ is gained and exercised for the redemption of man, for the sake of righteousness and holiness among us. Coercive power is foreign to the Church’s essence.

Application of this teaching can be very difficult. Our churches are legally constituted under the laws of civil government at every level. As such, they gladly and joyfully obey the law of the land to the fullest extent possible, even if it means enduring persecution or hardship. Jesus Himself paid the temple tax in order not to offend His countrymen (Matthew 17:24-27). In their legal constitution, our churches also behave like civil governments, with conventions (or voters’ assemblies) that act not only as the Church but also as the corporate owners and legislators of the Church’s worldly governance. They act as the Church when performing the duties commanded and instituted by Christ. They act as worldly legislators when managing all the temporal or earthly matters of the Church’s property and life.

Furthermore, our churches often ask their pastors not only to exercise the spiritual jurisdiction of the ministerial office and church visitation (as God commands), but also to exercise administrative or bureaucratic powers like rulers in civil government. Our Synod has adopted a balanced governance of pastors and laymen in its structure, so that laymen also participate not only in judging matters of doctrine and practice but also the organizational, legal, and financial affairs of the Church. In short, the Church is its own divinely established estate, but it engages the legal authority of civil governments and uses legal structures modeled after civil government.

I’m going to be blunt here. These realities mean that our churches at every level are always walking the knife’s edge of two dangers: On the one hand, Christians and churches may submit to or conform to civil authority, whether it be to actual civil government, to the behavior and attitudes of civil government, or to the civil structures that are used for good order in the congregation or church body, even when these laws or attitudes are contrary to the Word of the Church’s Lord. On the other hand, churches and Christians may resent or chafe against onerous laws, a difficult civil government, church bureaucracy, and the like, even when submission to these governments makes no compromise to the Word of God. We have witnessed both reactions in our time in the Church. And these dangers span the Church’s life from the local congregation’s pastors, leadership, and members, all the way to district and Synod entities.

Our leaders must be ruled by the Word of God and carry out their office in the fear of God and with humility toward their brethren whom they serve. They must recognize that the greater the coercive power granted them by the Church, the greater the restraint that is needed, for the sake of the Lord who rules His Church. The Church at every level should learn to recognize and understand the doctrine that undergirds every action and decision of its daily life. Many things fall into the area of freedom. But the Church should do what is right according to Holy Scriptures. Doing what is right may not fit within the expectations of men. God-given love will seek the path to reconciliation, restoration, unity of heart and mind, peace. Divine doctrine, that is, the eternal Word of Christ, must rule both our hearts and our minds.

Jesus Himself shows us the way forward in difficult Church matters. He was the model Pastor and consummate Bible Scholar, choosing the right passages of Holy Scripture for the occasion and unerringly giving the true explanation and application to each passage. Thus He confounded the devil in temptation from Deuteronomy (Matthew 4:1-11). Thus He explained His pastoral patience from Isaiah (Matthew 12:15-21). Thus He rebuked the moneychangers in the temple according to Isaiah and the Psalms (John 2:13-17; Matthew 21:12-13).

Nor was the Church government of His day, or of any day, always right, even when it seemed to have right on its side. David and his men ate the holy Bread of the Presence, which was explicitly forbidden them by Moses, when they were in dire need (1 Samuel 21). Jesus approved of David's deed and cited it as evidence in defense of His disciples, who were harvesting grain and eating it on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-8). Jesus taught us how to think about apparently conflicting laws when He healed people on the Sabbath. "I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?" (Luke 6:9). Church government and laws never exist for their own sake or for the survival or magnification of the earthly institution, but for the sake of God's Word, for the sake of Jesus Christ who governs His Church with the Word of God alone.

Dear brothers and sisters, we must indeed let love be the queen and mistress of the house in our congregations, district, and Synod. Let us be filled with the love of unity and zeal for the wellbeing of our congregations and pastors, of our own District, and Synod. Let the desire for concord and peace make us zealous to observe the manmade structures and rules represented by such things as constitutions, bylaws, and the offices they put in place. But always let the Lord Jesus be the first and final Ruler in His Church, and let that rule always take place through His blessed Word alone. He is the King and Master under whose loving governance all shall be well.

In his writing on the Church, Luther described the Church as God's spiritual empire. "The law of the empire," he writes, is Holy Scripture, "the law of the holy Church. Such law, empire, and judge must surely be feared on pain of eternal damnation. This law is God's Word, the empire is God's Church." And he adds, "But in this empire of the Church the rule is, 'The Word of our God will stand forever' (Isaiah 40:8)" (*On the Councils and the Church*, 133, 134).

Thus is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the Church, the true house of the Lord, the true Zion and Jerusalem,

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go the Law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples..." (Isaiah 2:2-4)

God grant that the Kingdom of Christ may come and abide with us also. Amen.

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ESSAY 2 BY REV. DR. HAROLD RISTAU

RECOVERING THE PASTOR AS A *SEELSORGER*: A CRUCIAL WEAPON FOR SPIRITUAL WARFARE WITHIN THE THREE ESTATES

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings to you from Luther Classical College and thank you for availing me the honour of addressing you all during this convention. When asked to present many months ago, I had not yet decided upon a topic but was trying to manoeuvre within the field of spiritual warfare, while mulling over in my mind the kind of theological, moral, and practical issues that matter to our district and synod. So, in this presentation we will discuss the pastor's role and responsibility in equipping members for spiritual warfare within the three estates, which is often a more subtle battle than we may at first realize.

When the COVID lockdowns and restrictions started spilling out in February of 2020 and churches were expected to follow along, a bishop of a confessional synod, who without much hesitation went along with the mandates, dismissed concerns of theologically compromising and tried to encourage members by stating that even though they couldn't have the sacrament or go to church, they could still read their catechisms at home and that was good enough in the meantime. He concluded by saying that *no one should be tempted to interpret the pandemic spiritually*. He has since apologized for that statement admitting that in hindsight one could approach events of COVID spiritually and that theological factors should have been more at play.

Another prominent clergy who operated at synodical levels from the same synod said that, in trying to navigate these uncharted waters spiritually, "this was no time for theological theatrics, and let's be practical." To date, I don't believe he has apologized.

It is sinful to not approach any aspects of the Christian life spiritually. There is no *secular* sphere in the mind of God.

It's a bizarre and dangerous affair to believe that there is a neutral aspect to Christian living that does not require the faithful to approach it with a theological lens. In other words, there are parts of life that God doesn't really have any business poking His nose into. I praise God for the Wyoming District since this attitude is less of a problem here. When COVID hit, and the left hand wanted to tell the right hand how to operate in their churches, *this* district told the government to back off and got away with it. I would suspect that nobody here disagrees that for Christians there really isn't something called "secular." Since again, that would imply God is not interested in some dimension of Christian life. Pastors can't fully carry out the duties of their ministry when it comes to individual caregiving of members, unless we disagree that all aspects of life have a spiritual side to them.

The question is not “if” but “how” the Church is to be a voice in the three estates, as an institution, but mainly through the lives of each of her members as they continue to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12) within the three estates. The first estate, Church, is an easy one. Obviously, the church and pastors have a huge say when it comes to Christian living in that sphere. But how to behave in the second estate of private life gets a little more controversial: “Is it really my pastor’s business how I run my family?” After all, I’m the head of the house, so do I really need pastoral oversight there?” And when it comes to the third estate (public and civil life), things heat up even more, as we saw with the COVID battles: how Lutheran laity and clergy were expected to behave or not behave in the public square. For here’s where it gets complicated when addressing this new, foreign-to-Lutheran dubious term, “Christian Nationalism.” As we’ll hear later, it’s a term created by the enemies of the true faith. Therefore, it’s poor scholarship to embrace a definition of this term from malignantly secularist sources that have clear agendas to muzzle the Christian voice in the public sphere by weaponizing a word. By labeling Christians who are actively seeking to preserve and advance the interests and the mission of the Church through both speaking the truth in civil society and cultivating Christian culture in the public sphere, as “Christian Nationalists” (i.e. as some kind of radicals, millennialists, Christian jihadists), they terrify humble servants of Christ out of obeying God’s commands when it comes to the left hand kingdom. I don’t mean to offend any of you by raising this topic, but it’s hardly an escapable subject anymore, and the way it has been handled over the last several years has caused a lot of spiritual damage since pastoring in the third estate requires some discussion on how a deep separation of church and state is not possible nor desirable for pastoral care or general society. But in the wake of Christian nationalism, as a gaslighted word that seeks to attack Christian activity in the public square, I believe I need to address that in some detail and will get there during my later parts of this presentation.

God cares about all aspects of Christian living. It follows that His representatives, as ambassadors and shepherds, should too. They are, after all, His presence and voice, not only in the midst of the congregation but also in the lives of each *individual* Christian entrusted to their care. In Luke 10:16, when our Lord says, “He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me,” He is not just speaking to Christians in general (although there is an application to the laity in terms of evangelism; when lay people talk about Jesus to unbelievers, they are the voice of God to *them*). But these words were *firstly* directed to the Apostles in the apostolic office, which pastors hold told. It’s not meant as dictatorial or domineering, but part of clergy responsibility to properly and thoroughly “feed His sheep” as Jesus instructed pastors in John 21, as the ultimate expression of love for God. Jesus not only uses the word “sheep” in general, but also “lamb” indicating the intimate one-on-one nature of pastoral ministry, in which every single Christian is the lost sheep and counts to God. Yet the distinction in Greek between “arnion” and “probaton” appears to be one between the immature and mature Christians. Pastoral caregiving *to a congregation* is not normally practical or possible because the levels of

Christian maturity and Biblical literacy fluctuate from one person to the next. Some need milk and other need solid food. Pastors are always compelled to provide care on a *one-to-one* basis. Feeding of spiritual lambs doesn't happen in a trough, but in individual servings.

Most clergy would agree in principle, but application is where the controversy begins. Many argue that it is not the job of the church to pry into family life or poke around into the political views of members (a famous Canadian Prime Minister said, "There's no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation"). But when it comes to God and the Church, this is not true. We don't *like* such paternalism because it infringes upon our private lives and personal opinions which is where the most intense spiritual war happens. Demonic possession or oppression often scares people into the arms of Jesus, so that the devil is best to remain undercover, taking on the form of angel of light, or as C.S. Lewis writes, just convincing people he doesn't exist, except maybe as a laughable pointy-tailed cartoon character. He is more *dangerous* in the *subtle* ways that he convinces us that God's word has little to say about the intricacies of our lives. The devil is in the details. We like to think the greatest spiritual battles involves stuff like exorcisms, as we find Jesus and apostles delivering demons. And yet, Jesus says to the disciples amazed at His miracle-working abilities, "You think that's great? That's nothing. Blessed are you that your names are written in heaven. Salvation is the greater miracle." Or regarding the paralytic, "bodily healing is easy, forgiveness of sins is the hard part." Yet all things are possible with Christ.

The enemies of the Church have the greatest effect on the inside, and no Church body is spared them, as we see with Judas in our Lord's inner circle. Now, let's close that circle even further and let's bring it really close to home: to our own hearts. We are our worst enemies. My heart is more of a threat to me than an anti-Christ, or a Judas could ever be. And my heart's state is evidenced in the decisions I make within the three estates. We all need help in making those choices. The Holy Spirit helps, but He does not normally work directly. He works through means. Means include the pastoral office. That means pastors.

(See slide: *three estates*)

So, in all of the three estates, or life in both of the Two Kingdoms – however you want to categorize it – Christians are called to see the world through a lens of the Holy Scriptures, a hermeneutic which requires pastoral involvement as the main interpreters by 1. Skill; 2. Training; and 3. Authority. Pastors have a responsibility to then help their members interpret life spiritually with the Word of God as their guide. To deprive Christians of interpreting all of life spiritually (like the bishop who said there was nothing spiritual about the pandemic), it cripples their ability to believe and behave like Christians. It also deprives them of chances to pray and give thanks for all things. All episodes of suffering undergone by Christians should be interpreted spiritually. God is using it all for individual good and often for the common good. Without sounding like a Calvinist determinist, nothing is random. So, when we are

punished for our sins, we repent. When we suffer for other reasons, we lean more on Christ. Both lead to a strengthening of faith and a deeper trust in and love of God.

This may seem obvious to many, but it needs to be stated anyway, especially in the post-pandemic days, when we as a Church confess our sins and find ways to improve, so that we don't make the same mistakes again when we are tempted to act like the world in dealing with problems of a national or global level, instead of handling apparent "secular" things spiritually. It is also particularly applicable due to recent debates over soft antinomianism, which seems to question traditional tactics and strategies of Christian witness, such as historical methods of participating in the world around us (like the role of the pastoral office and the Church as an institution in the civil society), and which the district encourages in Resolution 8.

The broader question becomes: Is it the pastor's job to, essentially compel believers towards good works? It seems like a dumb question. But it's not. It's actually controversial since the idea is that though the Ten Commandments are clear, how they play out isn't. Think of the pandemic when the first, third, and fourth commandments were all pitted against each other. No church should have closed, or at least for long periods of time. We all know that now. But back then it wasn't obvious. Circumventing the issue without wanting to say out loud that you actually believe a matter is secular and that there is no spiritual dimension, or at least no *clear* spiritual dimension, is despicable addressed by the misuse of the word "adiaphora."

Lutherans like to use the word "adiaphora" in order to protect Christian freedom from legalism. The intent is honourable, but in our post-modern society, from which no Christian nor church is isolated, subjective morality fueled by hyper-individualism (as political philosopher, Charles Taylor once characterized individualism in North America) leads to believing that different, or even opposite, spiritual decisions are equal. But even though "all things are permissible", the debates on food sacrificed to idols and circumcision in the apostolic age were not nearly as adiaphoric as we sometimes like to believe. The debates in Acts *do not* support an antinomian position to "do whatever you wish because you are now forgiven by Christ, and free from the law."

Today, if a pastor wants to deeply unearth what good works look like in any given scenario, or even time-period in history, he may be stepping into a mine field. "It's not the church's business" is sometimes spoken, but more often unspoken. There's the question as to whether or not it's appropriate given, again, Christian freedom. If a pastor is just sharing his own personal opinions and preferences, he may get away with it. Otherwise, it's likely seen as dictatorial or domineering. Allergy towards such a level of pastoral involvement is also complicated by critics wondering whether or not this is slippery step towards righteousness, or a protestant holiness movement. Are pastors who poke around too much into the lives of their parishioners and judging their "personal" decisions endangering souls by making them think firstly that they are saved by works, and secondly that they are saved by the

idiosyncratic preferences of their pastor? Yet if the pastor is God's presence, everything in life is his business, right? We have a hard time with this. We may concede somewhat by saying, "Yes it's God's business, but no it's not the pastors. The pastor is a sinner and only human." While at the same time we *all* confess that there is an element of trust that we must show to pastors and their decisions in life-living areas and acknowledge that they are accountable to heaven for them: "To him who has been entrusted much, much will be demanded" (Luke 12:48).

Prioritizing seminary education is one of the Church's ways of protecting and consoling people from abusive clergy. But the suspicion towards pastor entering more intimately into our lives is often the same one that tempts to confess our sins *exclusively* and *directly* to God through silent prayer and avoid any middleman, like our pastor through private confession. Can we at least agree that the pastor needs a *greater* role to play in our personal lives? By compartmentalizing any part of our life from the pastor, I would argue you have done the same to God, since the pastor after all holds the divine office. And that would be saying there are certain parts of life that we *don't* need to interpret/address spiritually. That means there are areas in our lives that we won't want God to step into and speak. But the Bible says we need His illuminating light in all compartments of our lives.

(slide) **"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), ¹⁰finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. ¹¹And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. ¹³But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. ¹⁴Therefore, He says:**

**"Awake, you who sleep,
Arise from the dead,
And Christ will give you light." (Eph. 5:8-17)**

We need help in letting Christ's light expose the darkness and illuminate our souls with God's grace, and for that reason God hasn't just given us a holy book that we need to read on our own and work out our salvation all by ourselves. But He has graciously given us pastors, and other Christians in congregations to do that.

A shepherd has the responsibility, not just to feed the flock, but also protect the flock from the devilish wolves that seek to spiritually devour them. A good shepherd actively throws rocks at them to scare them away, warning them and offering refuge to the flock. When he acts in his capacity, he should not be seen as going beyond the limits of his ministry. It is interesting that the word φυλάσσω (phulasso: to guard), used in Paul's exhortations to pastors the letters to Timothy (in 2 Tim. 1:13-14 and 1 Tim. 6:20-21), has the sense of "keeping watch over the possessions that have been entrusted by another, and of "standing guard,

defending them.” The verb is linked to the function performed by the night watchman of a city. We have a similar meaning in προσέχω (prosecho: “to take care of”) in 1 Tim. 4:6-16 and Acts 20:28-30. It means to be in a continuous state of readiness and willingness to investigate a future danger or need and to react appropriately. In other words, the role of the shepherd goes beyond feeding the flock and encompasses all aspects of life in which lambs may be exposed to danger.

Pastors are to be careful then on how to handle this divine responsibility of applying the third use of the law in the sensitive areas of members lives, but the bottom line is that it is their business. Inasmuch as the Bible has applications to every part of our life, so too does the pastor. Luther clearly makes it the business of pastor by talking about the distinction between two kinds of righteousness, the first being salutary alien righteousness of Christ, imputed to us by grace and received through faith, and the second one being “civil” righteousness: how we live in the world around us. The adiaphorists confuse civic righteousness (which a person can to some extent achieve through natural abilities that remain after the fall into sin) which righteousness before God (which no man can achieve or even contribute toward, but Christ alone possesses by His own virtue and imputes graciously to those who believe in him).¹

In Luther’s prayer and appeal for a free Christian council in his introduction to the SmalCald articles, he undisputedly shows that the mission of the Church involves her voice in all three estates, as a community and not just as individuals, and with obvious organized leadership including clergy. He offers a public defense against accusations of bad behaviour exhibited in society by Lutherans (who exhibited soft antinomian behaviour) which although involves doctrine, he makes a matter *for the prince* to address.

(Slide: excerpts)

Besides such necessary ecclesiastical affairs, there would be also in the political estate innumerable matters of great importance to improve. There is the disagreement between the princes and the states; usury and avarice have burst in like a flood, and have become lawful [are defended with a show of right]; wantonness, lewdness, extravagance in dress, gluttony, gambling, idle display, with all kinds of bad habits and wickedness, insubordination of subjects, of domestics and laborers of every trade, also the exactions [and most exorbitant selling prices] of the peasants (and who can enumerate all?) have so increased that they cannot be rectified by ten Councils and twenty Diets. If such chief matters of the spiritual and worldly estates as are contrary to God would be considered in the Council, they would have all hands so full that the child’s play and absurdity of long gowns [official insignia], large tonsures, broad cinctures [or sashes], bishops’ or cardinals’ hats or maces, and like jugglery would in the meantime be forgotten. If we first had performed God’s command and order in the spiritual and secular estate we would find time enough to reform food, clothing,

¹ *The Magdeburg Confession* (translated by Christian Preus, CPH, St. Louis, 2025), p. 33

tonsures, and surplices. But if we want to swallow such camels, and instead, strain at gnats, let the beams stand and judge the motes, we also might indeed be satisfied with the Council.

Therefore I have presented few articles; for we have without this so many commands of God to observe in the Church, the state and the family that we can never fulfill them. What, then, is the use, or what does it profit that many decrees and statutes thereon are made in the Council, especially when these chief matters commanded of God are neither regarded nor observed? Just as though He were bound to honor our jugglery as a reward of our treading His solemn commandments under foot. But our sins weigh upon us and cause God not to be gracious to us; for we do not repent, and besides, wish to defend every abomination.

O Lord Jesus Christ, do Thou Thyself convoke a Council, and deliver Thy servants by Thy glorious advent! The Pope and his adherents are done for; they will have none of Thee. Do Thou, then, help us, who are poor and needy, who sigh to Thee, and beseech Thee earnestly, according to the grace which Thou hast given us, through Thy Holy Ghost who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Father, blessed forever. Amen.²

Luther conceives of the Church, and its involvement in the three estates, as not just something that happens at an individual level. He also presumes this occurs at an *institutional* level; at a necessarily then, “political” level. The Church is a political institution and creature by nature, as are people and pastors. This is good and normal. After all, the Church is both visible and invisible. It’s “invisible” because it’s made of believers in Christ, and faith is something you cannot see. It’s “visible” because serious Christians are found together as a community, in an institution, which you CAN see. And as an institution, I believe that the Church has a role to play in the public square. Now the Roman Catholics take this too far. The Pope is the head of a religion and the head of a state (the Vatican). This is an abusive mix of the two kingdoms. But we Lutherans don’t take it far enough. We separate the two as if God is disinterested in the way we live in the public sphere. There are some exceptions, such as when our synodical president shares our theological view in congress or goes on a pro-life march. That’s terrific. But for the most part, we talk like the only voice Christianity can have in the world is by single individual Christians speaking out, as opposed to together as a body, as the Church. Yet evangelism (and speaking into the public square with the ultimate goal of converting souls for Christ), isn’t just done by individual Christians, it’s done also by the communal body of Christ.³

² This text was converted to ascii format for Project Wittenberg by Allen Mulvey and is in the public domain. You may freely distribute, copy, or print this text. Please direct any comments or suggestions to: Rev. Robert E. Smith of the Walther Library at Concordia Theological Seminary. Email: CFWLibrary@CRF.CUIS.EDU; Surface mail: 6600 N Clinton St., Ft. Wayne, IN 46825 Phone: (219) 481-2123 Fax: (219) 481-2126

³ If we agree that all things are spiritual, (since, again, there really isn’t a secular sphere in the mind of God), then God’s word matters to the public realm. This is precisely what Luther reaffirms in his doctrine of the two kingdoms.

Now I'm going to say something shocking, that makes Luther sound like a Christian nationalist: Luther cared about national security! Yes, that's right. He had a political position as a pastor. He doesn't just tell the prince to keep Muslims out of Germany because they're *heretics*. But on behalf of the Church, even though he is undoubtedly pro-evangelism (as we see in his rhetoric regarding salvation for the Jews), he tells him to keep the Turks out because they are a military threat to the nation: primarily because they attack the interests of the Church such as the preaching of the Gospel, but also because God cares about the *physical wellbeing* of his beloved people.

Luther never preaches politics from the pulpit, in the sense of salvation being conditional on views of public policy. But he does speak publicly about the applications of our life in Christ, applying common sense and godly wisdom to real life situations. When it comes to the third estate, the clergy drop the call when they are paranoid of preaching politics from the pulpit by addressing moral questions of abortion, euthanasia, homosexual culture, etc. These are both spiritual and moral topics that have biblical applications in Christian vocations in both church and civil society. As we will see, pastors as seelorsgers are expected to shape the souls of parishoners in edifying and God-pleasing ways. When WE don't do that, we betray soft antinomian tendencies. The Church is at the center of all civilization and the cross is on top and in the middle, the light of the world. But antinomians selfishly, lazily, or cowardly hide this light under a bushel. Even though "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *unto* good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10), soft antinomianism is manifested in a quietist position on matters of morality as we encounter them in the public sphere as individuals and as a Church.

We live in community together. Church community includes voting members in civil society. Issues of poverty or abortion don't just happen outside the walls of the church but inside too. The three estates are not silo-insulated spheres but overlap.

For instance, the Church is a charitable organization. Pastors officiate weddings as priests and represent heads of state. Think of evangelism techniques. We do ESL and soup kitchen ministries that help the body (as an excuse to helping the soul), and they are not only products of individuals, but also as an organization or program of a church. That is what many synodical RSOs are. Many of these endeavours are not just tolerated but seen as crucial to unique missions of local congregations. People are coached and led by pastors in those projects too, in ways that are not often theological, sharing their administrative and leadership abilities. Yet why is ESL and feeding the homeless less controversial than political involvement in moral matters encountered in the left hand kingdom (after all, the ultimate intent is never simply fixing temporal problems but saving souls)? Probably because it

And even though individual Christians are both living stones AND the very tools of God in building his Church, the Church as an institution is expected to boldly speak to the civil rulers, rebuking, advising, and praying, and the government in turn is expected to protect the Church and allow her to teach, preach and administer the sacraments freely.

touches on our idols. At the end of the day addressing these personal gods is precisely what the Gospel is about, done in public ministry but often most effectively in individual pastoral relationship.

COVID offers a good example of this happening or the neglect: Was it the pastor's job to inform about the morally questionable vaccines or not? Even later on during the pandemic, the hesitancy to talk about issues that seemed to have no bearing on spirituality at first, but then we had a hunch that we were wrong. Families were broken; worship services were reduced to zoom for years in some places. We may *now* admit that all things are spiritual, but have we learned from those mistakes? Are there still life-living subjects that we believe are off limits? Do pastors believe they should have spoken more about life in the third estate, or made it their business as to how their members believed and behaved? I haven't met an American Lutheran nor Lutheran pastor who hasn't confessed that they failed to some degree during that difficult and dark time in our history. Yet we sinners have a hard time confessing specifics, which is why the proposed convention overture and resolution on the topic are so refreshing.

I get asked to do a lot of presentations on spiritual warfare, especially pertaining to demonism. I have two books on the subject and a third coming out in the summer on what my Australian colleague and good long-time friend, Dr. John Kleining, from Australia has labeled "The Ministry of Deliverance." And I always introduce the subject with a contrast as to how we moderns view the invisible dimension of life versus our forefathers. It's not just a philosophical question that satisfies an epistemological curiosity. It has real practical implications: when the ancients looked around themselves, they did not see empty space (*slide*). They saw demons and angels around them all the time (for better or for worse). A haunted house wasn't as freaky to them as to us. Even my parents would refer to their parents experience with spells and voodoo in the folk life of Germany. My dad's opa apparently drank too much, and was threatened by my great-oma with words like "I will pay the local witchdoctor to put a curse on you, and then you'll smarten up."

In the old days, it was more natural to engage in spiritual warfare in a very tangible way. When Luther throws the inkwell against the devil, it's because he saw him there. And it wouldn't have been that strange for him to tell the mail what happened when the mess needed to be cleaned up. We laugh. We figure he was really stressed. Why do we presume it's a mental health problem? Was Luther crazy because he frequently had words with Satan? His hymns regularly rebuke the devil as if he's standing in the room beside him. He doesn't need to scream loudly either. The devil is right there! Many Lutherans including Luther, Chemnitz, Balduin, and even Walther give practical steps on how to exorcize demons, and none of them are alarmist (*slide: Luther crushing demons who are intimately close to him, but the written word*).

Today, due to the impact of rationalism, we get chills when we hear stories about demons and poltergeists. We believe in the supernatural but limited to the ins and outs of the two sacraments. As sinners, we don't like mystery. We don't like not having the answers. We think we know better than our forefathers! Why is it that when we imagine empty space, we see particles, rays, and energy, instead of a room crowded with angels and demons? It's because we are "scientistic," not "scientific." We have bought into the false religion of science as a way of viewing the world around us. It is closely related to the philosophy of rationalism, in the 18th Century, which elevated reason over God's word, resulting in higher criticism where you get to judge the bible and not the other way around. But the ancients did not see it that way. They saw demons and angels all around. If those were all manifested to us right now in the flesh, I doubt that we would be able to see each other standing a foot away.

Luther never pitted reason against faith. Philosophers such as Schleiermacher, Kirkegaard, and Wittgenstein did that. Luther saw reason as good and a gift of God, but its corrupted version he called "Frau Hulda." She is a whore that seeks to replace the Word of God as our lens through which to see the world (even when the Word seems to contradict itself). Lutherans believe the sacraments are what God says they are, even if it's humanly illogical. God says. We believe. Sadly, the practice of immediately referring those with demonism traits to mental health, is characteristic of Lutheran pastoral ministry today, unfortunately. We believe in sacraments doing miraculous things, and the Word, and yet it ends there. Miracles, demonic activity: some bronze agers even deny their existence entirely today. Angels and demons aren't really part of our lives, is the impression. For if they were, we would be forced to view things spiritually, with a spiritual lens. If we did that, it would change our lives. Pastors would then be *first responders* on demonism. God gets praise first, not doctors, when a healing occurs. We thank God, not coincidence or chance, when miracles happen through the prayers of Christians and from the altar, when no medicine could succeed. Yet the default position today when it comes to demonism, when church leaders notice an issue is that you send the suffering and hurting individual to the mental health experts or hospital first, even if it *clearly* has the marks of demonic oppression or even possession. For even if the congregation suspects that demonic activity is the cause, we have no protocol in place to address it. So, we ignore or deny it. Some Lutherans refer their members to the Roman Catholics because the papists apparently know how to deal with it better. This is a shame and a compromise. We can do the work better than they, since we have the full Gospel and right understanding of the Word. It's a *spiritual* concern which means it's a *theological* problem. By referring these issues to the Roman Catholics, we are conceding that they are theologically stronger, at least in this category, or have a better "in" with God. But our pastors are largely unaccustomed to thinking about it that way.

Whether it be dealing with demonism or mental health, or the family and political decisions of our members, talking about it with them and even among us is uncomfortable because have lost the art of SEELSORGER. Our Lutheran fathers saw the ministry of deliverance as a

kind of *unusual* but still “normal” part of pastoral ministry, because they weren’t rationalists, they were seelsorgers. And seelsorgers are involved in the application of the third use of the law in all three estates.

To interpret all of life spiritually means we need lenses to be given to us. Thanks be to God, those *have* been given to us through the holy catholic and apostolic Church, in Holy Baptism. Yet those lenses need some instruction on how to use them. And all the way along you need the pastor.

(slide) **Shift away from Seelsorger in Lutheran Culture and Practice**

Historically, Lutheran pastors saw themselves as seelsorgers. This was how they equipped members for spiritual war. Certainly sacraments do that, but just like any soldiers who have weapons, they need training. So, we need pastors to help us learn to use our weapons. Pastors are not just added extras but indispensable to our spiritual survival. Seelsorger literally means “Spirit guides” (not in the new age way, but as a kind of spiritual life coach, to put it crassly). The German word is “care for soul” giver, having no perfect English equivalent. Seelsorgers can be best likened to a kind father. Fathers care about the entire holistic life of their children; not just one compartment of their lives. Children secretly expect their fathers to poke their nose into all their business. What my kids eat, who their friends are, who they marry, career goals, what they watch on screens, is all my business as a father whether they like it or not. That’s normal. That’s love. The father’s “opinion” is not really a viewpoint among equals. He has authority over his children. They are to listen to him, show respect, obey and carefully consider his views in all things.

St. Paul refers to himself as the father to Titus and Timothy and others. It’s obviously not a biological relationship. It’s a spiritual one but the comparison is perfect. It’s normal for us to see our pastors as fathers, and pastors to consider themselves as such, even if they are decades younger than their members. This is how the pastoral office was once viewed. Why not so much today? We will talk in a moment about some historical movements that had us drift from there. But this idea of pastor as father is essential in seeing pastors as seelsorgers.

“Seelsorger” is pretty much a uniquely Lutheran term and expresses a biblical view of the function of pastoral office as the pastor relates to individuals. At least since the fourth century, pastors have been known to function as spiritual physicians.

The uniqueness of Lutheran pastoral ministry became very clear to me having served eleven years as a military chaplain. Lutheran pastors had an outstanding reputation for visiting people and members among protestants. Individual caregiving wasn’t as much of an emphasis for other denominations. Pastors for them were mainly seen as spiritual helpers, but without a right view of the Office of the Ministry, pastor as “father” is not in their vocabulary. In the wider religious spectrum of the Canadian chaplaincy, Christians were distinct, and Lutherans in particular, from “question and answer men” like rabbis or imams. Those religious

leaders exist to answer your theological questions or perform certain rites on your behalf. For Lutherans, due to Luther who gave new value to individual believers through the emphasis on the universal priesthood which meant each individual counted before God, each was a *precious little lamb of the good shepherd*. Pastoral care then was characterized as individual care. For Lutherans, it was crucial that pastor interacted with people. This was not the way for the Roman Catholics during Luther's time (the late medieval period). This isn't to suggest Lutheranism was doing something new. Instead, Luther resurrected a practice that had been corrupted by the papacy, as was the case with most of his reforms. He went back to an earlier, healthier Christian tradition. For "seelsorgering" as an early church practice of pastoral care was known as *cura animarum*, "the cure of anima" or "cure of soul" from the Latin word for the Hebrew "nephesh" (which comes from "breath" as God breathed into his newly formed creature) and the Greek word "psyche" from which we get "psychology," pertaining to the mind. So seelsorgering as pastoral care, ultimately, always recognized the connection between *soul and mind*, and that God's Word and ordained servants had something to say about the whole person: body, mind, and soul.⁴

Lutherans carried on that tradition, but it has sort of fallen out of use. So now we may need some help to carry it on in the future.

Back to the military, ironically, in Canada the word for "chaplain" was the Spanish word for father: "Padre." What a complement! And the way we speak and the words we use, doesn't only *reflect* the way we think, but *shapes* the way we think. So, the language was convenient for those of us who were missionizing soldiers in a Canadian environment which is radically godless compared to the USA.⁵ But in the old days the Canadian "padres" or American chaplains were the mental health workers, counselors, even doctors. They took a holistic approach to the survival of soldiers in *physical* war. We need to do the same as pastors and parishioners in today's *spiritual* war. (slide: photo of chaplain) But as the secularization of the Western world sped up in the 1960s, the role of the chaplain diminished, and his shepherding and fathering became more compartmentalized to just "doing" religious services, like a Roman Catholic priest today. Spiritual life became a subcategory of mental health as the "helping professionals" effectively hijacked the role of pastor.

For example, did you know that PTSD used to be called "moral injury" (a religious term) and prior to that "spiritual injury?" PTSD was considered to be 'a soul issue' and not a 'mental health issue.' This kind of change represents a deliberate shift to the secular world of psychology usurping the stuff of the church and making it its own. Unless PTSD among infantry men is caused by actual physical brain injury, it's usually a result of a crisis in

⁴ "Seelsorgering" doesn't exist as a verb, but for my purposes here, I will just use it as such.

⁵ The largely agnostic Canadian soldiers are forced to wrestle with how to incorporate chaplains into their lives as fathers, when they can't conceive in any sense how they are their children. Still I found Americans, even though they don't use the word "padre," actually treated us chaplains more like fathers than Canadians, largely, again, because Canadians were less confessing Christian.

conscience, guilt, or existential questions regarding 'who I am' and beliefs about the sanctity of a soldier's vocation within the machine of authorized killing. These spiritual questions remain undisputed among all health professionals as the cause of most mental injury. Yet the notion that religion should be the loudest voice in addressing them is considered absolutely laughable. I spent three years with NATO, Special Forces of NATO on teams with secular psychiatrists and psychologists in creating recovering packages for PTSD victims, and clearly the spiritual side is, at best, not understood in the least, and at worse seen as a Christian nationalist attempt at evangelization. Trying to regain this lost territory is next to impossible today and our militaries are worse off for it.

It's noticeable that the shift in the military to others doing the job that chaplains should be doing or once did, (like the heightened role of mental health workers active in spiritual caregiving), parallels what is happening in the church. I would guess that with the mental health stats what they are today (as roughly 20-35% of Americans, Christian, and non are using mental health professionals and/or legal or illegal drugs to cope with life), Christians are more inclined to speak to "secular" "specialists" over *pastors* about their problems; issues which, again, always have a spiritual and/or moral component.

I know that we pastors don't have training in psychotherapy or counseling, but does that preclude us from being the first tier in a process of healing? It's a huge mistake to think that any social or psychological issues in life does not have a spiritual dimension, which then requires the Word of God, administered by his pastors, to address. My kid may injure himself and need stitches, but before taking him to the doctor, I see if I can help first.

In short, pastors as seelsorger need to be involved in the details of the lives of their people in order to, as St. Paul writes help them take captive EVERY thought for Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

"Pastoral care" is often equated with "seelsorgering", though I would argue seelsorgering is a function of pastoral care as a description of pastoral ministry and the pastoral office. But notice that today how often "spiritual care" is substituted for "pastoral care." It's more open-ended and less paternalistic. "Not all people are religious, but they are all spiritual, right?" It's a popular less offensive notion: "spiritual" versus "pastoral." So too "spiritual counseling," even "Christian counseling" has come to replace the work of the seelsorger.

How did all this happen? What was it like in the old days? Individual Confession and Absolution was the way prior to the Reformation (*slide*). Afterall, priests were the early psychologists, and confession was the early therapy. You confess sins, get forgiven, and the pastor then advises you on how to live better. It's a shame that the Roman Catholics make absolution conditional by their view of penance. So, Lutherans flee from anything that looks like we need to guide people on how to live the new life. But look at our rite of individual confession. At the end, we expect our "father confessor" to say more than just forgive. He is to encourage and advise the absolved sinner. It's too bad that we have lost this art. As a

seminary professor I taught pastoral ministry and had a unit on how to practice effective private confession. I compared it with a dentist who goes poking around at rotten teeth in a mouth; each mouth is different. Each dental solution is somewhat tailor made. Yet treatment needs to be individual, as some individual teeth need more attention than others, and a general fluoride dose isn't going to be enough to effectively improve the situation. Pastors are that dentist and confession is that process. Sometimes they poke and say "Does that hurt?" or "How about this?" In confession, it is not inappropriate for the confessor to interrupt and steer the conversation, making sure it doesn't turn into a pity party or blaming of other people for your problems as the one confessing sins may experience meandering thoughts but spoken outloud (e.g. "I am really sorry Lord for my anger towards my sister, but she just drives me nuts and she thinks she's so much better, and gossips about me... Lord, can you get more busy on changing *her*?"). As a newly ordained pastor, I would just let people say whatever they want, and just forgive them, no matter what they ever said (justifying myself by saying, "Well they are just talking to God anyways, and not me"), and offering no advice afterwards. I don't do that anymore. I'm not saying that I make it a two-way conversation, but I do get involved and interact. No one has ever complained.

One of the seelsorger's best tools is private confession. Yet most don't like it because it's too personal and touchy, and maybe one reason is that it prods into the sins committed within the second and third estates.

Ironically, although priests don't have the tradition of seelsorgering like Lutherans they are structurally better set up for success as a Church due to the expectations by members to go to confession and receive the counsel of their "father." The problem is that the frequency among Roman Catholics to tap into the benefits of a "The Sacrament of Reconciliation" aren't great; 16% of Roman Catholics go once a month while 42% go once a year. Our stats are way lower, with most Lutherans never having gone to private confession even once in their lives. In fairness, confession stats are not necessarily the best marker to measure the openness of people to let the clergy into all aspects of their lives, but it is safe to say that it is increasingly less popular among *all* Christians, due to the dominant influence of hyper-individualism in Western culture.

Yet historically Lutherans theoretically had the advantage over the Roman Catholic in the department of pastoral care. For the difference between Roman Catholics and Lutherans on Confession was that the ministry of "spiritual care and counseling" for the priests was largely *limited* to private confession (it was often an empty and robotic rite, in within a factory of confession boxes with the priest in a swivel chair, speedily hearing confessions from one side to the next (*slide*), whereas for Lutherans it became one part, a crucial part, but no the only part of the more holistic seelsorgering of "spiritual therapy." Thus, smaller congregations with healthier ratios of pastor to people was important for Lutherans. In contrast, this really didn't matter to Roman Catholics, especially during the Middle Ages when just viewing priests doing the sacrament, as your go between, sufficed for salvation. Unfortunately, though, for

the Lutherans, time with the seelsorger later became a necessary pastoral *alternative* to the rite of confession (which became optional, as sadly, it is with human nature and the third use of the law, when the Lutherans refused to mandate certain practices like fasting or confession, they fall out of use).⁶

But on the bright side, seelsorgering was still actually very similar and complimentary to confession, even if it lacked the formal ritual. Think of when a pastor sits on the couch with an elderly woman crying on his shoulder and he pronounces Christ's forgiveness. No liturgical rite is followed, but there are unspoken mutual understandings in place, and the objective is the same. Such "sofa ministry" certainly is a function of the pastoral office, and fits under the category of confession, yet a little casual and fluid, which I think is okay, but a healthy Christian spiritual diet includes both.

Yet seelsorgering today, when practiced, has often begun to look like a kind of Christian psychotherapy. Seelsorgering in the past was more holistic with the aim to fully prepare Christians for living righteous lives. It was not limited to individual confession and absolution nor was it just about helping individuals address the dark areas of their life. It was a way of equipping them for spiritual warfare in the surrounding society, as they carried out their various vocations. It happened within a more communitarian-based and less pluralist pre-American society, and where the two kingdoms were really seen as two distinctive halves of one kingdom of God. So, it was a way of guiding people into the complexity of what they were dealing with in life, in all three estates. All aspects of life can fit within the circles of Church, state, and family which all overlap. Seelsorgering then wasn't just about questions of "how to heal from my sins" but also on "how to live a virtuous life." Pastors should not be shy to do what the hymnal encourages, though honestly it could say it a little more forthcoming (i.e. give advice on how to live better in light of the confession of specific sins, like again, that dentist prescribing a unique diet to each client based on their unique dental issues). We expect our *medical* doctors to pry into our personal lives, yet when it comes to the *soul*, we sinners don't like someone to do that because the devil doesn't like that. He has made his home in each of our hearts and doesn't like getting the boot.

I encourage you all to read, if you have not already done so, *Kirch und Amt* (Church and Ministry) and *Gesetz und Evangelium* (Law and Gospel) by C.F.W. Walther, where we get a picture of how seelsorgering involved more than just spiritual healing and mental health. Walther was a bit fan of making personal issues of members his business in not just estate number one, but two and three (family and civil life). Some pastors today may be gifts in pastoral counseling, and even have the CPE qualification, but are they addressing these moral and ethical issues, of say, life in the civil estate? In what venue do we train them for that, or even talk about it? When I asked during the pandemic aftermath how many pastors in one

⁶ Herbert Anderson, "Whatever Happened to Seelsorge?" *Word & World* (Volume XXI, Number 1 Winter 2001 Seattle University School of Theology and Ministry Seattle, Washington. 32-41), p. 33.

confessional circuit had told their people about the pecking order between different COVID Vaxes (all were controversial due to the connection to aborted children, but some worse than others), heads hung low and not one said that they had.

Some of you are familiar with LCMS Doxology crowd, intended to help equip pastors for the, dare I say, "practical" side of pastoral ministry, with its journal appropriately entitled *Seelsorger*. Founder and good friend, Hal Seinkbeil, talks about how seelsorgering has sadly become a thing of the less confessional and orthodox pastors, who are interested in spiritual counseling over traditional word and sacrament of ministry. That means that the most confessional pastors, the ones that we should look to for leadership, are the least accustomed to seelsorgering. This explains for so much silence in them feeling comfortable talking about COVID issues to their members, since even though we all agree that has had a major impact on life within all three estates (*slide*). Pastor Seinkbeil writes, ***"To do [seelsorgering] correctly and faithfully is the aim of the discerning pastor. Pastoral care is not one-size-fits-all. It is not as simple as tossing a struggling soul one of the articles of faith and hoping for the best. Systematic theology is the root of pastoral theology, but in itself it is not truly pastoral in the fullest sense. Unfortunately, some have abandoned doctrine entirely for what they consider greener pastures. The net result is that the word "pastoral" has been pitted against "doctrinal," just as "missional" has been pitted against "confessional," and "mission" has been pitted against "ministry."***⁷ We found during the pandemic that the most confessional pastors had their heads in the sand when it came to addressing current topics that had direct implications on the spiritual life of members. We found members equally disinterested in pastors prying into their personal lives. Such fear and suspicion is not healthy. Where does this cowardice or lack of conformability to seelsorg come from?

What went wrong? Well, you heard me mention earlier the term "rationalism." Rationalism was a pivotal philosophical movement that tried to reverse the roles of God and man by elevating the authority of man's mind over God's word. That movement was a product of a more specifically religious movement and philosophical theological system of the 17th Century called "pietism;" not in the sense of "pious" (doing good Christian behaviour or exhibiting healthy devotion to God), but the idea is that because you and God have a personal spiritual relationship, you don't need anybody or anything else to help you in your growth. Your direct relationship with God morphs into the idea that you don't need other people or *means*! You become your own priest, of sorts. Pastors, at best, become spiritual helpers, as do sacraments, fellow believers, and congregations. But none of them are essential. Your relationship is so personal, how can a stranger really speak into that? Your relationship is so spiritual, how can a "thing" like bread, water, and wine really make that much of a difference to what God is doing deep down in your heart?

⁷ Harold L. Seinkbeil, "What's Old Is New Again: The Art of Seelsorge" (CTQ, Vol 87:3–4 July/October 2023, 265-274), p.267.

The origins of this movement, which is hyper-spiritual and anti-clerical, is actually mysticism. Luther and the early orthodox reformers rebuked it as “enthusiasm” from the “schwärmer,” who boasted a direct link to the Holy Spirit, even outside of the Word, something which we find in Pentecostalism and charismatic evangelicalism today: “me and God have a direct link, without the holy Word and means of Grace.” The early Lutheran pietists would have been horrified to be associated with the theology of Zwingli, Karlstadt, and Muntzer, but that just goes to show you how careful we must be with all matters of doctrine and stand up against any hint of heresy creeping into our churches.

Now there is a good kind of mysticism, not a radical non-Christian type, but the kind that springs from the Word of God and says that even though we don’t count on experiencing God in our personal devotional life, we don’t need to be afraid of it either. Luther encountering angels while receiving the Holy Eucharist is a good example of that. Paul talks about levels of heaven and speaking in tongues. They don’t consider such mystical religious experience as rewards of holiness in any way, but they admit there is a dimension of mysticism, beyond human words to describe, in the lives of many, if not all, Christians. There were even some nice offshoots of mysticism and pietism, in Gerhardt hymns, that highlight your personal loving interactions and relationship with Jesus. One of my favorite devotional prayer books of Johann Gerhardt’s “Meditations on Divine Mercy,” in which you often get the impression that, as one fourth century desert father, an Egyptian mystic monk said “only you and God exist.” But they are all based in, and assume, the sacraments as the source, and operate within the walls of orthodox theology. Mysticism at its best fosters a very personalized relationship with God within the parameters of the Bible and never disconnected by His sacred means: the mysteries as we find them celebrated in the Church. The word “mystery” or “sacrament” in Latin itself suggests something being beyond human articulation, and thus there is a mystical element to the means of grace. Consider also how the term “mystic union” of Christ and His Body is entirely appropriate Lutheran language.

(slide) But just like anything, when misunderstood, a great gift can become abused and dangerous.⁸ And so it went with interpretations and applications of the writings of Lutheran mystics like Johann Arndt, in the 16th Century, a highly popular devotional writer among Lutherans (with his writings taking third or fourth place to Luther’s). Arndt, a great devotional writer was highly influential on Lutherans, reiterated, for the most part, the healthy Lutheran emphasis on individual faith and a direct relationship with God through Christ. The medium to God was the means of grace, whereas in the Roman system you had a soteriological mediation that involved not only sacraments, but *priests and saints*. But for the first time in a

⁸ The nature of demons is abuse. Angels are holy instruments of God and demons are those that reject their instrumentality (though almighty God uses them anyways, to their eternal frustration and horror!). Yet the devil’s nature is about twisting and abusing God’s gifts, the greatest being true doctrine. What is adultery other than perversion of marriage, or a lie as the deprivation of truth? The greatest spiritual battles in life happen when it comes to divine teachings.

long time, in the West at least, a relationship with God was personal. This was good news. Luther taught this, but the mystics, who influenced the pietists, showed you what it looked like. And it began to look less like a communal experience within the confines of the Church as an institution, or among people as interdependent members of an indispensable spiritual communal body. So, the drive toward individual spiritual development had its downfall, especially in a climate of temptation to throw the baby out with the bathwater when observing the abuses of the Roman Catholic church. Lutherans struggled with how to be catholic amidst all the abuses. If it looked Roman Catholic, it was dismissed as being exclusively for their use. Did you know that in early Lutheranism in North America, even candles were controversial? No wonder it has taken us so long to get crucifixes back into our churches.

So, Arndt, though not saying anything necessarily wrong, led to pietism. For instance, it led to one of the most famous Lutheran devotional books after the Small Catechism, *PIA DESIDERIA*. This book is largely all legalism and law, with little Gospel, as believers are forced to climb a ladder of holiness up to heaven, never sure whether if you died right now, you would make it there through faith alone. The implied goal of life was to please or impress God and avoid His wrath, by your personal religious decisions. Pietism then meant less focus on the *visible* church and *visible* sacraments. It fostered a view of the Church, capital C, as nothing but a bunch of believers with a common interest assembling together. It's a very inorganic and cold view of the body of Christ. It is basically the current protestant view that individual believers get to heaven, not within the wider body and institution of the Church, led by true doctrine, but by themselves and through the works of the law.⁹

Conversely, the Lutheran Confessions say that the Church is defined as believers assembling around the Word and Sacraments (which includes the pastoral office). To prove it, though lay people can do emergency baptisms, they cannot preside over emergency Eucharists. The Confessional Lutheran view of the definition of the Church is trinitarian and beautiful; the Father's children gathering around Jesus and brought there by the Holy Spirit. It's very warm and organic. The pastor feeds the sheep, the food purchased and won by Jesus.

Pietism caused rationalism and is closely related to it. As one friend, Rev. Paul Williams, author of one of the handouts, put it, "Pietism was rationalism of the heart, rationalism was a pietism of the brain." Rationalism rejected the Bible as authoritative. It said things like there is a rationale explanation for miracles; The Red Sea parted because of the wind; Demon possession is mental illness.¹⁰ Pietism ultimately rejected the Church, the Word and her

⁹ Most of my protestant Christian friends who served with me in the military see church as interaction between them, their Bible and a whole host of internet preachers. They all help coach you in your spiritual lives. These friends desire seersorgers, but they settle for a two-dimension pastor on a screen who they have never met or doesn't know their name, which does not suffice

¹⁰ I was surprised by a devotion by Bo Giertz, one of my favourite theologians, Swedish --but he's not perfect-- in *To Live With Christ*, where he makes reference to medical explanations for demonic possession in the New Testament

ministers as authoritative and thus as necessary. Both placed the individual mind, heart, and feeling experience as metaphysically supreme. After all, mysticism carves out the requisite space for rationalism. Mysticism means your spirituality is above anything knowable, including the Word of God, which is all just letter of the Law, right? God is spirit, immanent, transcendent, unknowable, uncontrollable, uncontainable. Faith in *this* God doesn't need to be at all reasonable and can't really be grounded in facts or history. Your spirituality hovers above all that, and so far above all that, that it has nothing to say about any of that, like the mundane things of the earth and everyday life.¹¹ Besides, if your personal relationship with Jesus is everything, then who cares about anything else; how you live, or how you think about other stuff? You can be an evolutionist while holding the "spiritual" view of the creation narrative. You can believe in a "spiritual" resurrection while holding to the world's view that physical resurrection is scientifically impossible. "We are not saved by reason anyway, right? We are saved by faith!" Faith and reason ironically become pitted against each other, as opposed to reason bending knee to faith and faith being shown to have reasonable substance. We encounter this in the existential German philosophers, most of whom, unsurprisingly, had Lutheran roots but watered down through rationalism. "Why study doctrine in depth if the bible is unreliable and if my highly individualized spiritual experiences and sentiments surpass in quality and cannot be contained by words and theological formulas?" Pietism resulted in a lot of devotional acts that either tried to increase the intensity of those religious experiences, as the soul escalated the ladder towards Jesus in the heart or reduced Christianity to doing good works, having a skewed view of "sanctification," to again, help you get closer to Jesus in your heart.¹²

But without viewing the pastor as necessary in guiding this spirituality and teaching the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, and the place of true good works, pietism paved the way for faith being the only thing that mattered in the end, and so personal that nobody else was deemed fit to judge the ins and outs of that, *including a pastor*, who functions really just as a more educated and moral man than the rest of us. The logic seems then also to have been extended to life living being *very personal and adiaphora*. This is key to this discussion.

LECTURE 2

era, in a way that implied that the disciples were less informed, scientific, educated and thus, rational, than us today in their assessment of a demoniac in categories other than mental health.

¹¹ I appreciate the argument of Luther in *Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Sacraments and Images* in 1525, where the heavenly prophets are criticized precisely because they are so heavenly minded, transcending word and sacraments and the fleshly aspect of Christian living. He also implies how they are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good.

¹² Baptist Lordship salvation is really a cousin of pietism. Pietism took a toll in all of Christendom, including Roman Catholicism through both the cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary (i.e. (your personal relationship to Christ happens through her) or the cult of the Sacred heart of Jesus, with its emphasis on Jesus changing your heart through His heart. Incidentally, that's what those beams of light flashing out of His chest signify. The mind—i.e. doctrine—isn't the focus: the heart is.

For today, as pietism has been filtered to us, life-living is largely treated as *adiaphora*, based on personal and contextual decision that individuals make, with lots and lots of religious freedom. If all that Lutherans care about is forgiveness of sins, since believing *that* doctrine is the only one you really need, why talk about good works? In pietism, you become your own priest, your own judge. Living in the three estates becomes a matter of opinion and preference. Your pastor may have an opinion, but yours trumps his.

Pietism had a huge influence in the Western world. It was a Lutheran phenomenon that impacted all of Western Christendom. With the Reformation's emphasis on the individual relationship with God, the radical reformers took this to its logical conclusion and said there was no need for *any mediation*, such as the means of grace, which are just symbols of spiritual realities that we "do" because God says we should. For the means of grace to do more than just being symbols of divine truths, *necessarily implicates some kind of mediation*. Luther is 100% correct in arguing that man can never escape a physical means in connecting to God. If you reject God's means, your hear, brain, and emotions take the place. Like Baptist bible studies: "I believe the Holy Spirit is telling *me* that this verse means x, y, and z *to me*. What about you?" Well, the protestants never really responded to any of these criticisms. The Peasant revolt of 1524 resembled a kind of communistic rebellion destroying the *orders of creation* by a misunderstanding of the *order of redemption*. Their logic went: "If we are all equal before God, why not before *man*? So, let's all destroy any distinction between priest and lay, king and subject." This shift, which included despising the church as an authoritative hierarchical organization in any sense, resulted in demonic anarchy, rebellion, and mass murder.

But the Lutherans had it right. Although individual Christians have a direct mediation with God through Christ, *that* mediation happens *through* mediation: the means of Grace, and where the pastors also belong to those means. Whether you consider them a means to the means or means themselves, they are necessary. The Bible says it. They are "essential workers" and so are the buildings from which they operate and the tools that they use (which is why churches should not close even during a *real* pandemic). But shortly after the successes of the reformation were celebrated, the counter reformation was launched and much of the territory gained by Lutheran was lost quickly, and the golden age of Lutheran orthodoxy was pretty short-lived. The religious wars resulted in fragmented church bodies, and lack of strong confessional leadership, with Lutheran princes hailing a status as "emergency bishops" without much of any theological knowledge, and thus clearly mixing the two kingdoms in devilish ways. Seminaries were in a poor state. Pietism meant Lutherans, who could now read and could afford bibles, had them along with Luther's Small Catechism, but not without much orthodox instruction. After all, the Small Catechism isn't enough to get you through all of the complexities of life in terms of Christian living.¹³ Pietism meant

¹³ AND is more ecumenical than we Lutherans may want to admit (the only really offensive parts are on the sacraments, and since Vatican II, not even to most Roman Catholics).

spirituality was reduced to “Me, God, and my Bible,” with the sacraments functioning as spiritual booster juice but not essential nourishment. The third book on the bookshelf of an average educated Lutheran, *Pia Desideria*, by Spener, didn’t help the situation at all.

So, when the Lutherans migrated to North America, they brought with them the baggage of the pietistic ideas. Immigration always involves the importance of culture. This is why it should be a concern for Christians, and saying so is not racism! Due to the prevalence of Protestantism in North America, these new Lutherans found an easy fit in the American climate. The American landscape was theologically comfortable for these early “confessional” Lutherans who simply didn’t know any better. After all, pietism, rationalism, and ecumenism were the largest threats to true confessional Lutheranism in America. Rationalism is a denial of mystery and pietism applied on a community level, meant “as long as church bodies are trying their best to grow close to God and do good works, doctrinal differences shouldn’t put up unnecessary walls in fellowshiping together with non-Lutherans.” The two notions together lead to, and fueled, ecumenism; where nobody should be compelled to judge personal relationships with God. Pietism’s emphasis on good works and “piety” meant that most Christians appeared to be the same, in terms of a general observation of the Ten Commandments. And “after all, we have more in common than not and we *need* each other to survive in the new world.”

None of this was good for Confessionalism in America. Clergy were hoped for, but not necessary. And because they weren’t there, Lutherans got used to not needing them and doing the pastor jobs, or at least what they thought were pastor jobs, themselves. Communion practices were infrequent. There were few notable confessional pastors interested in tackling the American wild life. Courageous pastors such as Henri Muhlenberg led the church, prior to men like Walther. Yet however confessional we wish to depict such personages in historical records; the honest truth is that he more than likely wouldn’t have passed Wyoming standards.

In short, pietism resulted in a lessened openness and expectations in pastors as seelsorgers, especially in the American context. The principles of democracy are expressed in the US Bill of Rights, aligned well with pietistic ideas. Don’t get me wrong; these developments were not out of place, and it has been argued that Martin Luther’s early emphasis on the “universal priesthood of all believers” was an instrumental founding pillar for the U.S. Constitution regarding equality between men. As mentioned earlier, the removal of soteriological hierarchy, such as the necessity of priests and saints to get close to God, meant each individual has equal value before God, and now in America, before man. But the downside of American democracy was that it was rooted in suspicion of authority. After all, it was a reaction against abusive British monarchy. There is a good side to this and a bad side. I believe that the USA is one of the best countries in the world, due to the preservation of Christian culture but also its stability through wise checks and balances within the political structure. After all, there is a place for healthy suspicion, since all men are liars and the bible

says do not put your trust in princes. Checks and Balances in American democracy (Constitutional Republic) make sense. Even the way that we ordain and install pastors shows a *realpolitik* sensitivity in controlling for sinful abuse of power and authority in the life of congregations: pastors and their people promise to keep each other in check in doctrine and life. We all need to be accountable to someone due to the fact that we are sinners. But the concerns of the left hand (civil government) had a major spill into the right hand; ecclesiastical authority. Pastors are obviously sinners too, but when they speak from the Office, and with arguments and counsel supported by the Word of God, they are the voice of God; and unless they are *actually* abusive, crazy, or heretics, it's wrong not to listen to them or let them consult on matters that they believe have spiritual implications. The pastoral office *is* the office of Jesus, who is God, and pastors are His presence through that office. But the tricky part is, not everything pastors say come from the office. Pastors need to be aware of that as they may inadvertently abuse their authority when their personal opinions which actually are *adiaphora* are viewed in a Lutheran *ex cathedra* kind of way.

American Lutherans already had a lowish view of clergy, by virtue of this pietistic and protestant culture to which they were exposed and by no fault of their own (surrounded by church bodies who largely have low view of the office). But also, confessional Lutherans of the LCMS stripe had a specific issue that aggravated the situation of clergy trust even more. Now I know that the pastors in the room know all about LCMS history from seminary, but many of you lay people may have not had the opportunity to hear it. So let me give you a really fast low-down on how suspicion of clergy was reinforced by those early confessional Lutherans escaping the Prussian union in 1839.

The Prussian union of protestant churches was established in 1817 by a Calvinistic king, Wilhelm III, who was ruling a majority Lutheran population, approximately 95% Lutheran. He forced the Lutherans to compromise their faith through unionism, such as what we would call today altar and pulpit fellowship, which is why the state church in Germany today is basically theologically ELCA. The liturgy was changed in order to accommodate Calvinistic Eucharistic beliefs. Faithful Lutherans like Walther (*slide*), after resisting all the wicked political maneuvers and public policies of the king, fled to America with a few ship loads of others to be able to practice their faith without compromise. The bishop of the time was a man named Martin Stephan. Well, the bishop (who already had a shady reputation as being princely and domineering) got caught in a scandal with an affair with the church secretary. After the alleged affair was revealed in a confession to a Lutheran pastor, who then shared the news with the clergy, Stephan was chased out of town demanding a fair trial, which he didn't get. He probably did it, but just for the record, we don't actually know.

But the point was, for those early Missourians, there were some understandable trust issues when it came to authorities. Walther had a lot of damage control to do after the scandal. Without any strong leadership, having lost one of the ships crossing the ocean, many confessional Lutherans had doubts as to whether or not this was divine judgements and

whether to flee back to the theological reign of terror of unionistic Prussian King. The superstitious thought that God was punishing them for leaving the state church in Germany. Walther was the clear selection as a new leader, or “bishop”, but was wise not to assert his authority too strongly in light of the scandal, and also of him being a youngster at 27 years old. It took some time for him to earn his reputation and clear designation as leader of what would become the LCMS, proving his remarkable abilities by stabilizing the situation, but in the meantime, the view of clergy improved mildly, but not enough for pastors to be really viewed as a spiritual “father” in the seelsorger way.¹⁴ It would take months and years for Walther to build the lost trust. If being a real seelsorger was already difficult in the American climate, it would increasingly be so after this fiasco.

As much as we adore Walther, he wasn’t perfect, and his mentor, Wilhelm Löhe (*slide*)¹⁵ was Walther’s mentor and hero, having funded Confessional missions in North America through the Iowa Synod of the time, at a moment in history when it was very much needed in light of the influx of so many weakly catechized “cultural Lutherans” from all over Europe. He founded the Fort Wayne seminary, was a huge fan and supporter of missions among American Indians, developed a responsibly Lutheran approach to the diaconate, and helped preserve Lutheran culture from the influence of other denominations. Walther came to America for theological reasons, to escape the persecution of resisting the syncretism of the Prussian union, which was unlike many other Lutheran immigrants prior to him, who came for business opportunism and adventure. Most of those pre-Waltherian Lutherans sadly, but appropriately, melted into the pot of the ELCA today. Löhe, on the other hand, suffered many trials in Bavaria in his fight for confessional Lutheranism would take in the new world. Yet that doesn’t mean his judgements were invalid, though again, they often lacked empathy, and even sympathy. But Löhe’s big fear was Walther being tempted to compromise the true faith in the American landscape. For example, he warned Walther of importing democratic principles into church governance. Walther likely did not have much of a choice, politically, after the Martin Stephan scandal. The suspicion of authority, pietism, and democracy made it hard for a German episcopal “top down” ecclesiology to thrive, and so a more congregationalist “bottom up” structure was pretty much inevitable. Within 100 years, Lutheran polity went from being governed solely by pastors in ministeriums to equal lay and pastor representation in Synod. Again, it was easy to criticize Walther from Bavaria, but to strain relations more, Walther was a stubborn Saxon. Personality wise, Löhe was more of an idealist and even a romantic, while Walther was more practical. And so, whether or not Walther agreed with Löhe on the inside, he never took heed of his warnings in any significant way. Löhe was seriously concerned about the relationship between the pastor and the people and the impact of all these factors on the role of the pastor to the congregation. Löhe

¹⁴ Notice how “bishop” is less popular in American LCMS circles than “president” in spite of the opposite being the case overseas.

¹⁵ Thomas M. Winger, “The Relationship of Wilhelm Löhe to C.F.W. Walther and the Missouri Synod in the Debate concerning Church and Office”, in *LTR* VII:1&2 (Fall/Winter 1994 & Spring/Summer 1995) pp. 107-32.

was more concerned about cultivating a culture where pastor is truly a seelsorger, whereas Walther thought that, even if all American cultural tides pummeled Lutheran orthodoxy, Lutherans were set of, deep down, spiritually hardwired to view their pastors as fathers. Walther had his hands full in making sure the Church just survived in America, so Löhe's concerns were pretty low priority on his totem pole.

Yet even if Walther wanted to preserve a high view of the pastoral office alongside a high view of the congregation, it was pretty difficult in an environment of lay led congregations. Many, by no choice of their own, were operating without pastors. Many German pastors were frankly ill-equipped for the ruggedness of the USA, and even wildly worse winters in Canada.¹⁶ Some were honestly too snobbish and elitist to come to America (which, honestly, wasn't necessarily a bad thing in many cases since many of the seminary training of the time in Europe was pretty liberal due to the impact of rationalism). Congregations continued worship without pastors and thus, began to see as increasingly less necessary or important. Communion wasn't possible except for occasional clergy visits. The protestant neighbors were doing okay with pastors or communion. Joint worship was a common phenomenon, receiving shepherding by local leaders of other protestant denominations who had little theological training. Sadly, the temptation to mimic other protestants and have fellowship with them, surpassed Lutheran convictions and confessional commitments.

Johannes Grabau (father and president of the Buffalo synod, which fell out with Missouri Synod, but who was a confessional pastor, and good friends with Löhe: see *slide*), was a contemporary of Walther. Even more critical of Walther than Löhe, Grabau went to bat with Walther on a number of matters.¹⁷ Without going deeply into the differences and what led to the separation between the two¹⁸, unlike Walther (who was leading churches recovering from treats the pastor more as the mouthpiece of universal priesthood and representative of people before God. Grabau had a slightly different view of the pastoral office, troublesome to Missouri.¹⁹ These differences of church and ministry strained relationships between Löhe and Walther, because though Löhe habitually took a middle position between Walther and Grabau, Löhe sided *more* with Grabau. There were also some differences between what confessional conscription meant in terms of the authoritative relationship of the Lutheran confessions and the Scriptures. Iowa wanted a historical context to dictate some matters of church practice and allowed more open questions whereas Missouri took a less flexible approach. Afterall, the AC doesn't answer every question, such as new ones, as Herman

¹⁶ which is why so few Lutheran settlements in Canada survived, most being absorbed by Anglicans, and even handed over to them by "confessional" missionaries who asked Anglican priests to teach Luther's catechism to their Lutheran attendees.

¹⁷ See Benjamin T.J. Mayes, "Grabau Versus Walther: The Use of the Book of Concord on the American Lutheran Debate on Church and Ministry in the Nineteenth Century" in *CTQ* 75 (2011), pp/ 217-252.

¹⁸ For a detailed study on differences between Walther and Grabau on the Church, Ministry and Pastoral Office see William M. Cwirla, "Grabau and the Saxon Pastors: Of the Holy Ministry 1840-1845" (*Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*. Vol. 68 , 2, summer. 1995 Concordia Historical Institute), pp. 84-99.

¹⁹ Ibid

Sasse point out in 1933 (*slide*) when defending his battles against Naziism from “confessional” clergy who effectively thought the Lutheran Church had nothing to say about Hitler, since there wasn’t, say a 29th article on Naziism in the Augustana.²⁰ (*slide* from Sasse).²¹ Although these Lutheran leaders all had way more in common than not (a godly fixation on pure doctrine, infallibility of Scripture, traditional worship, and the authority of the Book of Concord in its unaltered form), the falling out was significant on the theological shape that the LCMS would eventually take.

Walther and Grabau parted ways. Löhe had to decide with whom he agreed with more. He chose Grabau. The break seemed more personal than theological, though personal reconciliation between Löhe and Walther did eventually occur. In any case, Grabau was accused of having a domineering attitude. He said that what was the parishioners business is the pastors business. In other words, the pastor has a right and obligation to go poking around in the private life of his parishioners.

It may sound bad to our American ears, but is it justified, nevertheless? Now I wasn’t there in the 1800s, and I don’t know much about the guy, but when you read Grabau’s writings,²² you don’t get the impression that we have a dictator monster pastor, but rather we get a window into a deeply pastoral heart.

At the same time, you can see how a pastor prying deeply into lives of parishioners can be upsetting, dangerous and thus controversial. When asking why private confession and absolution is increasingly unpopular among Roman Catholics, answers range from shame to fear, basically reflecting distrust in the confidentiality maintained by the priest. I personally believe there is a direct correlation between those who see pastor as seelsorger, as opposed to just a theological resource and/or officiant over religious services, and those who understand him as a father; a good and trustworthy father. The Church has tried to protect her children by putting several mechanisms in place to reduce clergy abuse. Defrocking, for example, is one way. It has two clearly biblical foundation; false doctrine and immoral life (and maybe incompetence). But we also include the reason on “domineering,” which allowed for much more subjectivity. All of us here may *think* we know what a domineering pastor looks like, but it’s hard to put your finger on it, especially when the alleged dictator-type

²⁰ The idea that somehow the era of the formulation of the confessions was closed after the Formula of Concord would be absurd to its authors. No, we do not grab hold of the confessions in order to allow the theologians of the time of the Reformation to answer the questions of the twentieth century. We do so rather to encounter the church which still possessed the courage and the authority to produce confessions. This was the church in which there was not merely a chaos of individual opinions of lone pastors, professors, and ecclesiastical leaders, but rather the great consensus of the “we believe, teach and confess”, the consensus of genuinely churchly fellowship” [Hermann Sasse, “Church and Volk”, in *The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters*, volume 1, (CPH, 2005, 123-125), p.121.]

²¹ which is why we create CTCR documents in order, in some sense, to “fill in the gap”. It remains unclear, though, as to their authority. Some dismiss them as having no weight and being the mere opinion of a few in synod, while others treat them as addendums to the Book of Concord. What is the middle road considering the tension between our doctrine and ecclesiology?

²² See his *Hirtenbrief*. Also, see Benjamin T. J. Mayes, “Reconsidering Grabau on Ministry and Sacraments”, in *The Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol XX (2006), 190-208.

pastors are theologically orthodox. In my seminary class, there was one student who was the brightest, but his attitude was sour, negative, and aggressive. The seminary delayed his ordination for years, since he would have destroyed his first parish. Yet he lived a pure life and never spoke heresy.

It's hard to measure and assess these kind of subjective qualities in pastoral formation. We pray for our precious seminaries to have the divine wisdom to properly vet candidates in order to minimize defrocking based on domineering attitudes. And they do a really good job. But in terms of identifying problematic personalities, there is a fine line between domineering and just being a faithful father who may become unpopular due to his decisions when they are controversial.

Although I ask my kids for their opinion at the supper table, their input doesn't outweigh mine as father. And sometimes they don't like my decision. I am wise to get my wife on board with my decisions, and even the kids, but at the end of the day, the family is not a democracy and neither is the Church. One needs to be careful with accusations of a pastor as domineering, especially when considering Biblical prophets and apostles who may have failed the tests that we set for pastors today. Thanks be to God that these delicate issues aren't as prominent in our district.

I have lived here for one year now, and I am so impressed when I travel to hear all the mutually kind things said between pastors and the lay people about each other. It's really beautiful. And maybe that is why it is such a unified, and thus, strong district. And maybe that is why this district has responded so well to soft antinomian stuff, and still doesn't compromise on matter of *predigt und amt*.

But still, even in the best ecclesiastical contexts, are pastors viewed as seelsorgers? Are they willing to be used as seelsorgers? Are they getting deeply involved in parishioners lives?²³

It takes a lot of patience and instruction for a pastor to convince his treasured flock and precious lambs that much of their "persona" lives are his business, in so far as the life of children in a biological family are the business of parents. St. Paul says, "For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, ye you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus / *became your father* through the gospel" (1 Cor. 4:15). He also compares himself as mother, as does Jesus, expressing an intimate and involved connection between clergy and people. Galatians 4:19 calls them "his children" for whom he is "in anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you;" much depth to unpack. But St. Paul basically sees himself as the one who chiefly forms them, like he is a mother who is with child. That he is in painful agony in that

²³ ²³ In Canada, in my experience, to do so, is often automatically seen as abusive and domineering. And where it is done well, it has taken many years for pastors to cultivate relationships of trust in which the parishioner allows them to be that seelsorger, which proves my point of overcoming suspicion of the holder of the pastoral office, and even lots of catechesis for them to understand what that office is and is supposed to do.

birthing and formation of them as his children. It's normal for pastors to suffer in the process of forming his members spiritually. But Paul is playing with a kind of double image here; that precisely *through* him birthing them, they are birthing Christ – as Christ is being formed in them. It's a touching image. The point is that a pre-American view of seelsorgering is fully Biblical and historical.

But the good news is that in spite of the challenges of early LCMS, in light of church structure, power, and authority in relationships between clergy and laity, congregational autonomy and relations to synod, you still observe lovely practice that shows pastors as more fatherly and involved in their parishioners lives than today. The notion today of separation of church and state seems to suggest that the church has nothing to say about the life of parishioners outside of religious life, meaning the estates of family and life in civil society are off limits to pastors. But this was not the case at all in Walther's day. Lutherans guided by their pastors freely and openly talked about family size, career choices, marriage etiquette and engagement, financial planning, what leisurely weekend activities were appropriate or not, if and whether you could attend a church of another confession (like at a funeral or wedding), who to pray with. Did you know that when you visited a congregation while traveling you needed a letter from your pastor stating that you were in good standing? Your word was not good enough? The pastor had that level of oversight over your "private" decision. Did you know that even life insurance was a question that pastors believe they need to speak to? Did you know that what we deem as pastors influencing the political opinions of parishioners, was not an issue in the early LCMS and even until recently?

For those who believe that the Church has no voice in the public sphere: The Old Testament and New are threaded with precedents. Whether Isaiah or Jeremiah, Joseph or David, the prophets warned government officials of the consequences of ungodly decisions and keeping them accountable. The imprecatory psalm praise justice and victory whenever the interests of the Church are promoted in the public sphere. Although such successes are temporal, they are still important to God. One the Two Kingdoms, Luther is clear on the Church's obligation through the pastor, to not only pray for, but rebuke and advise the prince. In return, the "state" is obliged to protect the Church and her interests in preaching the Gospel and providing Word and Sacrament ministry. Accordingly, later confessional Lutherans, even as we encounter them in figures such as Walther or Herman Sasse, pressed against government abuse and overreach in the life of the churches in Prussia²⁴ or Nazi Germany.²⁵ In 1974, the LCMS reinforced the idea also, both that there is no truly secular sphere in which the church has no public input, and that Christendom (which the enemies of

²⁴ Consider the controversy of emergency bishops and Prussia Frederick William III of Prussia who forced unionism upon his subjects, and, effectively, became both head of state and Church, resulting in the heroic departure of the first founders of LCMS to flee to America, from such governmental abuse.

²⁵ Sasse was a renown social critic of Nazi government in the 1930s.

the church seem to define today as Christian nationalism) is a good thing, and that Lutherans are obliged to keep the civil authorities in check by active political participation.²⁶

(slide) A CTCR document from 1965, which I know is a bit controversial, and we had a somewhat improved version of it in a 1974 CTCR publication, that sought to sure that in good Chalcedonian Christological logic, the relationship between the two kingdoms is expressed in a Biblical and balanced way, without separation and with confusion – still there are some golden nuggets of wisdom in there nevertheless such as this: **“We acknowledge that Jesus is Lord over all the world and that there is no area of man’s existence which is secular in the sense that it is removed from the lordship of Christ and from His providential care. However, we also recognize that Christ exercises His lordship in a twofold manner. Lutherans are accustomed to distinguishing between His kingdom of power and His kingdom of grace. To function in His kingdom of power the Lord has instituted civil government or the state, and to promote His kingdom of grace He has established His church. Both are divine institutions.”**²⁷

The outlandish argument that the Two Kingdoms somehow coexist as two self contained silos, with no effective relationship between, was a foreign concept to our forefathers. It was absolutely inconceivable in Luther’s time to imagine a rigid separation of church and state in the sense of what we have become accustomed to. Luther presumes the tight and overlapping relationship between the two kingdoms. He was not a modern. In fact, the early Lutherans, such as the authors of Magdeburg Confession, elevated the sanctity of the state and government leadership in a way anabaptists and papists could not. Non-Lutherans rejected, or tolerated it, but never glorified it. In contrast, the Lutherans thought that if God is the Lord of both kingdoms and His holy hand is at work through both (albeit through different instruments and for different goals), then both kingdoms are holy. Who gave you your glass of milk this morning? God did it. Yes, hidden through means: the one who milked the cow and sold you the product. Who gave you a speeding ticket last week? God did. Through the police officer and administrator at the local police department. Even the executioner is a holy instrument of God, via carrying out the justice of God. Every dimension of life in a society underpinned by Biblical morality and Christian virtues is thus *holy*, because *our holy* God is working through God-pleasing vocations to serve us. *Both* kingdoms are to be hailed as divine ordinances, unless when they contradict the Word of God. In those cases, and there are many, we Christians need to speak and act as if Christendom is the work of God in both kingdoms. This isn’t advocating social or justice or liberation theology. Instead, it’s confessing that both kingdoms are God’s and rejoicing and submitting to the Holy Spirit’s work to help and save the lost, and even our enemies.

²⁶ AC XXVIII, 4-5; Ap XVI, 54-55, 58-59. THE MISSION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN THE WORLD: A Review of the 1965 Mission Affirmations. St. Louis: Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, 1974., p. 6.

²⁷ Ibid

This Lutheran high view placed on ordinary society and the civil state actually becomes problematic after the Reformation with the left-hand leaders claiming a *higher* status and power than the right-hand leaders, in the political power shifts in the 16th Century. European royalty even began to basically view themselves as divine incarnations, on equal footing or even higher than the pope. But Lutherans elevated the status of civil rulers not only because of their practical role regarding preserving Christian instruction, worship and virtue, but also, as the Magdeburg Confessions says, *political* leaders and *political* processes are "sanctified."²⁸

There was never a thing in the minds of Lutherans as a neutral or secular sphere. Again, consider Luther's distinction between the two kinds of righteousness, and how "civil righteousness" obviously assumes moral expression in the estate of the civil sphere. Up until the Age of Revolutions, any notion of a radical separation of church and state was absolutely and undesirable. National socialism and communism were the first ideologies that sought to entirely rob the left hand kingdom of the influence of the Creator. Those Christians today who are opposed to envisioning our Triune God as Lord over both appear to be the same people that were all too eager, however inadvertently, to hand over that which is God's to Ceasar's, on a silver platter, during the panic of the recent pandemic.

(slide) Ernest Koenker in 1956 wrote: **"We have become so accustomed during recent centuries to think in terms of 'separation of church and state' and 'established church' that we often fail to realize that these designations are quite recent developments. They are the results and sponsors of a compartmental arrangement of life. In the light of the idea that man is a unified entity, they must be judged to be pragmatic and artificial."**²⁹

Who would not want Christian culture? The CTCR on Civil Obedience and Disobedience, 1967, does not just tolerate but encourage protests and petitions by Lutherans. It even provides a step-by-step helpful guide on how to go about it in good Christian order. The logic and argumentation of how to address abuses in government reflects those of the Magdeburg Confession (i.e. different levels of crimes or injustices require proportionate responses by the Church, to ensure that she doesn't overreact but approaches things in the most sensitive way to the consciences of people, and displays due respect for authority).³⁰ In other words, Lutherans need to be careful in such high impact decisions, and follow the logic of Jesus in Matthew 18 in addressing sin publicly, but with the ultimate goal of actually

²⁸ *The Magdeburg Confession* (trans. Christian Preus)(CPH, St Louis, 2025), p. 80.

²⁹ Ernest Koenker, *The Two Realms and the "Separation of Church and State" in American Society*, Concordia Theological Monthly, January, 1956, p. 8.

³⁰ *The Magdeburg Confession* (trans Christian Preus)(CPH, St Louis, 2025), p.37.

addressing it, even to the point of political resistance, including the rare cases of taking up arms.

Lutherans who are uncomfortable with allowing their pastors to inform into this arena of socio-political life, and pastors who are equally uncomfortable doing it, wish that the two kingdoms can be juxtaposed. Not only is this not practical nor possible, but it is also not Christian. It's easy to just flipantly say that the US is about separation of church and state and not admit that that was never a reality in America. Remember that the US Constitution rhetoric was driven by a desire *to protect the church from state interference* (protect the right hand from interference from the left hand), and not the other way around. What has changed in our Church today that tempts us to agree with the liberals that somehow the right hand is an ungodly threat to the left? The founding fathers of America understood that God cares about His Word governing *all of* the space of both His left and right hands. Unless we are Amish, we Christians have, then, a critical role to play in the public space. It is not an advocacy for the theocracy to believe so.

The difference between a theocratic country and a country grounded in Christian culture, is the fact that a theocracy mandates and forces religious principles upon all people in spite of their consciences in all areas of their lives, like an Islamic state. In some places within a "Christian society" you may have shops closed on Sundays, encouraging people to go to church, but nobody is forcing you to get off your couch and do so. Chick-Fil-A isn't firing its employees who don't agree with Sunday closures of their restaurants. One could argue that abortion ought to be illegal everywhere, not because of religion, but because of natural law and science. Fetuses are human and killing them is murder. It is easy for the unbelieving world to mudsling Christians claiming our goal is to create a theocratic Christian nation, since they are irrational and under the power of the devil in a way that we aren't. But it is bizarre for Christians to support them. Chesterton complained about the Church of England's tendency to tolerate "underbelievers" but to persecute "overbelievers."³¹ Lutherans enthusiastic in letting Christ's Church and change society for the better should be supported and not shut down.³² I have never *met* one Lutheran in my entire life who had an issue with Augsburg Confession, Article XCII which rejects trying to materialize the heavenly kingdom on earth through political forms.

Yet, the greatest problem of a theocracy for Lutherans isn't even moral, it's theological. It can lead to works righteousness: faith in Christ is not sufficient for salvation, but the political form that we adopt, or political party affiliation, is also somehow necessary to secure a place in heaven. But the argument that natural Law, logic, true science and reason, which support the

³¹ Kurt E. Marquart, "Luther and Theosis" in *CTQ*, (Volume 64:3, July 2000), p. 196.

³² "Certainly we do not want men to allow their Christianity to flow over into their political life, for the establishment of anything like a really just society would be a major disaster" (C.S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letter XXIII*)

vast majority of Christian notions as they apply to the public sphere, should govern the language, content and decisions in the public sphere is NOT theocracy.

Back to Walther: question of family and political life were common points of discussion, and played into Walther's unspoken expectations that his pastors practiced seelsorgering. Although none of these moral issues or life issues are obvious addressed in the Book of Concord, they were still seen as something that needed to be discussed in the public sphere, and required a Christian response. Today, unless people ask us explicitly what we think about a heated topic, we have a hard enough time addressing in church abortion and related issues like fetal stem cell research and vaccines, sexual perversion and gender pronouns, that to raise topics like how to spend your month in God-pleasing ways, retirement decision that maximize service to God instead of self, appropriate careers that don't compromise the dignity of either sex, or couples choosing not to have kids or when to have them, just seems absolutely impossible. When was the last time you heard the topic of capital punishment or birth control raised in bible study?

But seelsorgering to individuals naturally spills into "seelsorgering" to groups, and can be compared to the case of the necessity of individual confession leading to the necessity of corporate confession, as we do every Sunday. If talking about these issues with individuals is important, why not also in the larger community? Seesorger-minded pastors tackle these topics publicly and not just privately. (slide) I have made available an article and handout (that can also be purchased as a book via Ad Crucem) that approaches the issue from a Canadian Confessional prospective, at the back.

Luther Classical College is already tackling these kinds of questions boldly and without compromise, in good ole fashion Missouri ways, through our Ad Fontes, Christian Culture Conference and magazines. The popularity of these from those not even interested in classical Lutheran education, but just loving our topics, is pretty incredible. It shows that people are hungering for help in dealing with life as it is applied in the three estates: seelsorger material.

We at LCC hope to help set a positive example. Even while I was a professor in Ontario, recruiting at my seminary, I would raise the issue with congregations that we all have obligation to grow seminary student bodies. That is all our jobs to encourage Lutheran boys with whom we have no biological ties, but may make good pastors one day, to consider seminary. I got the impression that I had invaded personal space. Yet our spiritual family is even more family than our biological ones. After all the blood of Christ is thicker than biological blood ties within our physical families. We need to regain such early Church communitarian views.

The importance of pastor as seelsorger, in the estate of family, is clear when examining, say the stats of mental health and pornography. 70% of American men and 40% of women,

regularly use porn. The number is lower but significant still among church going Christians. The subject of family and sex is a hugely important field that pastoral voice needs to speak into. When it comes to demonic possession and oppression (allegations of which are on the rise, and if you want to hear why I think so, you can buy my new book coming out in the summer on the topic), entry points of demonic activity include not just false teaching about theology, occult practices, etc. (first estate), but also sexual perversion and drugs (pertinent to the second and third estates).

In 2 Cor 10, the weapons of spiritual war are presented as equipment that resides in the pastoral office; but intended to be shared with the laity, meaning it's not going to work as well unless clergy help dress them and train spiritual soldiers. If pastors wish to fight the spiritual war alongside members, and help *them* fight, they need to both exemplify this Christian soldiering [as St. Paul tells the flock to "imitate me" (1 Cor 11:1) while He could have said just imitate Christ] but also *deliberately* address these issues throughout their ministry.

Pastor Ramirez, at our Evangelism conference a few months ago, did an excellent job discussing the new interest among young people, especially men, in topics such as birth control, role of sexes, Christian etiquette, appropriate gender related activities. Youth are crying out for seelsorgering. They are not just asking intellectual questions to satisfy curiosity, they want help in how to make difficult decisions. We talk about saving our youth, but how many are courageous enough to meet these "lost boys" where they are at, and to delve into the tough topics instead of tiptoeing around them, even if we lose a few who get offended? Our college is trying to do that (though we could use a little more help from the larger Church Body), as we get flack for being too cultish, as soon as word hits the street that, say, we raise questions about modesty in dress, or publicly praising fatherhood and motherhood. We have been accused of being sexists for saying that one of woman's primary roles is having children. We have been called chauvinists for arguing that men need to rejoice in the uniqueness of being man.

But though pastors inserting themselves into topics pertaining to family is controversial, they are still justifiable in the mind of most Lutherans. We don't say "wait a second, the church has no business talking about family life, gender roles, etc." even though we find it really awkward when they are addressed and discussed.

But when it comes to the state, which includes politics, we back off

Yet pastor has much an obligation to speak to the third estate than to the others. Some Americans treat politics with a jingoist religious zeal (like America is the new Isreal), which is obviously bad. Others make a similar error by treating enlightenment ideas like egalitarianism (that have some Christian roots, but unbalanced consequences) as sacrosanct. It makes it difficult to seelsorge within the third estate with some of these idols in the way. But discussion still needs to happen, and having no discussion is usually the worst scenario. Like

in any family, issues that people do not want to talk about are precisely those that need to be addressed the most.

To assume that parishioners need no coaching in these topics is irresponsible. You would be hard-pressed to argue that St. Paul's words in 2 Timothy 3:6, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for instruction, for conviction, for correction, and for *training in righteousness*, so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:17), that "training in righteousness" is not referring to civil righteousness. The response to COVID was a perfect example of clergy being unprepared to respond to the necessity of addressing the juncture between faith and civil life (i.e. politics) in the lives of their congregations and each of her members. Little guidance was provided to faithful Christians as to how to react to, say, certain vaccines that the Church, up until then, unhesitatingly condemned due to her stance on abortion. Clergy were disinterested or afraid to speak into the personal lives of their members being unaccustomed to do so. But to suggest that moral, and thus, political positions are a matter of adiaphora is nothing short of an endorsement of soft antinomianism. In the recent American election, Christians were free to not vote for Trump, but it was hardly justifiable for any of them to vote for his competitor, arguable a communist, who had a portable abortion clinic present at the democrat convention in Chicago. In other words, pastors should feel free to tell people how *not* to vote, (that is a totally appropriate application of the third use of the law in the third estate), which is not the same as telling them *how* to vote. (*slide*)

The Church renders a service to the State by not only permitting Christians to do their full duty as citizens, but urging members to do so. So, the Church will urge her members to make use of the right of voting; to vote intelligently, and therefore to inform themselves as to the questions the vote is to decide; to make sure that they vote for the right man. The Church, through her ministers, will enlighten the conscience of members on matters before the public as to what is right and wrong; encourage them to keep informed on what kind of laws are being considered by the legislature; if good to support them; if not good, to oppose. The Church will not discourage, but rather encourage her members to take office in various departments of the State. Luther said, "If you are able, you should offer yourself for some office and try to get it."³³

Christians sometimes need to be told what to do. This is what it means to preach the Law (*in light of the critical Canadian election which happened days ago, in an effort to dissuade Lutherans from voting for the communist Prime Minister who sadly was elected, one district of Lutheran Church - Canada published a "Christian Election Guide" *telling* people the kinds of things they should be thinking about in casting their vote. I have left that for you as a resource).

³³ Theo Hoyer, "Church and State," in *The Abiding Word*, (Vol. II, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, 1947), p. 606.

(slide photo) Last summer, conservative Baptist reporter and author, Meghan Bashan, laid out topics that at first glance do not appear to have spiritual applications. In her book *Shepherds for Sale: How Evangelical Leaders Traded the Truth For A Leftist Agenda*³⁴, she exposes the despicable depth of corruption in Christian higher education with multiple top schools having sold out to billionaire influencers and anti-Christian foundations that deliberately seek to poison America with cultural Marxism.³⁵

Due to a vast array of reasons, pastors are often vulnerable to these leftist agendas and many have shockingly and rapidly compromised on “Me Too, LGBTQ, Climate Change, COVID-19, illegal immigration, abortion, and CRT. The striking success of this deliberate leftist agenda is manifested in Christianity Today, Billy Graham Association, the Council for Christian College and Universities, or Southern Baptist Convention, to name a few.

In that list, most pastors have hopefully tied into sermons, offered prayers about, and done bible studies on homosexuality and abortion. But what about CRT (the demise of logic and rationality), economic socialism and DEI (with objectives against Christian values, Christian culture and Christendom), Me Too (feminism), immigration (involving multiculturalism, the infiltration of Islam, and how a liberal agenda is a theological agenda). National security is a very important issue for the Church, not just due to love for our neighbor’s physical well-being, but also in protecting her interests like the freedom to preach the Gospel. It is really hard for church to be church, and preach the Gospel when she dwells within an Islamic or communist state. A political view on this (and political forms that best protect the Church and supports its growth) is obviously not a mark of the Church, but it is an *expression* of the Church, not just individual Christians, but Church (capital C). Thus, “Synod” has a role to play in public space.³⁶

Hopefully four years after the pandemic, most of us have considered the spiritual dangers of blindly complying to government mandates during an alleged plague. Hopefully we have taken to heart father Luther’s words on ministering during a real plague. But climate change?

³⁴ Meghan Bashan, *Shepherds for Sale: How Evangelical Leaders Traded the Truth for a Leftist Agenda* (Broadside Books, 2024).

³⁵ For instance, she reports on the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, the U.S. Federal government during the recent pandemic, the impact of atheist billionaire George Soros and his foundation, who intentionally influence evangelical leadership and work in promoting anti-Christian Marxism. She writes: “Around 32 percent of the U.S. electorate describe themselves as evangelical, and the vast majority of that group leans right. Among Americans who describe themselves as conservatives, Protestant evangelicals are the single largest religious group by 23 points. As The Atlantic put it in 2021, evangelicals are simply “America’s most powerful voting bloc.” Accordingly, conservative and evangelical church leaders, schools and organizations have been actively targeted in America by leftists, a tactic that stretches back to WWII and the Cold War. In *The Devil and Karl Marx*, political science professor Paul Kengor describes the process the Communist Party USA used between 1920 and 1950 to deliberately infiltrate mainline Protestant churches and woo pastors to their socialist program, particularly in the realm of education.

³⁶ Scripture aside, opponents must at least concede that interest in national security is part of the Lutheran tradition, back to Luther seeing a primary role of state to prevent Islamic invasion for sake of the Church. On the *War Against the Turks*, Luther is clearly interested in advising the heads of state. Again Luther is not just saying to the prince that he hates Muslims because he is a white supremacist, but he says keep them out of Germany for sake of the Church and Christian culture/Christendom!

What does that have to do with religion? How could the devil be using this apparent threat to close churches, divide families, and usurp fatherhood? Did you know that Sweden is closing seven historic churches during winter months due to mandates on oil heating?³⁷ Heating churches is apparently contributing to global warming, so the government is requiring their closure during several months of the year. Nobody would have thought a political issue like climate change could be so deliberately an attack on the interests of the church. Sweden was once a historical Lutheran powerhouse, but now, the church is totally unprepared to address those issues theologically or politically. If we don't talk about these supposed secular issues as soon as they come up, as Christians *led by pastors*, and view them through spiritual lenses, we will continue to be unprepared for the devilish consequences.³⁸

There is no shame in pastors coaching members in political matters. In fact, I would argue it's their obligation.

LECTURE 3

(slide: Arguments against the necessity of the seelsorger)

Yet now, I would like to address the arguments against truly practicing seelsorgering. I used the word "truly" because what Lutheran pastor would openly criticize the idea that he can always improve in being the father that He is to his spiritual children? But to *actually* feel comfortable doing it is another thing. The resistance to pastors *from* pastors behaving as seelsorgers, who help guide and shape their members in living their lives especially as it applies to civil righteousness in the third estate are twofold (cartoon *slide* on ethics: "we overthink what God wants us to do, complicating the simple ethical scenarios which involved decisions which are much easier to make than we want to believe).

Firstly, that most of Christian living is a matter of Christian freedom. The way soft antinomianism has been able to dupe Christians to think that the pastor and thus the Word of God has less authority than it does in questions of Christian living, is with the trump card word "adiaphora." As Drs. Preus and MacPherson point out in the new translation of the Magdeburg Confession, the abuse of the notion of "adiaphora" was used by confessional Lutherans in their caving into government regulations when they should have pushed back. Even Philip Melanchthon, (theologically orthodox but renowned for his political tact, with the downside being more susceptible to compromise in the practice of theology) gave into these temptations. But when the only thing that really matters is faith in Christ as your personal Lord

³⁷ https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/sweden-is-closing-churches-to-meet-climate-goals-including-historic-churches-from-the-middle-ages/?utm_source=most_recent&utm_campaign=catholic.

³⁸ Or what about masks and the dehumanization that they cause when used wide scale, or the suspicion cultivated among each other in social distancing, or the unimportance of communion, or the necessity of communion *together* in an environment that does not foster doubt that God is sovereign, good and safe? These were clearly all demonic attacks on the Church. Spiritual soldiers never rest but need to always engage in defensive and offensive warfare. For us, that means at least talking about the truth and responding to the political and social trends.

and Saviour, a practice of that faith doesn't only take second place, but even very little place in the life of a Christian. For example, through all sorts of virtue signaling and public messaging the democrats wanted to be identified as the pro-choice party. It wasn't just one item of their mandate, but a major identifying characteristic. Even if a Christian believes other positions for which that party stands are more Biblical than the emphasis placed upon them by the Republican party (like addressing issues of poverty, as an easy example), the issue of murdering children needs to take a primary spot. Very few pastors would rebuke voting against the democrats (which is, again, not a voting for republicans since you can always just destroy your ballot, which is a legitimate act also). Thanks be to God that most LCMS pastors would not have voted for the democrats this last election, but sadly most would not share the reasoning behind that decision with congregations (out of fear of pushback), and even more sadly, because they thought it was wrong to do so. They thought that even though they were telling the truth about whatever the political topic happens to be, theologically they were mixing the two kingdoms, which mean, silence was preferable over vocalizing truth. (*slide: fact over fear*)

Often the justification today in dealing with the awkwardness of the matter, is that whether or not you sin in casting an ungodly vote, it's forgiven anyway. I knew pastors in Canada who were quite open with me in saying that they didn't want members to know why all the COVID vaccines were morally controversial, because they didn't want to put their members between a rock and a hard place, *aggravating their consciences, and forcing them to make a decision*. It's a very twisted argument. It's also a denial of the fact that we are commanded to repent of both things that we have done wrong and things that we have not done right in every field of life. We often don't realize that we should have done something better unless somebody points it out to us. Our conscience may be unaware because it's a little lazy or it just doesn't have all the information; so that a Christian is deprived of necessary information for a fitting confession and God-pleasing repentance because a pastor or friend didn't have the courage to tell them what *they* happen to know about the subject. The bottom line is that those who took this position thought they were being loving by not telling them the truth. By not pointing out their sins, they deprive them the chance to *feel guilty* for those sins. Well *guilt* has a divine purpose in our spiritual growth and the spiritual battle. Luther considers Satan a divine tool for God's saving purposes, because he is a great "preacher" of the Law, and accuser (Satan=accuser). Certainly the devil has evil intents for flaunting the dirty laundry of our sins in front of our noses, but that doesn't stop the love and grace of God in using bad for good (as was the case with Joseph's brothers, with Joseph confessing, "you intend it for evil but God for good"). We should welcome suffering and rebuke, as needed discipline of God. Not telling someone the truth because you are hurting their feelings does not represent a spiritual victory in our battles with darkness.

Besides, consciences are fallen too, and most can use some help in their formation. The secular psychologists claim that psycho and sociopaths don't have consciences (which is not

Biblical) or that their consciences are not developed (which is kind of Biblical). If decisions based on conscience are informed, at least partially by, communal values held by individuals, do you see how difficult it is for good decisions to be made based on conscience in a pluralist post-modern society? Today in our fragmented multi-cultural Western society people often don't feel guilty when they should. That is way less likely in a homogeneous society, where people have the same morality and culture, and therefore feel guilty for the same kinds of sins. The secular discipline of ethics is largely about trying to form these consciences. We Christians can do better. But when pastors don't talk about the issues individually and publicly, they are not even helping their people make godly decisions *on their own*; by neglecting to help form the necessary Biblical and Lutheran framework for them to do so. So, even if you think that the third use of the law decisions should be considered as very individualistic and contextual, without some guidance, people aren't able to make as responsible conscience-driven decisions in a complex American, often anti-Christian, landscape today.

And this ties into the next reason seelorsgering is not seen as essential (or even treated as dangerous) in the minds of those who embrace or flirt with soft antinomianism or versions of it.

"Life is just so grey and complicated, let's just ignore it and trust God to deal with our questionable decisions. It's covered by Christ's blood anyways." There is some truth here when dealing with ethics and the grayness of life, but it doesn't mean there is not a Christian response to any of it. If we know canned pineapple is produced by children laborers in the third world, we still need to take that seriously and it should change our spending habits, even though if you did the research you would find most of our imported food from outside of the Western world is tainted by the same moral and ethical concerns. With the COVID injections, we heard that because other vaccines that we had all blindly taken were also tainted by fetal stem cell technology, why worry about these ones? I am the first to admit that while deploying overseas in the military, I took, without hesitation, shamefully lots of vaccines that I should have opposed for the same reason I opposed the COVID ones. Yet I have repented and publicly. But many instead console themselves with Luther's "sin boldly believe more surely" statement, by taking it out of context. Today it is used to mean that you realize something you have done was sinful, but that you shouldn't feel too bad about it, and not *really* repenting of it, believing that you had no other choice. Such logic gives us permission to make the same sinful decisions again, without even going through the intellectual and spiritual work as to discerning whether or not my decision is driven by right motives; i.e. grounded in true crisis of conscience, or just laziness or cowardice. Now there is some room for context to play into decisions that may vary from one situation to another. One Christian may eat meat sacrificed to idols while another doesn't. St. Paul addresses that, and the reasoning behind it. But today, there appears to be a post-modernity element here where you can say context dictates different responses without being required to offer explanation

or serious justification. Instead, the pietistic post-modern and Western hyper-individualist Lutheran asks “who are you to judge?” Ignoring the raising of such questions in our parishes and the lives of individual members suggest that not only do I get to decide the context, but I don’t even need to talk about it or justify it to God.

One problem with this is our consciences only work rightly when they are rightly informed. So back to the idea of pastors depriving people of information that would bother their conscience: *means* Christians can in “right conscience” make a decision that is *ungodly*, and *feel good about it*. Again, they can make a sinful decision while not feeling bad in the least. It’s the reason why militaries only let soldiers have the bare information to get the job done (on a “need to know” basis). It’s largely because they want them to follow orders, *without hesitation*, and not let *their conscience* get in the way of that process. A soldier second-guessing orders because he is wondering whether blowing up that village over there is morally justifiable, not only puts his team at risk but can jeopardize the whole mission. Conscience is powerful, and especially when well informed. God made it that way. Yet, in the end, with the individualistic approach to spirituality in America, the idea is that “I interpret the word of God as I wish. I determine the context. My conscience almost exclusively comforts or rebukes me. I am free in Christ to live how I interpret that according to a general reading of the Ten Commandments.” This careless and arrogant attitude coupled with a pietism that doesn’t appreciate pastors fully for what they are and can do, results in pastors who are uncomfortable speaking about these subjects. Or pastors feel like they are about to make salvation seem conditional on non-doctrinal decisions (like again, the hesitance to give advice after private absolution).

Again, both of these responses amounts, or at least leads, to a version of soft antinomianism, where the Law is no longer needed nor applied to redeemed person. So much for the fourth part of the catechism on baptism on daily drowning of Old Adam. It also diminishes the importance of *sanctification* and suggests that there is no pastoral role to play in the formation of the sanctified life of believers, which includes training in righteousness. Soft antinomians express an unbalanced view of the sinners that we are, and our ability to fight temptation and make godly decisions. Proponents think that spiritual completeness in possessing the alien righteousness of Christ *means* there is little or no need for guidance on, how to live life. “Forensic Justification is all that we confess to be important: that is the Gospel. So what else is necessary? To talk about how to live life, is adding on to the Gospel, which is works righteousness.” This logic leads to a Gospel reductionist, “cheap grace” view of the work of Christ, or displays faith in the lie that salvation means you are actually no longer much of a sinner. The error represents a reaction to pietism which placed too much emphasis on being a saint and progress up a ladder of good works, and yet it kind of buys into it, by assuming that Christian holiness is a hidden and highly individualized phenomenon, best left to individuals with the Holy Spirit to figure out by themselves. Yet any father of a family knows that raising children takes work and lots of intimate conversations and involvement. They also

know, even if the kids don't, that the kids need help in figuring out how to live. Now the way your kids behave does not change their status. Whether they are lazy ungrateful slob, versus obedient children, doesn't change that they are still your kids.³⁹ But good fathers seek to *improve* their children and help them live up to the family name. You care about how they live inside the family system *and outside* (in all their vocations, throughout the other estates). You want them to be good witnesses and representatives of the family; that they spread the good reputation of the family name to the world around them.

The parallels in our spiritual family and our status as God's children as saints, yet needing help to live as the saints that we are, due to the sinners that we are, is hopefully clear. Soft antinomianism is often fueled by laziness or delusion. It's like accepting that your kids are just "good enough" in spite of bad behavior and a poor representation of the family. True Christianity celebrates our status in Christ, but also the right use of the law to address the flesh.

So, unless you believe forgiveness is all that needs to be said, and that no coaching is needed in spiritual progress, then pastors and people need to be passionate about seelsorgering. It's the reason that I have always chosen small churches over large ones. I need my pastor. I need him intimately involved in my life (even if, as a sinner, I don't want him there). I need to confess my sins and struggles to him, and have him keep his eye on me; so that he can curb my life and be my guide. It's harder to hide from him in a small congregation. After all, when we choose our doctors, we want one who, both, has a great reputation due to competence, but also one (all things being equal), who has a small client base, so you get maximum attention. Yet why when it comes to churches, strangely, we all want to join the biggest one?

(slide: Guidance in the sanctified life as part of seelsorgering)

But when pastors are hesitant to guide people in the production of good works (believing that only right faith in forensic justification is adequate in making all the fruits simply grow, and doesn't need some guidance, or pruning, by the pastor as farmer), they would be wise to make a distinction between *sanctification* and *good works*. There are all kinds of good works, but there is *one* sanctification, and *one* sanctifier. And addressing issues of sanctification is definitely something that no one would argue falls outside of the parameters of the pastor's business. But sanctification needs to be *distinguished* from good works. The Reform tend to equate sanctification and good works, and sometimes Lutherans do as well. That is why we talk about being saved by justification and grace alone, with no contribution on our part, and now, out of gratitude for God's grace, *we choose* to do *good works*. And thus, *sanctification* is understood as the part that *you do* or cooperate with the Holy Spirit to do. *Talking about sanctification* seems to be focusing on *our deeds*, instead of Christ's. We may feel that we are

³⁹ But let's be careful even here: regarding the prodigal son, what would have happened had he not repented? He is a son but living outside of the Father's kingdom -- essentially denying his identity, or at least living contrary to it— what would have happened had he died outside of that kingdom? We don't know, since its not the point of the parable

being self-righteous by talking about sanctification since it seems like we are celebrating ourselves and our good deeds.

To console the consciences of those who feel guilty talking about sanctification is somehow betraying the Gospel of Justification, we can ask ourselves, "What is sanctification?" The word "Sanctus" comes from the word "holy." What is holiness? It's hard to describe. "Separate," yes since things pertaining to God's nature are different from anything conceivable related to creation. But what is it? Dr. John Kleining often points out how defining the "glory" of God is equally problematic. It's hard to describe, since it's so otherworldly. It has to do with concepts pertaining to the nature of God with no parallel "on earth." It's totally unique so we have no common references for it. We are left with only describing what holiness looks like, but are very limited. So, Dr. Kleinig points out that, "holiness is the glory of God revealed," while "the glory of God is the holiness of God concealed." Due to this limitation, it's also hard to intellectually grasp the attribution of holiness to man, or the process of being made holy. Lutherans rightly run from any ideas of Lordship Salvation: "Jesus became my savior through justification and now he becomes my Lord through sanctification", because it makes it seem like salvation is incomplete. Yet there is room for spiritual progress in Lutheran spirituality. Although completely redeemed and thus fully holy, there is a sense in which we are incompletely sanctified until we get to heaven. Sometimes sanctification has been defined as "ongoing justification." That *partially* solves the problem for Lutherans: "I keep getting what I already have." It's a paradox. We Lutherans like that. It's mystical, so we can say it's sacramental. We like that too. We are both justified and sanctified at the same time, both complete and yet both ongoing at the same time, like two sides of the same coin. But though there is a time and place for this analogy (namely that it seeks to ensure those two processes aren't juxtaposed from one another), it doesn't *give the whole picture*. Justification is easy to define. Forensically, we are declared righteous; the guilty named innocent. And this imputed righteousness is external to us, as so *clearly* articulated in the Formula of Concord. We are not justified by internal faith or spiritual changes, like in the Ossianian sense. But sanctification as a consequence of this, as its offspring or subsequent step, is much harder to handle. *Simil iustus et peccator* doesn't help either; since we are 100% saved and "made" holy, and yet we are still "becoming" holy.

Sanctification is hard to grasp intellectually. Good works, on the other hand, is easier. We can see them. They are also something we *do*, yes through the Holy Spirit in us, but we are, in a sense, a cause. We choose to resist the Spirit's work in our lives or not. We *choose* to walk the old lady across the street or ignore her. Sanctification is different. *It is something that happens to you*. You are entirely a passive recipient, just as you were when you first believed, were baptized, and were saved. Sanctification is that you are made, and being made, holy. The glory of God is mysteriously at work and present through, in and on His holy people. How? By the means of grace. You share in God's holiness, even participate in His glory, and are made holy by His Word and Sacrament. In as much as a newborn baby has no choice in its birth

from the womb of its mother, so was your experience from the womb of Mother Church at the font of baptism. In as much as a baby sucks life giving milk from the breast of its mom, so it is with you as you open your mouth at the divine altar and the Lord enters in. Through such sacramental acts that forgive your sins, sanctification is happening. It is really the active result of the ongoing justification that happens by the declaration of God's divine word on God's elect. Good works are then a result of this, or these, processes. Faith is increased by the justifying and sanctifying power of our Triune God, and good works are its fruits.

The Bible makes the distinction between sanctification and good works by saying that we are MADE HOLY in order to DO good WORKS (*slide*): 2 Timothy 2:21: **"Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, use to the Master prepared for every good work."** The one who is cleansed of sins, is a sanctified person, useful to God, and used by God, through His good works. That means that when pastors help people examine themselves according to the Law, in all three estates, and even in the nitty gritty personal details, more good works are being produced through the labor of God.

Underscoring the importance as Seelsorger assumes that pastors are called to do more than simply absolve since, though that remains chief and the crown of their divine ministry and holy office. In light of the threat of soft antinomianism, permit me to take some time to pitch the argument that, although we are 100% justified and thus, "saint" that divine promise and reality doesn't produce the fact that there is a spiritual growth and thus "progress" involved in the Christian life. We are sinner/saints, completely, both, simultaneously and yet we progress from sinner into saint.

I married a convert from Pentecostalism. And in order to get my mother-in-law's approval, I agreed to one session of premarital counseling with her pastor. When asked where my relationship with God was on a scale of 1 to 10, I was a little snarky. I said, "What do you mean?" So, he said, "You know, most Christians are around a 5 or 6." He said he was maybe around an 8 or 9. So, I said, "Well, I'm a zero and a ten: totally deprived sinner and fully fulfilled child of God as a saint." He really hated that answer. ⁴⁰

But we are a 1 and a 10. Otherwise, the words of St. John does not make sense about Christians being perfect and having no sin, and yet we are deceivers if we say we have no sin (1 John 1:8). But that is not the end of the story in terms of our experience of spirituality on earth. Just like a husband and wife who have a healthy relationship and communicate a lot with each other, and exchange lots of love, and intimacy, etc. are as *fully and equally married than those you don't* (where there is no talk, no romance, no deep relationship), there is still

⁴⁰ So, the rest of the hour conversation revolved around practical ways of financial management of a household, like putting your credit card in a bucket of water and freezing it, so that every time you are tempted to use it, you were forced to rethink your decision...Actually, its not a terrible idea for young people today. But not really what I expected to talk about in a pastoral counselling session.

room for growth in either marriage. We are declared the righteous bride of Christ, but there is still room for growth in the relationship of exploring how wonderful our Bridegroom is, until the day we die and we enter glory. We talk to Him in prayer. He talks to us in His Word. Our marriage is consummated weekly in the holy Eucharist. Husbands and wives are married once, and reminded of that marriage daily, and yet we could say that we are “becoming” increasingly married, the more we live together, get to know each other, and deepen our love for one another. Marriage is thus a mystery, and points to a higher mystery, as the Bible explains. So yes, our identity as Christians is a paradox, being *fully* saint and yet still *becoming*, and any emphasis on the third use of the law is driven by this acknowledgement. What makes the concept of sanctification different among Lutherans from all other denominations and protects us from self-righteousness is our *Christocentricity* and the fact that the Law always still accuses (*lex semper accusat*). We are not perfect and are constantly reminded of our sins and full dependence upon Jesus for all things. For this reason, where other denominations tend to slip away from spiritual growth happening at the foot of the cross of Christ, for Lutherans there is no room for ego and pride, since there is never a reason to boast in self. Any boasting happens in Christ.

As the sainted Dr. Kurt Marquart once said, in his criticism of the Finnish school on their take on deification or theosis, “all right talk [of the subject] must pass at least a twofold test, to be genuine *theology of the cross*. The first is whether God and His life are accessible *directly*, or only in the crucified and risen Savior, and in His gospel means of salvation. The second test is whether [it] is driven by the downward movement of God or by the upward movement of man.”⁴¹

(slide) I have a scale here with the x-axis showing time and y-axis showing spiritual growth to demonstrate how we pass these two tests. For most Christians they see spiritual progress according to the top, blue line. Once converted, like ai have my life to Christ, I start up in the middle somewhere (above murderers, but below Mother Theresa), at say “5” and except for a few bumps along the road, I get better in my spiritual state. That is religion of the Law. But with the religion of the Gospel (the red line), you THINK you start up here, at say a 5. But as you “grow” in your faith, you find that your experience is a descent. In the acknowledgement of your sinful state (that it is way darker than you thought at first), you mature out of self-righteous kinds of thinking; you stop crossing commandments off the bucket list of your spiritual life thinking you have mastered any one of them, (since you don’t lust after women like you did as a youth, you are content with your wealth level and therefore don’t covet anymore, that you finally have a regular devotional life and are never tempted to skip church on Sunday, you got the third commandment down pat, and fulfilled, and you only have say, 3 or 4 left to master before you die). No! Instead, the mature Lutheran sees himself as descending on that scale through time. We go down, we get weak (as Luther says, “God

⁴¹ Kurt E. Marquart, “Luther and Theosis” in *CTQ*, (Volume 64:3, July 2000), pp. 195-196.

came down... in order to lead us back into a knowledge of ourselves"⁴² so Christ can go up, and we with Him, as we are revealed and made strong in him). Spiritual growth is not an *ascending* but *descending* experience! The bumps are the self-righteous moments in our life when we THINK we have become better, and God deals with those through verbal rebukes through the Bible, sermons and pastors, or personal afflictions like suffering. All things that make us feel uncomfortable in this process should be considered as suffering, and so suffering is what pushes us down that scale; down to the bottom, to the zero mark from the perceived 5 starting place. "May I decrease so Christ can increase," John the Baptizer says. And that's what we say too! When we find ourselves down at the bottom; at zero, we are a 10 in Christ. The more we examine our lives the more sin we see. And if you have a hard time believing you are a sinner, remember Don Matzat of the original Issues, Etc. He said, "You can't name anymore sins? Ask your wife and she'll tell you some."

(slide: hymn) Like a tree that stretches up at the sun with its branches bearing fruit for others to eat, it grows closer and closer to the sky, no cognizant of its fruit since its disposition is directed towards the sun, the *mature* Christian isn't producing fruit on his branches for himself to eat (by say, introspection), and isn't really aware of that fruit as others *munch on it*. The *immature* Christian talks a lot about himself, tracking his good works, boasting of spiritual progress, doing spiritual gift inventories and obsessing over his spiritual talents; *eating his own fruits*. But when others see those fruits and praises them, the *mature* Christian is kind of surprised that anything good comes from his piece of wood, out of that rotten tree, and rejoices at the miracle of it all. Like when Christ compliments the disciples on their good deeds, they naturally as, "Lord, when did we do all these good things?" - they weren't even keeping track and noticing in themselves 0- but the Lord noticed! For it's the tree of the cross, producing the fruits of the spirit, through the body of Christ affixed to it, the body that you are, a body that you possess and am possessed by, which is the thing doing all that work.⁴³

(slide) Sanctification includes "Qualitative" changes with Christians

The moment we acknowledge some progress is involved in the Christian life, you need to acknowledge some "qualitative" change in a Christian. Again, we Lutherans are uncomfortable with the notion, understandably, since we don't want to be lumped together with the "holiness heresies" of Wesleyan perfectionism which claims that the Christian human is intrinsically of better quality than that of unbelievers, due to the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and some lack of both actual and/or original sin. Yet we are not talking about infused grace, as something salutary, reflecting Roman Catholic and Pentecostal views of a holy substance inside you that grows more and more, making you more and more holy in

⁴² WA 5: 128-129. Walter Mostert, "Martin Luther- Wirkung und Deutung," in *Luther im Widerstreit der Geschichte*, Veröffentlichungen der Luther-Akademie Ratzeburg, Band 20 (Erlangen: Martin-Luther Verlag, 1993), p. 78

⁴³ In my experience with other denominations, Lutherans are more aware of their sins than their fruits, and the fact that we talk a lot about sin causes other Christians to think we are overly pessimistic: an orthodox chaplain friend of mine once accused us of being so down on ourselves. But actually, we are realistic and honest. He never understood how we could find joy in this profound truth and mystery. Well, he wasn't Lutheran.

your holy rolling. We forgiven sinners are already holy as we are being judged and assessed by God IN Christ who is holy. And yet we still do change, transfigured daily by Word and sacrament. Otherwise, what do we do with the language of "mortification," "renewal," and "healing of our nature" of Luther and the Formula? Chemnitz writes, **"The healing and renewal itself is not such a change that is immediately accomplished and finished in a moment, but it has its beginnings and certain progress by which it grows in great weakness, is increased and preserved."**⁴⁴ Lutherans don't slip into the "holiness movement" direction when any internal change is rooted in Christ's works. Because sanctification isn't just about our status before God, but also involves internal spiritual growth, a growth that is manifested in good works, there is a "qualitative" element to Christian growth and maturity.

We can't ignore this reality. We confess this when addressing the distinction and role in Christian life between the sacraments of holy baptism and the Holy Eucharist. Baptism happens *once*. But it's still ongoing. Unlike Roman Catholics who limits its use to a past event (just forgiving original sin and having little more to do with the here and now), or Protestants that treat it as a symbol of truth, for Lutherans, through daily contrition and repentance, we return *continually* to our status of being baptized, as a source of Christian comfort. But the Eucharist is more clearly an ongoing act. We don't simply receive it as a reminder that we are *already* forgiven, but that we are *being* forgiven.

What is noticeable about Lutherans who deny salvation causing a spiritual process, and those soft antinomians, is a verbal support of the sacrament of the altar, but a lack of sincere conviction that it is necessary. Their silent thinking is, "If baptism suffices, then why do we need to keep communing?" They may argue for a need for the eucharist, and weekly, since it's Biblical. But in their heart of hearts, it's not understood as essential. Instead, the Lord's Supper is essential for more reasons than we are able to conceive, for it does change our hearts, making them more like Christ's.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Examen I:424.

⁴⁵ And not only that, even to take this one step further, Luther describes the bodily benefits of communion as ultimately a medicine of immortality for both soul and body. In other words, it doesn't just change the soul, it changes the body! This is certainly not the main reason for communing, but an added, and really unsurprising bonus, given we are not Gnostics but believe in the redemption of the whole person through the God-MAN, by his incarnation and corporal presence in the Lord's Supper. In short, the Lord's Supper is not just something that points us to our resurrection, a reminder of a not yet materialized promise, but has practical repercussions on our mortal bodies and Christian lives now. "Lift up your hearts" isn't a command to look up into the sky, but an invitation to tilt your head up slightly to the altar, where God enfleshed is now found. The Lord's Supper is a reminder of what has already been achieved for us, but it's not just a confirmation of what has already been done to us. Communion changes us.

Communion is connected to bedside ministry with a sense of urgency, not just because it offers a special reminder of the grace that is already ours. Some Lutherans behave like neo-gnostics, insisting upon a rigid separation of body and soul, until we talk about the final resurrection of the dead. But being anti-gnostic means appreciating that spiritual phenomenon has physical consequences. Miracles still happen today through prayer. Demon possession is a physical manifestation of a spiritual problem. The works of sanctification are the physical manifestation of a spiritual solution that contradicts a theology of "completeness", for lack of a better word. The bible sometimes logically contradicts itself, but this is not problematic for Lutherans who welcome the mysteries. Example of contradiction: the debate between us and Calvinists regarding single versus double predestination: double is

So now, let's look at three verses that speak to this paradox. (slides)

1 Cor. 6:11: "But you were/are washed, you were/are sanctified, you were/are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

Here we encounter the interchangeability of the notions of justification and sanctification and baptism. Ultimately the three are grouped and even equated together. But I think it is notable that sanctification is the second in the list and justification is the third. You'd think it would be the opposite (putting justification first). I wonder if St. Paul does this in the Corinthian context of immature holy rollers who overstate spiritual growth, expressed in "penta-Baptist" self-righteous ways. But for our purposes (not to overstate the significance of the listed sequence of the terms), it informs on how all three events or processes are completed as a final act (even "sanctified": you are completely holy, suggesting no progress happens). The fact that all three are of the passive or middle voice, means the subject is a *passive recipient* of an act done to them (i.e. God does the work on man all by Himself). But with an aorist (instead of the perfect or imperfect) there is a subtle deliberate silence of when the action takes place and how long it lasts.

Now let's compare this with Heb. 10:14 (*slide*): "For by one sacrifice he has made perfect- (teteleioken) forever those who are being made holy (agiozamenous)."

"Made perfect" is in the indicative, active perfect. It has been done in the past, by God alone, but with present effects. "Being made holy" or "sanctified" is the present passive or middle particle. Both are saying that the divine saving and sanctifying work has been done to, and for, you as the passive recipient. *Yet one says the process is complete and the other ongoing.* It is difficult to reconcile logically. But Lutherans say both, because God says so.

Incidentally, it happens to coincide with our human experience (although one should always be careful judging any theological truth based on human experience). We live by faith believing that we are perfect, in spite of our experiences as sinners that in the department of holiness, we are not even close, or it hasn't even started happening at all. But in reality, consider it this way; we are in a sense growing into the clothing of Christ gifted to us by grace, the robe of righteousness given us at baptism. Our life of sanctification is God growing us into those clothes. The good works we produce which God uses to change the world around us, are evidence of us getting comfortable in that foreign attire; while as sinners it's obvious to us and others, that we are squeezing ourselves into a clothing size too small or making an extra-large fit a medium sized body. Even though it's now *our* clothing, it's always going to be an uncomfortable fit until we enter glory. But it still does the job. Christ lives in me and I live in Christ, and good works demonstrate that. Yet sins demonstrate that the

logical, single is Biblical. We accept God's word as magisterium. And so it goes with the issue of justification versus sanctification. We don't understand it. But we don't need to. We are fully holy and yet still becoming holy. Soft antinomianism denies the mystery, and rejects the paradox.

process is not yet complete and never will be until the final resurrection.

Our final verse is 2 Thes. 2:13: "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation for sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth." (NSAB)

God saved you via divine election through belief, which I would argue corresponds with justification (i.e. having faith in the promise of what Christ has done for us) but "for" the purpose of "the sanctification" of the Holy Spirit, implying the process of being sanctified. So again, you are chosen by God to be saved, a passive recipient of sanctification and faith/belief, yet where one process is a completed act,⁴⁶ and the other is ongoing (being sanctified). But both are interdependent; we are being saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit *and* through belief in the truth. Now some exegetes debate whether or not the preposition "for" in "for sanctification" should actually be translated as "through" (as in "through sanctification"). "For" would imply that you are saved *for the purpose* of being sanctified and believing. The idea is that God is saving you and sanctifying you *so that you* can be a fitting worshipper of Him and "worthy" inhabitant of heaven. "Through" suggests that sanctification is a cause of salvation, which Pentecostal types really abuse, because they equate sanctification and holiness with good works and holy living. They judge faith by works; salvation by external observances of holiness. So if you smoke or drink, and participate in any unholy works of their estimation, this mean you are likely not saved. They judge whether or not you are justified by your sanctification made visible by your external good deeds. But for our sake the distinction between "for" and "through" is not that important when recognizing that sanctification and holiness is a HIDDEN phenomenon, based on what God does inside us by His Holy Spirit through the means of grace. Certainly, good works are a *fruit* of sanctification, but those works are by no means the *foundation* of sanctification. The fact that we are not to judge makes for a more humble and compassionate church. The good works shown by, say, a recovering Christian alcoholic who has been raised by terrible abusive parents may not appear *to us* to be as spectacular and as *obvious* as those from a Christian who has been raised by wholesome parents. The baggage of the past may make them less refined in their Christian manner. But one beautiful thing about being Lutheran is that a gracious God, not man, is the ultimate judge of the quality of good works or the tree from which they are produced.

(slide) Sanctification shapes the Culture of Individual Christians who possess it making Christian Culture an inevitable and also beautiful thing.

These three verses are example of how the Bible shows salvation as a completed process and yet ongoing as we exist in time. Summaries: 1. We are not dead, so we are *continually* being

⁴⁶ Having faith: you do or you don't. Certainly "I believe, help my unbelief" shows that faith can grow too, but a basic faith is the starting point

saved;⁴⁷ 2. Part of that being saved phenomenon means there is an element of Christian growth as there are two logically distinct things going on here: God is saving us and we are being made holy. And God is the author and completer of both;⁴⁸ 3. That growth is often invisible, though having visible manifestations, since we are body/soul people; and 4. The spirit of Christ within us produces true good works *for others* to enjoy.

This leads us to the question of what the difference is between good works produced *by Christian* versus *by non-Christians*. On the one hand, I would say Christians produce *truly* good works, while unbelievers are only capable of producing *somewhat* good works, at best. The distinction returns to the idea as to whether or not there is a “qualitative” change in Christians through the indwelling Christ or not, which I believe there is.

You often can’t tell the goodness of a work by its external appearance. So you can’t see sanctification happening, because it’s hidden phenomenon, as the Holy Spirit works through the means of grace in Christians, while good works are indicative of that. But at the same time, God is so gracious that He produces good works through unbelievers too, just as he gives daily bread to evil people as well as His baptized children. For example, an unbeliever and believer can both give \$1,000 to a charity. These are good works, equally good. \$1,000 is a \$1,000 not matter who gives it. It gets put to good work. But the one from *the believer is accepted by God* as a fruit of faith (even though still “tainted” with sin, since we are unable as sinners to produce *pure* good works, though as saints they are received as such), while the other from the unbeliever is regarded as having no value by God (even though almighty God still uses these works for his good ultimate purposes). That “good works” from the unbeliever may even be condemned as works righteousness by those believing they can earn points with the divinity by doing them. But even if it is not a deliberate effort of works righteousness, the fact that it doesn’t *come from God’s people*, means it doesn’t have *any positive* bearing in God’s estimation of the one who does it. Muslim parents love their kids, sincerely. Not just because they fear God’s wrath. Pagans can behave kindly to each other, not just because they subconsciously believe they are earning their way to heaven. The fingerprints of God remain on them too, though they are unredeemed and corrupted. They can still do legitimately good things (i.e. “somewhat” good works). Thanks be to God. But in the sigh of our heavenly father, he effectively turns a blind eye from those works since they are not “truly” good works, arising from his “true” children.

⁴⁷ Even psalms like 80:19, salvation is spoken in the subjunctive: “Do this Lord for us who are saved *already*, and we *shall* be saved”.

⁴⁸ Warning: many bad bible translations typically interpret expressions of divine monergism of Grace as involving human activity: subjunctives or the imperfect is often translated as imperatives: commands like “Do this!” instead of appeals to “keep doing this”. In other words, don’t resist what God is already started and continues doing in you. The Holy Spirit is already at work and your job is just not to get in the way. The idea is that we are compelled not to resist his work, as sinners, as opposed to being led to believe that the work can be reduced to our cooperation with the Holy Spirit or even just a neo-Pelagian idea that we can do it on our own. When protestants don’t see holiness as happening to you, but rather it is rather something you do, it’s partially due to bad interpretations and bible versions.

Here's an illustration to help; When my kid draws a stick man on a piece of paper in art class, I put it on my fridge and am the proudest dad in the world. Yet I know that it has no *objective* value. It will never get hung in an art gallery. If a stranger's kid gave me the exact same drawing, I likely wouldn't put it on my fridge, and maybe eventually throw it in the trash. It is the same work and quality, yet its *significance and meaning* changes due to its personal relationship with me. Christian *good works* are better in the sight of God than unbeliever's same good works, which *relationally*, can be viewed as *not even good works*, but bad works.⁴⁹ Our works as Christians are filthy rags, but God accepts them as beautiful since they are covered in Christ. The "good deed" of the believer and unbeliever may externally appear exactly the same, but due to the *different relationship* between the giver and the receiver, one has a different status. In this sense, on the one hand, you could say there is no qualitative difference between good works between believers and unbelievers.

But on the other hand, when asking the question regarding a definition of *true* good works, Christians have the sanctifying Holy Spirit in them who makes good works happen while unbelievers don't. This means that there IS a "qualitative" difference to a Christian's good work. Christians do "better" good works and follow a standard that is higher. They can fight addiction more effectively. They can overcome temptation more successfully. They can do better than the world and exceed the low standards of morality that unbelievers put in place. This is why unbelievers like living in Christian societies because they experience this "Christian culture" to be true. They would trust the keys of their home in the hands of a Christian over a non-Christian. They like it when their boys date Christian girls. They hate Christ, but they like the good works that they observe in the lives of Christ's disciples [like the new atheists who want to live with Christians and in Christian culture, though they deny God].

This implies that countries with more Christians are "qualitatively" better than those without. Christian culture matters to a better life on earth. Of course, eternity is our ultimate aim but temporality is still important to God. I may care most about what my kids do when they grow up, but I am still interested in whether or not they are having a good day, today, here and now, even though it has no real bearing on the most important events of life.

(slide) Seelsorger benefits the world around us through Christian culture

Seelsorger then has something to say about not only personal internal battles within Christians, but about the larger spiritual war within surrounding society. Good seelsorgering makes better Christians, one's who behave better in their vocations in the three estates, including their political participation in civil society. Now, one needs to be careful, since the theology of cross means we are not trying to create heaven on earth, nor judge spiritual success by our eyes. In early Calvinist states, you got a fine from the government for skipping church or Bible study: a pretty compelling reason to live a holy life. We stand against Reform

⁴⁹ For give the crass comparison but did you ever notice that the diaper of your kid doesn't really smell as bad as that from somebody else's?:)

type 'Christian Reconstructionism', like America as the new Israel, because they see the USA as the most "Christian" society on earth. There is no such thing as a "Christian" country, in the sense of salvation through citizenship in an earthly society. We should even be wary using the word "Christian" as an adjective too often. But there is a sense of a Christian country, and hence, "Christian nation", when the majority of citizens are Christian, or at least seek to live according to Christian or Biblical values and principles, underpinned by a Christian ethos, anthropology and philosophy. Christianity flavors society, it gives an aroma to the culture unparalleled by other religions. **(SLIDE) "For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life."** (2 Cor 2:15-17). So as Lutherans we shouldn't be ashamed when God blesses us, as a nation. We can praise God for all the visible expressions of the internal workings of the spirit, through Christian good works which have had a measurable, quantifiable and powerful impact in the society and world around us. We should not shy away at seeing the tremendous opportunity in cultivating that even more. When pastors, as seelorsgers, coach their people in Christian values, virtues and morality as it pertains to specifics within family AND POLITICAL life, that is what is happening.

We have the Holy Spirit producing good works, and *He* is intimately at work in this life on earth. This changes society. After the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the world started to change due to *the cultural influence of Christianity*. **John 16 prophesizes that (SLIDE). "And when [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged."** (John 16:13). This text mentions a "judgement" upon the culture of the non-Christian mainstream. Is it possible that our Lord means that the evils of the world will be exposed at a new level, because there will be a community, a Christian culture with which to contrast the pagan one?

I used to think that the Red Crescent was a Muslim version of the Red Cross. Then I found out that it was the Red Cross operating in Muslim countries, and the financial support is all Western. What we find is that the only truly altruistic religion on the globe is Christianity, because we Christians care and love everybody. Jews care about Jews and Muslims about Muslims. Buddhism is the most selfish of all religions (just thinking about yourself all day long), and Hinduism the most satanic. Due to Christianity, the world is a better place for everybody on earth. Just consider the roots of public services like hospitals and schools, etc. It was Christianity that created the first public hospitals, networks of social care, mass education and respect for people. Constantine was crucial in creating a "Christian" nation of

Rome by reforming the devilish gladiatorial games, implementing better treatment of slaves, women, and children.⁵⁰

Christianity changed the world, not just spiritually, but in a physical way, which is evidenced in “Christian culture” today. Sure, we are all sinners, and “Christian nations” consist of them, but the loss of this culture will eventually mean the deterioration of the God-pleasing pillars of Western civilization. Right now, we are in a kind of in-between stage in history. We still all benefit, believer and unbeliever alike, from the dregs of Christian civilization, but once those dry up, what will take its place? My home country is a perfect example of a nation undergoing the growing pains of losing Christian culture to multi-culturalism alongside anti-Christian culture. We boast the second highest medically assisted suicide in the world, and the freest abortion laws (there are none). My former Prime Minister proudly proclaimed when he first arrived into his office to begin his reign of terror, that Canada has no shared values. “Canada is becoming a new kind of country, not defined by our history or European national origins, but by a “pan-cultural heritage”. There is no core identity,” Trudeau said, concluding that he sees Canada as “the first post-national state.”⁵¹ He led the country into rebellion against the authority of God and did not see himself as accountable to His law. For amorality is immorality.

This new movement that seeks to muzzle the Church’s voice in the public sphere is all very odd and spiritually unsettling. Over the last couple of years, the bizarre buzz around the elusive phrase “Christian nationalism” has spread throughout our churches. The recent interest and confusion surrounding the concept frowns upon active participation in the public sphere by Christ’s faithful followers who are simply trying their best to live Christian lives through their God-given vocations.

⁵⁰ Historian Tom Holland’s *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (Basic Books, 2019) underscores this legacy, tracing how Christian values of compassion, equality, justice and human dignity became the moral bedrock of Western civilization. As Holland writes, “To live in a Western country is to live in a society still utterly saturated by Christian concepts and assumptions. The ambitions of universal human rights, the expectation that the wealthy should look after the poor, the notion that society should protect the vulnerable – all of these are deeply and distinctively Christian.” The notion of equality before men is a Christian idea which was further refined by Luther with the universal priesthood. That alone should be enough to acknowledge that Christian culture is foundation of what secular culture takes for granted and gives you an idea of what is at stake by not fighting for Christian culture. See also Alvin J. Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World* (Zondervan, 2004). “Yet, as secularization intensifies, the moral depth of, say, a healthy view of human rights are being eroded. Yale professor Samuel Moyn’s in *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* warns that framing rights as timeless obscures their historical and theological origins, reducing them to hollow abstractions. In such a state, rights become instruments of power rather than enduring moral principles. Oxford theologian Nigel Biggar cautions that a purely secular understanding of rights lacks the moral depth necessary to justify their universality. When this happens, rights risk degenerating into tools of political expediency – a devolution that is all-but complete, with seismic implications for the trajectory of Western societies.” Instead of appreciating the invention of human rights, by Christians, as reflective of human value, they are used and abused by non-Christians to serve unchristian ends.” Patrick Keeney, “Analysis: Notre Dame Cathedrals Rebirth Deeper Meaning” in *True North News*, January 12, 2025. <https://tnc.news/2025/01/12/analysis-notre-dame-cathedrals-rebirth-deeper-meaning/> Accessed 01-13-2025.

⁵¹ Candice Malcolm, “Trudeau says Canada has no ‘core identity’”, *Toronto Sun*, Sep 15, 2016, <https://torontosun.com/2016/09/14/trudeau-says-canada-has-no-core-identity>, accessed May 27, 2025.

As has become typical of the anti-Christian Left, who weaponize words and phrases to bar their opponents' effective entry into the public sphere for rational discourse (such as dismissing Christians as "extreme" or "far right", "conspiracy theorists"), Christian nationalism has become the new pejorative term intended to keep the Church's perspective (which is God's perspective), out of the public sphere. The leftists have framed this debate in a way that disallows a defense of Christian values, which underpins and is expressed in Christian culture. By controlling the language of the dialogue, they set the parameters of discussion within it. By embracing the language, Christians adopt a crippled disadvantage in the debate. Yet through the label "Christian nationalists", which they manipulatively equate with being "white" and "white supremacists", and even "Nazis" by unchristian sources, they terrorize consciences. In a society that is less equipped to think critically due to the demise of Western culture, the term has become a highly effective one in fearmongering.

However, it has become a strangely powerful and shameful gaslighting term to dissuade Christians from fulfilling their vocational duties in the civil sphere. It's a hot topic, and you can obviously see how this bizarre association of "Christian culture" with "white supremacy" via "Christian nationalism" are a concern for our college, with our "Christian Culture" conferences and journal. If you speak into the public sphere in an effort to foster Christian culture, you risk accusations of being called a radical, or neo-Nazi, which is typical a devilish tactic to frighten Christians and stop up the mouth of the Church.

[And yet] As my good friend and colleague John Stephenson writes **that while for Luther in the Large Catechism 'holy Christendom' (ein heilige Christenheit) is the 'best and clearest' rendering of the credal article of faith in the one holy Church (LC II, 48; BS8 656,26), so that for the Reformer, Christendom and Church are synonymous terms. Since Anglo-Saxon times this noun has also had the wider sense of the geographical area over which Christ holds sway, hence not only denoting the Church stricte dicta but also connoting cultures suffused with the Christian ethos. According to the still authoritative, but less credible, Encyclopedia Britannica you may be startled by a certain overlap of its definition of 'Christian Nationalism' with what used to be familiar under the rubric of 'Christendom':**

"Christian nationalism: an ideology that seeks to create or maintain a legal fusion of Christian religion with a nation's character. Advocates of Christian nationalism consider their view of Christianity to be an integral part of their country's identity and want the government to promote—or even enforce—the religion's position within it."⁵²

A Two thousand year old belief system given the status of an 'ideology'? Moreover, a series of linked developments on five continents over twenty centuries is flippantly dismissed? The incontestable influence of Christ and His Church on history and culture, which has undeniably included the effect of Christianity on many cultures, is scornfully

⁵² [Christian nationalism | Definition, History, United States, & Facts | Britannica](#), accessed 14 November 2024 .

waved away. "Who could ever think that Christianity might be an 'integral part of some countries' identity'? What fool examining the historical data would 'create or maintain a legal fusion' been certain countries and the religion practiced by a majority of their citizens?" Consider the appearance of the Cross—in the case of the British Union Jack an overlay of three crosses—on many (actually 31 out of 196) national flags indicates that britannica.com and the article that has provoked these reflections are clearly 'gaslighting'."⁵³

The contemporary Reformed theologian Carl Trueman sagely notes that, 'The term "Christian nationalism" has become a canard used by secular progressives (and some Christians) as a rhetorically pejorative catchall for anyone who holds to any number of traditional conservative views.'⁵⁴

Luther believed in the importance of Christendom as a support for the Gospel. Whenever you hear Luther talk about protecting Christendom, he is NOT talking about preserving a narrow sense of the preached Gospel. He MEANS the entire package of Christian culture. When Seelsorgers do their job well, they help cultivate a necessary Christian culture. They speak to three estates, including civil society which includes politics. It's a sensitive topic, especially during the pandemic when so many pastors were terrified to speak God's word into the third estate, but especially as we consider what is at stake over this paranoia that behaving like old fashioned patriotic American Lutherans has now become wrong, because the liberals tell us it is. As LCC's Academic Dean, Dr. MacPherson indicated, "America has never been "Christian," but deistic at best. But there is a lot less salt and light in this nation, than there used to be," and we sure do notice a difference.

Even being practical, just turn to those on trial in Europe, including confessional Lutherans, for vocalizing that homosexuality is a sin, or when Britain prosecutes those who prays silently before an abortion clinic, or in Canada 112 churches (including Lutheran ones), and the numbers till grows, were burnt down by leftists due to a lie that Roman Catholic and Anglican priests had mass murdered thousands of aboriginal children, without one thread of evidence, while the Prime Minister defended the violence as "understandable", and thus justifiable.

Christians seeking to explore the relationship between Church and Culture or Church and State in the context of the right understanding and application of the teaching concerning the Two Kingdoms or Two Governments and the interaction of the Three Estates (as one convention resolution proposes) should avoid playing to the world by casting aspersions of

⁵³ From an early draft of "Aphorisms on Christendom haunted by the Specter of 'Christian Nationalism'" (Ad Crucem, 2025).

⁵⁴ Ibid

so-called 'Christian Nationalism' on those who appreciate and seek the continuance or restoration of Christendom among us.⁵⁵

(slide) Some of you already know this, but others have no idea; but I became known as the chaplain for the Canadian Trucker Convoy in 2021. Remember that? Tens of thousands of truckers from across Canada came to our nation's capital, Ottawa, to voice their concerns, at which time the government accused them of illegally occupying the city; which then resulted in a horrific use of martial law against thousands of Christian protesters in some of the most violent acts against Canadians in our peaceful history? Canada is the last country on earth that you would think the government would crack down on peaceful protesters! I say "peaceful" since no laws were broken other than parking infractions (trucks parked all over the streets, as far as the eye could see, but peppered with Canadian courtesy: always with one lane clear for emergency vehicles). Long story short, I became one of four litigators against the Canadian socialist government regime against peaceful protesters, and I won the case in federal court, which, according to several republican governors and President Donald Trump, was instrumental to the undoing of our country's dictatorship. Sadly, the Church didn't care. It was implied that Christians had no business in getting involved in such matters. The newly elected socialist government of Canada, prior to their win, vocalized its intent to take away charitable status from all prolife organizations including churches (If that happens, half our churches will close within a few years). The argument that matters of the state have *nothing to do* with church life is an absolutely foolish, unbiblical and unhistorical argument.

We are grateful for Christian culture, and the world is too whether they acknowledge it or not. But Seelsorgering into the third estate, is becoming harder and harder due to this bizarre question as to whether or not Christendom *was ever beautiful*. That's the agenda behind Critical Theory. A recent Canadian seminary professor actually published an article a few weeks ago implying that Christendom is evil such as the loss of DEI in the public sphere is lamentable.

Those critical of Christian nationalism think that there is this spiritual playground of neutral space where individual Christians are free to make decisions that are equally God pleasing to each other. It is a post modern myopic deception that the public sphere is somehow neutral of values. The New Testament clearly announces how this present age is darkness (Eph 6:12). Yet those who courageously and boldly share the voice of the Church and her Lord in the public sphere, which is more important than ever as we approach the final *parousia*, are being increasingly persecuted and discouraged from doing so.

⁵⁵ From an early draft of "Aphorisms on Christendom haunted by the Specter of 'Christian Nationalism'" (Ad Crucem, 2025).

When we oppose Christian nationalism *in its best form*, are we ready for what fills the vacuum left?

(slide) Koenker writes, "**An absolute separation [of church and state] would deny any participation of the Christian in political affairs. This would open the door to the completely secular state, which would inculcate its own - possibly anti-Christian - ideology in the public schools; it would require a religious devotion to itself, as it is not entirely without evidence even now among spokesmen for the public schools and for democracy.**"⁵⁶ (*SLIDE)

All citizens have religious beliefs that influence public policy and legislation at all levels of government whether they acknowledge them or not. Christians should celebrate and not flee the fact that the Holy Spirit has called them to share, advocate and fight to advance those beliefs in the public sphere. (*SLIDE and handout). Let me end with an excerpt from the first preacher of the highly esteemed and beloved Lutheran Hour, Dr. Walter A. Maier, who addressed these same issues 100 years ago, and arrives at the same unsurprising conclusion:

(Slide: Keep America Christian!⁵⁷ A Sermon By Dr. Walter A. Maier)

WE NEED GOD TO PRESERVE OUR CHRISTIAN HERITAGE

We should, however, do more than cry out, "Keep America Christian!" We must act! Everyone who knows the Lord Jesus and the magnificence of His grace in reconciling a lost world to His heavenly Father must be ready to assume individual responsibility. Jeremiah does not primarily seek to start a mass movement nor ask others to act for him. He recognizes his own share, his personal duty. May the Holy Spirit awaken men with the courage of that mighty prophet who, as few others, protested ceaselessly against evil, defended the faith at all costs, resolutely championed his Lord and continually sounded the necessary note of repentance and contrition! Let American clergymen make this fearless man of God their model by clinging to the whole Word of Truth! Such loyalty may produce opposition, just as Jeremiah had to fight the chief priests and the officials in the ecclesiastical system of his day. Dare to be a Jeremiah, and you will have a Jeremiah's blessing - deliverance in danger and persecution! If necessary, the Almighty can invoke His heavenly power to sustain you in any struggle.⁵⁸

The problem with the rhetoric of anti-Christian nationalism is it frightens faithful Christians away from living Christian lives and into the devilish claws of antinomianism. But if *pastors* have open discussions about these questions and deliberately address them with their

⁵⁶ Koenker, *The Two Realms*, Concordia Theological Monthly, January, 1956, p. 9.

⁵⁷ KEEP AMERICA CHRISTIAN! A Sermon By Dr. Walter A. Maier. First Aired January 1942.

<https://branscome.org/KeepAmer.htm>

⁵⁸ Ibid

people, and model them in the public sphere, we are sure to find those fears reduced. Only enthusiasts and pietists believe the Holy Spirit can be the personal seelsorger of individual Lutherans and that will suffice in equipping spiritual warriors in knowing how to spiritually battle within the complexities of the third estate. Instead, it's the pastors job, as the Holy Spirit works through his instruction, by which he sanctifies his Church and produces the necessary fruits from which the world nibbles, so that they can taste and see that the Lord is good, and join Christ's flock as new followers, disciples, and missionaries.

So, I hope I did not disappoint any of you by giving these lectures on spiritual warfare, by not speaking about the armor of God, or sharing ghost stories about demonic encounters. What we have here is far more important and relevant, since the attacks of the devil are found in these ordinary ways, and that is why pastors are crucial in that warfare, primarily as seelsorgers who have the courage and ability to speak regularly and comfortably into all three estates.

**The PowerPoint presentation can be found at wylcms.org/2025convention under the 'Reference Materials from Essayist' tab.

Part 4

Convention Adopted Resolutions

For the Church of Christ to Stay and Do Her Duty

Resolution 01a

(Overture 06)

Whereas, God commands, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8); and

Whereas, Our Lord and Savior proclaims, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4); and

Whereas, The apostle Peter declares, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29; and

Whereas, The Scriptures admonish Christians to "consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb. 10:24-25); and

Whereas, Christian liberty should not be determined by someone else's conscience (1 Cor. 10:29); and

Whereas, The Large Catechism teaches that the Sacrament of the Altar is essential to the Christian faith, "A great number of people who hear the gospel, now that the pope's nonsense has been abolished and we are freed from his compulsion and commands, let a year, or two, three, or more years go by without receiving the sacrament, as if they were such strong Christians that they have no need of it. Others let themselves be kept and deterred from it because we have taught that none should go unless they feel a hunger and thirst impelling them to it. Still others pretend that it is a matter of liberty, not of necessity, and that it is enough if they simply believe. Thus the great majority go so far that they become quite barbarous and ultimately despise both the sacrament and God's Word" (Large Catechism V 41 [Kolb-Wengert]; cf. AC VII, AC XXIV; 1932 Brief Statement); and

Whereas, During the years 2020, 2021, and 2022, responses to the COVID-19 pandemic included the cancellation of public, communal, in-person worship services, by congregations, pastors, and affiliated educational institutions; and

Whereas, Online or virtual worship is not a substitute for corporate worship (Heb. 10:24-25; LCMS 2023 Convention Resolution 5-08A); and

Whereas, These responses taught God's flock and the world at-large that public, communal, in-person worship is non-essential (while allowing grocery stores, liquor stores, and cannabis dispensaries to remain open); that such public worship of God by those who wish to do so can be forbidden by the consciences of others who do not wish to gather in public worship; that public opinion or government demand can forbid public worship; and

Whereas, Great societal distress over the COVID-19 pandemic ought to have instead compelled the Church to keep her doors open instead of close them, faithful in her vow to

1 "intend to continue steadfast in this confession and to suffer all, even death rather than fall
2 away from it" (LSB Rite of Confirmation); therefore be it

3 *Resolved*, That we commend the desires of faithful pastors to care for their flocks in a
4 time of pandemic, granting charity and a wide latitude of understanding to our brothers in
5 the Public Office of the Holy Ministry due to the emergency nature of the situation at that time
6 confronting us all; and be it further

7 *Resolved*, That pastors and congregations recognize that not offering public worship
8 was sinful, even if done in ignorance, and repent where necessary; and be it further

9 *Resolved*, That the Synod President and the Council of Presidents publicly encourage
10 pastors, congregations and educational institutions of Synod to stay and do their duty by
11 holding public worship services during any pandemic for those who wish to attend; and be it
12 further

13 *Resolved*, That in the future, the Synod President and the Council of Presidents should
14 give proper concern and understanding to the doctrine of the two Kingdoms especially as it
15 relates to resistance to government tyranny (cf. 1932 Brief Statement, Church and State), and
16 be it further

17 *Resolved*, That the Synod President and the Council of Presidents and those who assist
18 them be counseled and urged to instruct our pastors and congregations on the basis of Holy
19 Scripture's example and exhortation to gather and meet together and also celebrate the
20 Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42; Hebrews 10:25) on the basis of the examples found in Augsburg
21 Confession Articles VII and XXIV, and be it finally

22 *Resolved*, That in the future the Church should stay and do Her duty and not abandon Her
23 people in such a crisis and instead exhort pastors and congregations not to abandon the
24 holy, faithful people of God even if it should bring persecution, but rather that the sheep be
25 gathered together accompanied by their pastors, comforted by the Word of God, by the
26 sacraments, by fellowship, and by prayer.

**To Uphold the Scriptural Teaching of the Church as One Chosen Generation
in Spite of the Existence of Various Earthly Races**

Resolution 02c

(Overture 01)

WHEREAS, The word "race," can broadly be used to refer to the entire human race all of whom are descended from Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:20 "And Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living."); and

WHEREAS, The word "race" has also come to refer to various bloodlines/lineages, which the Scriptures acknowledge (Acts 17:26 "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings," also Genesis 10, Deuteronomy 18:9-14, Acts 2:5-12); and

WHEREAS, The Apostle Peter, using the language of Isaiah ("My chosen people," 1 Pet. 2:9, speaks of the Church as a people not in reference to a single earthly race but rather to the chosen people of God, the sons of Abraham by faith; and

WHEREAS, As those of the Church, the chosen generation we are given to proclaim not the doctrines of the world, but rather the words of the Prophets and Apostles which proclaim Jesus Christ crucified for all nations; therefore be it

Resolved, That we reject any racism in the Church, that is, exclusion of another from the Body of Christ or hate of a brother in Christ because of his race (1 John 3:15, Matthew 5:21-22), or the deeming a neighbor as sub-human because of his race (Genesis 1:27, Proverbs 14:21)—these acts break the Fifth Commandment; and be it further

Resolved, That we recognize and affirm our Lord's promise to the Church that we are a "chosen lineage" or "chosen generation" (1 Pet. 2:9), which is the lineage of all those called into the Promise; and be it further

Resolved, That we rejoice that as the Church, the lineage of the promise, we are given to "proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9), a proclamation to be proclaimed to all nations (Matt. 28); and be it further

Resolved, That we affirm that the Church denounces anyone who excludes another from the Body of Christ or hates a brother in Christ because of his race, or deems a neighbor as sub-human because of his race; and be called to repentance with the hope and the prayer that the Lord restore him to the Church, the chosen lineage of the promise; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Wyoming District in convention memorialize the Synod to affirm that the Church denounces anyone who excludes another from the Body of Christ or hates a brother in Christ because of his race, or deems a neighbor as sub-human because of his race; and be called to repentance with the hope and the prayer that the Lord restore them to the Church, the chosen lineage of the promise.

**To thank the CTCR for its clear response to Wyoming District Res. 2021-1-01
and to forward its response to appropriate publishing arms of the LCMS**

Resolution 03

(Overture 03)

Preamble

WHEREAS, The 2021 Convention of the Wyoming District noted that “the 2017 Explanation [of *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*], while it teaches that ‘I will enjoy being with Christ in His new creation, in body and soul, forever.’ (p. 225, q. 224), yet avoids speaking of the immortality of the soul and the Christian’s soul dwelling with Christ upon death, and so breaks with the pattern of words (2 Tim 1:13) used by all previous synodical Explanations”; and

WHEREAS, The 2021 Convention of the Wyoming District noted that “the Synod’s newest systematic theology teaches, ‘What does the scriptural understanding of body and soul mean for the “immortality of the soul”? It denies this view, if by soul one means, as is usually intended, a separate principle that a human being has or receives’ [Samuel H. Nafzger, ed., *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 1:285, and see footnote 68]”; and

WHEREAS, The 2021 Convention of the Wyoming District believed that “the 1969 Commission on Theology and Church Relations position paper, A Statement on Death, Resurrection, and Immortality, rejects the immortality of the soul, claiming that, ‘The Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions compel us: ...To reject the teaching that the soul is by nature and by virtue of an inherent quality immortal’ (III, 6, e). The paper does not, however, affirm that, like the angels, the soul is immortal by the ongoing and active will of God”; and

WHEREAS, The Wyoming District in convention asked President Hill to invite the contributing author of Nafzger’s Systematic Theology to come to the Wyoming District and “to give a defense of calling the soul ‘personal identity’ instead of soul;” which invitation went unanswered; and

WHEREAS, The Wyoming District in convention asked the CTCR to answer the following question: “Does the Synod, in its teaching, affirm that man has in any way an immortal soul, deny this, or leave it as an open question?”; and

Whereas the CTCR formally responded to this inquiry in a February 2, 2024, letter to the Wyoming District that stated, in part, “the Commission answers in the affirmative: the LCMS does hold to the biblical doctrine of the immortality of the soul”; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Wyoming District in convention thank the CTCR for its unambiguous answer; and be it further

1 *Resolved*, That the Wyoming District in convention ask LCMS's doctrinal review to
2 distribute the answer of the CTCR to all reviewers serving the LCMS president in reviewing
3 articles for publication; and be it further

4 *Resolved*, That the Wyoming District express its special concern that doctrinal reviewers
5 be alert not only for overt denials of this Biblical doctrine, but also for errors of omission when
6 it is appropriate to express the immortality of the soul for a full confession of the faith; and be
7 it further

8 *Resolved*, That the Wyoming District forward the letter of the CTCR to Concordia
9 Publishing House; and be it further

10 *Resolved*, That the Wyoming District in convention formally ask Concordia Publishing
11 House to reconsider Nafzger's *Systematic Theology* especially in its substitution of the term
12 "personal identity" where "soul" would better maintain "the form of sound words," and, where
13 appropriate, to amend this substitution in future editions; and be it finally

14 *Resolved*, That the Wyoming District in convention formally ask Concordia Publishing
15 House that in all future editions of the synodical explanation of the *Small Catechism*, to make
16 explicit confession of the soul's dwelling with Christ upon death—as it was made in all editions
17 of the synodical explanation prior to the 2017 edition.

Relation of LCC and the Wyoming District

Resolution 04

(Overture 05)

Preamble

Wyoming District schools and educators were pioneers in the young classical Education movement in The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS), beginning in the late 1990s. Three of the first conferences of the nascent Consortium for Classical Lutheran Education (CCLE) were held in the Wyoming District at St. Andrew’s Lutheran Church and Campus Center in Laramie (2003) and Trinity Lutheran Church and School in Cheyenne (2011) and Martin Luther Grammar School in Sheridan, Wyoming (2017). Presently, all five of the district schools have adopted classical Lutheran education as their guiding pedagogical principle. Numerous homeschool families in the district have also pursued the high goals and standards of classical Lutheran education.

From the beginning, schools in the classical Lutheran education movement in the Wyoming District and throughout the Synod sought to find and recruit classically educated pastors, teachers, and headmasters. For the past quarter-century Lutheran schools and Lutheran parents have contemplated the need for a Lutheran classical college in which sound Christian doctrine, philosophy, history, literature, the classical languages, and the mathematical arts are thoroughly integrated and incorporated into the life of the home, church, and community. Classical Lutheran leaders who attempted to start such a college in the early years discovered that the time was not right. The right time has now come.

In 2020, pastors, laymen, and congregations of the Wyoming District and across The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod organized a Board of Regents for the new Luther Classical College (LCC). This year, 2025, LCC will hold classes for its first cohort of students. The college has been hosted and sponsored in various ways by Mount Hope and Trinity Lutheran Churches in Casper. The college will be located permanently on property adjacent to both Mount Hope and the Wyoming District’s Lutheran Ministries Center. Each congregation supplies a pastor and elder to serve on the LCC Board of Regents (BOR). The pastors and elders of each congregation supply the list of candidates for the BOR, thus retaining congregational sponsorship of the college. LCC’s pastors receive divine calls and LCC’s commissioned teachers receive teacher calls from one of the two Casper congregations. The Wyoming District President is also a member of the BOR; he advises the President, BOR, Mount Hope, and Trinity in the appointment and election of faculty; and he provides ecclesiastical oversight, encouragement, and counsel to LCC through its President and BOR.

LCC is sponsored and funded by hundreds of supporting LCMS congregations nationwide and more than a thousand individual LCMS donors. LCMS families are sending their young men and women to LCC to receive a robust classical Lutheran Education. All the faculty and staff are members of LCMS congregations. The pastors and commissioned

1 teachers on the faculty and staff are members of the Wyoming District and are under the
2 ecclesiastical supervision and care of the Wyoming District President.

3 Luther Classical College is a congregational college, that is, a college organized by,
4 supported by, and supporting the congregations of the LCMS. In its doctrinal commitments
5 and Lutheran culture it complements the Synod's Concordia Universities, but it is not a
6 member or part of the Concordia University System (CUS). LCC is not governed by the LCMS
7 and has no legal or financial connection to the Synod. From the time of its organization,
8 however, LCC has been seeking a formal ecclesiastical relationship to Synod. Its mission fully
9 supports and advances the divinely instituted objectives of The Lutheran Church–Missouri
10 Synod.

11 LCC is bound to the Holy Scriptures as the inerrant, inspired Word of God and to the
12 Lutheran Confessions as a true exposition of Holy Scriptures and a correct exhibition of the
13 doctrine of the Lutheran Church. LCC is guided by these commitments:

14 Luther Classical College educates Lutherans in the classical, Lutheran
15 tradition and prepares them for godly vocations within family, church, and
16 society, fostering Christian culture through study of the best of our Western
17 heritage. (LCC Mission Statement; lutherclassical.org)

18 The college will provide a conservative, classical Lutheran education to Lutheran
19 students. Paramount will be the promotion of Christian culture, a stress on the priority of
20 Christian marriage, family, and piety, and a cultivation of confessional Lutheran theology,
21 liturgy, hymnody, and identity. With courses using the "great books" of the past for the
22 core curriculum, the college will offer Latin, history, theology, literature, logic, rhetoric,
23 music, geometry, biology, and mathematics, all within a purposefully Christian and
24 Lutheran framework.

25 WHEREAS, At its October 27, 2020 meeting, the Wyoming District Board of Directors
26 (BOD) approved this resolution:

27 Be it Resolved that the Board of Directors (BOD) of the Wyoming District
28 LCMS support the effort to found Luther Classical College (LCC) on the
29 campus of Mount Hope Lutheran Church, Casper, Wyoming, as described in
30 its Prospectus; and be it further

31 Resolved that the BOD affirm the Wyoming District President's
32 ecclesiastical oversight of LCC and its rostered workers; and be it finally

33 Resolved that the BOD encourage the congregations of the Wyoming
34 District to respond positively to the LCC Call for Support as they are able.

35 And,

36 WHEREAS, At its May 3, 2024 meeting, the Wyoming District Board of Directors resolved:

37 that the Wyoming District BOD support the work of LCC as a mission
38 effort of the district in all aspects possible: theologically, materially, and with

1 encouragement coupled with due diligence, in order to ensure faithfulness in
2 all areas.

3 And,

4 WHEREAS, Because LCC is sponsored by Wyoming District congregations, is governed
5 by Wyoming District congregations and Regents, is located in the Wyoming District at our
6 Casper congregations, is visited diligently by the Wyoming District president for the
7 maintenance of true ecclesiastical concord (Preface to *The Book of Concord*, 24), and serves
8 the congregations of the Wyoming District by teaching her students and returning them for
9 life and service to the congregations of the Wyoming District; therefore, be it

10 *Resolved*, That the Wyoming District in convention affirm the resolutions and actions of
11 the BOD in supporting Luther Classical College; and be it further

12 *Resolved*, That the BOD continue, in its care for congregations and workers and in
13 advancing the educational mandates given to the district, to help and support LCC with the
14 resources God provides it; and be it further

15 *Resolved*, That the Wyoming District affirm and support the District President's duties

- 16 • to provide ecclesiastical supervision to LCC and its pastors and teachers,
- 17 • to encourage and counsel LCC's BOR and administration with God's Word,
- 18 • to advise the LCC President and BOR in the College's search for and
- 19 appointment of faculty,
- 20 • to advise Mount Hope and Trinity in the calling of LCC faculty,
- 21 • to assist the LCC President in the college's interactions with LCMS entities and
- 22 agencies, and
- 23 • to serve *ex officio* on the BOR of LCC;

24 And be it further

25 *Resolved*, That the congregations of the Wyoming District and their members be
26 encouraged to pray for LCC, send their young people to LCC as students, and provide
27 financial gifts and support to LCC as they are able; and be it further

28 *Resolved*, That the Wyoming District commend LCC for preparing future husbands and
29 wives, congregation members, workers, seminary students, teachers, musicians, and the like
30 for godly service in their homes, congregations, and communities; and be it finally

31 *Resolved*, That, most importantly, the Wyoming District recognize and give thanks to
32 God that Luther Classical College serves the congregations of the Wyoming District in
33 obedience to God's Word (Matthew 28:19-20; Ephesians 6:1-4; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm
34 78:1-8).

1 **Appeal for a Recognized Ecclesiastical Relationship between LCC**
2 **and the LCMS**

3 **RESOLUTION 05**

4 *(Overture 04)*

5 **Preamble**

6 The classical Lutheran education movement in The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod
7 (LCMS) began in the late 1990s with a few schools and the gathering of a small number of
8 educators in what has become the Consortium for Classical Lutheran Education (CCLE, a
9 Recognized Service Organization). As the classical education movement gained momentum
10 nationally, LCMS Lutherans sought to develop a uniquely Lutheran curriculum and
11 educational philosophy, distinct from the many Reformed, Roman Catholic, Baptist, and
12 secular versions of the classical liberal arts. In the LCMS, Lutherans discovered that the
13 Western Christian educational tradition had already been richly and thoroughly adapted by
14 Lutheran leaders (e.g. Luther and Melanchthon) in the Lutheran Reformation and again in the
15 United States of America at the beginning of the LCMS under C.F.W. Walther’s leadership.
16 Current classical Lutheran educators have sought to build on this tradition.

17 Today, this movement in the LCMS continues to grow rapidly among Lutheran schools
18 and homeschools. In the LCMS this movement is supported by new classical offerings in our
19 Concordia University System schools, by the biennial “Lutheranism and the Classics”
20 conference hosted by Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, and by the CCLE.
21 Recent CCLE conferences have been attended by over 500 participants. The number of CCLE
22 accredited schools surpassed 20 schools in 2024. Numerous homeschools throughout the
23 Synod have embraced the Western tradition of classical education.

24 From the beginning, schools in the classical Lutheran education movement throughout
25 the Synod have sought to find and recruit pastors, teachers, and headmasters who have
26 received an education that combines a thorough knowledge of Scriptures and the
27 Confessions of the Lutheran church with the skills and knowledge appropriate to the Western
28 Christian liberal arts tradition. For the past quarter-century Lutheran schools and Lutheran
29 parents have contemplated the need for a Lutheran classical college in which sound Christian
30 doctrine, philosophy, history, literature, the classical languages, and the mathematical arts
31 are thoroughly integrated and incorporated into the life of the home, church, and
32 community. Classical Lutheran leaders who attempted to start such a college in the early
33 years discovered that the time was not right. The right time has now come.

34 In 2020, pastors, laymen, and congregations of the Wyoming District and across The
35 Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod organized a Board of Regents for the new Luther Classical
36 College (LCC). In 2025, LCC holds classes for its first cohort of students.

37 The college has been hosted and sponsored in various ways by two Wyoming District
38 congregations in Casper, Wyoming (Mount Hope and Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Churches).

1 Each congregation provides Regents to the LCC Board of Regents (BOR), calls for rostered
2 church workers, and has a role in the nomination of Regents.

3 The Wyoming District President is a member of the BOR; he advises the LCC President,
4 BOR, Mount Hope, and Trinity in the appointment and election of faculty; and he provides
5 ecclesiastical oversight, encouragement, and counsel to LCC through its President and BOR.

6 As of January 2025, LCC has been sponsored and funded by hundreds of supporting
7 LCMS congregations nationwide and more than a thousand individual LCMS donors. LCMS
8 families are sending their young men and women to LCC to receive a robust classical
9 Lutheran education. All the faculty and staff are members of LCMS congregations. The
10 pastors and commissioned teachers on the faculty and staff are members of the Wyoming
11 District and are under the ecclesiastical supervision and care of the Wyoming District
12 President.

13 Luther Classical College is a congregational college, that is, a college organized by,
14 supported by, and supporting the congregations of the LCMS. In its doctrinal commitments
15 and Lutheran culture it complements the Synod's Concordia Universities, but it is not a
16 member or part of the Concordia University System (CUS). LCC is not governed by the LCMS
17 and has no legal or financial connection to the Synod. From the time of its organization,
18 however, LCC has been seeking a formal ecclesiastical relationship to Synod. Its mission fully
19 supports and advances the divinely instituted objectives of The Lutheran Church–Missouri
20 Synod.

21 LCC is bound to the Holy Scriptures as the inerrant, inspired Word of God and to the
22 Lutheran Confessions as a true exposition of Holy Scriptures and a correct exhibition of the
23 doctrine of the Lutheran Church. LCC is guided by these commitments:

24 Luther Classical College educates Lutherans in the classical, Lutheran tradition
25 and prepares them for godly vocations within family, church, and society, fostering
26 Christian culture through study of the best of our Western heritage. (LCC Mission
27 Statement; lutherclassical.org)

28 The college will provide a conservative, classical Lutheran education to Lutheran
29 students. Paramount will be the promotion of Christian culture, a stress on the priority of
30 Christian marriage, family, and piety, and a cultivation of confessional Lutheran theology,
31 liturgy, hymnody, and identity. With courses using the “great books” of the past for the
32 core curriculum, the college will offer Latin, history, theology, literature, logic, rhetoric,
33 music, geometry, biology, and mathematics, all within a purposefully Christian and
34 Lutheran framework.

35 WHEREAS, LCC is a thoroughly Lutheran micro-college with joyful commitments to Holy
36 Scriptures, the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, and the doctrine of the LCMS; and

37 WHEREAS, LCC fulfills the divine commandment to teach Lutheran young people the
38 pure doctrine of Holy Scriptures and a pious Christian life in devotion and vocation (Matthew
39 28:19-20; Ephesians 6:1-4; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 78:1-8); and

1 WHEREAS, LCC not only conforms to the Confession of the LCMS (Constitution Article II)
2 but also advances the objectives of the LCMS to “aid congregations to develop processes of
3 thorough Christian education and nurture and to establish agencies of Christian education
4 such as elementary and secondary schools and to support synodical colleges, universities,
5 and seminaries” (Constitution Article III.5); and

6 WHEREAS, LCC is sponsored by LCMS congregations, is governed by LCMS Regents, is
7 located in LCMS congregations of the LCMS Wyoming District, is visited diligently by the
8 Wyoming District President for the maintenance of true ecclesiastical concord (Preface to *The*
9 *Book of Concord*, 24), and serves the congregations of the LCMS by teaching her students
10 and returning them for life and service to the congregations of the LCMS; therefore be it

11 *Resolved*, That the Wyoming District in convention petition the Synod President and
12 Secretary to work with the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) to write a proposed
13 amendment to the Bylaws of Synod that creates a regular process for establishing formal
14 ecclesiastical relations between a micro-college sponsored by LCMS congregations and the
15 LCMS; and be it further

16 *Resolved*, That the Synod President and Secretary consider proposing limitations in
17 these Bylaw amendments that include the following:

- 18 • that the micro-college be an undergraduate school restricted to a student
19 population of 400 or less;
- 20 • that the micro-college offer instruction primarily through in-person classes;
- 21 • that the entire faculty and administration of the micro-college be members of the
22 LCMS or members in good standing of LCMS congregations;
- 23 • that the micro-college receive regular ecclesiastical visitation with a visitation
24 team to include, in addition to the district president of the LCMS district in which
25 the micro-college resides, one representative each from the President of Synod,
26 the President of the CUS, a CUS president or member of the theology faculty,
27 and a seminary faculty member;
- 28 • that the doctrine and practice of the micro-college in all its faculty, teaching and
29 preaching, worship practices, and campus culture be thoroughly Lutheran in
30 accord with LCMS doctrinal commitments;
- 31 • that the micro-college be clearly separate from Synod legally and financially in a
32 way similar to the requirements established for RSOs; and
- 33 • that the micro-college not prepare or posture itself to prepare pastors for ordination
34 or laymen to carry out the functions of the pastoral office, nor certify for membership
35 on the roster of Synod teachers and other church workers;

36 And be it finally

37 *Resolved*, That this resolution be sent as an overture to the 2026 LCMS convention as
38 the record of the Wyoming District’s appeal regarding LCC’s ecclesiastical relationship with
39 the LCMS.

1 **Concerning the Practice of In Vitro Fertilization (IVF)**

2 **RESOLUTION 06a**

3 *(Overture 07)*

4 WHEREAS, Holy Scripture teaches that human life is a sacred gift from God, who is the
5 Creator of all life (Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 139:13-16); and

6 WHEREAS, Scripture affirms that man is made in the image of God and that this image is
7 bestowed upon each person at conception (Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:41-44; Genesis 9:6); and

8 WHEREAS, Christ sanctified and redeemed even human embryos in his incarnation and
9 conception of the Holy Spirit and Virgin Mary, His shed blood upon the cross, His
10 resurrection, and His ascension to the right hand of the Father (Luke 1:35; Matthew 1:20-23);
11 and

12 WHEREAS, The tradition of the Christian Church, in accordance with the creation order
13 revealed in Holy Scripture, has consistently upheld the sanctity of human life and the dignity
14 of procreation as an act that belongs within the marital union between a man and a woman
15 (Genesis 1:27-28; Hebrews 13:4; Matthew 19:4-6). This is also found in the early Christian
16 document *Didache* 2.2 "You shall not murder a child by abortion, nor kill a child at birth"; and

17 WHEREAS, The practice of In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) involves the creation of human
18 embryos outside the womb often resulting in the destruction or indefinite freezing of
19 embryos, which contradicts the biblical teaching on the sanctity of human life and proper
20 context for procreation; and

21 WHEREAS, The practice of IVF undermines biblical understanding, reducing the child to
22 a product of human will and technological manipulation rather than seeing and receiving the
23 child as a gift from God (Genesis 30:2; Psalm 127:3); and

24 WHEREAS, The use of IVF introduces a separation between the procreative and unitive
25 aspects of marriage, thereby undermining the integrity of the marital union as God intended
26 it (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:31-33; LC I, 206-209); and

27 WHEREAS, The practice of IVF often involves surrogacy, which is the rental of another
28 woman's womb, also undermining the integrity of the marital union as God intended it; and

29 WHEREAS, IVF commodifies human life, treating embryos as objects to be used,
30 purchased, stored, or discarded, rather than recognizing them as persons created in the
31 image of God (Gen. 9:6), deserving of dignity and protection and all the rights thereof; and

32 WHEREAS, IVF commonly uses gametes (sperm and eggs) taken from a third party thus
33 violating the one flesh union and depriving the child of his natural right to his biological
34 mother and father; and

35 WHEREAS, The desire for children is good, right, and godly, but Scripture teaches that
36 sinful means may not be used to procure a good end; therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Wyoming District affirm children conceived by IVF are created in the
2 image of God; and be it further

3 *Resolved*, That the Wyoming District condemn the practice of In Vitro Fertilization (IVF)
4 as contrary to the teachings of Scripture, the tradition of the Church, and the sanctity of
5 human life and the one flesh union; and be it further

6 *Resolved*, That the Wyoming District urge its members to uphold the biblical
7 understanding of procreation as a sacred act within the marital union, rejecting practices that
8 treat human life as a commodity or a product of human will; and be it further

9 *Resolved*, That the Wyoming District commit to educating its members about the ethical
10 and theological problems and spiritual dangers surrounding IVF and surrogacy, encouraging
11 them to seek alternatives that respect the sanctity of life and the God-given dignity of all
12 human beings; and be it further

13 *Resolved*, That pastors of the Wyoming District be exhorted to provide pastoral
14 counseling and absolution for those who have engaged in the practice of IVF; and be it
15 further

16 *Resolved*, That the entire pastorate of the LCMS be encouraged to do the same, and be
17 it finally

18 *Resolved*, That the Wyoming District send this resolution to the Synod convention as an
19 overture.

1 **To Encourage Struggling Congregations to Provide Financially**
2 **For their Pastors**

3 **Resolution 07a**

4 *(Overture 02)*

5 WHEREAS, The life of the Church comes solely from Christ's Word and Sacraments, and
6 her pastors are the men called by God to administer these vital gifts to her; and

7 WHEREAS, Luther's Small Catechism Table of Duties regarding what the hearers owe their
8 pastors cites 1 Cor. 9:14, Gal. 6:6-7, 1 Tim. 5:17-18; 1 Thess. 5:12-13, and Heb. 13:17; and

9 WHEREAS, Congregations are called to care financially for their pastors (1 Timothy 5:18,
10 "For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,' and 'The
11 laborer is worthy of his wages'"); and

12 WHEREAS, Financial burdens of congregations (especially small congregations) are
13 increasing due to decreased active membership and rising costs, especially insurance; and

14 WHEREAS, Jesus instructs His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny
15 himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23), and bearing the cross is
16 therefore part of the life of all Christians; and

17 WHEREAS, Christians are called to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2); and

18 WHEREAS, Our Lord promises to provide for His Church (Matthew 6:31-33) and will never
19 let her fall (Matthew 16:18); therefore be it

20 *Resolved*, That congregations be encouraged to prioritize the care of their pastors and
21 pastors' families financially, according to the current district guidelines, both in salary and in
22 benefits, even in the midst of financial struggle; and be it further

23 *Resolved*, That congregations strive to bear one another's burdens, especially the
24 burdens of providing for a pastor and his family through both direct assistance and other
25 means such as entering into ministry sharing agreements or into multi-parish agreements; and
26 be it finally

27 *Resolved*, That congregations not be condemned, by others or by themselves, for being
28 unable to meet district compensation recommendations despite their best efforts to do so.

1 **To Commend Faithful Resources on Atonement and Justification**
2 **Against Antinomianism**

3 **Resolution 08a**

4 *(President's Report, pp. 17-58)*

5 WHEREAS, The error of antinomianism destroys the Doctrines of Justification and
6 Atonement in Christ, therefore be it

7 *Resolved*, That the Wyoming District in convention commend for reading by LCMS
8 pastors and laity faithful resources on Justification and Atonement in Christ:

- 9 • Article IV of the Augsburg Confession and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession,
- 10 • Formula of Concord, Articles I-VI
- 11 • *Without the Shedding of Blood* by Rev. Dr. David Scaer, published by Ad Crucem
- 12 • Recent titles by Synoptic Text Information Services such as but not limited to:
 - 13 ○ *Atonement in Confessional Lutheran Theology: Franz Pieper*
 - 14 ○ *Atonement in Confessional Lutheran Theology: Chorus of Voices*
 - 15 ○ *Atonement in Lutheran Orthodoxy: Baier-Walther*
 - 16 ○ *Atonement in Lutheran Orthodoxy: Johannes Quenstedt, 2nd ed.*
 - 17 ○ *Atonement in Lutheran Orthodoxy: Abraham Calov*

Appeal to Memorialize District Visitation by the Synod

Resolution 09a

(President's Report, pp. 17-58)

Preamble

The LCMS defines ecclesiastical oversight as

"The responsibility, primarily of the district president, to monitor; to make inquiry and receive a response thereto; to make suggestions; to bring concerns to the attention of a higher authority, namely the Synod status granting office, as relates specifically to the ecclesial relations of a recognized service organization operating within his district, and the impact and/or reflection of its work on the mission and ministry of the church. (Bylaw 1.2.i).

So also, the LCMS defines ecclesiastical supervision as

"The responsibility, primarily of the President of the Synod and district presidents, to supervise on behalf of the Synod the doctrine, life, and administration of its members, officers, and agencies. Such supervision, subject to the provisions of the Synod's Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions, includes visitation, evangelical encouragement and support, care, protection, counsel, advice, admonition, and, when necessary, appropriate disciplinary measures to assure that the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod are followed and implemented. Thus, ecclesiastical supervision is also the presenting, interpreting, and applying of the collective will of the Synod's congregations. Ecclesiastical supervision does not include the responsibility to observe, monitor, control, or direct the day-to-day activities of individual members of the Synod, whether in the conduct of their work or in their private lives (cf. Bylaw 2.14.1 [a]). Further, those constitutional articles and bylaws pertaining to ecclesiastical supervision shall determine the full definition of ecclesiastical supervision (LCMS Bylaw 1.2.j).

While the LCMS does not, strictly speaking, practice an episcopal form of governance, there remains an evangelical and biblical form of governance that places pastors under the supervision of their district president, and district presidents under the supervision of the President of Synod. That supervision is enacted by way of visitation (ἐπισκοπῆς, Luke 19:44).

It is the Evangelical Lutheran position that forms of governance are adiaphora, but as the LCMS Constitution and Bylaws are a human institution (1 Peter 2:13), Christians who have willingly aligned themselves with the LCMS are duty-bound to submit to the authority of the LCMS insofar as the LCMS remains faithful to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

The shared ordination vows of pastors, as well as the confirmation vows of laypersons, demonstrate that there is an earnest desire to *walk together* as Synod. There are, however, theological differences among pastors and laypersons that extend far beyond those topics that may be relegated to adiaphora.

1 Concerning supervision and oversight Martin Chemnitz, in his *Enchiridion* (1574) writes:

2 Now, when this little book was to be published, I then dedicated and addressed it
3 first to you, reverend heads of the monasteries of this duchy, because the reformation of
4 the monasteries was directed to this end, that the prelates should gradually be drawn in
5 and used in the consistory, for visitation, for examinations, and for synods, etc. and
6 because the examinations of pastors in the first visitation were for the most part held in
7 the monasteries, so that this little book might publicly testify what kind of doctrine it is
8 regarding which pastors were examined toward the beginning of the reformation,
9 which [doctrine] also Your Reverences embraced and still profess. Moreover, at the
10 same time I also addressed you, the superintendents, general and special, and all
11 pastors of the churches of this duchy, to testify publicly, confirm thoroughly, and firmly
12 preserve Christian, salutary unity in pure doctrine, against all pernicious corruptions,
13 among the ministers of the churches in the duchy and in the city of Brunswick, as this
14 very model of pure, incorrupt doctrine resounded by divine grace in all these
15 neighboring and other nearby churches of Saxony, in thesis and antithesis, till now and
16 still resounds, as the chief points are explained in a simple manner in this manual. And
17 since God has given His special grace and blessing, so that the Christian declaration of
18 the disputed points of religion - which [declaration] was incorporated in the church
19 order of the duchy of Brunswick, from which also this manual was for the most part
20 drawn - is approved and praised as correct by many leading churches, not only nearby
21 but also far away, I could not object when the printer wanted to issue this little book
22 anew, and I have also improved it in some places. And I hereby want the first, previous
23 dedication of this little book to Your Reverence and Honor to be repeated and
24 confirmed.

25 May the faithful and most merciful God rule, teach, bless, and keep us in pure
26 doctrine and unity of the Spirit, so that we may one and all, by the grace and help of the
27 Holy Spirit, according to the teaching of Paul, hold steadfastly to the Word, which is
28 salutary and sure, refute those who contradict, Tts 1:9, and endeavor to keep—besides
29 pure doctrine—Christian, brotherly, unity and the bond of peace, Eph 4:3. Let us guard
30 against unnecessary, vexatious division and schism, Ro 16:17. Let us not give way or
31 place, even in the least, to the wolf and to tares of false doctrine, Jo 10:12, but, as
32 Luther says, do both faithfully and diligently: feed the sheep and drive away the wolf.
33 Amen. Written at Brunswick, August 6, A.D. 1574

34 Martin Chemnitz,

35 Lord Superintendent

36 It is well-established by the LCMS that visitation is a duty of district presidents and the
37 President of Synod:

38 **Constitution**

Article III Objectives

The Synod under Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, shall–

1. Conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3–6; 1 Cor. 1:10), work through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom. 16:17), and heresy;
2. Strengthen congregations and their members in giving bold witness by word and deed to the love and work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and extend that Gospel witness into all the world;
3. Recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth;
4. Provide opportunities through which its members may express their Christian concern, love, and compassion in meeting human needs;
5. Aid congregations to develop processes of thorough Christian education and nurture and to establish agencies of Christian education such as elementary and secondary schools and to support synodical colleges, universities, and seminaries;
6. Aid congregations by providing a variety of resources and opportunities for recognizing, promoting, expressing, conserving, and defending their confessional unity in the true faith;
7. Encourage congregations to strive for uniformity in church practice, but also to develop an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith;
8. Provide evangelical supervision, counsel, and care for pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers of the Synod in the performance of their official duties;

Article XI Rights and Duties of Officers

A. In General

1. The officers of the Synod must assume only such rights as have been expressly conferred upon them by the Synod, and in everything pertaining to their rights and the performance of their duties they are responsible to the Synod.
2. The Synod at all times has the right to call its officers to account and, if circumstances require it, to remove them from office in accordance with Christian procedure. ...

B. Duties of the President

1. The President has the supervision regarding the doctrine and the administration of
 - a. All officers of the Synod;
 - b. All such as are employed by the Synod;

- c. The individual districts of the Synod;
- d. All district presidents.
2. It is the President's duty to see to it that all the aforementioned act in accordance with the Synod's Constitution, to admonish all who in any way depart from it, and, if such admonition is not heeded, to report such cases to the Synod.
3. The President has and always shall have the power to advise, admonish, and reprove. He shall conscientiously use all means at his command to promote and maintain unity of doctrine and practice in all the districts of the Synod.
4. The President shall see to it that the resolutions of the Synod are carried out.
- ...

Article XII

The district presidents shall, moreover, especially exercise supervision over the doctrine, life, and administration of office of the ordained and commissioned ministers of their district and acquaint themselves with the religious conditions of the congregations of their district. To this end they shall visit and, according as they deem it necessary, hold investigations in the congregations. Their assistants in this work are the circuit visitors, who therefore shall regularly make their reports to the district president. District presidents are empowered to suspend from membership ordained and commissioned ministers for persistently adhering to false doctrine or for having given offense by an ungodly life, in accordance with such procedure as shall be set forth in the Bylaws of the Synod.

Bylaw 1.9.2

Before materials stipulated in Bylaw 1.9.1 are published, they shall be submitted to (a) doctrinal reviewer(s). Reviewers shall make a careful evaluation of the doctrinal content of all items submitted. Materials are to be reviewed in a prompt manner and completed in no longer than four weeks. Exceptions shall be arranged by mutual agreement between the reviewer(s) and the originating entity.

- a) The primary responsibility for doctrinal supervision and review lies with the President of the Synod (Constitution Art. XI B 1).

Bylaw 4.4.3

The district president shall, in accordance with the Constitution of the Synod, in his ministry of ecclesiastical supervision, visit the congregations of the district.

- a) He shall arrange in advance for an official visit to each congregation of his district at least once every three years and otherwise as he deems it necessary. He may call upon the circuit visitors and vice-presidents to assist him with the triennial visitation of congregations.

- b) In his official visits he shall seek to bring about to the greatest possible degree the achievement of the Synod's objectives as expressed in Article III of its Constitution.
- c) He shall conduct his official visits in an evangelical manner.
- d) He shall come to the pastor and the congregation as a brotherly advisor, reminding them of the joy of serving in the mission and ministry of the church.
- e) In his visits he shall include fraternal discussion in regard to worship and communion attendance; participation by the congregation in missions and the work of the church at large; the congregation's evangelism and education endeavors; its cultivation of sound stewardship principles; all aspects of compensation for professional church workers; the need for maintenance of purity of doctrine; the strengthening of the bond of Christian fellowship; and the provision of resources, opportunities, and assistance so God's people can grow in their faith, hope, and love. ...

WHEREAS, All pastors of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod make the same vows upon their ordination and installation concerning pure doctrine; and

WHEREAS, It is the duty of district presidents to carry out ecclesiastical oversight and supervision per the bylaws of Synod; and

WHEREAS, It is the duty of the President of Synod to carry out ecclesiastical supervision per the bylaws of Synod; and

WHEREAS, It is the duty of Synod in convention to exhort the men who hold such offices to do their duty; and

WHEREAS, Christians are called to submit to all human institutions (1 Peter 2:13); and

WHEREAS, Hebrews 13:17 teaches that submission to leaders is to be done out of love and respect with the confession that such leaders watch over the souls of those under them and will have to give an account to Christ at judgment day; and

WHEREAS, Pastors must therefore give an account for the souls in their congregations (Hebrews 13:17; Acts 20:28); and

WHEREAS, District presidents must therefore give an account for the pastors in their district; and

WHEREAS, The Synod President must therefore give an account for district presidents; and

WHEREAS, Proverbs 10:17 teaches that paternal discipline is a blessing to the one being disciplined. Proverbs 23:13-14, Hebrews 12:5-6, & 12:11 also teach this lesson; and

WHEREAS, God desires that all people - including pastors - would repent when their error is made known to them (Ezekiel 33:11; Matthew 18; 2 Peter 3:9); and

WHEREAS, No one lights a lamp and then hides it (Luke 8:16); therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That congregational pastors and district presidents be open and transparent
2 with their ecclesiastical supervisors concerning their doctrine and practice; and be it further

3 *Resolved*, That the President of Synod be encouraged to visit each district at least once
4 during each triennium for the sake of theological review, pastoral counseling, and reproof
5 where necessary; and be it further

6 *Resolved*, That district presidents allow their leaders to visit them “with joy and not with
7 groaning,” (Hebrews 13:17); and be it finally

8 *Resolved*, That this resolution be sent as an overture to the 2026 LCMS convention.

1 **To Allow Pastors to Opt Out of Pre-Call Interviews and/or Contact**

2 **Resolution 10**

3 WHEREAS, the Call to a pastor is a Divine Call extended by a congregation through the
4 guidance of the Holy Spirit; and

5 WHEREAS, pre-call interviews and contact can sometimes be perceived as shifting the
6 focus from a Divine Call to a secular hiring process; and

7 WHEREAS, this option respects the pastor's current ministry and personal discernment
8 process; therefore be it

9 *Resolved*, That the Wyoming District of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod in
10 convention assembled hereby petitions the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod to establish a
11 policy allowing pastors to opt out of pre-call interviews and/or pre-call contact initiated by
12 calling congregations.

1 **To Encourage President Hill to Publish His Essays**

2 **Resolution 11**

3 WHEREAS, The Reverend President John Hill has established himself as an excellent
4 theologian, speaker, and essayist; and

5 WHEREAS, Reverend Hill's devoted service to the Wyoming District has limited the
6 reception of his essays to the Wyoming District; and

7 WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod is always in need of good, written
8 materials on faithful expressions of Lutheranism; therefore be it

9 *Resolved*, That the 21st Convention of the Wyoming District of the LCMS encourages
10 President Hill to submit a collection of essays to an editor with the eventual goal of
11 hardbound publishing before the end of calendar year 20

