

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

Jesus First

Keep the Mission Moving

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Changes in Congregations Should Lead To Changes in Synod's Structure

By Charles S. Mueller, Sr.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States was founded in 1847 to support congregations in their ministries. In the eight score years since then, the congregations making up the Synod, now numbering over 6,000 in comparison to the original 12, experienced many changes, each in their own way. It makes sense that Synod's structure should adapt itself to new circumstances. The proposals of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Synod Structure and Governance go in the direction of decentralization, yielding a leaner structure of boards and staff.

For the first one hundred years the LCMS was made up of congregations that came in one of two sizes: small or large. In either case they functioned in essentially the same way. If they could speak loudly enough, pastors were interchangeable regardless of parish size or location. All did parish ministry the same way. One size fit all. What they did was the same thing: gather and care primarily for Lutherans.

By the 1950s it became increasingly clear that all parishes and their ministries were not alike. A number of different congregational types were developing. Some were Preaching Stations. Others were Family Parishes, or Pastor Parishes, or Organizational Parishes, or Resource Parishes or Community Parishes to cite but a few types. They were what their names suggested. Over time it became clear that they were not organized the same way, nor for their health sake, could they be. While sharing a common faith they did not do church the same way. That stirred institutional unrest and tension. And

more and more were becoming intentionally missional.

Further, these different kinds of parishes needed and developed different kinds of clergy leaders who required a broad range of skills, many not taught at the seminaries. But the LCMS organizes its congregations geographically not by size or operational style or mission intent. In the end congregations of one given style found themselves with more in common with similar congregations in another district than with many congregations in their own districts. Even within a certain size parishes deal with a wide range of ministry challenges like financial resources, generational distribution, cultural context and urban and rural locale.

Eight Different Types of Congregations

Today there are at least eight different types of congregations in the LCMS. (Data in support of this assessment has been around for years.) The pastoral/staff/lay leadership requirements of each type of congregation and its size- and location-specifics can vary markedly from one congregation to another. In many ways the most demanding and complex effective leadership requirements today are needed by clergy called to serve congregations worshipping less than 100 people per Sunday. Even within that size dimension there are parishes with a wide range of ministry components and variances (e.g. rural/urban, generational, cultural) vary.

The bottom line is that our Synod can no

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Kieschnick Writes *Waking the Sleeping Giant*

A review by Bruce A. Cameron

As it turned out, I bought a copy of Jerry Kieschnick's book, *Waking the Sleeping Giant: The Birth, Growth, Decline, and Rebirth of an American Church* during the same week that President Kieschnick and his wife Terry came to St. John Lutheran Church in Sparta, Illinois, for our 100th Anniversary Celebration. Because of that, I now have an autographed copy of the book.

More importantly, because of that, I was able to place his written vision of the "hopes and dreams that [he] has for the LCMS" alongside his spoken encouragement to the people of Sparta to be witnesses to Christ and his love in their own lives, to touch the lives of the people around them in their congregation, their community, and their world.

Early in the book, President Kieschnick spells out his focus: *"How the Christian Church addresses the needs and longings of people whose lives have been hugely affected by the changes that have occurred in the past 150 years, even the past 10 years, will mold and shape not only the lives of people in the church but also and especially the lives of people in our country and throughout the world. This is the topic of this book."*

In Sparta, he wondered aloud how St. John's founders of 100 years ago would have reacted to a pastor who walked over to the electronic keyboard to join with the guitars and singers for a few of the hymns (including Chris Tomlin's song that expresses our anniversary theme, "His Love Endures Forever"). His conclusion was that, after giving it a few moment's thought, they would probably say, "May God's holy name be praised."

Dr. Kieschnick's book is a look at how God's name has been praised, his word proclaimed, and his love shared over the past 160 - 170 years. He compares the Synod and its tensions to the congregation of his ancestors in Serbin, Texas, which split into two congregations, lived apart for a time, and then re-united. As the pastor there said, *"At some point, the things which divided them [which 'few people alive today can recall'] were not as important as what united them."* The same for the LCMS.

Although, in too many cases, the LCMS is known for its "infighting and animosity," President Kieschnick views our Synod as a gathering blessed with a doctrinal unity "unequaled in most parts of the Christian Church." He has his own lists of the treasures of doctrine and life that unite us, a list of problems that are not besetting us, and includes as an appendix Dr. Sam Nafziger's "Introduction to the LCMS" as a good summary of where our Synod is at.

It is with confidence in that unity that Dr. Kieschnick turns to the questions that do trouble us and test our unity:
--the question of who is admitted to the Lord's Supper
--the service of women in the church

--differing forms of worship

--inter-Christian relationships

In each of these areas, this book would be a good introduction to where the discussion stands and a resource of references to the places where our Synod has officially taken a stand.

Now, it is only fair to say that for those of you who have closely followed LCMS proceedings--especially for those who have actually studied *Convention Proceedings* and *Convention Workbooks* of recent years--and for those who have heard LCMS Presidential Reports, you will find that in many places, Jerry Kieschnick's book may sound like a presidential report. Which it is--complete with lists and charts, statistics and appendices. But even if we know the history of our Synod all too well, it can be good to see it put together in one place, tied together with a vision of what a church body and what individual Christians can do to praise God's holy name and to "vigorously make known the love of Christ sensitively and humbly, boldly and courageously."

How we as individuals and as a Synod fulfill this calling to be witnesses today is not a question only of our history. It is a question for present-day LCMS Lutherans to answer faithfully for our present-day neighbors, who are our present-day mission field. Dr. Kieschnick describes the congregations of his grandparents and his youth, as well as the church of his grandchildren and their future.

He asks, How are we to be the church? in today's America. Our church faces cultural and technological challenges; widespread biblical illiteracy; the plagues of pornography, adultery, and abortion. How do we fulfill our calling to be witnesses to Christ in a world where we are no longer the "insiders" of our society?

Each generation must grapple with C. F. W. Walther's question, "How shall we work together when we have no power over each other?" Our "rebirth" as a "Sleeping Giant" relies on our confidence in the power of God's word, and our certainty in his promises. That's all we have to give to anybody.

As Pastor Kieschnick said to the people of Sparta: "You have the opportunity to share God's love with people at the most vulnerable points in their life. It can be as simple as the statement, 'God's love is real. What Jesus did, he did for you. He forgives your sins and he loves you--just as all of those things are true in my life.'"

No church that has that message is powerless to move into the future.

Proposed Constitutional Changes Clarify That Mission Is Fundamental

By David S. Luecke

The very first phrase of Synod's present Constitution begs for clarification. The first reason for forming a Synodical Union is "The example of the apostolic church (Acts 15:1-31)." Acts 15 is a great chapter on the first apostolic convention that addressed a number of problems. Which one should we consider? The phrase seems like a last minute add-on by someone on the original drafting committee. It needs clarification.

Synod's Task Force on Structure and Governance is all about clarification in the Constitution, specifically clarifying that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is all about mission.

Last December they presented in regional meetings their recommendations to the 2010 Synodical Convention for changes to both the Constitution and the By-laws. The focus here is just the preamble and the first three articles of the constitution. These have no substantive changes.

Reasons for Existence of Synod

For instance, that phrase in the Preamble about the apostolic church turns into these two phrases as reasons for the existence of a Synod: To participate together in God's mission of saving all people through Jesus Christ, and To work together in proclaiming the Gospel message, in encouraging and urging the Gospel mission and in preserving doctrinal unity under the Gospel in the spirit of the apostolic church.

It is hard to imagine what could be controversial about these two purposes. The Task Force began its work with a study of basic theological principles underlying LMCS Structure and Governance. With the title "Congregation-Synod-Church," this study document has been widely distributed through the Synod, most especially at District conventions in 2009.

The first basic principle in this study is properly *The Lordship of Jesus Christ*. The second reasonably is *The mission of the church*. Jesus himself gave the mission when he declared that God desires all people to be saved, when he gave the disciples the Great Commission, and when he sent the disciples out, just as he had been sent by the Father. The church not only *has* a mission but *is in itself* God's mission to the world.

Confession

Article II of the Constitution addresses Confession. What is there does remain. The Task Force

corrects a glaring omission of the necessary confession of faith that Jesus is Savior before addressing the confessional basis for defining the faith. And so a new section A states the Synod, and every member of the Synod, believes, teaches and confesses without reservation that Jesus Christ, the second person of the Triune God, alone is the Savior of the world, and that only through faith in him is there forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation.

That is hardly controversial in this church body, where universalism has not appeared in any form.

Then come the existing statements about Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions as the basis for defining the faith we confess. For the sake of greater precision, the change substitutes for "norm and rule of faith" the Confessional phrasing (Formula of Concord) that Scripture is "judge, rule, and guiding principle" of faith.

Objectives, Mission and Purpose

Article III of the present constitution addresses Objectives. The proposal substitutes the more current phrasing of Mission and Purpose in place of Objectives.

By now it should be apparent that proposed changes are in the direction of greater clarification. Phrasing is taken from the LCMS Mission Statement adopted by Convention in 1998.

Nothing in the present Article III is omitted. But the ten statements turn into fifteen, divided between A. Mission and Purpose and B. Carrying Out the Mission and Purpose.

All of the five most basic purposes in section A are taken from the ten objectives currently listed. The objective of giving bold witness is expanded to include the anticipated result, "so that all people come into a saving faith relationships with Jesus Christ, grow in an ever deeper relationship with Christ and one another, serve him and another in the community of the church and the world, and to communicate the Gospel of Christ into all the world to save the lost."

Hardly controversial. This is a fine model statement congregations can use in their own constitutions, phrased in a way that meets current leadership expectations that not just purposes but also outcomes be identified. It is appropriate to ask each congregation whether, in

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C. F. W. Walther's phrase, it is going forwards or backwards. Forward is in the direction of more people coming to a saving faith, more people growing in a deeper relationship with Christ and more service to one another and the community.

Carrying Out the Mission and Purpose

The new section B lists ten means by which the Synod will carry out the mission and purposes of the Lutheran-Church-Missouri Synod. Again, there is greater clarification. The first paragraph is all new and declares The Synod motivated by God's love for the world, committed to its common confession of faith and the mission of God centered in Jesus Christ, and persuaded and directed by the power of God's Word, accomplishes and fulfills its mission and purpose together by:

Could anybody object to this theological explanation for carrying out the business of the Synod?

The first of the ten means is changed to use the current official vocabulary of "ministers of religion—ordained" and "ministers of religion—commissioned."

The next three means are new statements. Two of those state what has been happening since the beginning of Synod. We are to accomplish the mission by supporting the colleges, universities and seminaries of the synod, and by equipping and sending missionaries to various cultures and people, and establishing new congregations, missions, and ministries.

New in content is paragraph 2. Preparing and equipping the laity to carry out their Christian vocation and providing opportunity for their continuing growth. The role of laity in the church is controversial in the Synod at this time. Some, including myself, would like to see a stronger statement. But everybody can agree that at a minimum our church body needs to equip the laity to carry out their Christian vocation. Who can object to providing opportunity for their continuing growth?

I hope the floor committee proposes that we vote on Constitutional changes one article at a time. I can't imagine anybody voting against these changes to the first three articles.

Article V proposes changes in the vocabulary of Membership; specifically advisory members will become associate members. Future articles will address this and other proposed changes.

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longer muddle along in how to support congregations. If we try to we will only decline further and faster. We need to explore the matter of congregations in depth while there is still time. We need to do this openly and together driven by the Great Commission and avoid doing it covertly and alone.

Ministry Realignment

Recognizing this as a need many of our larger LCMS congregations are already linking with similar sized parishes across the nation in the hope that by working together they can help their pastors and parishes, improve in ministry and outreach effectiveness. This scares some. They feel intimidated. Instead of distancing ourselves from this kind of development we need to search for ways to rescale and expand our efforts in ministerial realignment to the benefit of congregations of various sizes, of significant ministerial variety and of service locale. The LCMS needs to vigorously investigate and strategize how its parishes in all categories may best be developed, linked and served regardless of district membership or geographical location.

Where should the impetus for such realignment come from? Top-down is cumbersome and would be resisted by many. After 160 plus years it seems quite clear that sustained congregational change happens best and the quickest bottom-up.

Synod shines brightest when it helps such development happen. A lot of institutional bureaucracy is not needed. Agreed? That being so, doesn't it make sense to start bolstering congregations by realigning our structure to just a Commission on National Mission and a Commission on International Mission—both mission-of-the-church oriented?

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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