

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

Jesus First

Keep the Mission Moving

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President Gerald Kieschnick Has Earned Re-election

Gerald B. Kieschnick was first elected President of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod in the 2001 Synod Convention. He is now finishing his ninth year in office. The key question for the 1,200 delegates at the 2010 Synod Convention in July is, Does he deserve a fourth term? Or, to rephrase, can someone else do a better job for the next three years?

Absolutely President Kieschnick deserves re-election. There is no other nominee who brings his level of experience leading one of the largest Protestant church bodies in American in the difficult times we are facing.

Sometimes a church body leader can function mostly as an office holder, keeping the institutional wheels turning. It is a position of great honor, and under more placid circumstances it can be held that way by a person content to bless whatever the larger body in all its parts is doing. But, in contrast, this is a time for a true leader like Jerry Kieschnick—someone who purposefully tries to mold the larger body into greater cohesiveness and ignite new mission energy for meeting the challenges of a new age.

The last nine years have hardly been serene for the LCMS—or, for that matter, any church body. In so many parts of the country the context for ministry has shifted--some would say dramatically – with far less support for conventional church life, especially among children who no longer follow in their parents' Lutheran footsteps. Internally, another round of divisiveness played itself out in LCMS politics in the 00s.

Consider how President Kieschnick has exerted powerful leadership in church politics, in building church unity, in reducing inefficiencies and in spearheading new mission.

Church Politics

The LCMS politics for the 00s were set on September 11, 2001 with the terrorists attacks in New York and Washington D.C. How should our church body respond? That was only ten days after Gerald Kieschnick assumed the presidency. As his ecclesiastical supervisor with pastoral instincts, he encouraged Atlantic District President David Benke to participate with prayerful compassion in the subsequent Yankee Stadium event.

Your reading of the nine years of politics since then and the vote this July depends on whether you were proud to have your church body and its loving concern on the world stage that day or whether you considered this participation an embarrassing betrayal of our doctrinal uniqueness. Best guess is that about 20% of LCMS pastors felt betrayed. Best guess is that 99% of lay members were proud.

That 20% went into attack mode for the next six years, often with aggressive action, even lawsuits, against the President personally. Repercussions can still be seen in the website blogs of the 20% urging vote for Anybody But Kieschnick. How would you respond if you were church body president? Many of his enthusiastic supporters urged the President to draw boundaries to exclude those who were so unhappy with Synod's considered positions. Gerald Kieschnick's response was to patiently reach out through inclusive, even-handed procedures and to avoid reprisals.

Here is the question for 2010. Do you want a Synod President whose major qualification seems to be readiness to draw even tighter boundaries than we by consensus already have? Or would you rather have a president with proven ability to subordinate his ego and to let the will of the majority work its way out.

Delegates can judge that ability and experience by how President Kieschnick led the delegate regional meetings and how he will administer the decision making before election of Synod President. Will any of his presiding decisions give cause to prefer a different leader?

Unity Building

How do you build unity in a church body that badly fractured about 35 years ago and that still has a minority, younger now, who think their elders are not sufficiently faithful to Scriptural doctrine in Lutheran formulation? At a minimum you keep highlighting where there is a conservative unity in doctrinal fundamentals that is indeed remarkable among historic Protestant church bodies. President Kieschnick has done this well and often, leading us to rejoice that we have unity in the problems tearing other denominations apart and distracting them from mission.

And you keep attention focused on working through the areas of disagreement. One is determining how to relate to other church bodies with which we are not in full doctrinal fellowship. At issue is not doctrine itself but symbols of how to practice distinctiveness. This issue had been worked extensively through due process in the 1990s by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, of which Texas District President Gerald Kieschnick was chair. The conclusions were overwhelmingly accepted at the 2001 Synod Convention at which Kieschnick was elected Synod President. Who then could be better prepared to interpret the will of the Synod in the tragedies the following September 11? As the Church Fellowship Study reported, ultimately in areas of uncertainty charity should prevail. Is not this the necessary path of churchmanship over against carrying grudges?

Another remaining dispute is strange to find in a church body that proudly claims fidelity to the Lutheran Confessions, including the Formula of Concord's statements on adiaphora especially in worship. This is the insistence on the part of some that there is only one legitimate Lutheran worship practice. At President Kieschnick's request, conferences have been held, some big ones with expenses covered by grants. Yet a small minority insists their practice is the only way. Would some other president be better at preserving the importance of a full subscription to the Lutheran Confessions?

Delegates will have had full exposure to the Kieschnick-guided, unity-building process used in developing proposals for the better Synod structure

and governance. There has been provision for extensive feedback at district conventions and at the regional delegate meetings this winter. Feedback led to refinement of proposals. How could there be a better process?

Will some other Synod president be better at building unity? Over the years President Kieschnick has preached in hundreds of congregations, giving him a good feel for conditions in our church body. Would some other president be willing to take on such a tiring travel schedule to keep Synod in front of congregations?

Re-organization

An officer-holder president would let the organizational wheels continue to churn from one financial crisis to the next. Only a leader would take on the arduous task of building agreement on a streamlined organization that changes how business was done in the past. That is a very difficult task, but one all former Synod presidents agree has to be done. Would some other president develop a better plan for the financial future of Synod? By the way, under the present administration the LCMS has done much better at raising per member the funds to support church-wide ministry than either the ELCA or the Presbyterian Church USA (<http://www.jesusfirst.net/2009feb02.htm>).

Perhaps this Synod Convention can take big steps toward lowering the price of mistrust in Synod affairs. This applies not only to overlapping structures that provide checks and balances but also to the huge printing and mailing costs of sending convention materials to every member of Synod. Being scrupulous about notification process is important for trust building. One mark of a good convention will be a high enough trust level to authorize Synod administrators next time to save tens of thousands of dollars by providing those resources on the Synod website.

Would some other president be better at building trust in the church body than procedurally fair President Gerald Kieschnick? Why take the chance?

Mission

Obviously the future of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod lies in the direction of more effective mission outreach. But perhaps the fundamental issue for the delegates in July indeed amounts to whether indeed mission is central.

The decline in numbers of congregations, members and dollars is apparent. We can adjust

Synod Has Had Effective Mission Leadership

By Jonathan Coyne

President Gerald Kieschnick and First Vice President Bill Diekelman have given great leadership to helping international mission work of Synod recover from a downturn and to expand in the last triennium. Let's look at the numbers.

A Lagging Indicator

In economics we learn about leading and lagging indicators. Leading indicators are those signals indicating an upward or downward movement **prior** to the actual change in the economy. Lagging indicators are those signals appearing **after** a significant change in policy and highlighting the upward or downward effect of that policy.

Mission work is a lagging indicator highlighting the prior work of leaders in the LCMS. Mission work requires planning, training, and allocation of resources to be effective. Jesus noted that we should take an account of what we need to do prior to entering a battle, or in this case, entering the spiritual battle of the mission field.

Gerald Kieschnick became president of the LCMS in 2001. William Diekelman became First Vice President of the LCMS in 2004. From 2001-2007, *29 full time missionaries* were called into the international mission field. In contrast, from 2007-2010, *42 full time missionaries* have been called in over 20 countries of the world! In the last triennium, Synod has called more than twice the number of missionaries from 2001-2007.

According to the numbers, we would have to conclude that LCMS Mission Services is highly effective. Our two top Synod leaders have certainly been mission driven.

A Lagging Economy

I live in Silicon Valley where the dot-com boom began and ended. During those halcyon days of high flying stock prices it seemed that everyone would make money forever. The LCMS saw benefits from this time as well. From 1997 until 1999 the LCMS received very large grants from the Schwan Foundation. During that time period the total grants for missions averaged \$4.8 million and the grants to our seminaries averaged \$3.8 million.

However, by 2003 Schwan Foundation grants hit bottom with \$1.6 million for missions and \$1.75 million for the seminaries. This type of financial freefall made for difficult decisions. Some may remember

when in 2003 many missionaries were called home due to a lack of funding. Schwan Foundation grants were a total of \$4-5 million from 2004-2008 (down \$3.5-4.5 million from the prior average) until 2009 when they fell again to \$1.6 million for missions and \$ 1.75 million for seminaries.

Similar difficulties have been faced in our congregations. From 2003 until today our congregations have faced rising health care costs that have more than doubled. Many congregations have been forced to cut their gifts to their districts because of financial difficulties. Have you witnessed financial stress in your congregation over those years?

Similarly districts were faced with rising costs, but without the offerings of the past from congregations. Many districts had to lower the amount of money they could send to the synod.

Finally, the LCMS as synod was faced with lower offerings from districts and lower revenue from foundation grants as well as with higher costs for health care and numerous other items. Just two years after taking office President Kieschnick faced the 2003 financial crisis that led to calling home so many missionaries. The economic troubles of 2008-2009 make 2003 look mild. Yet Synod leaders have reversed the trend, sending out twice as many missionaries as before. How was this accomplished?

A Vibrant Mission Department

LCMS Mission Services responded to the crisis of 2003 in many creative ways.

First, they began to connect the mission efforts of the LCMS to individuals and congregations. Short-term mission opportunities allowed pastors, congregations, and lay people to participate in foreign missions for short term assignments. When these people returned, they were different. They shared the joy of bringing the message of Jesus into a foreign country or culture. They encouraged others to see the power of the Gospel and to give of their time, talent and treasure. This created a large base of people and congregations who were willing to support mission work through special offerings and gifts.

The international budget for missions has increased over the past three years because of God's grace and the stewardship of God's people. The three-year increase is 15% or \$1.5 million more for the work of the Lord. Years of effort has changed our view of the mission field, our ability to participate in mission work, and our willingness to support missions.

A More Efficient and Effective Method

Prior to the financial challenges of 2001-2003, Synod attempted to bring international students over to our American seminaries and we sent American missionaries to countries with the goal of building one or more mission stations in a community. The majority of internationals who came to our seminaries were unable to do effective mission in their home country. Some wanted to stay in the United States, while others struggled for acceptance when they did return.

American missionaries had been sent into foreign countries to start churches. A better strategy is to use them to help start and develop a whole church body there.

Consider our work in Venezuela, which began in 1951. Faithful missionaries began 19 rural parishes, but there were never enough pastors. Rev. Ted Krey arrived in 2001 and implemented a new model of leadership development with veteran missionary Rev. Rudolph Blank. From 2008 through 2009, 13 internationals were ordained in Venezuela, bringing the total to 19 men serving all of the rural parishes for the first time ever. By empowering our trained clergy to teach leaders in foreign countries, we are able to multiply our efforts, and to help partner denomination multiply their church planting efforts.

In other words, our missionaries no longer leave with a goal to plant one congregation, but to plant a church body that will expand. We no longer bring one man to our seminary, but send one trained man to be the seminary in that place to train many men. This change in emphasis allows our mission department to be more effective and more efficient as good stewards of God's gifts.

National and International Missions

Originally the Blue Ribbon Task Force for Synod Structure and Governance (BRTFSSG) proposed a change from program boards to a pair of advisory commissions for national and international missions. The resolution coming to the convention now provides for a national and an international board for missions. It is exciting to see that the delegates through their regional meetings bring "grassroots" solutions to the process of modifying our governance and structure.

However, the most important part of the new emphasis is a broadened understanding of "mission." Perhaps many still see our own country as something

other than a mission field. I cannot do that, living in Silicon Valley, where less than 10% of all people attend ANY Christian church in a week. In many parts of our country we see less expression of Christian faith than many parts of Africa, Russia, and South America. Our LCMS leaders are helping us understand that all of our work is about the mission of Jesus Christ to bring saving faith to all people through God's Word and the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. We need to refocus on the fact that we are all missionaries at home and in foreign countries.

A Comparison

On June 5 John Wooden passed from this life into the glories of heaven. For those people who do not follow college basketball, John Wooden was the most successful college basketball coach of all time. He led UCLA to a remarkable 10 national championships, twice the number of any other coach and 7 championships in a row. I was watching the tribute show because an LCMS member from my congregation was a dear friend of John's and helped him get his job at UCLA. Watching the show I was surprised by one fact – John Wooden did not win a championship for the first 16 years of his coaching career. In fact, he was nearly fired after a season when he almost lost more games than he won.

Can you imagine what would be missing at UCLA if the regents had decided to replace Coach Wooden with a new coach? The legacy of which they are most proud would never have happened.

President Gerald Kieschnick and First Vice-President William Diekelman have been serving for 9 and 6 years respectively. They have led in a very difficult economic and social context. Some other large church bodies have split or are on the verge of splitting. Yet during these trying times, our leaders have not only held the church together, but they have created a peace which has led to more mission starts and more support from a broad base of God's people.

We stand at the moment in history when we can support our veteran leaders and see that a drop in support from districts has been balanced by the foresight of our leaders that is bringing an increase in direct gifts to mission work. More importantly, the LCMS, which is often called A Sleeping Giant, seems to be waking to the fact that all of us are missionaries and all of us can help bring the message of salvation to a world in desperate need of the Gospel.

Change in the LCMS Has Had a Noble History

By Charles S. Mueller, Sr.

Any suggestion that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod hasn't/won't/can't adapt to a changing world is categorically contradicted by its history from when the earliest Saxon segment of our ancestry arrived here in the late 1830s until now. For nearly two centuries our synod has worked its way through innumerable immigrant and language challenges, through nearing a dozen wars, through regularly recurring economic depressions, through the explosive expansion of our nation and the opening of the west and – most consequential of all – through our nation's swing from an overwhelmingly agricultural economy and social order to becoming the world's premier industrial power. The LCMS was deeply involved all the way.

That the challenge of change has been such a steady diet makes it all the more remarkable that today, in the first decade of the 21st century, the LCMS stands as the oldest extant Lutheran body of size in America, the ups and downs of change notwithstanding. Impossible?

Our longevity is not so much something about which to boast as it is something for us to acknowledge with thanks to God. Under His sure hand our ancestors faced and dealt with a constantly changing world and did so with little fanfare. Though seldom in the vanguard of national or international changes they were ever ready to grapple with whatever arose and did so effectively by clinging to two core values:

1. They were committed to the inerrant Word,
2. They were determined to work through challenging moments – together.

Values Deeply Rooted in the First Century

Neither conviction should surprise anyone. Both are rooted in Walther. His purposeful resolve to judge everything by Scripture, twinned to a determination to walk and work together with others who though different were of the same mind was at the heart of Dr. CFW Walther's 1848 inaugural presidential address. In it he openly stated that some believed the diversity among those who were forming the new association doomed it from the start. It could well have failed. As he and others organized immigrants from areas in Germany that had been separated for centuries Walther asked the question: "Why should and can we carry on our

work together although we have no power but the power of the Word?" His position was that the work would be carried on successfully if, together under the Word, the new association would be guided in their life together with convincing one another rather than by resorting to force or control.

In summary, that's how the LCMS started off and then adventured together through the first hundred years of its organizational life. There were rough spots over those years but there was also an awesome catalogue of accomplishments. It's tragic that so many LCMS members know little about our remarkable history while others have distorted it to their own advantage almost beyond recognition. The fuller story of that first century is told in numerous books plus pages and pages of regional and national reports. Walther's eloquent explanation of the only way synod could succeed is in *Moving Frontiers*, edited by Carl S. Meyer, CPH, 1964, pages 170-176.

Changes in the Second Century

The synod's second century opened in the late 1940s as the post-World War II world was taking shape, GI Generation and all. Many clergy and lay leaders were concerned in those years about what the face of effective ministry in the future might be. At the same time there was much institutional angst about change and about our place in the world of social/economic/political adjustments. Trying to find our way we explored TV, radio, the print media, outreach programs of all sorts, new attempts at foreign and domestic missions. Many congregations tested newer organizational models complete with councils, administrative boards and committees. There were efforts to expand and enlarge the role of the laity, male and female alike.

Internal unrest was developing as it became increasingly apparent that congregations were not all of one kind and that disturbing demographic realignments were in motion changing the face of our congregation's neighborhoods as well as our congregations themselves. The way church was done appeared to differ from district to district. Some found that scary.

Reaction? More than a few clergy and congregations assumed a position of denial: change was not going to happen on their watch without a fight. One reason many missed out on community/congregational transformation was that we had become embroiled in a battle about Bible versions, in

disagreements about hymn books, in arguing about worship styles, in tension over fellowship questions, in debating the place and value of the Lutheran World Federation, and in struggles with ever present internal theological differences over issues real and imagined.

While all this was going on we seemed to have lost institutional track of what was happening in the world around us even though signs of current and imminent change were everywhere.

Sorting Out Causes for Decline

On top of all that there slowly surfaced an uncomfortable recognition that after years of steady numerical growth most if not all such indicators of congregational health were in decline.

While ignoring our synod's easily demonstrable declining birth rate and of the enormous drop in immigrations from that of the 1840s to the 1940s there were those who saw all this falloff as another indicator of flawed doctrine and practice: not enough theology of the cross (purity in doctrine) and too much theology of glory (numbers). Some even gloried in our parish membership losses seeing shrinking numbers as evidence of doctrinal faithfulness.

Another explanation of the tragedy of declining and dying churches dismisses it all as attributable to chance. Growth and/or decline was a matter of being located in the right/wrong places (chance); of having the right/wrong kind of pastor (chance); of adopting the right/wrong programs (chance).

Few seemed to notice two critical sociological/ecclesial shifts affecting all churches – Lutheran or not – that were in motion. When left unattended these shifts forecast how hundreds of congregations have been brought to their organizational knees. The two?

The first is that LCMS parishes at their best are not cookie-cuttered clones having the same mission opportunities which called for the same style, resources and experience. The truth is that congregations can be, and most often are, different one from another in many ways even while locked together in love on the walk down a common road (*syn-odos*).

Secondly, huge changes have taken place in the generational picture which were not only triggered by their changing generational numbers and life expectancy but by the way current generations interrelate in our crowded (and getting more so) world.

Clearly the world in which we minister has changed. Delegates to the 2010 Synod Convention in July are asked to approve some major adjustments in how the 161-year-old Synod does its business. Don't be afraid of change. The LCMS has a noble history of doing that to meet new challenges.

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

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and downsize accordingly. Or we as a church body can conclude that we need to do our God-given job better.

Lutherans have always known that mercy ministries are important and have a track record second to none in church social services. Distributing relief and human care resources historically given so willingly by Lutherans is relatively easy leadership.

The LCMS also has a great track record of mission outreach to German immigrants, their children, and their grandchildren who moved off the farm and out of the cities to the suburbs.

But we are not doing well at all with the great-grandchildren who are by now fully assimilated in the American culture. This means we can no longer depend on Lutheran loyalties to drive our church life. This means we have to get better at reaching out to Americans of all cultures. This means we may have to change some of our own inherited Lutheran culture to welcome and include others. Such time of change also means that we have to work extra hard at maintaining our doctrinal integrity while adapting our cultural practices.

President Gerald Kieschnick has been a very effective leader in stressing mission in our church body, even and especially in a time of declining dollars. We are past the time when gathering and forwarding dollars to missionaries can do the necessary job. Pres. Kieschnick has relentlessly emphasized that mission is fundamental to every congregation and has tried to develop the conditions that challenge congregations to do their job more creatively and enthusiastically. He has highlighted churches doing their mission well, not just in numbers of members or attendees but also in spiritual growth and service.

President Kieschnick is a mission president who has led development of the Ablaze program of Synod. Fundamental is highlighting witness events—individual experiences witnessing Christ to another person. Personal confidence to do such witnessing is not a strength of our Lutheran culture. It has to be modeled, and he is doing so from the top, in person and program.

With his encouragement, Mission Services is finding new ways to put people out in international mission fields. It is a time for new thinking in many areas of our church life together. Can some other synod president do that with more boldness, courage and energy? Kieschnick has the proven track record.

How Much Change in a Time of Change?

Yet a time of change also needs firm leadership in what cannot change in the doctrinal integrity of the LCMS. Through his years at Chairman of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations as well as now nine years of ecclesiastical supervision for Synod, there really is no other national level leader who knows the issues as well and understands the boundaries better. In such an intensive time of change, why change the synodical presidency for someone less qualified and experienced?

Jesus First endorses Jerry Kieschnick without reservation for an additional term.

Is any other nominee better qualified to continue to build unity on the base of the great majority of pastors and congregations, not just the persistent small minority who insist theirs is the only way?

Is anyone else better qualified with more energy to work the fair procedures for the remaining steps of re-organizing Synod?

Are any of the other nominees better qualified than Jerry Kieschnick to lead congregations and districts into new days of effective creative mission outreach to new people for all the right Gospel reasons?

There is dissatisfaction with President Kieschnick on the part of a vocal minority, and that minority repeatedly shows a preference for staying as we have been and for resisting mission as our church's top priority.

Given his outstanding experience and qualifications in so many areas of church leadership, a vote for someone other than Gerald Kieschnick is inevitably a vote for less mission in the Synod. The issue is as simple as that.

By David S. Luecke
Convention Delegate