

For Gospel-Centered, Mission-Driven, Future-Oriented Leadership
in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

Jesus First

Keep the Mission Moving

Issue 62

April 2010

Putting Convention Nominations Into Perspective

Nominations Are Not Representative

What does it mean that sitting President Gerald Kieschnick received only the second highest number of nominations for the election to the presidency of Synod to be held at the convention this summer?

The answer depends on an understanding of the nomination process in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. It is not a random sampling from which could come the conclusion that the nominee with the highest numbers is more popular than the one in second place.

The main news from the nominations result is that only about one third of the eligible 6,000 congregations participated in the process. One interpretation is that by far most congregations are satisfied with the present leadership and thus did not participate. Their non-participation says nothing about how their delegates will cast their vote

Along that same line of reasoning, congregations that took the effort to make nominations are more likely to want change. There is website evidence this year that groups of dissatisfied pastors made a strong effort to organize to have their candidate(s) nominated. Thus one could conclude that a nomination total of 1,300 for a non-incumbent means only a quarter of the congregations are dissatisfied and want to change leadership.

In American politics weekly political poll comparisons can show momentum. This is not so with the LCMS nomination process, which is done only one-time and is not representative of the electorate. All the process yields is the names of five men who will serve if elected.

We are confident that President Kieschnick's fine leadership abilities have been and will be evaluated positively by the 1,200 delegates who produce the only number that counts: votes cast.

Opposition Says "Anybody But Kieschnick"

By Jonathan Coyne

The United States uses a process of political primaries to "nominate" candidates for president from each of the two major political parties. In this process, candidates campaign for a fixed number of votes, attempting to garner the simple majority of their party votes. In many ways, the "nomination" process in the United States is more like a mini-election, determining the person who will lead each political party.

The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS) uses a process of nominations which may seem similar, but really is quite different than, the process used in our civil government. First, in the LCMS there are no "political parties." Political parties are formed around ideological platforms in competition with one another. The LCMS has one theological platform, Scripture and the Confessions. Over the years there have been organizations like Jesus First and others who support one or more men for the office of president, but these support groups are not political parties, since they each support and defend the Scriptures and the Confessions.

Over 6,000 congregations have the opportunity to nominate pastors to the office of President and First Vice-President, but only about one-third of our congregations participated this year, since submitting a nomination is not mandatory. As you can see, with this system the total number of nominations is not representative of the entire church. Nevertheless, the process allows the church to identify five men who consent to serve if elected.

A Process to Identify Leaders Willing to Serve

In the United States in an election year, or most recently a process that dragged on for nearly two years, political pundits will talk about momentum as a candidate begins to garner more or less nominations. Likewise, newscasters will begin to speculate about who will win with fancy charts and graphs to prove their prediction. In the

THE MATTER OF SELECTING VICE-PRESIDENTS

The election of the Vice-Presidents is a matter of great importance to the Synod. The Vice-Presidents have opportunity to expand the heart and passion of the Synod. They are the front line expression of the office of the President. They are much more than “figure-heads.” They are the “real thing.”

And if the “real thing” is that the Synod is committed to being Gospel Centered, Mission Driven and Future Orientated, the Vice-Presidents had better be leaders, expanders, and promoters. If the “critical targets” of the Synod are to “initiate new ministries,” “revitalize ministries” with boundless potential, and affirm “stewardship” with all of its implications – well – the VPs better be the “real thing.”

We believe that these nominees for Vice-President of the Synod are the “real thing.”

FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT BILL DIEKELMAN

Pastor Bill Diekelman has demonstrated his passion for the Gospel while serving as First Vice-President in so many ways. Many gatherings of Synod and Synod’s congregations have been blessed by his solid Gospel proclamations. He has a passion for the initiation of new ministries, and has been tireless in affirming the importance of ABLAZE as one way of filling heaven. He struggles when ministries struggle. He knows their frustration, and their earnest desire to be faithful. He is mission driven. He envisions a church body continuing to stretch, and grow, setting the pace for others in the world Lutheran community. Bill Diekelman is “the real thing.”

REVEREND DOCTOR PAUL MAIER

Paul is “the real thing!” You have read some of his books, you have heard his presentations. You know he carries the great passion of the Gospel. You know that he brings a great sense of the Gospel in the history of the world and of the church. You know he does not want the church “stuck in the past.” You know he believes that these days call for great faithfulness. You know that he understands the days before us will call for our very best stewardship of the resources available to us. You know that he is committed to leaving a legacy that will encourage those who follow us. Paul Maier is “the real thing!”

REVEREND DOCTOR DEAN NADASDY

Dean is “the real thing.” He has been involved in the “revitalization” movement for a long time. He

has been part of revitalization of small ministries and of large ministries. He has been involved in planting ministries, one these days that is powerfully relating to our “post-modern world.” His gospel-centered sermons and writings serve as resources for many. His stint as a Seminary Professor helped him appreciate and understand what it takes to minister these days and the days that lie before us. His appreciation of how we use the resources available to us are legendary. Dean Nadasdy is “the real thing.”

REVEREND VICTOR BELTON

Vic is “the real thing.” His own formation has been shaped through the hard struggles of a parish pastor who proclaimed the Gospel, “no matter what.” “No matter” if the nation was going through significant changes. “No matter” that the Christian communities status and stance were changing. “No matter” that resources became more and more limited. “No matter what,” he steadfastly and faithfully proclaimed the Gospel, expanded the places where people might hear that Gospel, and looked to the future with confidence and optimism. Vic Belton is “the real thing.”

REVEREND LUTHER BRUNETT

Luther Brunette is “the real thing.” Well rooted in the traditions of the Gospel, motivated by a fierce love for those who know not the Gospel, open to using the resources that God has made available to His church, he looks back so he may look ahead. Far a head. He sees ministries that moved by the Spirit “live again!” He sees places where the Gospel must go. He encourages, mentors, coaches. He understands the importance of “being team.” Luther Brunette is “the real thing.”

REVEREND DOCTOR DAVID BUEGLER

David Buegler is “the real thing.” While serving in a wide range of ministries with significant leadership responsibilities, his heart remains that of a parish pastor. With that heart he led as a District President and a large school administrator. With that heart he participated in the fashioning of the restructuring Blue Ribbon Task Force. With that heart he continues to inter-face with the broader Lutheran and Christian community. His counsel is seasoned and measured. David Buegler is “the real thing.”

A Wise Change in Constitution and Bylaws

By David S. Luecke

The LCMS Convention this July in Houston will devote most of its time considering and voting on proposed changes in the Synod Constitution and Bylaws. This agenda was shaped through the three-year synod-wide process led by The Blue Ribbon Task Force on Synod Structure and Governance.

In the last newsletter I commented about proposed changes to the first three articles of the Constitution. They all are aimed at clarifying the fundamental commitment of Synod to mission outreach. None of the wording proposes change beyond clarification of what has been understood throughout the 153 year history of this Synod. To vote against these resolutions is to vote against mission.

Organizational Issues

Most of the bylaw changes address basic organizational issues. Lutheran tradition is that congregations and their associations are free to change their structure in ways that make sense for their time and circumstances. For many practical reasons, it makes sense now to simplify Synod structure and shift emphases back to congregations and their districts.

Doctrinal Issues

But one set of proposed resolutions needs to be highlighted because it addresses the fundamental confessional position of the Synod, whatever its organizational form. The present Constitution Article VIII.C speaks to "Resolutions at Synodical Meetings." It is a very simple statement: "All matters of doctrine and conscience shall be decided only by the Word of God. All other matters shall be decided by a majority vote."

So, who decides what is a matter of doctrine and conscience? If all other matters can be decided by a majority vote, what kind of vote does it take to adopt a doctrinal position?

The present Bylaw 1.6.2.a outlines the process for formulating a new doctrinal statement and submitting it to a Synod convention through the Commission on Theology and Church Relations. It can be accepted at the convention by a simple majority vote, although to be ratified and operative it needs to

be approved by two thirds of the member congregations.

The new statements under Constitution Article VIII.C strengthen the requirement for a two thirds majority. Then Bylaws 1.6.2, 3, and 4 carefully define and distinguish between Doctrinal Resolutions, Doctrinal Resolutions of Special Significance, and Doctrinal Statements. The latter two address areas of controversy. The special resolutions are short statements, and the convention floor committee will determine whether it qualifies as doctrinal. Doctrinal statements are the longer studies done and submitted by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations. In either case convention approval of a statement needs to be done by a super majority.

The Need for a Super Majority

Why is it important to have a two thirds majority vote for anything resembling a doctrinal position? That question is easier to answer in the year 2010 than it would have been before the very controversial vote last summer on requirements for ordination at the convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. Whether practicing homosexuals, even in a committed relationship, should be ordained has been the center of ELCA controversy for most of a decade. Previous votes could never approach a two third majority. The rules for their 2009 convention were simply changed to consider as sufficient a simple majority, which was barely reached.

An issue with the size of a majority vote is basically a matter of institutional wisdom. If almost half of the members are opposed to a change in fundamental position, the outcome is guaranteed to continue to be divisive, so much so that many of the congregations will opt out of the association. The protest results in the ELCA are becoming apparent a year later.

Who knows what doctrinal statements will be controversial in the LCMS 40 years from now? Whatever the issue, the Synod is more likely to retain its institutional strength if the minority recognizes that most (two thirds) of the fellow members thought the statement makes sense. Further protest is not likely to change anything.

Generational Ministry Opportunities

By Charles S. Mueller, Sr.

Whether in the singular or plural the Bible refers to generation(s) over 150 times. How long is a generation? By one measure of the past it was the length of time from a man's birth to the birth of his oldest son's first child. A common definition today is everyone born within a 20-25 year period. By that measure eighteen generations have developed in America since the 1620s with five generations always commingling: one taking shape, three on the scene full blown, one fading away. But that's no longer true.

Six Generations

A measuring of today's generational mix shows that sometime during the 1950s/1960s another full generation slipped in. Today there are six generations simultaneously on the scene: one taking shape, one fading away while four are elbowing each other for their place in the sun. Together with the birth boundaries of their generational years the six current generations are:

- a. a waning GI Generation (born 1905-1924)
- b. Silent Generation (born 1925-1944)
- c. Boomers (born 1945-1964)
- d. Gen X (born 1965-1984),
- e. Millennials (born 1985-2004),
- f. a gaining, yet unnamed, Newest (born 2005-2024)

Most congregations are unaware of this significant change in the number of extant generations. That sixth generation slipped in not only unannounced but unnoticed.

Generational Needs

Generational demands and needs radically differ one from another. It's like a sixth person showing up for a carefully planned meal when you had prepared for only five. Result? Things get crowded and competition for attention and food rears its head. Parish generations that feel ignored wander off -- sometime to another corner of the larger church; sometime to the "far country" which lured the prodigal in Jesus' Luke 15 parable.

To further exacerbate this situation our oldest generations are now living longer and in larger numbers than at any time in Lutheran history. By their very existence these "super-seniors" affect not only the congregations Sunday morning but its weekday activities as well. Their needs are straining community, church and family resources. But that's another story.

For now our clear Biblical mandate is to pass on His message of mercy and grace from generation to generation. That mandate calls for two very different actions: 1) we are to share His Word and will within each generation and, 2) see to it that it is shared between all generations. We are called to minister inter- and intra-generationally.

The struggle for generational recognition that has stumbled along within the church is readily acknowledged by the secular world and shown by how products are presented and promoted in print, radio, TV and the internet -- and to whom they are aimed. Have you noticed the change? What's more, generational concerns are at the heart of the current debate about governmental health care. Everyone seems to recognize distinct generational segmentation. But the church?

The Lutheran church has historically lavished most of our care on one generation, our youngest. The assumption has been that once our children are properly reared they will remain active within the Christian community. There does not seem to be evidence to fully support that assumption, which is not to suggest that we should care less about the young. Instead we should intentionally focus on life long needs of all generations by responding to all five post-adolescent generations as they move, intact, through life's stages.

Life Stages

Life stages? Did you say stages? Yes, indeed. Generations, always intact and in constant motion, move through life stages. They move "through" because life stages are static. They don't move. Instead its each generation that moves through those successive life stages. As they do they can react differently from each other at each stage. That's why ministerial programs that were effective in the past can be totally ineffective a generation or two later.

The succession of life stages follows this broad pattern with some variation: early childhood, childhood, adolescence, young adult years, periods of family and career growth, peak vocational years, empty nesting, pre-retirement, the go-go/slow-go/no-go later year. There are differences within these stages depending on gender and marital circumstance.

As a specific, have you noticed that many congregations pay scant attention to the needs of the GI and Silent Generations except to view them as a mother lode for volunteers and financial support? What many need much more is assistance working through questions of personal care, worth, service and life direction. And that's to say nothing about the needs of their care-givers and the sandwich generations.

All Six

The LCMS, both nationally and parish-by-parish, needs to recognize and respond to the six generations in its membership as each, even now, works through a half dozen and more life stages. Any convention action that ignores that challenge, whether in areas of doctrine or practice, will in time realize to their chagrin that they have squandered a significant opportunity.

And we all know how often most opportunity knocks.

Opposition Says “Anybody But Kieschnick

LCMS, it would be easy to engage in the same thinking, but it would be inaccurate. The nomination process is not about momentum, or speculating who will win, it is simply about identifying the people who will serve if elected.

Nevertheless, there are people who believe that the nomination process is incredibly important. Rev. Charles Henrickson is a featured writer on a website where most articles criticize LCMS leadership, and he posts on another site, both filled with people intent on removing the LCMS president. He wrote the following on the LutherQuest website in 2008 (barely one year after the last convention): *“What we need to do is to get networked and ORGANIZED, district by district, circuit by circuit, and a) elect ABK delegates in as many circuits as possible, and b) generate as many congregational nominations for SP as possible for the guy (even two guys, since each congo gets two noms) with the best chance of beating Kieschnick. Both tasks are doable, if we have the will and the energy to do them.”*

For those of you who do not understand the acronyms, ABK means “Anybody But Kieschnick,” a term which I find offensive in a church body professing that God ultimately calls our elected leaders. SP stands for Synod President. “Congo” is short for congregations and “noms” is short for nominations. Earlier on this website Rev. Henrickson wrote the following: *“This is why it so important to ELECT CONFSSIONAL DELEGATES AT THE CIRCUIT FORUMS IN 2009. That is how we can defeat bad proposals--and defeat our bad president--in 2010.”*

Speak Well of Your Leaders

I strongly disagree with these kinds of critical, pejorative statements, particularly on public websites. What is our witness when our pastors speak poorly of their leaders? It seems to me that the witness is contrary to the 8th Commandment which reminds us to “...speak well of him (our neighbor), defend him, and explain everything in the kindest way.” Jesus First has never called a president “bad” and never campaigned against someone by stating that “anyone” would be better. It seems insulting to those candidates supported by Rev. Henrickson and others, that these candidates would be considered to be just “anybody.” However, I congratulate Rev. Henrickson and all of the people who accomplished their goal of getting two candidates enough nominations to be on the ballot.

Many years ago when Jesus First recommended Rev. Gerald Kieschnick (LCMS President) and Rev. Donald Muchow (LCMS Chairman of the Board of Directors,) we worked to get enough nominations that

each one would be on the ballot. This year we realized that President Gerald Kieschnick and First Vice President William Diekelman would easily receive enough nominations to be on the ballot. There seemed to be little reason to rally congregations to create more nominations.

The same websites that “networked and organized” to create a large number of nominations for their two candidates are now filled with claims that this is a shift in momentum against the President and First Vice President and toward their candidates. I suppose we could not expect anything less from them. However, it is more accurate to look at this from a church perspective rather than a civil government perspective. This process is not about momentum, it is about identifying the five men who, if elected, would serve as president or first vice-president of the LCMS.

Pray for the convention

Please consider doing the following things for the future of the LCMS. 1) Encourage your delegates to read the 10 brief newsletters that Jesus First will send to them. Our newsletters represent less than 5% of the total mailings and bulk of paper they will receive from influence groups prior to the convention. 2) Pray that your delegates will be able to discern God’s will for the church as they cast their votes for elections and other decisions. 3) Remind all people, how we speak about our current President and Vice Presidents is about the 4th Commandment. We all have a right to support any candidate, but we are sinning when we use harsh, derogatory words to harm the reputation of our current leaders.

Jesus First continues to support President Gerald Kieschnick and First Vice President William Diekelman in 2010. We give thanks for the fact that with no Jesus First effort beyond an announcement in this newsletter, both men are on the ballot.

The vision of **Jesus First Leadership** (a 501(c)3 corporation) is for the LCMS to be a church body known for

- Commitment to confessional Lutheran theology.
- Encouragement of forward-looking ministry practices.
- Affirmation of the values declared in the Call to Affirm Jesus-First Leadership.

The publication team of Jesus First Leadership consists of Rev. Jon Coyne, Rev. Bruce Cameron, Rev. David S. Luecke, Rev. Charles S. Mueller, Sr., and Pat Schutte

Contributions, inquiries, and requests to be included on the mailing list should be sent to P.O. Box 220551, Kirkwood