

WHY LEAVE THE LUTHERAN CHURCH - MISSOURI SYNOD?

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Dear Friends in Christ,

When I received the phone call from Rev. Andrew Simcak inviting me to speak to you on the topic *Why Leave the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod?* I found myself thinking of an incident that took place in the life of Winston Churchill. It was an occasion where he was to speak to a large gathering of people. The chairman of the event leaned over and said, "Isn't it exciting, Mr. Churchill, that all these people came just to hear you speak?" Winston Churchill responded, "It is quite flattering, but whenever I feel this way I always remember that if instead of making a political speech I was being hanged, the crowd would be twice as big."

Now, I'm not placing myself along side a Winston Churchill, but the thought crossed my mind that by standing before you and saying what I'm going to say I could very well experience both flattery and a hanging in the space of a couple of hours. Well, maybe, mostly the hanging part.

One thing good about being a pastor of an independent Lutheran congregation is that if you should bring charges against me for heresy they will fall to the wayside. Sort of like the way it is now with Missouri's Dispute Resolution process.

I would have you note, at this juncture, that while the presentation this day will utilize a number of what I consider respected sources I will be drawing to some extent from Dr. Francis Pieper's *The Distinction Between Orthodox & Heterodox Churches* because it so very poignant for our considerations this day.

SOMETHING WRONG

When Pilgrim Lutheran Church and her pastors officially left the Missouri Synod in October of 2004 there were those who wanted to know why we left. Not that this was a surprise, mind you, but it was that strange, curious look on faces and the impatience that demanded an answer within 2 to 3 minutes which were, at best, interesting. The most succinct answer was: "Because our conscience, individually and collectively, could no longer bear the fact that the Missouri Synod has progressively moved itself away from its orthodox roots; that even with the all too short time of the now sainted A. L. Barry the Missouri Synod lost ground; and that with the election of Gerald Kieschnick - and his re-election in 2004 - and now you can add 2007 - the cry of "Just wait until the next convention!" has become that and nothing more. A cry.

I served for nearly 9 years on the Central Illinois District Board of Directors of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. During those years I served as Second Vice President and First Vice President of the District. I vividly remember all the clandestine meetings and efforts, even back to my first years in the ministry, and with them all the hopes and dreams that Missouri's pernicious and persistent drifting to the theological left could be corrected.

Case in point: the Pittsburgh Convention and the election of Dr. Barry to his first term as President of the Missouri Synod. I remember standing next to one of the finest, if not the finest, theologian of the late 20th century, Dr. Robert Preus, talking about the convention and where things were headed. I remember when Dr. Barry was elected. Dr. Preus turned to me and suggested that with Dr. Barry's election everything would fall into place. But it didn't. Something was wrong. And little of significance fell into place in spite of the next convention and the re-election of Dr. Barry and a mostly conservative Praesidium and Board of Directors. Indeed, something was wrong.

It was less than one year after Pilgrim left the Missouri Synod when I received a phone call from an elder of a Missouri Synod congregation in the Central Illinois District. He was upset and confused because their new pastor, a graduate of Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne - without any discussion, insight or teaching - moved the baptismal font to the back of the sanctuary. In a sermon of October 2005, the pastor stated, "You can't get into the kingdom of God without passing through the waters of baptism. You can't get into this church without passing that font. You can't look on a Holy God unless you are forgiven of your sins in baptism. You don't face the altar until you have confessed your sins in baptism. You don't face the altar until you have confessed your sins and received absolution at the font." In another sermon from December 2005 he stated, "In the sanctuary, the altar can be viewed, in one sense, as the location of God in all his glory. When we enter the nave, we come carrying our sin. We are unfit to approach the altar, or even to look at it."

I received a phone call from a second elder a couple of weeks later expressing the same concerns. And a third elder informed me that in a discussion with the pastor over his decisions and statements, the pastor informed him that a pastor has "the right to rule by fiat." The pastor later denied he had made the statement, which bothered the elder since, after the statement, the elder went home, got out his dictionary and looked up the meaning of "fiat". For the sake of clarity, *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition*, defines *fiat* as "...1 : a command or act of will that creates something without or as if without further effort 2 : an authoritative determination... 3 : an authoritative or arbitrary order..." Perhaps the most disturbing part of the pastor's statement is embedded in the first four words: "the right to rule..."

The elders were seeking some advice. I told them they should talk with their pastor and try to determine the basis for his statements, and that if the laity was not actively engaged in the life and doctrine of the church they would have a most difficult time. As I recall, I sent one of them a copy of C.F.W. Walther's *The Sheep Judge Their Shepherds* where Walther notes this:

In God's Kingdom we are all equal. Holy Baptism takes the purple from the king, and the rags from the beggar, and clothes them both in the robes of Christ's righteousness. In divine matters it does not depend on learning, or holiness, or cleverness or prudence. It often happens, rather, that the most learned are the

most perverse. Human wisdom is foolishness to God. Human cleverness is to Him stupidity. Human righteousness is to Him sin. If a learned man would enter heaven, he must climb down from the heights of his human wisdom and become a child. For God reveals His mysteries only to babes who humbly acknowledge their natural blindness and darkness. Therefore in divine matters no one is excluded from the judicial office. All Christ's sheep are judges, both learned and layman, a man and wife, bachelor and spinster, young and old, for it concerns each one's soul, his own life, his own salvation. (The Reverend Dr. C.F.W. Walther, *The Sheep Judge Their Shepherds*).

In spite of their efforts, a number of supportive and active families, including the three elders and their families, left the congregation. The pastor ultimately took a call elsewhere.

What I want you to note about this incident is that the pastor was not a church growth, CEO type. And he wasn't Waltherian in his understanding of Church and Ministry. Something is wrong, the wrong has grown, and it has gained a solid foothold. (In a conversation with the former pastor on October 20, 2008, I was assured by him that he never intended to present himself to the congregation in such a manner, that his statement regarding a pastor ruling by "fiat" was never made, that his statements were either taken out of context or misunderstood, and he expressed the fact that I should have contacted him in advance. I do apologize for not having first discussed this with him).

Sainted professor Dr. Eugene F. A. Klug writes:

There are two extremes which have appeared from time to time as regards the pastoral office, the one the Romanizing view, the other the "congregationalist" notion that has devalued and denigrated the office into a mere "job." According to the first (the Romanizing view), the office of the clergy, or priest, has been elevated entirely out of proportion to what God intended. It was conceived to be a higher, self-perpetuating estate. It became a virtual means of grace, according to which the ministrations of the ordained priest were counted as essential to salvation, episcopal ordination itself being viewed as essential. According to this aberration an indelible character is conveyed or conferred through the ordination which makes the administrator of the means of grace efficacious as to his own person. A similar high-church notion has appeared in Lutheran theology time and again. Walther had to contend against it in the person of and by the stir caused by John Grabau in the 19th century. Concurrently Wilhelm Loehe also fostered a mistaken notion concerning the self-perpetuating nature of the pastoral office. He stated: "The Office transplants itself. Only he who has the Office can transfer it to another." (Eugene F. A. Klug, *Church and Ministry*, St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1993, pp. 154-155).

Elsewhere Klug says:

Luther saw no primacy of jurisdiction for the clergy over the laity because of God's ordaining of the office of pastor, nor vice versa a subjecting of the clergy under the laity. For Luther the divine ordering of the congregation around the ministry of the Word was directly inter-connected with the divine instituting of the holy ministry of the pastoral office through the instrumentality of the calling people, or congregation of "priests." We must see, argued Walther, that God has closely linked these two great existential truths in the life of the church, and any neglect or distortion of them will lead to hurt. (C.F.W. Walther: *The American Luther, Essays in Commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of Carl Walther's Death*, Freeman S. Dakota, Pine Hill Press, 1987, p.4.).

Some of you might recall that this past season of Lent a Missouri Synod congregation in Michigan ran, for its Lenten theme, a series on human sexuality. The altar area - or was it the staging area? - or was it the entertainment area? - well, whatever they called it was turned into a bedroom setting. I saw a picture of it and tried to grasp what it would be like to receive the Body and Blood of Christ at such an "altar". And it's always the same, old nonsense: "We've got to do what's necessary to win people for Christ." The pastor becomes the Chief Executive Officer of the congregation, the main cheerleader hooraying the congregation through the waters of raw pragmatism with just enough theology to make it all seem so plausible. Well, at least warm and fuzzy. The unbelief in the efficacy of God's Word should be beyond alarming! Something is wrong, the wrong has grown into a hideous monstrosity, and it's foothold is obvious by virtue of the results of the last three Synodical conventions.

Dr. Klug writes:

"The second faulty notion, however, is virtually as destructive of the Lord's intent concerning the office of the ministry. It views the office as a kind of free creation of the early church, having apostolic precedent and sanction, but not resting upon distinct divine command. It loosely describes the position of Johann Hoefling, a 19th century Erlangen theologian. As might be expected, this led to a downgrading of the office in the eyes of those who were served by it, as well as the duties, responsibilities, and prerogatives pertaining to it. Gone, or at least subdued, was the direct link with divine authority, that God had expressly ordained its existence, and that God held those who filled the office accountable for certain prescribed duties. Gone, too, was a high sense of divine authority, under which the incumbent of the office viewed his calling as originating with God and the congregation viewed its task as a solemn mandate under God to call a worthy servant into the office and to accord him due respect in his office as God's emissary speaking His Word for their obedient hearing. The office had slipped into low esteem as a sort of contractual arrangement, a practical, business-like solution to a congregation's need.

“When Christian congregations call pastors into their service they are not exercising an option which has desirable advantages for their work but they are proceeding in accord with God’s express command...” (Ibid, p. 155).

Back in May of this year a Missouri Synod congregation in the Central Illinois District received a wonderful newspaper write-up because, as the article stated, of its “partnering with Main Street Church of the Living God” for a “Gospel Concert and Potluck.” The Missouri Synod pastor “said it’s been one of his aspirations to have a gospel choir perform at the church.” The Church of the Living God pastor said, “This is an excellent time to present ourselves as unified in the body of Christ... As pastors we have to unify ourselves before having unanimity within the body of Christ.”

The absence of real concern over doctrine or doctrinal unity in these statements is not remarkable. It is indicative of where Missouri has been heading for some years. Exchange of choirs, Gospel concerts and pot-lucks, and feeling good about God and us have become the marks of the visible church. The driving force of the church is not the Word. For many, as in this case, it’s human reasoning and sentimentality. As Dr. Luther stated,

Therefore, do not speak to me of love and friendship if the Word and doctrine are to be destroyed; for it is not love but the Word that brings eternal life, divine grace, and all heavenly gifts. C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, Saint Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1987, p. 127).

Another Missouri Synod pastor, who is a dear friend, called me one afternoon and informed me that he had called for a meeting with the pastor responsible for this “partnering” and that the meeting would include the Circuit Counselor. He wanted my take on the issue since Pilgrim and her pastors had been in severe conflict with church growth churches in the Missouri Synod since the early 90’s. I told him that the Circuit Counselor would brush it aside with a smile; that it probably wouldn’t get to the district level, and even if it did the District President would brush it aside; or that the District President would do what he did when Pilgrim and others brought a couple of congregations of the same mind-set before him: brush it aside and demand that everybody get back in their circuit meetings and work it out. Well, the pastor met with the errant pastor and the Circuit Counselor and the whole thing has been neatly brushed aside. All of this in the Central Illinois District of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, once considered one of the most conservative/confessional districts.

My dear friends, these are not isolated incidents. They are exact pictures of the fragmentation that marks the Missouri Synod. Church growthers of various shades on one side, echos of Grabau and Loehe on the other, and somewhere between here and there what appears to be the fading voice of Walther. Something is wrong, alright - and the something has been fomenting in Missouri for a long, long time. And it is irreparably embedded in the very fabric of Missouri.

I recall a lunch my son and I had about 15 years ago with a Synodical official. We expressed our concern and dismay that the obvious and growing disregard for Word and Sacrament ministry among pastors and congregations was at the point of no-return. We were assured that such would not be the case if we fight. The most disturbing part of the conversation was when he told us that we would never be able to turn the ship completely around (that is, get the Synod back to where it was some 60 years ago), but we could turn it around sufficiently. We did not realize there was a point where false teaching could be “sufficiently” tolerated.

While I’ve always had deep concerns about Reverends - and even laymen - in full time political positions in the Church, that incident only underscored my concerns. Let’s at least face it honestly: Reverends who have left their pulpits and altars behind; who see a political hierarchy as necessary to the function of the corporation (Oops! I mean *synod*) will, more than likely, dance to whatever tune that will keep their constituents at bay; will help them win re-election; that will keep order so that a money eating bureaucracy can survive. I have my suspicions and you have yours: Under the guise of “saving souls for Jesus” the real concerns are numbers and money and power.

POHLERS/MOYER CONFESSION

In September 2004 the Rev. Donald Pohlers and Rev. John Moyer issued a *Public State of Confession*. In their *Confession* they briefly highlighted Missouri’s history since 1945. I will not read the whole paper to you, but I do want to read a fair portion of it which contains very salient insights. They write:

Since at least 1945 and the publication of the “Statement of the 44,” our synod has been embroiled in a period of public turmoil over doctrine and practice...

From the mid 1950s through 1974 students at Concordia Senior College and Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, along with students at River Forest and other institutions of higher learning...were introduced by a number of professors and theologians to theological positions, which were contrary to the official doctrinal position of the Synod.... This infidelity in teaching and practice was exacerbated on the graduate level at the St. Louis Seminary where a number of professors rejected such teachings as:

1. The inerrancy of the Scriptures and the veracity of their historical, geographical, and scientific assertions;
2. The identification of the Scriptures as the Word of God;
3. The immortality of the soul, the doctrine of the resurrection in the Old Testament, and related teachings;
4. Rectilinear prophecy-especially as this related to Christ;
5. Authorship and/or apostolicity of certain Scriptural writings-especially that of Moses, Isaiah, and certain Pauline Epistles;

6. Close(d) communion, while permitting those of other denominations and of dubious commitment to Christianity to commune at Eucharistic worship services conducted at the seminary. These same professors arrogantly and cavalierly dismissed concerns regarding these unbiblical practices which were appropriately filed at the time with the Dean of the Chapel;
7. Rejection of the Third use of the Law;
8. Historic doctrinal positions in favor of Gospel reductionism;
9. The historicity of certain individuals in the Scripture acknowledged by our Lord and the holy writers as real people and the Bible's account of certain miracles and miraculous events-for example: the creation of the world and mankind, a universal flood, the crossing of the Sea of Reeds (Red Sea), the account of Jonah, miracles of Jesus and the Apostles, and other events in favor of a mythological understanding.

...With the election of Dr. J.A.O. Preus II to the synodical presidency, the false doctrine being taught at a number of Synod's schools finally began to receive the attention it deserved...

...However, the efforts of the synodical president were both too little and too short-lived. Certain district presidents were suspended, unfaithful faculty members at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis were terminated, and a number of unfaithful pastors, professors, and laymen withdrew from synodical membership to form another church body. Nevertheless,

1. Some district presidents who openly supported false doctrine and unbiblical practices were allowed to continue in ministry and their leadership positions while still openly supporting doctrinal positions and practices contrary to the Synod's doctrinal beliefs and commitment.
2. Seminex graduates were allowed to become certified as synodical pastors while maintaining the theological errors to which they had been committed before certification; and
3. Many pastors, teachers, and laymen who had supported false doctrine and unbiblical practices were never confronted with their sin or invited to repent and repudiate the unbiblical positions they had publicly espoused.

Most significant and related to our present concern is the fact that members of Synod who had formerly aligned themselves with false doctrine and unbiblical practices - including church fellowship with other unfaithful Lutheran denominations and joint membership with these denominations - were generally ignored and allowed to continue in their beliefs and practices. We believe that the Synod during this period thereby abandoned in practice the doctrine of the Office of the Keys and tolerated false doctrine in a "don't ask, don't tell" mentality.

With the accession of Rev. Dr. Ralph Bohlmann to the synodical presidency in 1981 those who espoused positions contrary to Scripture seemed to be free once again to resume more openly their sinful behavior of false teaching and unbiblical practice. Faithful pastors, professors, and even a doctrinally faithful seminary president, however, were persecuted and deprived of their divine calls by a “show of right,” and the Synod continued to drift farther from God’s truth in its doctrinal understanding and practice.

With the elections of Dr. Al Barry and Dr. Robert Kuhn in the early 1990s many of us believed that the Lord was sparing us from the judgment we, as a Synod, deserved for our long-standing toleration of false doctrine and unbiblical practices and our neglect of the Office of the Keys through faithful proclamations and application of Law and Gospel... However, persecutions of faithful pastors and professors continued - often provoked by unfaithful district presidents. Moreover, the efforts of Revs. Al Barry and Robert Kuhn appear to have been frequently undermined on the district level and, apparently also within the Council of Presidents...

Since the election of Rev. Gerald Kieschnick as synodical president in A.D. 2001, it soon became obvious that this is not “our grandfather’s church,” to use Kieschnick’s own expression. Within ten days of his election, Rev. Kieschnick authorized the violation of Synod’s historic doctrinal position regarding syncretism and unionism by a district president with the full knowledge that, in so doing, this district president was also violating a public promise he had made to the Synod several years earlier when he was under discipline by President Al Barry for a similar offense.

Thus, regretfully, we have come to believe that a renewed spirit of disobedience to the Word of God has seized our Synod, and the approval of the recent Synodical convention [2004] of understandings and actions which we consider to be unbiblical confirms that belief. We also fear that our dear Lord has now brought our beloved Synod into renewed judgment and discipline by permitting the leadership of a biblically unfaithful synodical president in much the same way as he disciplined Israel in the days of the Judges. Since, as a synod, we have tolerated false doctrine and unbiblical practices for some sixty years, while failing to uphold the Office of the Keys - both on a congregational and synodical level, the Lord now has permitted the Commission on Constitutional Matters...to make the application of Matthew 18:15-18 and John 20:22-23 difficult, if not impossible. Those who violate the teaching of Scripture are now protected by synodical leaders and the synod itself...

We believe and are ready to offer biblical and confessional evidence for the assertions that President Kieschnick has tolerated a variety of false doctrines and those who practice them and that he has sinned by omission in failing to defend publicly those who have upheld the truth of God's Word, such as...Rev. Dr. Wallace Schulz, who was sinfully removed from his position as Lutheran Hour Speaker by "a show of right."

With Gerald Kieschnick's recent re-election to the synodical presidency on July, 2004, and the election of those who are loyal to his sinful and unbiblical positions, the Synod has established itself, beyond any doubt in our minds, as a heterodox church body. (Portions of the Pohlers/Moyer *Confession*, September 2004).

Reflecting on the Pohlers/Moyer *Confession* I re-called that I was in my Sem. II year at Concordia Theological Seminary, then Springfield, Illinois, at the time of the St. Louis Seminary walk-out of 1974. I remember thinking, as many thought, if there wasn't a concerted effort to discipline pastors and congregations sympathetic to the walk-out and Seminex the cancer that brought about the walk-out would continue to grow and overtake the Missouri Synod.

ISSUES THAT CAN'T BE RESOLVED

It is not my intention to make a theological excursus of the issues that have plagued and continue to plague The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. I would only list them in passing:

1. Altar and Pulpit Fellowship (with special reference to A Prayer at Yankee Stadium).
2. The Missouri Synod's relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
3. The Sacrament of the Altar - Closed Communion.
4. The Church Growth Movement.
5. Contemporary Worship.
6. Renewal in Missouri.
7. The Service of Women.
8. The Office of the Keys (with special reference to ecclesiastical supervision and dispute resolution).
9. The Relation of the Synod to its Members (i.e., the binding force of the Constitution).
10. Stewardship.

There are others far more qualified than I am who can deal with all the nuances and histories of the issues. Besides, anyone in the Missouri Synod, layman or clergy, not familiar with what has happened and where the Missouri Synod is relative to its theological position is so without excuse. The fact is, the issues I just mentioned have gained wide acceptance and support in spite of every effort to deal with them.

For Pilgrim Lutheran Church David Benke's *A Prayer for America* at Yankee Stadium and the Synodical Convention of 2004 were catalysts which brought all the issues into a final focus. I realize that, in one sense, the Yankee Stadium issue is hardly the one issue causing

departure. It was, however, the issue which impressed upon us that there is a history in Missouri which not only emboldened a District President to reduce the Triune God to one among many but has obviously allowed him, as we say, to get by with it. Again, *A Prayer for America* was a catalyst which has brought so many issues into focus - an illustration that Missouri is deplorably divided and, while its "most reverend" politicians pay lip service to the inspired, inerrant Word of God and faithfulness to its Confessions, all issues finally meet at the crossroads of a Constitution and its By-laws which are subject to the twisting and stretching of those who have the power to enforce the twisting and stretching.

In his *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Heinrich Schmid notes the following:

(John Gerhard)...under the caption "things Hostile to the Ministry of the Word," discusses the chief hindrances to the efficiency of the gospel ministry... A heresy he thus defines: "A heresy is any private opinion, which any one selects for his reception in preference to a Christian doctrine and the Catholic faith, and obstinately defends... That any one should be a heretic, properly so called, it is necessary (1) that he be a person received into the visible Church by the Sacrament of Baptism; (2) that he err in the faith; whether he introduce an unheard-of-error or embrace one received from another, although the former seems to be peculiar to a heresiarch, and the latter to a heretic; (3) that the error directly conflict with the very foundation of the faith; (4) that to the error there be joined wickedness and obstinacy, through which, though frequently admonished, he obstinately defends his error; (5) that he excite dissensions and scandals in the Church, and rend its unity." (Heinrich Schmid, D. D., *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Minneapolis 15, Minn., Augsburg Publishing House, reprint edition, p. 615).

Taking into consideration the fickleness of human nature and how quickly Americans are bored with most issues the passing of time only diminishes any real interest or concern, much less the reality that what evolved at Yankee Stadium was heresy. Almost 6 years have passed and it appears that the majority of the reverend politicians, pastors and laity of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod have long since pacified themselves with what they perceive to be the correctness of the issue, or have suppressed their consciences. This last convention says an additional 3 years will pass with no resolution in sight.

I can't even begin to count how many lay people either pretend not to be aware of the Yankee Stadium issue, or simply see it as a squabble among a bunch of silly pastors who lack love and empathy for the hurting. And if taking up the cause means a disturbance or split in the congregation many lay people are far too in love with stones and stained glass windows and the crucifix great-great Grandpa Wilhelm donated for the Altar than the plundering of God's most precious and life giving Word. After all, the family has been in the same church for five generations. We couldn't abandon it now, could we?

Dr. Eugene Klug writes:

“Doctrine is given of God. The right and duty of knowing and testifying for it belong to pastors and people alike. Thus in the congregations the laity are expected to know and judge in matters doctrinal, and not only the clergy, though the latter may have greater theological training. As Luther pointed out, false *prophets* are not in the pew, but in the pulpit, and it is the hearers who are exhorted by God in His Word to judge between the false and the true prophets on the basis of His Word...

“It is a fact of no little significance that the Lutheran Confessions were as much the fruit of concerned laymen acting in behalf of the truth, as first of all of theologians involved in their production...” (Klug, *Church and Ministry*, pp. 287-288).

And Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

It is important to point out again and again that in all Scripture there is not a single text permitting a teacher to deviate from the Word of God or granting a child of God license to fraternize with a teacher who deviates from the Word of God. God is against the prophets who proclaim their own dreams (Jer. 23:31f.). And all Christians without exception are commanded to avoid such (Rom. 16:17; I Tim., 6:3ff.). (Francis Pieper, D. D., *Christian Dogmatics*, Volume III, St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1953, p. 422).

PERSISTENT CONFLICT

Points 28 and 29 found on page 13 of the *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* adopted in 1932 state the following:

“28. *On Church-Fellowship.* - Since God ordained that His Word *only*, without admixture of human doctrine, be taught and believed in the Christian Church, I Pet. 4:11; John 8:31,32; I Tim. 6:3,4, all Christians are required by God to discriminate between orthodox and heterodox church-bodies, Matt. 7:15, to have church-fellowship only with orthodox church-bodies, and, in case they have strayed into heterodox church-bodies, to leave them, Rom. 16:17. We repudiate *unionism*, that is, church-fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God’s command, as causing divisions in the Church, Rom. 16:17; 2 John 9,10, and as involving the constant danger of losing the Word of God entirely, 2 Tim. 2:17-21.

“29. The orthodox character of a church is established not by its mere name nor by its outward acceptance of, and subscription to, an orthodox creed, but by the doctrine which is *actually* taught in its pulpits, in its theological seminaries, and in its publications. On the other hand, a church does not forfeit its orthodox character through the casual intrusion of errors, provided these are combated and

eventually removed by means of doctrinal discipline, Acts 20:30; I Tim. 1:3.”

There are issues which have been and are being promoted and accepted in The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod which are most definitely in conflict with the Word and Lutheran Confessions. The last three Synodical Conventions have underscored, re-underscored and screamed the truth of this. The wide acceptance of the Church Growth Movement underscores it. The growing practice of open communion underscores it. Contemporary worship models underscore it. The pretense that what happened at Yankee Stadium is not an issue underscores it. The rejection of The Office of the Keys for Dispute Resolution underscores it. These are not minor issues or casual error. These are issues that have altered the orthodox character of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod and nothing has stopped this processional of errant, unrepentant behavior. To repeat, once again, from the *Brief Statement*: “The orthodox character of a church is established not by its mere name nor by its outward acceptance of, and subscription to, an orthodox creed, but by the doctrine which is *actually* taught in its pulpits, in its theological seminaries, and in its publications.”

And look at this: pastoral and lay delegates representing the wishes and desires of their various circuits and districts have repeatedly given approval of an agenda for Missouri that has moved it away from its orthodox roots. It has become increasingly obvious that the majority of laity in The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod prefer the “new” Missouri. And get this: Even resolutions which support orthodoxy and have been passed at Synodical Conventions are ignored.

You noted the reference to Romans 16:17 from the *Brief Statement* : “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.” - NKJV). Consider a portion of what Dr. Walther says regarding this passage:

“It is a dangerous error when a person thinks that the visible Lutheran Church is the Church, outside of which there is no salvation, and therefore only those who call themselves Lutheran can be saved. Yet it is just as false to suppose that because many people who are not members of the visible Lutheran Church are saved, the visible church to which a person belongs is of no consequence. This erroneous notion also involves the belief that whoever finds himself in a heterodox Church can remain in it without danger to his soul, and whoever belongs to the right-believing Lutheran Church can, without danger to his soul, leave that church for another.

“Here we see that God clearly prohibits fellowship between orthodox Christians and the heretics. Whoever persists in that fellowship sins against the commandment of the Lord, and whoever does so knowingly and willingly sins grievously, even mortally.” (God Grant It, Daily Devotions From C.F.W. Walther, Saint Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 2006, pp. 380-381).

In his second Epistle John writes, "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him, for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds." (2 John 10-11 NKJV). In other words, the proclamation of false doctrine is a terrible infection that not only rapidly spreads, but will bring spiritual decay and death.

My friends, you cannot read Scripture and conclude that God wants His people to remain theologically intimate with false teaching. Scriptures consistently call God's people to remove themselves from such settings. The Patriarchs of old whom God separated from the world around them, the cry of the Old Testament Prophets, our Lord's and the Apostles' calls to remove ourselves from those who bring destructive heresies are deafening warnings for this day!

There was a time when you could go to any church in the Missouri Synod and know you were at home. Those days are gone. Again and again synodical resolutions as well as official publications are promoting "new methods" which are destructive to the flock. They are an assault on the means of grace. And you are expected to tolerate these methods and financially support them. Missouri is ABLAZE, alright. It has thrown itself into a fire that has momentarily and permanently altered it, and not for the good.

Dr. Pieper writes:

"Furthermore, all Christians are expressly warned to *guard themselves carefully against false prophets*. 'Beware of false prophets,' Christ exhorts them in Matt. 7:15. And St. John impresses upon them, 2 John 10: 'If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine - namely, the doctrine of Christ - receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed,' that is, as a brother in the faith. Yes, the orthodoxy of the Church is such a serious thing with God that in the Old Testament, when He employed bodily punishments in the Church, He commanded His believers to stone the false prophets who led the people away from the Lord's commands, even when that false prophet was the nearest relative. Thus we read in that noteworthy passage of Deut. 13:6ff.: 'If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou nor thy fathers; namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; thou shalt not consent unto him; nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: but thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all thy people and thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die.'

"Thus God had ordained it in the Old Testament. In the New Testament this bodily punishment is expressly done away with. But with this law in the Old Testament, God has shown what a most serious thing the orthodoxy of the Church is to Him. In the New Testament, Paul expresses something similar when,

in Galatians 1:9, he pronounces the curse upon all who stubbornly falsify God's Word." (Pieper, *The Distinction Between Orthodox & Heterodox Churches*, pp. 15-16).

WHAT ABOUT STAYING AND FIGHTING?

We (i.e., Pilgrim and her pastors) are keenly aware of the admonition by many to stay and fight in order to remove the errors. This position fails to appreciate the fight that has already been going on for some time, as already outlined in this presentation. It also fails to grasp that the process of dispute resolution and the removal of error is entirely dependent upon those officials who are charting and/or supporting the new course for the Synod; namely the District Presidents and the Synodical President.

Again, the history of the past 60 years and, most recently, the past three conventions, as well as what is taking place in actual practice, have clearly demonstrated that the removal of error and the ability to remove errors is non-existent. Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

You may say: "I want to remain in the heterodox church in order to accomplish good in it, namely, to prevent it from losing the truth altogether." If you happen to be in a heterodox church, then first of all, bear witness to the truth clearly and definitely. If they listen to you, good. Under certain circumstances you can *wait* a little, to see whether the truth is accepted. But as soon as it is *clear* that they will not accept the truth, you must separate yourself from that group which holds to error. If you, nevertheless, remain in it, then you are no longer reinforcing the *truth*, but rather, the *error*. It is blindness if you suppose that you are still a witness-bearer for the truth when you continue in fellowship with openly known errorists. It is an absolute contradiction to be both a witness-bearer for the truth, and an associate of false teachers. As *Luther* says: You "cannot remain in the same stall with others who propagate false doctrine or are attached to it or always speak good words to the devil and his crowd." (Pieper, *The Difference Between Orthodox and Heterodox Churches*, pg. 49).

Dear friends, we're talking over 60 years of fighting false teaching! I don't claim to be a great exegete, but I see nothing in Scripture that would remotely condone what has only worsened. We're looking at false teaching that has persisted and reasserted itself after repeated efforts to confront and correct it! And it has gained a solid foothold over a period of several generations! And the cry is - what? - "stay and fight?" The Scriptures call for a separating of the ways.

When Pilgrim left the Missouri Synod there were those, of course, quite critical of the fact that we didn't stay and fight. But I will tell you that the pastors and lay leaders of Pilgrim understood that for the sake of the laity and because of the family connections and inner congregational relationships of the Decatur Circuit (e.g., LWML, LLL) there had to be a separation. The separation and distinction had to be made in order to avoid confusion for the

flock; that they might clearly understand and grasp the seriousness and severity of Missouri's "new" direction.

To remain in the Missouri Synod would have resulted in the diminishing and/or loss of force and momentum of the issues dividing the Missouri Synod; would have dulled the distinction between the truth and false doctrine for the laity; and would have lulled the flock into thinking that the issues were important - but not all that important! We did not and do not see how anyone can conclude that the situation in the Missouri Synod is nothing more than the intrusion of error that can be resolved in time. Time has proven the contrary. The 2007 convention has underscored the reality. The laity had to come to terms with its stand and witness to the truth.

Over the years, prior to leaving the Missouri Synod, we persistently encouraged the laity to become informed of the issues and never to excuse themselves with the thinking that because the Pastor says so, or the District President says so, or the Synodical President says so, or any convention says so means it's "so".

I'll say to the laity here what we said to the laity at Pilgrim many times and in different ways: If the laity of our congregation does not become seriously involved, carefully informed and willing to stand with their pastors the day will come when Mr. or Ms. Pastor is standing in his or her pulpit telling them that it really doesn't make any difference what anybody believes as long as they believe something, and that everyone is welcome to mince up to the communion rail as soon as the rock band finishes its Christian rendition of "I Want To Hold Your Hand" - or something along that line.

In a sermon, Dr. Walther said:

Now if Christian congregations do not want to fall again under a human yoke, an ungodly human guardianship, then they must hold firmly to the precious right of the spiritual priesthood, which all Christians have, that is, the right themselves to sacrifice, themselves to pray, themselves to search the Scriptures, themselves to examine and judge all doctrine, themselves to teach, warn, admonish and comfort one another. Where this right and this duty is not recognized or not practiced, there the Word of God cannot long remain, there is no blessing, there is no zeal. There everything turns to sleep, sluggishness, indifference. There one wants only to be led and borne, not himself to lead and bear, only to be directed, not himself to make judgments. In the end the despising and rejection of the truth must necessarily follow. (*C.F.W. Walther: The American Luther, Essays in Commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of Carl Walther's Death*, Freeman, S. Dakota, Pine Hill Press, 1987, p.76).

Frequently, we hear references to “our beloved Synod.” I deeply understand the thought here, especially as I recall the pastors of Pilgrim wrestling with our direction before and after the convention of 2004. The ache in the heart, the churning of the stomach, the wonderful thoughts of Missouri’s history and willingness to stand alone against this world’s and the devil’s allurements are still impressed upon our hearts and minds. They always will be.

It is not my intention to belittle or degrade the love any of you have for the Missouri Synod, but I do recall the moment I looked up that word *beloved*. Here’s the definition: “dearly loved: dear to the heart.” Just the way you figured it, right? And that’s all fine if taken in its context, but, finally, there is One and only One Who must be dearly loved and dear to the heart: The Triune God and all He gives us through Jesus Christ in the Word and Sacraments. God has given us His forgiveness and the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ. We daily receive the fullness of His love through the Word and Sacraments. In all our struggles and sorrows, our tears and turmoil, He is there forgiving and assuring us that we are His; that He will never leave or forsake us. He reminds us that we don’t direct our footsteps. He does. And He does so always in the context of our best interest here and into eternal life! A synod has its place, but it must never win our hearts and minds over God’s love in Christ and His giving us that love in Word and Sacrament.

Dr. Pieper writes:

On the other hand, the union of congregations into larger church bodies, such as conferences, synods, etc., has not been ordained by God. The command “Tell it unto the church,” according to the context, pertains to the local church, or congregation, and it must be restricted to the local church. “Tell it unto the synod,” etc., is a human device. Accordingly, Walther (*Pastorale*, p. 393) remarks correctly: “An association of a number of congregations to form a larger church body with governing officers, e.g., by means of a synod with the authority of supervision, a so-called superior board [Oberkirchenkollgium], a consistory, a bishop, etc., is not of divine right, but only a human arrangement, and therefore it is not absolutely necessary; of this there can be no doubt because there is no divine command for it.” (Pieper, *Christian Dogmatic*, Vol. III., p. 421).

WHAT ABOUT THE UNINFORMED AND THE WEAK?

Some will raise the cry that there are so many who remain uninformed. There is also the concern about those weak in the faith. While we would not want to disparage concerns about the uninformed and weak, the fact is there will always be the uninformed and weak.

After all these years of struggle and publication of the struggles, and after the years of catechesis the Synod received under the leadership of the Dr. A. L. Barry administration, we would contend that those who might be uninformed are so by choice - pastors and laity alike. You can ring the bell, but that does not mean people will come to church. Keep ringing the bell when people don’t want to hear it, and you will find yourself with a crowd that wants to ring you.

Consider what befell the sainted Robert D. Preus, or Rev. Wallace Shultz and others of less notoriety; some attending this conference. Confessional Lutherans persecuted in a supposedly confessional Lutheran synod.

As far as the weak are concerned, it is important for the strong to witness the truth to them and bear them up as much as possible. However, this cannot be an excuse, ever, for remaining in a heterodox setting. Pieper notes this statement from Dr. Luther: “For a Christian certainly can teach the other one who is still ignorant or weak and admonish him with the Ten Commandments, the Creed, Prayer, etc., and he who hears it is in duty bound to receive it from him as God’s Word and join in confessing it publicly.” (Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 441). I would ask you to underscore the words, “(the ignorant or weak) who hears it is in duty bound to receive it...as God’s Word and join in confessing it publicly.” And then this:

“The general rule to be observed is this: We must waive the use of our Christian liberty unless the truth of the Gospel is at stake. And that is the case when the weak brother insists that his error be acknowledged as the true doctrine and judges him who has the right knowledge, declaring him to be a transgressor of God’s commandment. In this case the weak brother becomes a false teacher, and then Col. 2:16 applies: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink or in respect of an holy day,” etc., and Gal. 5:1: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.” (Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. I., p. 562).

HOW LONG IS A LITTLE WHILE?

For a moment, I want to turn our attention back to these words from Pieper: “If you happen to be in a heterodox church, then first of all, bear witness to the truth clearly and definitely...Under certain circumstances, you can wait a little, to see whether the truth is accepted. But as soon as it is clear that they will not accept the truth, you must separate yourself from that group which holds to the error...” (Pieper, *The Difference Between Orthodox and Heterodox Churches*, p. 49).

The question is, “How long is ‘a little while’?” Three conventions affirming and re-affirming the fact that “this isn’t your Grandfather’s church” are more than “a little while.” Tracing the history of issues from the mid 40's on is more than “a little while.”

Indeed, you have waited for “a little while” with great longsuffering to see whether the truth is accepted. Well, has it been accepted? Can you demonstrate that persistent and repeated errors have been and are being eradicated? Is this just a matter of a casual intrusion of false doctrine, or is this process granting truth and error an equal footing in the Missouri Synod? The last three conventions plainly answer those questions. What is actually preached and practiced in congregations throughout the Missouri Synod answers those questions. What we experienced in the Decatur circuit answers those questions.

A MINOR OR MAJOR DILEMMA?

Some will argue and say, “If you struggle to distinguish so exactly between orthodox and heterodox churches and want no fellowship with those in error then the Church will be disturbed constantly, and it will suffer more harm than good.” In other words, there are those who are charging that pastors and congregations battling for orthodoxy are overreacting, making a big issue out of little or nothing, are loveless and constantly disturbing the church with trivial matters. Some may also think that in the long run this quest for orthodoxy will cause more harm than if you just keep your mouths shut, remain in the Synod and try to get along. After all, isn’t it important that we all just love Jesus?

Those who argue in this manner might even cite examples of parishes that left a particular organization only to find themselves suffering a slow death as members are lost and finances become less and less. Pieper correctly reminds us:

Such words come from the *conceited* flesh. Surely Christ the Lord knows best what will harm or benefit His Church. He says with respect to the false believers: “From such turn away.” 2 Tim. 3:5. “Avoid them.” Rom. 16:17. This do, if you want to be a Christian, according to the Lord’s Word, and do not presume to rule the Church with your blind thoughts. Besides, this objection is based on an altogether wrong concept of the *Church*. The Church is the communion of believers, of those who in faith cling to Christ as their Savior. The Church is benefitted when only that is preached which works *faith*, and maintains it, namely, the pure truth revealed in Scripture, and when everything is kept away that hinders faith in Christ, that is, false doctrine. Indeed, if the church were not the spiritual kingdom of those believing in Christ, but rather an earthly organization...then you would have to anxiously avoid everything that might disturb the *outward* peace of the church; then outward peace would have to be bought also by tolerating false doctrine. But now, the Christian Church is an institution of Christ for the preaching of His pure word to save souls. (Dr. Pieper, *The Difference Between Orthodox and Heterodox Churches*, p. 50).

Again, it is Francis Pieper who reminds us of the fact that there may be those who will say: “I can very well take care of my soul, also in those church bodies which proclaim error in addition to the truth. Whatever is said there against God’s Word, I will not accept.” This seems to be a fine idea and it would be really easy for pastors to buy into this. A pastor can easily reason that it is in his best interest to remain in a heterodox church body while continuing to preach and teach the truth.

The laity is also susceptible to this seemingly pious way out; especially in light of their families and friends who have placed their loyalties in church growth, contemporary worship, charismatic, open communion, spiritual gift inventoried, “make me feel warm and fuzzy” because I’m searching for my “best life now” and “purpose driven life” by praying the prayer of Jabez, doing what Jesus did and keeping my promises churches! Or, as several pastors have said

to us, in one form or another, “I’m going to build a fortress around my church and keep all this nonsense out.” Pieper remarks,

So speaks the *presumptuous* flesh. He who is really concerned about his soul will not speak that way. Do not trust yourself too much! Error is not such a harmless thing. Your heart is a breeding ground for all sins, also for every doctrinal error. This is proved already by your objection. The objection itself already reveals that you no longer have the right *abhorrence* for false doctrine. You are already half *gone astray*. Besides, you absolutely cannot take care of your own soul. That God must do. He wants to do it, and He will do it. He will protect you, so that you will not “dash your foot against a stone,” also in spiritual matters. That He has promised. But this He has promised to do, and He does this, *when you walk in God’s Ways*. That is, when you abide in God’s Word, when you avoid the fellowship of errorists, as God has commanded. (Pieper, *The Difference Between Orthodox and Heterodox Churches*, p. 50).

I remember a District Board Meeting - specifically lunch time - sitting with several other pastors talking about synodical issues and the frustration with those who refused to examine them and take a clear stand on them. One pastor quipped, “Well, you know, the glue that holds the Synod together is bound up in the Concordia Plans.” We all laughed. But only for a moment.

Paul writes,

Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (I Cor. 5:6-8, NKJV).

If you remain in the Missouri Synod you must discern whether this is the God-pleasing thing to do. The issue is not loyalty to a synod - an institution. Never. The issue is loyalty to God’s Word and love for your neighbor. It would be good to remember that the Lord often tests his people so that they may truly examine their walk with him.

Regarding false prophets and “dreamers of dreams” (or, should we say, those with a new vision for the church), God says, “you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” (Deut. 13:3, NKJV). And this from I Corinthians: “when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.” (I Cor. 11:18-20, KJV).

If you conclude that you are living in a heterodox church body, then it is incumbent upon you to stand fast for what is right and separate yourselves from the heterodox because you love God and wish to bear witness to your neighbor with the prayer that he will join you. As Pieper remarks:

It is also for the benefit of the children of God among the heterodox that we refuse fellowship to these churches. Thereby we are constantly reminding them that they are in the wrong camp. According to God's Word, Christians do not belong in the company of those who openly contradict some doctrines of Christ. (Pieper, *The Difference Between Orthodox and Heterodox Churches*, p. 28).

If, however, you conclude that what you are seeing is a casual intrusion of false doctrine, or if you conclude that you honestly haven't given the issues enough time then you (pastors and laity) must once again enter into the fiercest combat and remove the false teachers and their teaching by doctrinal discipline. But mark this: To enter back into this combat means you will pursue it through the District Presidents and a Synodical President who, for the most part, are advocates and supporters of the horrendous changes which have been taking place, and with the knowledge - at least from what we're seeing - that the majority of the laity is against you. They might entirely ignore you. They might put you in their sights. They might begin a process of entering your congregation through disgruntled members in an effort to create division and removal of those - pastors and people - not willing to accept the new Missouri Synod.

We wish we could have shared the optimism of those who were determined to stay and fight after 2004. We cannot share any optimism with those who will stay and fight after 2007. In fact, we cannot even begin to imagine what can be done that has not already been attempted but failed. Evidently, few have considered that the Lord has possibly been in the process of dismantling The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod after generations of pursuing the same unrepentant sins.

IF YOU LEAVE

For many, the thought of leaving the Missouri Synod is frightening. Many have never known life apart from the Synod. And the questions: "What will happen to us?" "Who will we be?" "How will we make it without the Synod?" "How many people will leave our congregation?" Well, dear friends, let's at the very least remember the fact that the church existed according to God's will long before there was a Missouri Synod. God provided her with pastors, furthered His mission through her and maintained the oneness of His saints. Your congregations are what they are not because of the Missouri Synod. They are what they are because of God's presence there through the Means of Grace. As we believe, teach and confess from the Smalcald Articles:

Accordingly, we should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external Word and sacrament. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil. (Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1959, p.313.10).

And this from the Epitome:

Likewise we reject and condemn the error of the Enthusiasts who imagine that God draws men to himself, enlightens them, justifies them, and saves them without means, without the hearing of God's Word and without the use of the holy sacraments. (Ibid., p. 471).

It appears that for many the Synod has become something similar to a pacifier or security blanket. Like children, many have the tendency to think they cannot live without it; that life will never be the same; that the congregation will shrivel and die. This thinking is ever so indicative of an entire nation that has become progressively institutionalized since the Depression Era of the early twentieth century. Somehow, few can grasp the existence of the church apart from an entity called "synod." But it does exist, you understand? It always has. And always will.

The truth is a synod is not a necessity. The Missouri Synod was formed not for the survival of the church, but so that congregations of like mind and heart could come together and do certain things more efficiently. Increasingly in Missouri the congregations exist for the synod - not the synod as a servant of the congregations. The survival of any congregation is based upon the will of God and the congregation's understanding and use of the Means of Grace.

I will place before you a statement the pastors of Pilgrim placed before the congregation prior to our official departure:

Upon leaving the Synod, who will we be? We will be the people that we have always been. We will be Christians "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" as Paul says in Ephesians. Lest we forget, in him the whole building is joined together and rises. We will be Lutherans because we believe that the *Book of Concord of 1580* is a right exposition of God's Word over and against false teaching. And what are we going to do without the Missouri Synod? We will preach and teach the Word of God in its truth and purity and administer the Sacraments rightly as we have always strived to do. We will seek fellowship with those who believe what we believe, we will maintain fellowship with these brothers and sisters, we will train pastors and send missionaries, devote ourselves as instruments to be used in the mission of God, and diligently educate and preserve true doctrine.

We understand how difficult all this may be for many, especially for those who have family in other Missouri Synod congregations as we, the pastors of Pilgrim, also have. It is easy to conclude, "I do not want to cause a disturbance and disorder in my family. I love them too much for that." Once again, Pieper helps us:

If you earnestly love your relatives, then in all love and patience bring the testimony of Bible truth to them, that they may in all things give honor to the Word of God and depart from error. You should not go over to them, but they should come over to you - that is God's will. If you do not succeed, then you must forego the good fortune of being united with your loved ones in one and the same Church. True it is: it hurts, not to be able to have church fellowship with those near and dear to you. But, Christ the Lord has already taken such a case into consideration, and has definitely settled it. He says, Matt. 10:37-38, "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me is not worthy of Me." And Matt. 19:29: "And everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life." Therefore, at such a time, and in such a situation, consider this: the Lord, your God, is testing you whether you love Him, whether you love Him more than all others, who is the Savior of your soul and who shed His blood for you. (Pieper, *The Difference Between Orthodox and Heterodox Churches*, p. 49).

OTHER ISSUES

There are a number of other issues which people ask us about regarding our leaving the Missouri Synod. One is the concern that becoming an independent Lutheran congregation might result in isolation. This a legitimate concern. We assured our flock then, as we say to you now, we are Lutheran Christians who not only seek the lost, but we also are seeking out those who believe, teach and confess the same things we do. We do not see this as optional.

Since leaving the Missouri Synod we have joined with Redeemer Lutheran Church of St. Clair Shores, Michigan and formed the United Lutheran Mission Association (ULMA). The Association was formalized in 2005. Since then we have been talking with other congregations, groups of laymen and pastors interested in our humble efforts. The Lord has allowed us to establish two small mission congregations and we are in the process of calling a Missionary at Large to begin a congregation in a yet designated area. We have taken note of the efforts of confessional congregations in Texas and are very much interested in your work and direction.

I know it's a plug for the United Lutheran Mission Association, but, then again, you invited me here and allowed me this moment. To put it in rather simple terms, the United Lutheran Mission Association is lay owned and operated. It is an association, not a synod. We are quick to point out that our constitution forbids pastors from holding offices; that they serve only in an advisory capacity. Lay leaders are not elected to salaried, perk pleasing positions, but

volunteer their time and energies.

We are Waltherian in our understanding and practice of Church and Ministry. Members of the Association must accept without reservation the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the inspired, inerrant, written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and practice. Also, congregations and pastors of the Association must accept without reservation all the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, contained in the *Book of Concord of 1580* as true and unadulterated statements and expositions of the Word of God.

Another issue is the concern regarding future pastors. For the immediate future we know there are Missouri Synod pastors who would prayerfully and seriously consider a call to our congregations. However, it is our hope that we will continue to establish fellowship with those of like mind and, consequently, work together to establish a seminary or method of training men for the ministry and mission work. If all of this comes to naught, then Pilgrim would look inwardly, seeking a man who meets the qualifications of Scripture and call him to be her servant. We are confident that the pastors of Pilgrim and Redeemer could train a man for the office.

If I may reverse the question, however, it would appear to me that it must, as emphatically, be asked of “old” Missouri congregations who plan to stay in the “new” Missouri: Considering the rapid changes, where will you ultimately get your pastors?

And, still, another concern has been that of “Where will I worship if I move to an area where there is no orthodox church?” In the Book of Acts we’re told, “At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.” (Acts 8:1). Since leaving the Missouri Synod we have impressed upon our young, as well as those who leave us for a different region, that it may very well be that the Lord will use them for mission work. And, as far as confirmation is concerned, up until a year ago Pilgrim was instructing and confirming members of our Pilgrim family who were living in different countries.

FINAL THOUGHTS

At this juncture, I am going to place some final thoughts before you starting with a portion of a sermon by Dr. C.F.W. Walther which was based on 2 Timothy 2:25-26. First the text:

in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

In the sermon Walther says:

“An accusation commonly made against preachers who strictly adhere to pure doctrine is that they are condemning, loveless men who ignore the Savior’s command to not judge and condemn. This command of our Lord, their accusers

say, will condemn them on the Last Day. Many allow themselves to be deceived by this reasoning, but the accusation rests upon a false interpretation of our Lord's command.

“When Christ tells us not to judge and condemn, it does not mean no one is permitted to judge and condemn false doctrine or openly proclaim God's judgment of unbelieving and wicked people. To do this is Scripture's clearest command given to all of Christ's servants repeatedly in God's Word...

“This applies not only to preachers but also to the laity. They, too, should confidently reject and condemn false doctrine and a godless life. The Lord says to all Christians, ‘Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves’ (Matthew 7:15). How could the hearers beware of false prophets if they are not permitted to judge, reject, and condemn their false doctrine?” (*God Grant It*, pp. 542-543).

Three Synodical conventions have only impressed upon you the disunity, false teaching and deception that have been part of the Missouri Synod's history for many years. In the late 80's and early 90's Pilgrim watched as the Church Growth Movement/Contemporary Worship scourge brought conflict and disunity to the Synod. Church Growth churches paid no regard to the unity called for by Scripture and the Constitution of the Missouri Synod, yet blubbered, cried and pleaded that their goal was the sweet salvation of souls. You can cut baloney anyway you want, but it's still baloney! For so, so many the issues are numbers and money and power.

Instead of unity in the Missouri Synod, pastors and people hungry to apply corporate thinking to the Great Commission of Christ have brought confusion and upset. Out of one side of their mouth the cry is, “The Word of God, the Word of God.” Out of the other side of their mouth the cry is “A new paradigm. A new vision.” Visionaries, indeed! Visions of forsaking the Word of Christ for human innovation and, with it, a seemingly endless and mindless quest for cultural relevancy. Oh, if only the prophets of the Old Testament had sought cultural relevancy. Think of how much suffering they would have avoided. If only John the Baptist would have preached a different message and appealed to the felt needs of others he would have died with his head attached to his shoulders.

I recall a meeting I had with a number of Central Illinois District pastors not too many years ago. The purpose was to discuss what the District might do to reach the lost. The conversation quickly deteriorated into human innovation when one pastor cried out, “We've got to grow! We've got to grow!” He was, of course, referring to doing whatever is necessary to grow; anything but Word and Sacrament.

Repeatedly we see pastors, lay leaders and officials insisting that the church must grow by doing whatever is pragmatically necessary to get bodies in the door. Man becomes the Holy Spirit and human methods become the means of grace. The quest for a little heaven on earth flops and fails to grasp the church's presence on this earth; fails to hear what Jesus says of it: “and you will be hated by all nations because of me.” (Matt. 24:9b); fails to grasp the reality that growth is only

according to God's will and the gathering of souls takes place only where the pure Word is proclaimed; fails to understand that the church cannot expect constant, worldly prosperous days in a culture that grows more negative toward Christ. As Christ says, as we draw closer to the last moment of this world's existence, "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold." (Matt. 24:12). Yes, programs and pragmatism might "grow a church," but the question always remains: "What, exactly, have you grown?" The Missouri Synod is not *growing*. And the congregations that have experienced great growth have, so often, drawn the weak and uninformed from their sister congregations. The lack of catechesis has only made the laity bait for hungry wolves. And nothing has remotely halted this process. But more . . .

The Americanization of the church is one of the most tragic success stories imaginable. For most, bearing a cross for Christ is failure to complete the latest 10 step program, or not reaching a degree of success and material happiness and uninterrupted comfort many see as an indication that God is "happy" with the person. It's a confusion of Law and Gospel, and a blurring of the Article of Justification. The clear teachings of our Lord ("If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." [Lk. 9:23] and "In the world you will have tribulation..." [Jn. 16:33]) are either ignored or confused with the wrong voice which cries out, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." (Matt. 4:9). The need for the laity to know and grasp doctrine with the ability to apply it for the sake of Christ's Church and to stand faithful for it regardless of the cost is too disruptive for many lifestyles bloated with this world's comforts and conveniences, and the thinking that the goal of life is a perpetual round of happy moments and worldly acceptance topped off by a serene death allowing one entrance into eternal bliss. Can we imagine what Christians in other parts of the world who suffer horrendously, are tortured and imprisoned for their witness to Christ - many murdered - must think of such thinking!?

Synodical officials and District Presidents have been dancing around issues for years. Church discipline has been cast aside under the guise of, "We've got to be loving toward the weak and erring" which is, in actuality, the very goal of sound discipline. A mockery has been made of liturgical worship and its clear focus on and substance of Word and Sacrament. Reformed/pop theology with its egocentric emphasis and the "If you do this for God, God will do this for you." theology has gained wide acceptance. As earlier implied, *Promise Keepers, What Would Jesus Do, The Prayer of Jabez, The Purpose Driven Life, Your Best Life Now* - horrific theologies elevating the power and ability of the human to get and grab and cajole God infiltrated Missouri, and the best its leadership could do (with few exceptions) was either ignore it or dance with it. It has mostly opted for the second alternative and now it has danced itself into ABLAZE of confusion and disunity, loss of members and money. Should anyone be all that surprised at the approval of a possible special convention for 2009?

The sainted Dr. Kurt Marquart writes:

“The Gospel and sacraments themselves - not organizational chains of command - are the content, nature, task, and power of the office [i.e., *Predigtamt*, the preaching office]...

“Completely contrary to all this is the sectarian/activistic notion of the ministry as basically ‘trainers’ of the laity. As if Christ had said not, ‘Feed my sheep,’ but, ‘Organize my sheep into work-brigades, to do the “real” ministry themselves’! If the task of the ministry is not the distribution of Gospel treasures but something else, then it is no longer an evangelical institution in the sense of AC V, but a legal and legalistic one. Furthermore, the evangelical ministry is not manipulative. It relies totally on God’s own working through His holy means ‘*When and where he pleases*’ (AC V.2) - not when and where human surveys, strategies, and ‘goal-settings’ may predict or prescribe. The humble pastor of the famous prayer which adorns many Lutheran sacristies is a far cry from the strutting modern entrepreneur, whose mastery of ‘scientific’ technique guarantees him *x* per cent of statistical success for *y* per cent of ‘effective effort.’” (Kurt E. Marquart, *THE CHURCH And Her Fellowship, Ministry, And Governance*, CONFSSIONAL LUTHERAN DOGMATICS, Fort Wayne, Indiana, The International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1990, pp. 122-123).

In a footnote to this, Dr. Marquart sets forth this incredible mouth full of stomach wrenching theology from Kent Hunter - Hunter’s words from his *Foundations for Church Growth*:

“The pastor is the called shepherd of the royal priesthood, but he is not there to do ministry for the sheep. Shepherds don’t reproduce sheep, anyway. Sheep reproduce sheep! Mission and ministry belong to the people. The pastor is there to be the trainer, the equipper of the people. The pastor is like a playing coach. He does ministry himself, but his primary responsibility is to train Christians to do this ministry.” Ibid., p. 123).

This pop/Christian theology has not put its foot inside the door of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, it has both feet inside the door and the door is shut!

Article VI of the *Constitution* of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (*Handbook of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod*, 2004 edition, p. 13) states the following in part:

“Conditions for acquiring and holding membership in the Synod are the following:

2. Renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description, such as...
 - a. Serving congregations of mixed confession, as such, by ministers of the church;

- b. Taking part in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations of mixed confession;
 - c. Participating in heterodox tract and missionary activities...
4. Exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymn books, and catechisms in church and school..."

Article VI is a joke. The elected officials who have promised to uphold it have, for the most part, boldly ignored it or side-stepped it, or they simply break it with no fear of repercussions. Nothing has stopped the train. And now, dear friends, now what do you plan to do? More conferences? More clandestine meetings? More gatherings of those who seek power and control? More assembling of legal minds for legal action? More resolutions for the next District Convention and the next Synodical Convention? More articles? More...what?

Yes, I know, you stand to lose much. The name. The seminaries. Some addresses. Some people who you once thought loved you. But it's only of this world. It's only for the moment. The fact is, you'll lose nothing. You'll gain everything. You already have everything in Christ! Are not our very lives worth laying down for Him and not a synod? Souls are at stake, dear friends. Let the errant have the buildings and their deluded bragging about bloated numbers and "success". You hold tightly to the Means of Grace.

It has been correctly noted:

For Walther the synod was only advisory in its relationship to the congregation. The synod could govern itself as a synod, but it could not reach into the realm of the local church. Walther had to explain this principle to people who feared synodical organization as if it meant a power like that of the state churches in Europe. (C.F.W. WALTHER: *The American Luther*, p. 79).

I'd like for you to consider that last statement: "Walther had to explain this principle to people who feared synodical organization as if it meant a power like that of the state churches in Europe." While you have not seen the passing of resolutions permitting the overt encroachment of the Synod into the life of the congregation, surely that same concern must be impressed upon the people today. Pastors who have fought against synod's heterodoxy are vulnerable and attacked, unless the laity stands firmly with them. I'm guessing that most of us know of cases where faithful pastors have been placed on restricted status or forced out of their pulpits, not because of false doctrine or violation of constitution and bylaws, but because, in faithfulness, they found themselves at odds with a District President and his agenda.

Article VII, point #1 of the *Constitution* of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod states the following:

In relation to its members the Synod is not an ecclesiastical government exercising

legislative or coercive powers, and with respect to the individual congregation's right of self-government it is but an advisory body. Accordingly, no resolution of the Synod imposing anything upon the individual congregation is of binding force if it is not in accordance with the Word of God or if it appears to be inexpedient as far as the condition of a congregation is concerned. (*Handbook, The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, 2004, p. 14*).

Article VII is a joke. Regarding a question which was asked of the CCM relative to investigating a congregation for any reason, a CCM ruling (04-2387) from May 2004 states:

The Bylaws do not define the term "proper channels" and thus the procedure to be used in the investigation is chosen by the District President or his representative and does not necessarily require the initial contact or meeting to be with any particular person or group [as named in the congregation's constitution]. In such an investigation, any meeting is to carry out the purposes as set forth in these Bylaws.

Obviously, this ruling allows a District President the freedom to approach anyone he desires to gather information and make decisions apart from the congregation's approval as expressed in a voters' meeting, and to do so while ignoring the constitutionally appointed leadership of the congregation.

In a letter sent to Redeemer Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint Claire Shores, Michigan concerning their inquiry into this matter President Gerald Kieschick states:

Regarding your requests that relate to official opinions of the Commission on Constitutional Matters of the Synod, it should be noted that such opinions are binding unless and until they are overturned by a convention of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. The recently concluded 62nd Regular Convention of the LCMS (i.e., 2004) did not overturn the referenced CCM opinions. They are, therefore, still binding on members of the Synod. The members of the Council of Presidents have no authority, constitutional or otherwise, to change the decision of a convention of the Synod.

The facts are these: The Synod has become "an ecclesiastical government", it does exercise legislative and coercive powers, and it has moved beyond an advisory body. Again, Kieschnick states that the referenced CCM opinions "are...still binding on members of the Synod." And, again, Article VII states "...no resolution of the Synod imposing anything upon the individual congregation is of binding force if it is not in accordance with the Word of God or if it appears to be inexpedient as far as the condition of a congregation is concerned." *An advisory body?* Missouri has traveled a long way from its roots.

While the Scriptures call you to stand firm and fight with your flesh, this world and the devil they do not call you to remain part or to stay and fight in the midst of error which has now firmly established itself in a synod. Again, I would refer you to the words of the *Brief Statement* quoted earlier: "...all Christians are required by God to discriminate between orthodox and heterodox church-bodies...to have church-fellowship only with orthodox church-bodies, and, in case they have strayed into heterodox church-bodies, to leave them, Rom. 16:17." No, you haven't "strayed into" a heterodox church-body, but you are in one that has become firmly entrenched in its heterodoxy. Again, I remind you of the history of the E.L.C.A. and its never ending quest to be relevant with the world and its thinking. A familiar and costly tune.

I would place one last excerpt before you from Dr. Pieper:

"Some time ago, a respected Presbyterian preacher in St. Louis confessed that if he in his congregation would try to have God's Word rule as it does with us, in four weeks his whole congregation would scatter. The sects owe their outward size mostly to this, that they *play* church instead of actually conducting themselves as God's Church. Neither do they rightly bear witness of the Law of God, nor do they act as true witnesses of God's grace. But, this is what the Lutheran Church does. By God's grace, it is a faithful, incorruptible witness of God here on earth. Let us, therefore, not be ashamed of the external lowliness of the Lutheran Church, otherwise we are ashamed of Christ himself, and of His holy Gospel! Christ the Lord also walked about on earth in the lowly form of a poor man. And yet, at that time all were supposed to follow Him. We condemn the scribes and Pharisees, and all those in Israel who did not want to follow Christ because of His outward lowly appearance. Now, let us be careful not to commit the same sin! What Christ taught, that the Lutheran Church teaches; and as *He* in the days of His flesh bore a servant's form, so also the Lutheran Church. Thus, we dare not let the servant's form of the orthodox Church keep us from *joining it with joyful confession*. Otherwise, we deny Christ in denying it.

"Let us learn more and more to look upon the Lutheran Church with the right kind of *spiritual eyes*: it is the most beautiful and glorious Church; for it is adorned with God's pure Word. This adornment is so precious, that even though an orthodox congregation were to consist of very poor people, - let us say, nothing but woodchoppers - and met in a barn (as the Lord Christ also lay here on earth in a barn, on hay and straw), every Christian should much, much rather prefer to affiliate himself with this outwardly insignificant congregation, rather than with a heterodox congregation, even if its members were all bank presidents and assembled in a church built of pure marble. Let us be sure that our *flesh*, and the talk of others does not darken the *glory* of the orthodox Church, or crowd it out of our sight. (Pieper, *The Distinction Between Heterodox & Orthodox Churches*, pp. 46-47).

Once again you have found yourselves in a *Crises At The Crossroads*, if I may use the words of the sainted and greatly missed Dr. Kurt Marquardt. But you do not find yourselves at this point in time as defeated children of God. You already have the greatest victory of all: The removal of all sin

and guilt and the promise of eternal life through the life, suffering, death and resurrection of our beloved Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

After leaving the Missouri Synod we were asked on numerous occasions what we internally experienced as Pilgrim Lutheran Church and her pastors traveled some occasionally very nasty waters prior to October 2004 and what it felt immediately after leaving. Well, the first week or two there were those momentary feelings of aloneness. However, as time quickly passed, there was an atmosphere of peace we had not experienced for some years and an understanding that the Lord would guide and help us. And that He has done. I'm not saying we live in a fantasy thinking there won't be trials and struggles. There have been, are and will be. But, with God's help, we will continue to work through them.

My friends, the Holy Triune God has entrusted you with His Word and Sacraments. He has allowed you to fight the good fight. He has given you opportunity to exhort and clarify issues. He has put you in the position of calling the unrepentant to repentance. And now He has brought you to one of the most important moments in your lives and walk with Him. Now you must decide, for the sake of God's Word and for the sake of your flocks, if another round of exhortation, chess playing and resolution passing make up the road you want to travel.

I could never describe removing yourselves from the Missouri Synod as defeat. I would describe it as an opportunity to give witness to the truth of God's Word and a response to Scripture's admonition: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths." (Prov. 3:5-6).

I could only encourage you to channel your energies and zeal to the new opportunities to pursue faithfulness to Christ and His Word free from the persistent error and confusion that have become the marks of the Synod.

And, finally, I would leave you with these words from Friedrich Gerhard Bente - a portion of the words he penned at the closing of the preface of the *Concordia Triglotta*:

"The Lutheran Church differs from all other churches in being essentially the Church of the pure Word and unadulterated Sacraments. Not the great number of her adherents, not her organizations, not her charitable and other institutions, not her beautiful customs and liturgical forms, etc., but the precious truths confessed by her symbols in perfect agreement with the Holy Scriptures constitute the true beauty and rich treasures of our Church, as well as the never-failing source of her vitality and power.

"Wherever the Lutheran Church ignored her symbols or rejected all or some of them, there she always fell an easy prey to her enemies. But wherever she held fast to her God-given crown, esteemed and studied her confessions, and actually made them a

norm and standard of her entire life and practise, there the Lutheran Church flourished and confounded all her enemies.

“Accordingly, if Lutherans truly love their Church, and desire and seek her welfare, they must be faithful to her confessions and constantly be on their guard lest any one rob her of her treasures...” (*TRIGLOT CONCORDIA, The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church*, St. Louis, Mo., Concordia Publishing House, 1921, Preface, p. IV).

Thank-you for allowing one so unworthy to stand before you this day. I pray the Lord grant you guidance and wisdom in the days to come. The Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Pastor William K. Abbott
Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Decatur, Illinois

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