

REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT

Part I

Introduction and Welcome to Delegates to the 63rd Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ, Savior of the world and Lord of the universe, through whom alone we receive forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation!

Welcome, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, to the 63rd Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. It is my privilege to share with you this first portion of the report of the President of the Synod to this very important Synod gathering.

The report of the President will be presented in four parts:

- Part I is the written report you are now reading, printed in the 2007 Convention Workbook. Also included as a supplement to Part I is a Special Lawsuit Report.
- Part II will be presented orally at the initial meeting of the convention floor committees, to be held in St. Louis, May 18–21, 2007. It will also be posted on the LCMS convention Web site following its actual presentation on May 18.
- Part III will be presented orally at the convention on Sunday, July 15, 2007.
- Part IV will consist of a question-and-answer session at the convention, also on Sunday, July 15, 2007.

It is my hope and prayer that your service as a delegate to this triennial convention will be a blessing to you, to the congregations, and to the individual members of the Synod.

The Vision for The Lutheran Church— Missouri Synod

It is also my hope and prayer that your involvement in this convention will be instrumental in the accomplishment of a vision for our Synod that the delegates to the 2004 convention resolved to “endorse and respond enthusiastically to ... encouraging our brothers and sisters throughout The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to do the same.” That vision is articulated as *One Mission, One Message, One People*.

Holy Scripture is replete with biblical references regarding the Vision of ONE, especially our oneness in Christ:

- *And He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure ... to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under ONE head, even Christ.* (Ephesians 1:9–10)
- *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.* (Ephesians 4:3–6)
- *“Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* (Ephesians 4:1–6)

- *“Now, I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no schisms among you.”* (1 Corinthians 1:10)
- *Jesus prayed, “... also for those who will believe in Me through their [the disciples’] message... That they may all be one, as You Father, are in Me, and I in You.... That they may be one just as We are one... May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.”* (John 17:20–23)

One Mission—To Seek the Lost for Christ

- *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.* (Luke 19:10)
- *The Lord says: “It is too small a thing for you to be My servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring My salvation to the ends of the earth.”* (Isaiah 49:6)
- *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.* (Acts 1:8)

One Message—Jesus Christ Is the Savior of the World

- *There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.* (1 Timothy 2:5)
- *There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.* (Acts 4:12)
- *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled the world to Himself through Christ, not counting mankind’s sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation.* (2 Corinthians 5:17–19)

One People—United by God’s Love in Christ Jesus

- *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ . . . stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.* (Philippians 1:27)
- *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.* (Ephesians 4:3–6)
- *Jesus said, “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to My voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”* (John 10:16)

Succinctly stated, this vision anticipates the congregations, pastors, and commissioned ministers, of our Synod working together to achieve the *One Mission* given by God, that of seeking people who without faith in Christ will be lost eternally, by proclaiming the *One Message* given by God, that Jesus Christ alone is the Savior of the world, as the *One Peo-*

ple God has called us to be, united by God's Love in Christ Jesus.

What does this vision of ONE look like in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod? In a spirit of humility, repentance, and prayer, I respectfully submit this description of my hopes and prayers for the LCMS in the years ahead:

A Repentant People

The vision of ONE sees the people of the LCMS by the Holy Spirit's power, in the light of God's Word, first looking into our own hearts in repentance, seeing our own personal need for forgiveness and renewal through the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

A Redeemed People

The vision of ONE sees the people of the LCMS as redeemed and Spirit-filled, confident of God's forgiveness for Christ's sake, living our lives to the glory of God and exercising faithful stewardship of His many gifts to us.

A Renewed People

The vision of ONE sees the people of the LCMS as renewed "lights in the darkness" and "salt of the earth" who love, respect, and honor one another, vigorously making known the love of Christ by word and deed within our churches, communities, and the world, speaking freely and joyfully about God's grace to those who have yet to hear and believe!

It is in this spirit of repentance, redemption, and renewal that I encourage our Synod to move forward in the years ahead, united in the mission and the message that God has entrusted to our care!

Convention Theme and Biblical Basis

The theme of this convention is the second part of the three-fold vision of ONE: "One Message—*Christ!* His Love is Here for you!" Its scriptural basis is 1 John 4:9–11:

This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Many passages of Holy Scripture articulate the truth that Jesus Christ alone is the Savior of the world, including 1 Timothy 2:5; Acts 4:12; and 2 Corinthians 5:17–19—all listed above. The apostle John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, addresses the person and work of Christ from a personal perspective, focusing specifically and powerfully on the benefit of God's love, made known to mankind in the person of Christ, for each and every person in the world.

In addition, John clearly focuses his Spirit-given words on matters of great importance for us as Lutheran Christians, namely, a proper understanding of Law and Gospel. "*This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*" Thus John also writes, in the 19th verse of this same chapter, "*We love because He first loved us.*"

It is therefore true that any love that comes from us as human beings comes only as a result of the fact that God "first loved us." This is true in respect to the love we show to

one another, as well as the love we demonstrate toward God Himself. Our lives are lived to God's glory, in accord with our vocational calling as Christians, purely in response to God's love for us in Christ our Lord. The power of that love propels us to proclaim the light of Christ's love to all who live in the darkness of doubt and disbelief.

During our convention as I address the delegates and guests, I plan to tell the stories of how the light of Christ's love was shared with two individuals I encountered as a result of what can only be described as "divine appointments." On two separate occasions, I met Brad, a 43-year-old man, and Jerry, a 26-year-old woman, under circumstances that were totally unplanned, at least humanly speaking. In both cases, traumatic events had occurred in their lives, events that created fear, anxiety, even despair. By the power of God's Spirit, the light of Christ's love provided hope, encouragement, and peace. I can't wait to share "the rest of the story" with you!

The sub-theme "His Love is Here for You" has numerous applications:

- Christ's love is here, in God's Holy Word, for you!
- Christ's love is here, in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, for you!
- Christ's love is here, in the words of Holy Absolution, for you!
- Christ's love is here, in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, for you!
- Christ's love is here, in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, for you!

The non-believing people of the world, including many people here in our own country, are watching and waiting for the discovery of meaning and value in their lives. They also are wondering and wandering in their effort to find such meaning and value, often turning to movements or groups whose faith is based on principles or beliefs contrary to what we in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod believe, teach, and confess.

From 160 years of biblical and confessional study, we in the LCMS have come to understand and firmly believe the truth of God's love for the world in Jesus Christ, expressed so clearly in the words of Jesus Himself: "*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.*" (John 3:16–17)

That is the message we proclaim. We in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have *ONE Mission*—to be *ABLAZE!* with the power and presence of the very Spirit of God in our lives, on our lips and in our labors! We proclaim *ONE Message*, that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of the world! We pursue the *ONE Mission* and proclaim the *ONE Message* as *ONE People*, united by God's love in Jesus Christ!

And so our task, our purpose, our privilege in life is to be *ABLAZE!* with the God-given light of God's love, made real to us in the person of Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord. In and with that light, we are enabled to focus our time, our talents and our treasure on reflecting God's love in Jesus Christ to the people of the world.

That is precisely the meaning of the LCMS Mission Statement:

In grateful response to God's grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacraments, the mission of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is vigorously to make known the love of Christ by word and deed within our churches, communities, and the world.

May that mission be the constant focus of this 63rd Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod!

The Purposes of a Synod Convention

The Bylaws of the Synod clearly indicate the major purposes of a Synod convention in these words:

The national convention of the Synod shall afford an opportunity for worship, nurture, inspiration, fellowship, and the communication of vital information. It is the principal legislative assembly, which amends the Constitution and Bylaws, considers and takes action on reports and overtures, and handles appropriate appeals. It establishes general positions and policies of the Synod, provides overall program direction and priorities, and evaluates all such positions, programs, policies, directions, and priorities in order to provide responsible service for and on behalf of its members. Only a national convention of the Synod shall authorize affiliation or association and the discontinuance of such affiliation or association of the Synod with other church bodies, synods, or federations. (Bylaw 3.1.1)

The Bylaws also direct that certain officers, boards and commissions are to be elected by the Synod convention, including "the President, five vice-presidents in line of succession, the Secretary, the Vice-President—Finance—Treasurer (who shall also be designated as Chief Financial Officer), and the Board of Directors of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod" (Bylaw 3.2.1) and:

- A Board for District and Congregational Services
- A Board for Mission Services
- A Board of Directors for Concordia Publishing House
- A Board of Regents for each Synod seminary (Bylaw 3.2.2).

In addition, some members of other boards and commissions are also to be elected by the Synod in convention (Bylaws 3.2.2.1).

Accordingly, convention sessions and activities will be planned and conducted with all these goals and objectives in mind. During the delegate orientation the first day of the convention, Saturday, July 14, specific attention will be given to matters of information and importance for each delegate to consider as the convention begins. This includes basic information regarding parliamentary procedure, a very important part of how we work together as a Synod in convention. Please plan now to attend this orientation session Saturday afternoon, whether or not this is your first time as a delegate.

Additional information will be provided to delegates in the months and weeks prior to the convention. All delegates are evangelically advised and encouraged to read carefully all official materials received from the Synod.

In addition, delegates are no doubt already aware that unofficial and unsolicited materials will be received in abundance. It is my fervent prayer that God will provide wisdom and discernment to each delegate, enabling each of you to

evaluate objectively and prudently the many opinions and perspectives that may literally fill your respective mailboxes.

In this regard, it grieves me to inform you that some of the material you will receive may not be accurate, charitable, or even truthful. Accordingly, it would behoove you as a delegate to investigate fully any matters about which you receive questionable information in order that you may be assured of knowing the truth. You may do so, for example, by researching the actual facts or by asking your district president about these matters. This is particularly important should you receive communications that do not honor the Eighth Commandment's injunction that we defend and speak well of our neighbor and "put the best construction on everything."

May the blessing of Almighty God grant you the ability to discover the facts and discern the truth as you endeavor faithfully to prepare yourself for the significant task and responsibility given to you by virtue of your election as a voting delegate, advisory delegate or advisory representative to this 63rd regular convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

The State of the Synod...Defining Reality

That was the title of one section of my written report to the 2004 convention of the Synod. After recently reading and reflecting on this report, I have decided to share it once more with the delegates to the 2007 convention.

On Sunday, July 15, 2001, in an acceptance speech following my election as President of the Synod, I offered the following prayer:

Our Gracious Heavenly Father, your ocean is so big and our boat is so small. You have chosen to place my hand with yours on the rudder of this ship we call The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. At times my hand will probably be tempted to turn that ship toward the safety of the harbor, for ships are safe in a harbor. But that's not what ships are for. So, fill the sails of our ship with the sometimes steady, sometimes strong, and sometimes seemingly still breeze blown by your Holy Spirit, who is the breath of life. And as our ship sails through weather, stormy or smooth, enable us to cast the life preserver of your precious Gospel to those drowning in the depths of sin, that they may also, by your grace, be saved eternally, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

In that speech, I identified a number of matters of importance facing our Synod in the years ahead:

1. The fulfillment of the Great Commission.
2. The recruitment, training, and support of pastors, educators, evangelists, musicians, and other professional church workers.
3. The importance of the priesthood of all believers, especially the full support and creative involvement of lay leaders.
4. The importance of relationships between the Synod, its districts, and its congregations.
5. The place of the grace of God among us.
6. Synod solidarity.

On Saturday, September 8, 2001, moments after my installation in the Chapel of Saints Timothy and Titus on the campus of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis as the 12th

President of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, I prayed this prayer:

Dear Father in Heaven, look upon your people gathered in this beautiful and holy place, filled with the presence of Your Spirit. Focus our eyes and our hearts upon Jesus, given by You, in your majestic and universal love, for the salvation of the world. Prepare our hearts and hands this day to love and to serve You and You alone. Build our commitment to be faithful and strengthen our resolve to be courageous, that through Your power we might “Shake the Earth” with the great news of forgiveness, life, and salvation through Christ, the Savior of the world and the Lord of the universe. We pray this in His most holy and precious name. Amen.

In the speech that followed, I offered the following comments and observations:

- It is the mission of the church that concerns me most at the beginning of my term of office as President of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Let it be known, with no equivocation or uncertainty of any kind, that accomplishing the mission of the church to disciple and teach the nations of the world will be Job One in this administration! We do not have the luxury, even if we wanted to, of “fiddling while Rome is burning.”

- After briefly describing the origin of the Early Church following the death and resurrection of Christ, including the persecution and martyrdom of many believers and disciples, I added, “Also hardy souls, the people of central Europe, in my case, southeastern Germany near the Polish border, lived their faith in a reasonable semblance of joy and peace. But the oppression of governmental entities made it clear to our ancestors that they had no choice but to leave the place of their birth, travel on leaky, ill-fated vessels to a distant land, leaving behind their homes, their property, their heritage, their families.

For what reason did they choose to make this sacrifice? The integrity of their faith was in danger of being lost as a result of governmental declarations forcing those who bore the name “Lutheran” to enter into ecclesiastical relationships without adequate basis for such relationships. That would be too much to tolerate, much less to affirm.

So, with a portion of their possessions in hand, they embarked upon the journey that would take some of them successfully to places like Perry County, Missouri, and Lee County, Texas. Many of them died on board and were buried at sea. The survivors thrived in the new world. They ultimately formed what was once known as the *German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and other States*, later called the *Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and other States*. Still later they changed their name to *The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*.

- Notwithstanding the significant growth experienced by congregations and entities of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the first century of its existence, the LCMS is not exactly, at the present moment, on top of the heap when it comes to church bodies that demonstrate vibrancy and significant impact on the worldwide Christian scene, either among Anglos or among other cultures and nationalities. Few would argue with the existence of our strong biblical, doctrinal and confessional stance. Nevertheless, many would view as marginal our church body’s impact on the entire body of Christ, not to mention the 4 billion unsaved people in the world, given our propensity in the past for internal dissension and divisiveness.

Could it be that, in our zeal to retain our steadfast confession of the faith once delivered to the saints by our forefathers,

we have become under-concerned with the demonstration of that faith in our daily lives? Could it also be that we have become less than passionate, if not lukewarm, with the proclamation of that faith to the unbelievers of the world who literally surround us at the beginning of this 21st century?

A few specific parochial statistics should suffice to make the point:

- Annually, 35 percent of the congregations of the LCMS gain not one adult by baptism or confirmation.
- Annually, 47 percent of the congregations of the LCMS gain one adult or less by baptism or confirmation.
- Since 1968, the number of annual adult confirmands has remained virtually the same, just under 30,000. Statistically, it requires the efforts of 115 LCMS members to result in one adult confirmation.
- We are facing significant financial challenges that will chart the course of the Synod in the years ahead:
 - Total annual LCMS congregational contributions have risen from \$200 million to more than \$1 billion in the past 30 years (\$1.3 billion in 2003 and \$1.4 billion in 2006).
 - Congregational contributions to the LCMS budget through the districts of the Synod have declined from just over \$25,000,000 to slightly under \$25,000,000, not adjusted for inflation, in the past three decades (\$22.5 million in 2003 and \$20 million in 2006).
- LCMS communicant membership has risen from 1,875,000 to 1,950,000 in the past 30 years, a sign of the graying of the LCMS.
- LCMS baptized membership has declined from 2.8 million to just under 2.6 million in that same period of time.
- We are blessed with a strong commitment to biblical and confessional theology, yet average attendance at worship, Sunday School, and Bible class continues to decline in many of our congregations.
- LCMS Bible study trends indicate Sunday School pupil enrollment dropped from 850,000 thirty years ago to under 500,000 today, with youth and adult Bible study group participants increasing from 310,000 to 340,000 during that same period.
- LCMS total weekly worship attendance has declined from 1,140,000 to 960,000 in the past 30 years, a decrease of more than 15 percent. Approximately one of every three baptized members of our Synod attends worship each week.
- We struggle with reaching and retaining people in our congregations, including our children and grandchildren:
 - Almost 50 percent of the infants baptized in our congregations are not confirmed in them.
 - Almost 50 percent of the children confirmed in our congregations are not active in them at age 21.
- We are currently experiencing critical shortages of professional church workers, including both pastors and educators. Many of our workers are stressed. Some are depressed and on the verge of burnout. Others are contemplating resignation due to family and/or financial pressures.

- Since 1988, the LCMS has lost approximately 1,750 more ordained ministers and more than 3,000 more commissioned ministers than we have gained.
- A vitally significant challenge faces our Synod as we address the issue of caring for and retaining these special gifts of God, while recruiting and training new workers to lead us into the future.

Some Reflections and Insights to Address These Present Realities

1. God's church, to be living, vibrant and productive, must rely on the power source of the church's vitality, namely, God's means of grace. In the same way that we are saved by grace through faith and our works flow from that God-given faith, so also our powerful God provides vitality in the church through the proclamation of His Word and the administration of His Sacraments. The result in the New Testament was rapid growth of the church! The marginal vitality in our Synod challenges us to address a genuinely spiritual problem. What resides in our heads must also find a prominent place in our hearts!
2. God has chosen to use people, His imperfect instruments, to distribute the Word and Sacraments in order to accomplish His will that all might be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. In the past several decades, American and global culture has changed from "churched" to "unchurched," making communication of the Gospel message much more difficult. At this moment in time, the Lutheran church has no meaningful presence in the minds of most Americans, especially non-white, non-upper-middle class Americans. We have much work to accomplish in faithfully and fruitfully communicating the Gospel of Christ to unbelieving people in America in this 21st century!
3. A national church body such as the LCMS is dependent upon the spiritual and organizational health and vitality of individual congregations for its own corporate health and vitality. Achieving holistic congregational health and vitality with a passion for mission requires significant effort, including concern for the holistic health of its members and its workers, as well as a proper concern for both doctrine and practice. Congregational health and vitality with a passion for mission must be the focus of our national Synod and its 35 districts.
4. Denominational finances are mostly dependent upon the health and vitality of individual congregations. Both the source and system of giving has significantly changed in Synod's funding over the last decade. For example, 30 years ago, the national Synod received \$25 million from congregations through the districts of the Synod. This year (2004) these gifts amount to \$22.5 million, not including special and designated gifts from individuals and congregations in the districts. (In 2006 the national Synod received \$20 million in unrestricted gifts from the 35 districts of the Synod.) We must address the question of whether we still want the national Synod, on behalf of the 6,148 congregations of the Synod, to conduct worldwide and national

ministries such as missions, higher education, congregational services, human care, etc. If so, from where will come the funding? The bottom line is that no program of funding or development will revitalize the LCMS. The issue is not a funding or allocation problem. Funding follows mission.

From the past, in the present and into the future comes The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, blessed by God in so many ways, yet significantly challenged by the realities of a rapidly changing world!

While some of the facts and figures stated above have changed in the past six years, I believe these observations still capture and articulate in succinct fashion the state of the Synod. Along with most other major U.S. church bodies, the LCMS continues to experience challenges of many kinds.

At the same time, I am greatly encouraged by the growing development of a mission spirit exemplified by the increasing number of congregations and organizations that have become focused intentionally and intently on expending the precious resources of time, energy, and money on reaching lost people for Christ. All of this is necessary, even vital, for the renewal and revitalization of the mission and ministry of our Synod at every level. Consider the following:

- More and more LCMS congregations have become directly involved in mission initiatives, both in their communities and around the world.
- Our seminaries have incorporated into their curriculum a distinctively mission-oriented focus.
- Our colleges and universities continue to develop a mission emphasis, both in curricular and extra-curricular endeavors.
- *Ablaze!* initiatives in the districts of our Synod have increased significantly in the past triennium.
- *Fan Into Flame* donors have committed millions of dollars to mission activities in and beyond their local congregation.
- Our Synod's auxiliaries, the Lutheran Women's Missionary League and the International Lutheran Laymen's League, continue to provide leadership in prayer, financial support, mission involvement, congregational training, and media and printed resources for the people and congregations of our Synod.

All these and many more initiatives are aimed at assisting congregations and their members "vigorously to make known the love of Christ, by word and deed, within our churches, communities, and the world." (LCMS Mission Statement)

Ablaze! and Fan Into Flame Goals

Although these goals have been stated numerous times in multiple ways, I believe it is important to state them here once more. By 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, under the blessing of Almighty God, we pray that the Spirit-guided efforts associated with the *Ablaze!* movement will have resulted in accomplishment of the following goals adopted at the 2004 Synod convention:

- Provide a Gospel witness to 50 million unreached or uncommitted people in the USA.
- Provide a Gospel witness to 50 million unreached or uncommitted people in the rest of the world.
- Plant 2,000 new LCMS missions in the United States.

In addition, we pray God's blessing upon the achievement of the following specific strategies articulated by LCMS World Mission in support of the *Ablaze!* goals noted above.

- Provide support and assistance for 2,000 LCMS congregations who recognize the need for renewed health and vitality.
- Increase by 50 percent the number of LCMS career missionaries in the field.
- Provide increased support for the 29 partner churches of the LCMS throughout the world.

Fan Into Flame! Goals

By 2010, we pray that our Synod will have gathered \$100 million to support the mission objectives of *Ablaze!* that require financial expenditure. These objectives include:

- the planting of 2,000 new missions in the United States;
- the revitalization of 2,000 existing LCMS congregations;
- the increase in numbers of career missionaries involved in a ministry of Word and Sacrament; and
- the provision of increased support for the mission and outreach efforts of our 29 partner churches throughout the world.

At the time of writing of this report, \$15 million in gifts and pledges have been received, mostly from major gift donors (\$50,000 and up) and from the two pilot districts (Texas and South Wisconsin) who initiated the congregational phase of *Fan Into Flame*. During 2007, seven additional districts will participate in the congregational phase, with approximately that same number scheduled to participate in 2008, 2009, and 2010, the year in which *Fan Into Flame* is to be concluded.

For the Sake of the Church

For the Sake of the Church is an effort to double the number of LCMS students and to gather \$400 million in endowments at our Concordia University System's ten colleges and universities. The latest report indicates an increase of LCMS students at our Concordias of approximately 50% and a total endowment at our ten institutions of approximately \$150 million. This is a most important endeavor worthy of our continued prayers and support!

Synod Solidarity in the Midst of Synod Conflict

In my report to the 2004 convention of the Synod, I shared observations and concerns regarding Synod solidarity in the midst of Synod conflict. That section of my 2004 report is included in the appendix of this *Workbook*, titled "Synod Solidarity in the Midst of Synod Conflict—Excerpt from the President's Report Part 1 of the 2004 Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod." Specifically, the following topics were addressed.

- Close Communion
- Church and Ministry
- Traditional and Contemporary Worship

- Participation in Events or Services with Other Christians or Non-Christians

While these issues are still matters of concern among us in our Synod today, numerous steps have been taken to address them. Noteworthy among these are the two "Model Theological Conferences" held in Phoenix in 2002 and 2005, both of them in August! All 35 districts of the Synod sent as many as five representatives, who then assisted with the planning and conducting of similar conferences in their respective districts to consider such topics as participation in civic events and the role of the office of the pastoral ministry in relation to the priesthood of all believers.

In addition, the Praesidium (the President and five vice-presidents of the Synod) is providing Bible studies for use by circuit counselors at circuit pastoral conferences for further study and discussion related to these and other issues. Also, the Council of Presidents is working diligently to provide counsel to the Synod regarding these subjects. When the COP completes its work aimed at achieving concord and unity on many of these matters of concern among us, that work will be shared with the Synod.

Lawsuit against the President and First Vice-President of the Synod and the Synod Itself

In the past three years, another point of contention has arisen among us, namely, how Christians in general, but specifically LCMS Christians, resolve conflict that arises in our midst. A most notable event this past triennium that caused particular attention to such concerns was a lawsuit filed August 15, 2005, against the President and First Vice-President of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and against the Synod itself. It is difficult to estimate how many people in the LCMS are aware of the lawsuit. Suffice it to say that many in our Synod have heard about this matter, the facts of which I will attempt to relate as objectively as possible in a Special Report from the President to the 2007 Convention of the Synod.

That Special Report, included in this *Workbook*, provides details regarding the issues and resolution of the lawsuit. I invite you to read that report to discern with certainty and in greater detail the facts of the lawsuit and to understand the agreements reached in its culmination. Some of the major matters of concern from the lawsuit are addressed in the report of the 2004 Resolution 7-02A Committee, which delegates will receive prior to the convention. The convention will have ample opportunity to consider the 7-02A Committee report and to take any action the delegates deem appropriate.

In this section of my report, the following news release from the November 1, 2006, issue of LCMS e-News offers a summary of the matter.

The lawsuit filed in the Circuit Court of St. Louis County, Mo., in August 2005 (known as the "Anderson Lawsuit") has now been fully dismissed, with all clerical details and waiting periods satisfied. The lawsuit was filed initially by approximately 80 LCMS members against President Gerald Kieschnick, First Vice-President William Diekelman, and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (as a necessary nominal defendant).

The plaintiffs initiated the lawsuit based upon their belief that exceptions requested by district boards of directors and granted by the President of the Synod that allowed circuits not meet-

ing bylaw criteria to send delegates to the Synod's 2004 convention were excessive. A second issue in the lawsuit was the plaintiffs' belief that certain official opinions of the Commission on Constitutional Matters of the Synod unlawfully restricted the authority of the Synod's Board of Directors.

In February of 2006, at the initiative of the Board of Directors, a four-member committee of the Board met and conferred with a four-member committee of the plaintiffs. After a series of meetings, an agreement was reached (see separate news release, "Anderson Lawsuit Agreement").

In the weeks after agreement was reached, the Agreement was signed by a large majority of the plaintiffs. However, prior to the court date for presenting the Agreement and advocating dismissal of the lawsuit, four members of the Board of Directors filed a Motion to Intervene as a result of concerns associated with that portion of the lawsuit pertaining to Board of Directors and Commission on Constitutional Matters authority issues.

Subsequent discussions resulted in the withdrawing of the Motion to Intervene paving the way for a final dismissal of the Anderson suit.

Again, I encourage you to read the Special Report in this Convention Workbook to understand more fully the details of this lawsuit.

In the future, it is my prayer that matters such as these will be settled among us, not with lawsuits in the civil courts, but in accord with the covenants of love to which we have agreed to live and work together as a Synod. It is God's will that we live and act in the spirit of the love of Christ, in accord with the exhortation of the Word of God, especially as written in 1 Corinthians 6:1–11:

"If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother goes to law against another— and this in front of unbelievers!

The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

As delegates will see in the Special Lawsuit Report included as a supplement to this Part I of the President's report, our Synod's Commission on Constitutional Matters has responded to questions submitted to it regarding this matter. The following question and response is of particular significance:

109. Proper Dissent and Dispute by Members of the Synod (05-2444)

Question 1: *Is it in harmony with the Constitution and Bylaws (1.3, 1.4.1, 1.7, 1.8, 1.10, 3.1.1, and 3.1.6.2) of the Synod for any member of the Synod or any group within the Synod as an avenue or form of dissent or dispute to engage in promoting non-compliance with the resolutions of the Synod and making charges against the Synod, the President, and others of the Synod by use of lawsuits, publications, letters, or meetings and conferences that are not in keeping with the polity of the Synod as set forth in the Constitution and Bylaws?*

Opinion: *No. Every member of the Synod (individual and congregation) joins the Synod voluntarily and in doing so agrees to relate to, live, and serve together with one another ("walk together") in harmony with the Constitution and Bylaws....*

In their agreement to live and work together in harmony (in harmony with the Constitution and Bylaws) the members of the Synod, when and where disputes exist, are required, subject to limited exceptions, to use the avenue provided by the Synod to settle disputes, as set forth in Bylaw section 1.10, "Dispute Resolution of the Synod," which in part states:

The Holy Scriptures (1 Cor. 6:1–7) urge Christians to settle their differences by laying them before the "members of the brotherhood." Therefore, the Synod in the spirit of 1 Corinthians 6 calls upon all parties to a disagreement, accusation, controversy, or disciplinary action to rely exclusively and fully on the Synod's system of reconciliation and conflict resolution. The use of the Synod's conflict resolution procedures shall be the exclusive and final remedy for those who are in dispute. Fitness for ministry and other theological matters must be determined within the church. Parties are urged, in matters of a doctrinal nature, to follow the procedures as outlined in Bylaw section 1.8. (Bylaw 1.10.1.1)

Therefore, all members of the Synod are required to resolve all matters of dissent or all disputes by the avenues and structures available to them as set forth in the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod without resorting to secular courts and without resorting to avenues, means, structures, or communications that are foreign or contrary to the synodical agreements and which are not in harmony with the polity of the Synod.

Dear friends in Christ, I truly hope and fervently pray that God's Spirit will touch the hearts of everyone in the LCMS, that all would work and walk together in a way that builds harmony and peace in our Synod, not divisiveness and contention.

Response of the Synod to South Asia Tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, and Hurricane Rita

As ONE people proclaiming the *ONE* message of Christ, we love one another and bear one another's burdens. We respond with open hearts and caring hands to the needs of our neighbors, "especially to those of the household of faith." This was exhibited across the Synod in a tremendous way during

the past two years in response to the natural disasters and catastrophes that struck our nation and world. Our Synod responded as Christ's ambassadors to the world. As president of this church body, I could not have been more humbly proud of our response:

- LCMS World Relief and Human Care continues to coordinate people and gifts, which exceeded \$13.4 million for hurricane relief and over \$5.7 million for tsunami aid in South Asia.
- LCEF granted special consolidation loans and other concessions to congregations, schools, and professional church workers.
- Concordia Plan Services waived premiums, fees, and deductibles for congregations, schools, and professional church workers.
- Synod districts have partnered with and supported congregations, schools, and professional church workers in the Southern District and other affected districts.
- Congregations and individuals have given generously of financial resources, have volunteered unselfish amounts of time for clean-up efforts, and have lifted up countless hours of prayer on behalf of those whose lives were impacted by these natural disasters.
- And, so much more was done and continues to be done.

We are called to live out our faith in such charitable and selfless ways for the sake of the Gospel.

In many areas of our country and world that were so devastated by disaster, many are still in need. As a Synod, we will continue to care for our brothers and sisters until those needs are met and the mission and ministries of our sister congregations are renewed. We are the caring arms of Christ that extend to our churches, to our communities, and to our world.

Church Relations

The Bylaws of the Synod state, "The President shall be the chief ecumenical officer of the Synod" and "He or his representative shall represent the Synod in official contacts with other church bodies" (Bylaw 3.3.1.1.2). Much time and energy are spent by the President of the Synod in relating to other church bodies and, under Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, working "through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies" (Constitution, Art. III).

At the present time, the LCMS enjoys the official relationship of altar and pulpit fellowship with 29 other Christian church bodies, all bearing the name "Lutheran," none of them located in the United States of America, but in the following countries:

1. Argentina—Evangelical Lutheran Church of Argentina
2. Brazil—Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil
3. Canada—Lutheran Church—Canada
4. Chile—Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Republic of Chile
5. Denmark—Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Denmark
6. England—The Evangelical Lutheran Church of England
7. France and Belgium—Evangelical Lutheran Church—Synod of France and Belgium

8. Germany—Independent Evangelical-Lutheran Church
9. Ghana—Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana
10. Guatemala—Lutheran Church of Guatemala
11. Haiti—The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Haiti
12. Hong Kong—The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod
13. India—India Evangelical Lutheran Church
14. Japan—Japan Lutheran Church
15. Kenya—Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya
16. Korea—Lutheran Church in Korea
17. Latvia—Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia
18. Lithuania—Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania
19. Mexico—Lutheran Synod of Mexico
20. Nigeria—The Lutheran Church of Nigeria
21. Papua New Guinea—Gutnius Lutheran Church
22. Paraguay—The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Paraguay
23. Philippines—The Lutheran Church in the Philippines
24. Russia—Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia (formerly part of Finland, now St. Petersburg)
25. South Africa—Lutheran Church in Southern Africa
26. South Africa—Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa
27. Sri Lanka—Lanka Lutheran Church
28. Taiwan—China Evangelical Lutheran Church
29. Venezuela—Lutheran Church of Venezuela

We are also engaged in dialogue or have had preliminary contacts with the following church bodies:

1. The American Association of Lutheran Churches
2. The Christian Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bolivia
3. Malagasy Lutheran Church (Madagascar)
4. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia
5. Protestant Christian Batak Church in Indonesia
6. Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church
7. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sudan
8. It should also be noted that we continue to have many opportunities for contacts with the Lutheran Church of Australia, especially in the International Lutheran Council.

Furthermore, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations is recommending that this summer's synodical convention declare the Synod to be in altar and pulpit fellowship with The American Association of Lutheran Churches. The report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations that recommends approval of this fellowship relationship is included in this *Convention Workbook*.

We pray that God will bless all of these relationships as we seek to strengthen them and to deepen our biblical and confessional unity in doctrine and practice with other Christian church bodies around the world, in accordance with our Lord's will as expressed in His high priestly prayer in John 17:20–23:

I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message,²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.²² I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as We are one:²³ I in them and You in Me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.

2004 Convention Resolutions Assigned to the President of the Synod

Following is a succinct summary of the 2004 Convention resolutions directly assigned to the President of the Synod, together with a report of my actions in response:

Action on Resolutions Assigned to the LCMS President's Office 2004 Synodical Convention

3-07 To Continue Discussions with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Resolved:

"Encourage the President of the Synod and our representatives on the Committee on Lutheran Cooperation (CLC) to pursue substantive conversations between representatives of the ELCA and the LCMS, in a continuing effort to bear witness to the truth of the Scriptures and the Confessions in the hope that agreement can be reached in those areas where we disagree" and "report to the next synodical convention any recommendations concerning changes in joint activity with the ELCA."

Action Taken:

Continuing conversations on numerous substantive issues between the ELCA and LCMS have been held semiannually. Participating with the President in these discussions were our representatives on the Committee on Lutheran Cooperation (CLC), namely First Vice-President William Diekelman, COP Chairman William Hoesman, Secretary Raymond Hartwig, Chief Administrative Officer Ronald Schultz, and CTCR Executive Director Samuel Nafzger. Also participating in the specifically theological discussions were Rev. Ralph Blumenberg, and Professor Walter A. Maier III. At one such substantive theological discussion, LCMS President Emeritus Ralph Bohlmann also was an invited participant.

Some discussions have utilized the 1978 document prepared and distributed by the Division of Theological Studies, Lutheran Council in the USA, titled, "The Function of Doctrine and Theology in Light of the Unity of the Church (FODT)." This report, prepared in the 1970s by official representatives of the LCMS and predecessor bodies of the ELCA, continues to represent a responsible description of the principal theological differences between the LCMS and the ELCA. These differences include the authority and interpretation of Scripture, the nature of confessional subscription, and the nature and basis of church fellowship. The FODT document therefore provides a helpful basis for ongoing theological discussions (also involving representatives of the seminaries of both church bodies) to assess the current situation and the prospects for continuing working relationships in the future.

On March 30, 2005, the President and LCMS representatives on the CLC shared with the ELCA representatives a statement offering "An LCMS Response" to the January 15, 2005, report of the ELCA's Task Force on Sexuality. I directly addressed this and other issues and concerns in my August 12, 2005, address to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Orlando. The text of this address is included in this workbook

as an addendum to my report. (See President's Report Part I, Addendum A.)

In addition, during the past triennium, the Praesidium has monitored and discussed "current concerns and potential directions of the ELCA (2004 Res. 3-07), including the ELCA's response to the Task Force Report on Sexuality and the ELCA's adoption (on August 11, 2005) of a proposal for "Interim Eucharistic Sharing" between the ELCA and the United Methodist Church.

In view of these developments, the Praesidium believes that the President of the LCMS and the Praesidium need to "continue to assess pastoral working relationships with the ELCA" (2004 Res. 3-07) during the next triennium. Resultantly, continued conversations are being planned. At this time there are no recommendations for convention consideration regarding any changes in joint activity with the ELCA.

However, before leaving this topic, I believe it is important for me to state my ongoing impression that, at many levels, the ELCA continues to demonstrate a vastly different understanding of the authority of Holy Scripture and interpretation of the Lutheran Confessions than does The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The primary reason for continuation of "substantive [theological] discussions" with the ELCA is, as articulated in Resolution 3-07, a "continuing effort to bear witness to the truth of the Scriptures and the Confessions in the hope that agreement can be reached in those areas where we disagree."

In addition and in conclusion, I believe the words of one portion of 2001 convention Resolution 3-21A "To Address Cooperative Pastoral Working Arrangements with Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" provide another valid reason to continue our discussions with the ELCA:

"Resolved, That we of the LCMS recognize that many of our brothers and sisters of the ELCA remain faithful to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and we resolve to reach out to them in love and support ..."

4-07 To Establish Blue Ribbon Task Force for Funding the Mission

Resolved:

"The Synod President appoint a Blue Ribbon Task Force (with representation from the board of Directors, Council of Presidents, and other such representatives as deemed appropriate by the President) on Funding the Mission that would report its recommendations to the 2007 convention one year prior to the convention."

Action Taken:

In 2004, I appointed the Blue Ribbon Task Force for Funding the Mission (BRTFFM) with representation in accord with 2004 Resolution 4-07. The BRTFFM completed its work with recommendations in a July 2006 report that was subsequently distributed in hard copy to all boards and commissions of the Synod, to all district boards of directors, and to all circuit counselors of the Synod. In addition, the availability of the report was communicated in an official periodical of the Synod and was made available to the Synod through its Web site. A copy of this report will be included in the *Convention Workbook*.

One of the recommendations of the task force has already been implemented, namely, a fiscal conference held February 8–10 in St. Louis. All 35 districts were represented at this conference by the district president or his representative and, in most cases, two other district representatives. A report on this conference was included in the March 2007 issue of *Reporter*.

7-02A To Amend Synodical Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws Regarding Officer and Board Responsibilities

Resolved:

“The convention . . . directs the President and the Board of Directors jointly to appoint a committee to address the matter and report to the 2007 convention.”

Action Taken:

In 2004 the Board of Directors and I jointly appointed a committee to address “the matter” of the Synod’s Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws regarding officer and board responsibilities in accord with 2004 Resolution 7-02A. The committee has been working diligently and is in the final stages of completing its report with recommendations to the 2007 convention. (A copy of this report was sent to delegates prior to the convention.)

Action on Certain Resolutions Not Specifically Assigned to the President 2004 Synodical Convention

1-01 To Affirm Mission 21st Century Response to Great Commission and

1-02 To Promote “Mission Outpost” Attitude

In many ways, I continued to affirm a confessional and mission-minded approach by the Synod toward fulfilling the Great Commission and have encouraged all congregations, schools and entities to view themselves as mission outposts and their communities as mission fields.

1-04 To Commit to \$100 Million Ablaze! Fund-Raising Effort

Soon after the 2004 convention, this effort was titled *Fan Into Flame*. Since that time I have personally expended significant time and energy in participating in the promotion of this effort and in visiting prospective major gift donors in support thereof. As of this writing, advance gifts and pledges amount to \$15 million, with that total increasing almost daily. An updated report will be provided at the convention.

1-05A To Establish Ablaze! National Goals

World Mission Services Executive Director Bob Roegner, his staff, and I organized and participated in district *Ablaze!* cluster groups in 2004 and 2006 and have addressed numerous gatherings to encourage and support efforts to achieve these goals. Further information will be presented at the convention.

1.07 Ethnic and Urban Ministry

In 2006, I appointed a Blue Ribbon Task Force on Hispanic Ministry to study how best to assess and improve the Synod’s capacity to reach out to the enormous and growing Latino population of the United States. The report and recommendations of the BRTFHM to the 2007 Convention of the LCMS address the short-term objective of helping us energize the LCMS in our goal of reaching Latinos with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and addresses longer-term objectives that will help us reach out to and integrate Latinos into the LCMS in real and meaningful ways. A copy of that report is included in the *Convention Workbook*.

2-03A To Accept Lutheran Service Book and Agenda as an Official Service Book and Hymnal of Synod

On many occasions I have supported the introduction of *Lutheran Service Book (LSB)* with special acknowledgments to the Commission on Worship and commendation of *LSB*.

2-04 To Affirm Responsible Use of Freedom in Worship

In conversations with the Commission on Worship, I affirmed respect for diversity in worship and encouraged the commission in its development of diverse worship resources for use in the Synod. The commission has appointed a committee to pursue this matter and will be reporting its recommendations to the 2007 convention.

2-07 To Reaffirm Lutheran Educators and Schools

In my regular e-news Letter to Pastors I highlighted the roles of Lutheran educators and other church work professionals on an ongoing basis. In addition, I visited and addressed various educators’ conferences in districts of the Synod.

2-09 To Commit to Strengthening Lutheran Doctrinal Education

In visits to the campuses of all ten Concordia colleges and universities and multiple visits to our two seminaries and in public addresses and written communications I have continued to promote the maintenance of a strong and solid confessional basis for all that we do in mission and ministry for our Lord and His Church.

3-01 To Formally Declare Altar and Pulpit Fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya

In addition to implementing this fellowship relationship according to protocol documents, various LCMS leaders and I personally visited the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya in 2006. As is true of most of the church bodies with whom the LCMS has declared altar and pulpit fellowship, the ELCK is rich in spirit and poor in resources. Significant time and resources have been shared with this partner church in the past three years.

3-02 To Encourage the International Lutheran Council

As a member of the executive committee of the ILC, I have continued to support and participate in the work of the council. I attended the biennial meeting of the council in Berlin in

2005 and numerous other meetings on behalf of the ILC. The next biennial meeting of the ILC is scheduled for September 24–30, 2007, in Accra, Ghana (West Africa).

3-03A To Foster Peace, Harmony, and Trust within Synod for Sake of Christ's Mission

On innumerable occasions I have addressed publicly and in print scriptural and confessional principles for promoting unity and trust in the Synod. Much time and energy was devoted to planning and participating in the 2006 National Circuit Counselors' Conference, the first conference of its kind since 1991, at which this issue was addressed.

3-06A To Commend CTCR Report on Guidelines for Participation in Civic Events

As directed in this resolution, I have consistently commended this document to the Synod for use when congregations and individual members of the Synod were faced with the possibility of participation in civic events.

3-08A To Affirm the Conclusions of the 1994 CTCR Report: The Service of Women in Congregational and Synodical Offices

Shortly after the 2004 convention, I appointed a special task force to create guidelines for congregations and district constitution committees to follow in revising congregational constitutions and bylaws to permit women to hold congregational offices so long as their assigned responsibilities do not include "distinctive functions" or "public accountability for the function of the pastoral office." That report was widely disseminated in the Synod and remains readily available.

4-02A To Provide Support for Seminaries

In preparation for the 2007 convention of the Synod, I designated the 2007 National Offering with a goal of \$1 million to be directed toward pastoral formation worldwide. Two-thirds of all gifts received will support Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, MO, and Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, IN. The remaining one-third will support the preparation of pastors at seminaries of LCMS partner churches around the world.

5-01 To Emphasize Mission Leadership Focus in Professional Church Worker and Lay Person Preparation

In my visits to LCMS colleges, universities, and seminaries, I have encouraged this emphasis among the presidents, faculties, and staffs, and continue to do so in communications with other Synod leaders as well.

5-03A To Increase the Number of Synod-Certified Teachers and

6-02A To Make Compensation and Health Care of Church Workers a High Priority

The recruitment and retention initiative known as "What a Way!" continues to highlight opportunities and encouragement for recruiting and retaining professional church workers. In addition, I appointed a task force to address the issue of church worker indebtedness related to compensation. The report of that task force has been shared with the Synod.

Furthermore, I have articulated on many occasions that priority be given to recruitment, training, compensation, and retention of professional church workers. I am encouraging the Council of Presidents to provide leadership in this very important matter in the years ahead.

6-01 To Address National Human Care Priorities

On numerous occasions I issued statements in support of President Bush's veto of the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act, which would have expanded federal funding for human embryonic stem-cell research, addressed the proposed Missouri Stem Cell Research and Cures Initiative, and issued a joint statement with the executive director of LCMS Human Care on the issue of immigration.

7-01A To Revise Bylaws to Clarify Election Process

These newly revised bylaws will be implemented at our 2007 convention.

7-14 To Amend the Procedure for Filling Vacancies

When and where appropriate, I have helped facilitate the procedure created by this resolution.

8-01A To Amend Bylaws on Ecclesiastical Supervision and Dispute Resolution

As called upon to do so I have implemented and supported this amended procedure in accord with the duties of the Office of the President.

Presidential Participation in Events, Meetings, Conferences, etc.

A summary of my participation in events, meetings, conferences, etc., is included below. I believe it is self-explanatory and provides the reader with a brief glimpse into the scope of responsibility of the person who occupies this office.

President's Activities

Groups or Categories	Number of Meetings, Events, etc.
Boards, Committees, Commissions, Forums, Auxiliaries, etc.	196
Council of Presidents	17
District Conventions	20
District Pastors Conferences/ All Workers Conferences	8
Visits to Seminary, College, and University Campuses	28
Congregational Anniversaries, Dedications, etc.	44
Other Conferences, Miscellaneous Conventions, etc.	31
Miscellaneous Events—Out of town	65
Miscellaneous Meetings/Events—St. Louis	82
Meetings with Individual Pastors, Lay, Staff, etc.	Countless

Visits from, to, or with Current or Potential Partner Churches	
American Association of Lutheran Churches	4
Canada	1
Germany	1
Haiti	1
Indonesia	1
Kenya	2
Latvia	1
Lithuania	1
SELK	1
Sudan	1
Meeting with President George W. Bush	1

Concluding Comments

Based on my extensive travels throughout the Synod these past 6 years, participating in many district pastoral conferences and conventions, meeting with district presidents, boards of directors, district staff members, pastors, teachers, and lay leaders from many congregations of the LCMS, I have a number of observations to share:

1. The LCMS has a tremendous opportunity and virtually unlimited resources from the hand of God to experience a reversal of the trend of the past 30 years that has marked us as a declining church body. I believe that excellence and faithfulness in Christian education endeavors, human care opportunities, and re-energized mission strategies in our Synod, centered in Word and Sacraments, will result in the LCMS being recognized worldwide as a dynamic, Christ-centered movement and a vibrant, vital gathering of biblical and confessional Christians in mission to the world. We are a biblical and confessional church. Our confession must and will be heard.
2. The LCMS is being refreshed with a renewed spirit of zeal for the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ. At times, this zeal is hampered by a partially fractured party spirit. But the presence of God in Word and Sacrament among us, the hope of Christ that is alive in the hearts of our people, and the mission focus that is welling up in so many of our congregations, institutions and entities give me great hope for the future of our beloved Synod.
3. The LCMS is held together by the grace of God. The commitment of her pastors, teachers, people, and congregations to that grace of God is increasingly evident. In response to God's grace, the people of this Synod are being compelled and propelled by the love of Christ to engage passionately the billions of unsaved people in this world with the confession of God's grace in Jesus Christ our Lord.

In the midst of such a time as this, we must seize the opportunities provided by the Spirit of God, overcome our challenges by the grace of God, and boldly move ahead in the mission given us by the Son of God. As our mission statement declares:

"In grateful response to God's grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacraments, the mission of the LCMS is vigorously to make known the love of Christ by word and deed within our churches, communities, and the world."

"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." (1 Cor. 15:58)

Respectfully submitted,



President's Report Part I, Addendum A

ELCA CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY GREETINGS

From Gerald B. Kieschnick, President
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
Orlando, Florida
August 12, 2005

Presiding Bishop Hanson, Assembly Members, Special Guests, Friends in Christ:

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ, Savior of the world and Lord of the universe, through whom alone we have forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation!

I couldn't help but observe during your assembly proceedings that you are no strangers to the joys and sorrows of parliamentary procedure. As a matter of fact, there was an occasion on which I closed my eyes and felt absolutely certain that I was at a convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod!

Seriously, it is my privilege today to bring you greetings on behalf of the 2.4 million baptized members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Even in the midst of our endeavor to reach 100 million unreached or uncommitted people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ by 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we have been praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit upon your assembly gathered here as children of the heavenly Father, "Marked with the Cross of Christ Forever."

In our liturgy for Holy Baptism, we speak these words, "Receive the sign of the holy cross both upon your forehead and upon your heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified." In Baptism, we are marked with the Cross of Christ forever.

Luther wrote in this regard what we also confess, "Since the water and the Word together constitute one Baptism, body and soul shall be saved and live forever . . . No greater jewel, therefore, can adorn our body and soul than Baptism, for through it we obtain perfect holiness and salvation, which no other kind of life and no work on earth can acquire" (LC, Baptism, 46, Tappert).

As Lutheran Christians, we cherish this great jewel that adorns us and marks us with the Cross of Christ. Likewise, we treasure the holy, precious Word of God that reveals the perfect law of God and the merciful Gospel of Christ—the light for the path of the Christian Church. With the confessors, “we believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testament are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged” (FC, Epitome, 1, Tappert).

Having received the treasure of God’s Word, as fallible human beings we are challenged with being true to this Word in the midst of a “dark and perverse generation.” Especially in this post-modern era, we are called upon to heed the Scripture that warns of days when people will listen only to what their itching ears want to hear. Meanwhile, the Word of God teaches that there is only one voice to be heard and followed, the voice of Jesus (John 10:4). It is imperative that we always strive faithfully to adhere to the Word of God in all aspects of faith and life, also in times of discord and discontent.

To that end, we in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod sincerely desire to be faithful to the Word of God in our life and work, both internally and externally. This includes our working relationships with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We will continue to strive to be faithful, by the grace of God and under the authority of God’s Word as the rule and norm of the Christian faith and life. We encourage you and we pray for you in your efforts to do the same.

We in the The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are sensitive to the struggles experienced within the ELCA, including the strongly held, opposing positions in your church on issues acted upon by this assembly this very day. We ourselves are no strangers to internal struggles.

In the Constitutions of each of our national church bodies, we pledge allegiance to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran

Confessions. However, it is clear that our two churches do not always share the same understanding of what is meant by such allegiance. All too often we do not come to the same conclusions regarding what we understand the Scriptures and Confessions to say. It is clear that we have reached different conclusions in a number of areas of faith and life, church and ministry, internal and external relationships. Decisions made by LCMS national conventions and decisions made by ELCA churchwide assemblies are apparently reflective of different exegetical principles and hermeneutical conclusions at work in our respective church bodies.

We humbly and respectfully pray that we will be able to come to harmonious conclusions regarding the authority and interpretation of the Word of God, so that the distance between us will not be widened, but will be bridged. I pray for both of our church bodies a special measure of wisdom, humility, understanding, and faithfulness to God’s holy revelation for our faith and His holy will for our lives.

Martin Luther writes regarding Baptism, “Therefore let everybody regard his Baptism as the daily garment which he is to wear all the time. Every day he should be found in faith and amid its fruits, every day he should be suppressing the old man and growing up in the new. If we wish to be Christians, we must practice the work that makes us Christians” (LC, Baptism, 84–85, Tappert).

Marked with the Cross of Christ in Baptism, may God help us in the fulfillment of our calling as the baptized children of God that we may “be found in faith and amid its fruits . . . [and] practice the work that makes us Christians.”

Please be assured that all of you are in my prayers and in the prayers of the pastors and people of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. God’s grace, mercy, and peace be with you all!

Gerald B. Kieschnick, *President*

R1-8-01

**Special Report of the President to the 2007
Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri
Synod regarding the Lawsuit against the
President and First Vice-President of the Synod
and against the Synod Itself**

A notable event that occurred within this past triennium that has caused much concern in the Synod was a lawsuit filed Aug. 15, 2005, against the President and First Vice-President of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and against the Synod itself. This special report from the President to the 2007 convention of the Synod attempts to relate, as objectively as is humanly possible, details and actions taken in regard to the issues and resolution of that lawsuit.

To begin, the following news release from the Nov. 1, 2006, issue of LCMS e-News offers a summary of the essence of the matter.

* * * *

DISMISSAL OF LAWSUIT

The lawsuit filed in the Circuit Court of St. Louis County, Mo., in August 2005 (known as the “Anderson Lawsuit”) has now been fully dismissed, with all clerical details and waiting periods satisfied. The lawsuit was filed initially by approximately 80 LCMS members against President Gerald Kieschnick, First Vice-President William Diekelman, and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (as a necessary nominal defendant).

The plaintiffs initiated the lawsuit based upon their belief that exceptions requested by district boards of directors and granted by the President of the Synod that allowed circuits not meeting bylaw criteria to send delegates to the Synod’s 2004 convention were excessive. A second issue in the lawsuit was the plaintiffs’ belief that certain official opinions of the Commission on Constitutional Matters of the Synod unlawfully restricted the authority of the Synod’s Board of Directors.

In February of 2006, at the initiative of the Board of Directors, a four-member committee of the Board met and conferred with a four-member committee of the plaintiffs. After a series of meetings, an agreement was reached (see separate news release, “Anderson Lawsuit Agreement”).

In the weeks after agreement was reached, the Agreement was signed by a large majority of the plaintiffs. However, prior to the court date for presenting the Agreement and advocating dismissal of the lawsuit, four members of the Board of Directors filed a Motion to Intervene as a result of concerns associated with that portion of the lawsuit pertaining to Board of Directors and Commission on Constitutional Matters authority issues.

Subsequent discussions resulted in the withdrawing of the Motion to Intervene, paving the way for a final dismissal of the Anderson suit.

Additional information of significance is contained in a public statement titled “Response to Question re 2004 LCMS Convention Delegates and Other Matters” issued by eight elected leaders of the Synod on May 6, 2005, which is reprinted in the following section.

**RESPONSE TO QUESTION RE 2004 LCMS
CONVENTION DELEGATES AND OTHER
MATTERS**

In recent days, some members and individuals in congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have contacted Synod and some district headquarters with questions and concerns regarding a letter that has been circulated to a number of LCMS congregations. The letter solicits participation in proposed litigation regarding exceptions granted for electoral circuits for the 2004 Synod convention, the authority of the Board of the Directors under Missouri law, and the status of related opinions of the Commission on Constitutional Matters. The purpose of this communication is to provide factual information in response to these questions and concerns.

BYLAW REGARDING VOTING DELEGATES

First, it is important to note the bylaw of the Synod regarding voting delegates and the granting of exceptions to electoral circuits sending voting delegates to a convention of the Synod. The applicable bylaw is from the 2001 *Handbook* of the Synod, which reads as follows.

Bylaw 3.03 Voting Delegates

Voting delegates shall consist of one pastor and one layman from each electoral Circuit. An electoral Circuit shall consist either of one or two adjacent visitation Circuits, as shall be determined by each District, on the basis of the following requirements: Each pair of delegates shall represent from 7 to 20 member congregations, involving an aggregate communicant membership ranging from 1,500 to 10,000. Exceptions to these requirements and limitations can be made only by the President of the Synod upon request of a District Board of Directors.

**SYNOD PRESIDENT’S COMMUNICATIONS
WITH COUNCIL OF PRESIDENTS**

The following information shared by the Synod President with the Council of Presidents in their regular meetings (and subsequently with the Board of Directors) in reference to the granting of exceptions may also be helpful.

**September 2002 Synod President’s Report
to LCMS Council of Presidents**

Electoral Circuits

In my initial long range planning and preparation for the 2004 Synodical Convention, I have reviewed the Handbook of the Synod regarding the matter of Electoral Circuits.

As I recall the practice of previous Synodical Presidents, I am reminded of the following quote in a letter from President Barry regarding this subject prior to the 1998 LCMS Convention, in a letter dated April 9, 1998, granting exemption to two Electoral Circuits in the Texas District. President Barry wrote:

“Exemptions are made on the basis of a circuit fulfilling one of two requirements of the Bylaws for an electoral circuit; namely, either seven congregations or 1500 communicant members.”

In an attempt to provide guidelines for each District that are consistent with historic practice, I plan to follow a similar principle, in general, when considering any request that may come from your District Board of Directors. Specifically, I envision giving positive consideration to requests for “exceptions to these requirements and limitations” of the definition of a Circuit that satisfy at least one of the requirements for a min-

imum number of 7 member congregations or a minimum “aggregate communicant membership” of 1,500.

It is my intention and pledge to work with each of you and with your District Board of Directors in resolving any unusual cases that may be received in my office as a request for exception to the “requirements and limitations” noted above.

Although it may seem a bit early to be thinking about such matters, I am sensitive to the rapidity with which time passes, especially with the first District Convention scheduled to begin January 26 in Grand Forks, ND. You will have many items “on your plate” in the months preceding your District Convention!

The Handbook defines the timetable for election of delegates to the Synodical Convention:

3.05 Election of Delegates

a. Each electoral Circuit shall meet at the call of the Counselor(s) to elect its delegates not later than nine months prior to the opening day of the convention.

Since the Synodical Convention begins July 10, 2004, this means that your Electoral Circuits must have their work of delegate elections completed no later than October 10, 2003. Therefore, if your Board of Directors desires to request an exception to the electoral circuit “requirements and limitations,” my office will need to receive these requests no later than July 10, 2003. This notification should provide ample time for you to process your requests and for me to consider them. Thanks for your assistance and understanding in this matter.

November 2002 Synod President’s Report to LCMS Council of Presidents

Electoral Circuits

In an attempt to provide guidelines for each District that are consistent with historic practice, I envision giving positive consideration to requests for “exceptions to ... requirements and limitations” of the definition of a Circuit that satisfy at least one of the requirements for a minimum number of 7 member congregations or a minimum “aggregate communicant membership” of 1,500.

February 2005 Synod President’s Report to LCMS Council of Presidents

Voting Delegates for 2007 Synod Convention

While I have already mentioned this matter verbally on two previous occasions, I encourage you again to review your District’s Electoral Circuit configuration to determine whether or not any changes need to be made. If that should be the case, my counsel is to handle this matter through the appropriate channels ASAP, in order to avoid the necessity of requesting exceptions to voting delegate requirements in preparation for the 2007 Synod convention.

April 2005 Synod President’s Report to LCMS Council of Presidents

Voting Delegates for 2007 Synod Convention

In preparation for the 2007 convention of the Synod, at each meeting of the COP since the issue addressed in the paragraph above was raised I have counseled all District Presidents to address the question of electoral circuits in your respective Districts. Specifically, I encourage your District Board of Directors or District convention, as the case may be, to make any changes to the configuration of your electoral circuits deemed prudent and proper in accord with Bylaw re-

quirements of 7–20 congregations and 1,500–10,000 communicants per circuit. I repeat that counsel once more, with the evangelical encouragement that this be done as soon as possible. Doing so will help avoid any further anxiety, criticisms, or concerns. It will also assist in preparation and logistics regarding the number of voting delegates to the 2007 convention of the Synod.

SYNOD BOARD OF DIRECTORS ACTIONS

In response to a November 3, 2004, letter from an LCMS pastor asking the Board of Directors of the Synod to file a similar suit against the Synod President and others, the board conducted an investigation into the matter of exceptions for electoral circuits sending voting delegates to the 2004 convention. This study included an inquiry into the actions of district boards of directors, who must request that such exceptions be made by the President of the Synod. The investigation demonstrated that the decisions and actions of the President were in accord with the Bylaws of the Synod. To the extent that district secretaries responded to requests for their board of directors’ minutes, the investigation also demonstrated that the districts were in compliance with Bylaw 3.03. A brief chart showing the number of voting delegates, the number of delegate exceptions requested and granted, and a review of these facts for the past three conventions is included as Addendum 1 to this communication. The complete report of the Secretary of the Synod regarding this matter is available on the Synod’s Web site.

The Board of Directors also took the following related action recorded in the February 24–25, 2005, minutes of the board:

(F.) To Proceed with Seeking a Judicial Declaration

A member of the Board placed into the docket a proposed action advocating that the Board of Directors proceed with seeking a judicial declaration to decide whether the delegate representation at the 2004 convention was valid and whether the outcome of any action taken by the convention was affected. After discussion, the following resolution was introduced: “*Resolved*, That the Board of Directors deny the request made in the November 3, 2004, letter that asked the Board to initiate a lawsuit against President Kieschnick and others regarding the creation of 188 [*sic*] additional delegates to the 2004 convention, the legality of convention Resolution 7-02A that relates to the authority of the Board of Directors, and the validity of certain CCM opinions; and be it further *Resolved*, That the Board of Directors express its concern regarding these issues and the need that they be resolved definitively and clearly.” After further discussion, an amendment was offered to shorten the resolution to end with the words “...and others” in the first resolve. The amendment carried, as also did the amended resolution. President Kieschnick asked that the minutes record that he refrained from voting. The resolution as adopted read as follows:

Resolved, That the Board of Directors deny the request made in the November 3, 2004 letter that asked the Board to initiate a lawsuit against President Kieschnick and others.

It should also be noted that the Board of Directors and the President of the Synod are moving forward with the requirement of Resolution 7-02A of the 2004 convention that “directs the President and the Board of Directors jointly to appoint a committee to address the matter and report to the 2007 con-

vention.” “The matter” refers to a large extent to the very issues that the proposed lawsuit intends to raise. The Board and the President have agreed upon an appointment process and have made their respective appointments. Arrangements for an initial meeting of this special committee will be made during the Board’s May 2005 meeting.

CONCLUSION

This information is being shared with the Synod in the hope and desire that the members and individuals in congregations of the Synod will be fully informed and reassured regarding these matters. We are prayerful that any congregation or individual solicited to join in such needless and divisive litigation involving these matters will decline to do so, especially given the fact that the Board of Directors has investigated the electoral circuit matter and has resolved not to pursue such action, and given the additional fact that the Board and the President have appointed a committee to look into the very issues being raised by the would-be lawsuit. The Holy Spirit-inspired words of St. Paul are commended for prayerful consideration:

¹If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? ²Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? ³Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! ⁴Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! ⁵I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? ⁶But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and this in front of unbelievers!

⁷The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? ⁸Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.

⁹Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:1–11)

Response submitted on May 6, 2005, by the following:

Dr. Gerald B. Kieschnick, President of the Synod
Dr. William Diekelman, First Vice-President of the Synod
Dr. Raymond Hartwig, Secretary of the Synod

Dr. Tom Kuchta, Vice-President—Finance—Treasurer of the Synod

Dr. Robert Kuhn, Chairman, Board of Directors of the Synod

Rev. James Fandrey, Vice-Chairman, Board of Directors of the Synod

Rev. William Hoesman, Chairman, Council of Presidents of the Synod

Dr. Larry Stoterau, Vice-Chairman, Council of Presidents of the Synod

ADDENDUM 1: Voting Delegate Registrations and Attendance

The following is a comparison according to districts of voting delegate registrations and attendance at the Synod’s 1998, 2001, and 2004 conventions:

- The numbers in **boldface print** represent the number of voting delegates registered for each convention.
- The numbers following in *italic print* represent the number of voting delegates that actually attended each convention.
- The numbers following in parentheses () indicate the number of requested exceptions granted by the President of the Synod according to Bylaw 3.03.
- The numbers in brackets [] indicate the number of such requests for exceptions that were denied.

	1998	2001	2004
Atlantic	24 22 (3) [1]	20 19 (4) [4]	24 24 (6)
Cal./Nev./Hawaii	36 35 (4)	32 32 (4)	36 36 (4)
Central Illinois	32 32	32 31	32 32
Eastern	32 32	28 28 (1)	32 32 (5)
English	38 36	40 39 (11) [1]	38 38 (8)
Florida/Georgia	32 32 (1) [1]	31 32 (1) [1]	44 44 (7)
Indiana	43 43	44 44	44 44 (1)
Iowa East	26 26	26 26 (1)	26 26
Iowa West	40 40	39 40	40 40 (1)
Kansas	32 32	32 32	32 31
Michigan	88 86 (3)	88 88 (5)	88 88 (5)
Mid-South	22 22	21 21 (1)	24 24 (1)
Minnesota North	36 35	36 36 (1)	36 36 (1)
Minnesota South	52 52	52 52	52 51 (2)
Missouri	58 58	58 58 (1)	58 57 (1)
Montana	12 12 (1)	12 12 (1)	12 12 (2)
Nebraska	44 43	44 44	44 44 (1)
New England	18 17 (2)	18 18 (2)	18 18 (3)
New Jersey	12 12	12 11	10 9 (1)
North Dakota	16 16	16 16 (3)	12 12
North Wisconsin	40 39	40 40	40 40
Northern Illinois	52 52	49 49 (2) [1]	52 52 (3)
Northwest	48 47	48 48 (1)	50 49 (5)
Ohio	30 30	30 30	30 30
Oklahoma	14 14	16 16 (1)	18 18 (4)
Pacific Southwest	56 55 (1)	52 52 (2) [3]	64 64 (2)
Rocky Mountain	28 28	28 28 (1)	28 28 (1)
SELC	6 6	6 6	6 6 (1)
South Dakota	22 22	22 22	22 22 (2)
South Wisconsin	54 54 (1)	53 53 (2)	54 54 (1)
Southeastern	38 38 (1) [1]	36 36 (1) [1]	40 40 (2)
Southern	28 28	28 28 (2)	28 28 (3)
Southern Illinois	14 14	14 14	22 22
Texas	62 61 (2)	72 72 (6) [2]	76 75 (13)
Wyoming	14 14 (2)	14 14 (2)	14 14 (2)
TOTALS	1199 1185 (21) [3]	1191 1188 (56) [13]	1246 1240 (88) [0]

In summary:	1998	2001	2004
• Number of visitation circuits:	629	627	644
• Number of electoral circuits:	601	596	623
• Number of voting delegates registered:	1199	1191	1246
• Number of voting delegates in attendance:	1185	1188	1240
• Number of districts requesting exceptions:	11	23	28
• Number of exceptions granted:	21	56	88
• Number of exceptions not granted:	3	13	0
• Number of delegates from exceptions:	42	112	176
• Percentage of delegates from exceptions:	3.5%	9.5%	14.2%

Excerpted from Report to LCMS Board of Directors,
February 24–25, 2005

Compiled by Dr. Raymond Hartwig, LCMS Secretary

[NOTE: In addition to the information in the original table included above with this report, the numbers for the 2007 convention have been shown in a table included at the end of this special report for the sake of complete comparison. (See Special Report Addendum A)]

In spite of the counsel offered above, a number of individuals pursued the matter, soliciting pastors and congregations to add their names to the lawsuit. Two LCMS laymen who were leaders of the movement to file the lawsuit met with the President and Synod's legal counsel on July 25, 2005, to discuss their intentions. Others had previously encouraged the filing of "a friendly lawsuit" to address the issues of the relationship between the Board of Directors and the Commission on Constitutional Matters, a matter addressed by Resolution 7-02A of the 2004 convention. Ultimately, the lawsuit was filed Aug. 15, 2005.

At the regular meeting of the Board of Directors on Aug. 19–20, 2005, the following resolutions were adopted after being discussed in executive session, with the President and First Vice-President of the Synod being excused from that session:

Resolved, That it is in the best interests of the Synod and its officers to have separate legal counsel for the officer defendants and for the Synod and to pursue insurance coverage and respond to the lawsuit accordingly. (The President of the Synod abstained from voting due to potential conflict of interest.)

Resolved, That the Synod indemnify the officers of the Synod to the extent of the deductible if insurance coverage is available and to indemnify them for their full legal expenses if coverage is not available, pursuant to Board of Directors Policy 5.8.5. (The President of the Synod abstained from voting due to potential conflict of interest.)

The Vice-President–Finance—Treasurer of the Synod has included in his report to the convention that the cost to the Synod for responding to this lawsuit was \$500,000, which includes the cost of responding to the motion to intervene filed by four members of the Board of Directors on July 26, 2006. That motion to intervene was subsequently withdrawn during a regular meeting of the Board of Directors on Aug. 25–26, 2006.

As of the date this report is being written, all but a few original plaintiffs have signed the agreement to dismiss, which is summarized in the official summary report below.

SUMMARY REPORT (5/24/06)

A lawsuit that was filed in the Circuit Court of St. Louis County, Mo., in August, 2005, by approximately 80 LCMS members against President Gerald B. Kieschnick, First Vice-President William R. Diekelman, and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as a necessary nominal defendant has been resolved with all claims dismissed.

The plaintiffs initiated the suit based upon their beliefs that the number of exceptions made for delegates to the Synod's 2004 convention by the President of the Synod upon request of district boards of directors was excessive and not in compliance with the Synod's Bylaw 3.1.2, and that certain official opinions of the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) unlawfully restricted the authority of the Synod's Board of Directors. The President and Vice-President denied all allegations of wrongdoing and moved to dismiss the claims. The Synod also filed a separate motion to dismiss the suit.

The questions raised in the lawsuit regarding the exceptions were based upon the increased numbers of exceptions made for the 2004 convention compared to exceptions made for the Synod's 1998 and 2001 conventions and upon incom-

plete information from an early report published by the Secretary of the Synod. Following the initiation of the lawsuit, an updated report was prepared by the Secretary and posted on the Synod's Web site.

The concerns regarding certain CCM opinions that address or impact the authority of the Board of Directors had been raised before and during the Synod's 2004 convention and were the subject of a convention resolution (Res. 7-02A) that directed the President and the Board of Directors to appoint a committee to conduct a study and to report and make recommendations to the Synod's 2007 convention.

In January of this year the Synod's Board of Directors adopted a resolution, "consistent with Matthew 5:25, in the best interests of the Synod, and with a desire for peace and unity," to establish a committee of the Board to meet with representatives of the plaintiffs to see if the matter could be resolved out of court. Accordingly, a committee of four Board members was appointed which, along with President Kieschnick and Vice-President Diekelman, met and conferred with a committee of the plaintiffs until an agreement to resolve the claims was reached.

The Agreement includes a dismissal of all claims against President Kieschnick, Vice-President Diekelman, and the Synod. It also includes an expression of regret by the plaintiffs for the pejorative language contained in and resulting from the filing of the lawsuit and an apology to the Synod, the President, the First Vice-President, and all others offended by the lawsuit. No disciplinary action for participation in the lawsuit will be taken against plaintiffs who sign the Agreement.

In the Agreement the President commits to reaffirming his communications to the district presidents of the Synod regarding the implementation of bylaws governing visitation and electoral circuits. In the spirit of Bylaw 3.1.2, he will first direct individual visitation circuits not meeting bylaw requirements for electoral circuits to the remedy provided by the bylaw (to combine with an adjacent visitation circuit to form an electoral circuit).

The Agreement also includes provisions related to the issue of the CCM opinions and the authority of the Board of Directors, the subject of Resolution 7-02A adopted by the 2004 Synod convention. The President will give priority to the Resolution 7-02A Committee created by the 2004 Synod convention by referencing the committee's work in his convention report, by including it in the convention *Workbook*, and by allowing ample time for the convention floor committee to which the committee's work is assigned to present its report and resolutions to the convention. He will also recommend to the convention the approval of a standing rule that will allow 90 minutes of continuous consideration, presentation, and debate of the resolution(s) pertaining to the 7-02A Committee's report and will schedule the floor committee's report for presentation in a session of the convention early enough to allow for proper consideration of and action on its resolution(s) regarding the Resolution 7-02A Committee's report.

In the interest of peace and harmony in the Synod, neither the plaintiffs nor the defendants will request of the other or of the Court payment of their attorneys' fees and costs associated with the lawsuit.

The resolution of this lawsuit was made possible by the recognition by all involved of the need to approach the task as fellow Christians intent upon resolving the matter for the good of the Synod and its proclamation of the Gospel. The parties to this matter support the agreements that have been made and the measures that will be taken to satisfy the concerns that have been raised. They have pledged to work together to effect the terms of the agreement.

Some have questioned the wisdom of the following portion of the agreement dismissing the lawsuit: "In the interest of peace and harmony in the Synod, neither the plaintiffs nor the defendants will request of the other or of the Court payment of their attorneys' fees and costs associated with the lawsuit." This matter was discussed at length, both during conversations between plaintiffs and Board of Directors members and also in the Board of Directors itself.

Many members of the Board felt strongly that the Synod should seek reimbursement of these fees from the plaintiffs who initiated the lawsuit. Vice-President Diekelman and I were among them. Yet as the conversations continued, two factors emerged that led to the Board's decision not to seek reimbursement. One factor was the possibility that if the case were to go to court, a judge or jury could make a decision forcing the Synod to pay plaintiff's legal fees. The second factor was the difficulty in collecting legal fees from approximately 80 pastors and/or congregations, even were the court to instruct the plaintiffs to reimburse the Synod's legal costs. Many of the plaintiffs were retired pastors, living on modest, fixed incomes. A few plaintiffs had even died after agreeing to file the lawsuit. Collecting legal fees from their widows and/or children was not a viable option. So the decision was made, as the statement says, because doing so seemed to be "in the interest of peace and harmony in the Synod."

Of significance in this case is the work of the Commission on Constitutional Matters in reply to questions submitted to the Commission regarding the appropriateness or lack thereof of members of the Synod filing a lawsuit against other members of the Synod. Following are excerpts from the minutes of the Nov. 28–29, 2005, meeting of the Commission:

109. Proper Dissent and Dispute by Members of the Synod (05-2444)

Question 1: Is it in harmony with the Constitution and Bylaws (1.3, 1.4.1, 1.7, 1.8, 1.10, 3.1.1, and 3.1.6.2) of the Synod for any member of the Synod or any group within the Synod as an avenue or form of dissent or dispute to engage in promoting non-compliance with the resolutions of the Synod and making charges against the Synod, the President, and others of the Synod by use of lawsuits, publications, letters, or meetings and conferences that are not in keeping with the polity of the Synod as set forth in the Constitution and Bylaws?

Opinion: No. Every member of the Synod (individual and congregation) joins the Synod voluntarily and in doing so agrees to relate to, live, and serve together with one another ("walk together") in harmony with the Constitution and Bylaws...

In their agreement to live and work together in harmony (in harmony with the Constitution and Bylaws) the members of the Synod, when and where disputes exist, are required, subject to limited exceptions, to use the avenue provided by the Synod to settle disputes, as set forth in Bylaw section 1.10, "Dispute Resolution of the Synod," which in part states:

The Holy Scriptures (1 Cor. 6:1–7) urge Christians to settle their differences by laying them before the "members of the brotherhood." Therefore, the Synod in the spirit of 1 Corinthians 6 calls upon all parties to a disagreement, accusation, controversy, or disciplinary action to rely exclusively and fully on the Synod's system of reconciliation and conflict resolution. The use of the Synod's conflict resolution procedures shall be the exclusive and final remedy for those who are in dispute. Fitness for ministry and other theological matters must be determined within the church. Parties are urged, in matters of a doctrinal nature, to follow the procedures as outlined in Bylaw section 1.8. (Bylaw 1.10.1.1)

Therefore, all members of the Synod are required to resolve all matters of dissent or all disputes by the avenues and structures available to them as set forth in the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod without resorting to secular courts and without resorting to avenues, means, structures, or communications that are foreign or contrary to the synodical agreements and which are not in harmony with the polity of the Synod.

Question 5: Is it in harmony with the Constitution and above Bylaws of the Synod for any member of the Synod to engage in dissenting (or promoting non-compliance) against the Synod by use of a lawsuit, when such members have not used the avenues of dissent as set forth in Bylaw 1.8 of the Synod?

Opinion: No. A lawsuit is not a legitimate avenue of dissent. In the agreement to live and work together, a member of the Synod is required to follow the avenue of dissent as set forth in Bylaw section 1.8, including honoring and upholding the resolutions of the Synod. While a lawsuit may be an appropriate process in which to resolve a dispute in the secular world, members of the Synod are governed by Bylaw section 1.8 as the required, exclusive, and agreed-to avenue of dissent and Bylaw section 1.10 as the required, exclusive, and agreed-to method of dispute resolution.

Question 6: Is it in harmony with the Constitution and above Bylaws of the Synod for any member of the Synod to engage in dispute against the President of the Synod or the Synod itself by use of a lawsuit, when such members have not used the avenue of dispute as set forth in Bylaw 1.10 of the Synod?

Opinion: No. In the agreement to live and work together, a member of the Synod is required to rely exclusively and fully on the Synod's system of reconciliation and conflict resolution. Unless the dispute is one concerning property rights or contract arrangements under Bylaw 1.10.3 (a) or (b), such suit would be a gross violation of the process of Bylaw section 1.10 and the covenants which bind members together in the Synod. The use of the Synod's conflict resolution procedures is the exclusive and final remedy for those who are in dispute (Bylaw section 1.10).

Question 7: If any of the above is not in harmony with the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod, what remedy does the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod provide?

Opinion: The Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod provide disciplinary measures against any member who violates the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod. Such provisions include Bylaw section 1.10, "Dispute Resolution of the Synod": "The use of the Synod's conflict resolution procedures shall be the exclusive and final remedy for those who are in dispute" (Bylaw 1.10.1) and Article XIII of the Constitution, "Expulsion from the Synod," and its procedures as set forth in Bylaw sections 2.13-2.16:

The only remedy available to the Synod in response to improper activities in the life of such a member of the Synod is, as is true with respect to violations of other conditions of membership or is otherwise appropriate under the Constitution or these Bylaws, and following the procedures set forth in these Bylaws, to take such action as may lead to termination of that membership and the attendant rights and privileges. (Bylaw 2.13.2)

* * * *

Some of the matters of concern articulated in the lawsuit are addressed in the report of the 2004 Resolution 7-02A Committee, which will be sent to all delegates prior to the convention. The 2007 Convention will have ample opportunity to consider the 7-02A committee report and to take any action the delegates deem appropriate.

At the time of writing of this report, some of the original participants and plaintiffs in the lawsuit are engaged in an effort to communicate to delegates to this convention concerning topics in the lawsuit in a way that misrepresents the truth and casts aspersions on the integrity and motives of district boards of directors and officers of the Synod. I truly hope and fervently pray that God's Spirit will touch the hearts of those involved in this endeavor, that all would work and walk together in a way that builds harmony and peace in our Synod, not divisiveness and contention.

Respectfully submitted,



Special Report, Addendum A

Voting Delegate Registrations and Attendance

*According to the Secretary of the Synod, prior to 2001 delegate exceptions were handled "informally," so the precision of figures for 1998 is questionable.

District	1998				2001				2004				2007			
	1998 No. of Reg. Voting Delegates*	Reg. Voting Delegates Attended	Exceptions granted under Bylaw 3.03	Exceptions denied under Bylaw 3.03	2001 No. of Reg. Voting Delegates	Reg. Voting Delegates Attended	Exceptions granted under Bylaw 3.03	Exceptions denied under Bylaw 3.03	2004 No. of Reg. Voting Delegates	Reg. Voting Delegates Attended	Exceptions granted under Bylaw 3.03	Exceptions denied under Bylaw 3.03	2007 Tentative No. of Reg. Voting Delegates	Reg. Voting Delegates Attended	Exceptions granted under Bylaw 3.1.2	Exceptions denied under Bylaw 3.1.2
AT	24	22	3	1	20	19	4	4	24	24	6	3.03	24		4	
CNH	36	35	4		32	32	4		36	36	4		32		1	
CID	32	32			32	31			32	32			32			
EAS	32	32			28	28	1		32	32	5		34		2	
ENG	38	36			40	39	11	1	38	38	8		40		8	
F-G	32	32	1	1	31	32	1	1	44	44	7		42		4	2
IN	43	43			44	44			44	44	1		48		2	
IA E	26	26			26	26	1		26	26			26			
IA W	40	40			39	40			40	40	1		37		1	
KS	32	32			32	32			32	31			34		2	
MI	88	86	3		88	88	5		88	88	5		88		4	
MDS	22	22			21	21	1		24	24	1		24		1	
MNN	36	35			36	36	1		36	36	1		36		1	
MNS	52	52			52	52			52	51	2		50		1	
MO	58	58			58	58	1		58	57	1		58		2	
MT	12	12	1		12	12	1		12	12	2		12		2	
NEB	44	43			44	44			44	44	1		44		2	
NE	18	17	2		18	18	2		18	18	3		18			
NJ	12	12			12	11			10	9	1		10			
ND	16	16			16	16	3		12	12			12			
N WI	40	39			40	40			40	40			40			
NID	52	52			49	49	2	1	52	52	3		56			
NOW	48	47			48	48	1		50	49	5		50		4	
OH	30	30			30	30			30	30			32			
OK	14	14			16	16	1		18	18	4		18		4	
PSW	56	55	1		52	52	2	3	64	64	2		64		3	
RM	28	28			28	28	1		28	28	1		30		2	
SELC	6	6			6	6			6	6	1		8		1	
SD	22	22			22	22			22	22	2		22			
S WI	54	54	1		53	53	2		54	54	1		51		2	
SED	38	38	1	1	36	36	1	1	40	40	2		42		2	
SOU	28	28			28	28	2		28	28	3		28		3	
SID	14	14			14	14			22	22			22			
TX	62	61	2		72	72	6	2	76	75	13		74		7	
WY	14	14	2		14	14	2		14	14	2		12			
TOT	1199	1185	21	3	1191	1188	56	13	1246	1240	88	0	1250		65	2

Part II

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ, Savior of the world and Lord of the universe, through whom alone we receive forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation!

Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to this Floor Committee Meeting Weekend, in preparation for the 63rd Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. As you are well aware, convention activities will begin eight weeks from tomorrow. Many in the Synod are looking forward with great anticipation to this convention, and I pray that is true of each of you, as well.

In my travels around the Synod and in communications from pastors, educators, and laypeople from throughout the Synod, I am greatly encouraged by the voluntarily and freely offered assurance that many, many people and many, many congregations are holding each of us, the entire Synod and our national convention in their private and public prayers. Although originally offered in a context of prayer for healing, the words of the apostle James seem fitting for our church body as well: “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16). It is my prayer that the prayers of the many who have been made righteous by the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, our Savior, will indeed be received with favor by God Himself and that His blessing will abound in our midst during the days, weeks, months, and years ahead.

Floor Committee Selection Process and Assignment

There are several aspects of this Report of the President of the Synod: Part II. Before delving into specific areas of importance and concern, I believe it is important to say a few words about how and why each one of you has been selected to serve your God and your Synod as a member of a convention floor committee. The Bylaws of our Synod address this important matter:

3.1.7 All reports and overtures accepted by the President in accordance with the foregoing paragraphs shall be referred by him to convention committees appointed by him in the name of the convention.

(a) Appointments will be made from among the voting delegates (Bylaw 3.1.2ff), advisory delegates (Bylaw 3.1.3ff), and advisory representatives (Bylaw 3.1.4ff).

(b) Ordained ministers, commissioned ministers, and laypersons shall be represented on all committees.

Those words describe in general how you got here. More specifically, in appointing each of you to your respective floor committee, I asked for and received assistance from your district president, who several months ago received information from my office regarding the process that would be followed in the selection of floor committee members.

Basically, that process recognized the variation in numbers of convention voting delegates from each of the 35 districts of the Synod and created a formula for floor committee member recommendations in proportion to the number of voting delegates from each district. Essentially, the larger the number of voting delegates in a district, the greater the number of floor committee member recommendations that were received from that district for potential floor committee ser-

vice. Resultantly, district representation across the whole of all the committees is generally proportionate in number to the size of the voting delegation and number of floor committee recommendations from each district, with a minimum of at least one floor committee member from each district in addition to the district president. Your district president was quite helpful in identifying the gifts, interests, and experiences of the voting delegates from your district, from among whom you were chosen for this position.

Serving on a floor committee includes privilege, task, and process, all briefly described in the remainder of Bylaw 3.1.7 and in Bylaw 3.1.8.1:

(e) If the President deems it advisable, he may convene any committees prior to the opening of the convention.

(f) After due consideration of the matters referred to it, each committee will report its findings and recommendations to the convention.

3.1.8.1 The first issue of *Today’s Business* containing proposed resolutions shall be sent to all registered delegates of the convention and to each congregation of the Synod.

(a) Responses to the tentative resolutions contained in the first issue of *Today’s Business* shall be submitted to the chairman of the appropriate floor committee at least one week prior to the convention.

(b) All floor committees shall meet at the convention site at a time prior to the opening of the convention to review such responses and reconsider their proposed resolutions accordingly.

Those of you who serve as floor committee chairmen and vice chairmen are well aware of the process by which you were selected by the Synod President. Essentially, a review was conducted of Synod conventions since 1980, providing objective information regarding how frequently and how recently each district has been privileged to offer the services of its district president as floor committee chairman. In addition, consideration was given to gifts, interests, and experiences of district presidents that would be compatible with the needs of each floor committee.

In all cases, the process of appointment of floor committee chairmen and members was bathed in prayer and purposeful reflection. While others may have been chosen for the position you now hold, the fact remains that, in the words of the letter written by the apostles and elders in Acts 15 (the portion of Scripture, incidentally, that summarizes one of the two reasons for the forming of this “Synodical Union” we know and love as The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod), “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” that each of you be appointed.

A Word of Prayer

With that introduction, I invite you to join me in a word of prayer before we proceed.

Dear heavenly Father, we praise and magnify your holy name. We thank you for the gift of the life, perfect obedience, suffering, death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Pour out upon us the gifts of your Holy Spirit, by whose working through Word and Sacrament we have become your children. Fill our hearts and our minds, our lips and our lives with the truth and the power that you alone can provide. May every word we speak and every deed we perform bring honor and glory to your name, edification to your people, and expan-

sion to your kingdom, in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Convention Theme and Biblical Basis

In the Report of the President: Part I, printed in your *Convention Workbook*, I spent some time unpacking the theme of our convention, “One Message—Christ!” I believe it is important briefly to review this information.

The theme of this convention is the second part of the three-fold vision of *One Mission, One Message, One People*. Our theme is “One Message—Christ! His Love Is Here for You!” Its scriptural basis is 1 John 4:9–11:

This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Many passages of Holy Scripture articulate the truth that Jesus Christ alone is the Savior of the world. The apostle John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, addresses the person and work of Christ from a personal perspective, focusing specifically and powerfully on the benefit of God’s love, made known to mankind in the person of Christ, for each and every person in the world.

In addition, John clearly focuses his Spirit-given words on matters of great importance for us as Lutheran Christians, namely, a proper understanding of Law and Gospel. “*This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*” Thus John also writes, in the 19th verse of this same chapter, “*We love because He first loved us.*”

It is therefore true that any love that comes from us as human beings comes only as a result of the fact that God “first loved us.” This is true in respect to the love we show to one another, as well as the love we demonstrate toward God Himself. Our lives are lived to God’s glory, in accord with our vocational calling as Christians, purely in response to God’s love for us in Christ our Lord. The power of that love propels us to proclaim the light of Christ’s love to all who live in the darkness of doubt and disbelief.

The subtheme “His Love Is Here for You” has numerous applications:

- Christ’s love is here, in God’s Holy Word, for you!
- Christ’s love is here, in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, for you!
- Christ’s love is here, in the words of Holy Absolution, for you!
- Christ’s love is here, in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, for you!
- Christ’s love is here, in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, for you!

The nonbelieving people of the world, including many people here in our own country, are watching and waiting for the discovery of meaning and value in their lives. They also are wondering and wandering in their effort to find such meaning and value, often turning to movements or groups whose faith is based on principles or beliefs contrary to what we in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod believe, teach, and confess.

From 160 years of biblical and confessional study, we in the LCMS have come to understand and firmly believe the truth of God’s love for the world in Jesus Christ, expressed so clearly in the words of Jesus Himself: “*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him*” (John 3:16–17).

That is the message we proclaim. We in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have *ONE Mission*—to be *ABLAZE!* in seeking the lost for Christ with the power and presence of the very Spirit of God in our lives, on our lips, and in our labors! We proclaim *ONE Message*, that Jesus Christ alone is the only Savior of the world! We pursue the *ONE Mission* and proclaim the *ONE Message* as *ONE People*, united by God’s love in Jesus Christ!

It is my prayer to our gracious God that this message will be the constant focus of this 63rd Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod! It is both my counsel to you and my prayer to God that every resolution you prepare for presentation to the convention of our Synod will reflect this theme and will enhance the mission connected to it, to the glory of God and for the salvation of many of the people of the world who do not now confess the name of Jesus.

Report of the Convention Delegate Review Committee

Perhaps by now most if not all of you have received information regarding a document titled “Update on Circuit Exceptions for the 2007 LCMS Convention.” The author was a plaintiff in the lawsuit filed in 2005 against the President and First Vice-President of the Synod and against the Synod itself. The document essentially resurrects the same issues contained in the lawsuit, having to do with requests for bylaw-allowed voting delegate exceptions to a Synod convention. Detailed information regarding the lawsuit is included in the *Convention Workbook* in a “Special Report of the President to the 2007 Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod regarding the Lawsuit against the President and First Vice-President of the Synod and against the Synod Itself.”

In an April 17, 2007, memo to all district presidents, I addressed this matter in some detail, encouraging district presidents to share that memo with voting delegates from their districts. In addition, my May 8, 2007, memo to all voting delegates and district presidents stated,

This memo is to inform you of my belief and testimony that all things regarding this matter have been done with integrity, transparency, and propriety, with no violations of either the spirit or the letter of Holy Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, state or federal laws, lawsuit agreements, constitution, bylaws, resolutions, or other covenants of love by which all members of the Synod have agreed to work and walk together. All current and former district presidents in office prior to the Synod conventions in question (2001, 2004, and 2007) have also stated in writing their belief that nothing inappropriate has been done in their districts in connection with this process.

However, to assure the Synod that all is in order regarding this matter, to honor and protect the integrity of the convention itself, and to assure each of you that your election to serve as a delegate to the 2007 LCMS convention is indeed

valid and proper, I have asked seven national Synod leaders to confer together to review the procedure followed by district boards of directors and the president of the Synod regarding circuit electoral delegate exceptions to the 2007 convention. Their report is due to be completed by May 15 and will be sent to all voting delegates.

Their report is now complete, has been sent to all voting delegates, and is attached as Appendix I to this Report of the President. Summarily, the report stated that no evidence was found of collaboration between the office of the President of the Synod and the presidents and boards of directors of the districts regarding the seating of delegates to the 2007 convention and that the 65 electoral circuit exceptions granted for the 2007 convention of the Synod were granted according to the provisions of Bylaw 3.1.2. The committee also “recognizes that a comprehensive study of concerns associated with the Synod’s delegate representation process is needed” and is aware that the topic of fair representation at national conventions is included in the overall study currently underway by the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Synod Structure and Governance.

The bottom line is that convention delegates and the Synod itself can rest assured that there was nothing improper or inappropriate that occurred in the process of requesting or granting approval of bylaw-allowed exceptions for circuit electoral delegates. All voting delegates to every Synod convention, including the 2007 convention, have been legitimately and properly elected and certified in accordance with the covenants of love by which we have all agreed to abide.

The concluding paragraph of my special report regarding the lawsuit (written March 10, 2007) states,

At the time of writing of this report, some of the original participants and plaintiffs in the lawsuit are engaged in an effort to communicate to delegates to this convention concerning topics in the lawsuit in a way that misrepresents the truth and casts aspersions on the integrity and motives of district boards of directors and officers of the Synod. I truly hope and fervently pray that God’s Spirit will touch the hearts of those involved in this endeavor, that all would work and walk together in a way that builds harmony and peace in our Synod, not divisiveness and contention.

That remains my hope and prayer.

Suggestions for Floor Committee Consideration

As has been the custom for many years, I believe it is appropriate to offer general recommendations for floor committee consideration. This has been the precedent set by Synod presidents in the past. I follow this precedent with the assurance of my absolute trust and complete confidence in you, the leaders and members of the floor committees entrusted with the responsibility of forming and fashioning the resolutions to be presented to the convention of our Synod in the weeks ahead.

Here are a few general comments and recommendations for your consideration as you undertake this significant responsibility.

Floor Committee 1—Missions

Many in our Synod share with me a deep concern about the decline in baptized membership of the congregations of

the Synod over the past 35 or more years. This trend sounds an alarm of the corresponding plight of many, many people who are dying every day without saving faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Simultaneously, it remains God’s desire for “all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” The clearly stated mission of the LCMS, “vigorously to make known the love of Christ,” is intent on God’s purpose. It is the heartbeat of our existence and gives direction for our life as a church body. The formidable fiscal, spiritual, and human resources of our Synod must be focused on God’s mission as we address the regrettable and unacceptable decline in baptized members in the congregations of our Synod—for this decline is a manifestation of more people leaving the Synod through death or defection than those who join our congregations through infant and adult Baptisms, adult confirmations, and professions of faith. Most important is our concern about the horrifying dilemma that some of the people who leave our congregations represent souls lost for all eternity. So we faithfully pursue the many opportunities for mission that exist in our country and world that we “might win some” for Christ.

Numerous individuals, congregations, districts, entities, institutions, auxiliaries, recognized service organizations, and mission societies of the Synod are involved in intentional mission efforts of many kinds, including global mission endeavors, some but not all in partnership with LCMS World Mission. Many are experiencing direct, hands-on mission involvement, primarily through short-term mission events, both locally and globally.

My counsel is for Floor Committee 1 to consider resolutions that would

- affirm the priority of mission involvement in coordination with LCMS World Mission;
- explore ways and means of expanding our worldwide mission impact in fiscally prudent and biblically acceptable avenues;
- encourage mission planting in the United States by “covenant congregations” in collaboration with district mission leaders;
- encourage the objectives of congregation revitalization toward the goal of every LCMS congregation as a “mission outpost”; and
- affirm the role of the priesthood of all believers in partnership with pastors and other church leaders in the mission of our Synod.

Floor Committee 2—District and Congregational Services

A primary focus of Committee 2 will most likely be provision of proper and adequate resources to congregations and professional church workers of the LCMS by the national Synod and its districts. Close and careful coordination of work currently accomplished at the district and national Synod level is necessary for faithful stewardship of the precious resources entrusted to our care. Many of our pastors and educators are inadequately compensated, some living at or near poverty levels. They serve in the midst of people who are richly blessed and, under most circumstances, are eager to be of service and in mission with their people in meaningful ways.

My counsel is for Floor Committee 2 to consider resolutions that would

- encourage creative cooperation between lay leaders and professional church workers in congregational life, mission, and ministry;
- encourage proper compensation for professional church workers;
- expedite provision of doctrinally pure material for use in nontraditional worship;
- implement recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Hispanic Ministry;
- initiate planning for and celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017; and
- express appreciation and support for the National Youth Gathering.

Floor Committee 3—Theology and Church Relations

Our first constitutional objective is

The Synod, under Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, shall—

1. Conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3-6; 1 Cor. 1:10), work through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom. 16:17), and heresy." (LCMS Constitution Art. III 1)

This is no small task in a pluralistic, postmodern, multicultural society. But the enormity of the task makes it even more imperative that we address it, seeking our God's leading, guiding and directing in this vital area of our life together in the Synod.

My counsel is for Floor Committee 3 to consider resolutions that would

- establish altar and pulpit fellowship with The American Association of Lutheran Churches;
- explore faithful ways and means for the LCMS to "work through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies..." (LCMS Constitution Art. III 1) and faithful ways and means of relating to "other Christian church bodies" with which altar and pulpit fellowship has not yet been established;
- encourage appropriate LCMS theological leadership around the world;
- encourage renewed study of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions;
- address requests for clarity of 2004 Resolution 3-06A re participation in civic events;
- address requests for clarity of 2004 Resolution 3-08A re service of women, the order of creation, etc; and
- address or refer for clarification the distinctions between doctrinal resolutions and doctrinal statements of the LCMS.

Floor Committee 4—Program and Finance

Great concern exists in many circles for adequate funding of the mission of the Synod at all levels. When aware of the need, the people of the LCMS will support a church focused on faithful Gospel proclamation through Word and Sacraments, with a passion for mission. In recent decades, gifts

designated for a specific mission field or ministry endeavor have flourished, while undesignated gifts have languished. In times of economic difficulty, both designated and undesignated gifts have decreased, regrettably resulting in reductions in all areas of national Synod ministry, including the mission field. We must continue to address the questions of in what ways, to what extent, and with what resources we will continue to ask the national Synod to be involved in leadership in mission and ministry.

My counsel is for Floor Committee 4 to consider resolutions that would

- Affirm and encourage implementation of recommendations from the report of the 2004 convention-mandated Blue Ribbon Task Force on Funding the Mission;
- Emphasize the importance of stewardship education at all levels in the Synod and urge our congregations, districts, colleges and seminaries collaboratively to promote and lead a "stewardship renaissance" in the LCMS;
- Encourage continuation of greater communication and collaboration between districts and national Synod to consider ways and means of maintaining or increasing current levels of financial support and continued cooperative sharing of existing fiscal and human resources;
- encourage continual evaluation and prudent stewardship of assets of districts and national Synod; and
- encourage creative ways and means of prioritizing professional church worker education funding.

Floor Committee 5—Seminary and University Education

Concern about and support for the recruitment and training of our Synod's professional church workers remains one of our highest priorities. The fields are ripe for the harvest! Workers must be identified and equipped for mission and ministry in a culture largely indifferent or even hostile to Christianity. To strengthen our institutions, significant overtures have been proposed to amend the structure, selection of members, and governance of the boards of regents of our seminaries, colleges, and universities.

My counsel is for Floor Committee 5 to consider resolutions that would

- affirm the recommendations of the Board for Pastoral Education, our two seminaries, the Council of Presidents, and the Board of Directors to establish the position of specific ministry pastor;
- strengthen LCMS seminaries and universities by implementing recommendations regarding membership on boards responsible for seminary and university education;
- clarify bylaw provisions regarding seminary and university administrative matters; and
- encourage commitment to continuing education for professional church workers.

Floor Committee 6—Human Care

The expression of Christ's love through human care and world relief, especially in times of national or world catastrophe, remains an important objective of our Synod. This was

demonstrated during the past triennium in remarkable ways in response to the tsunami in South Asia and to numerous hurricanes along the Gulf Coast, most notably Katrina and Rita. We are called to continue faithfully and generously to address ways and means of sharing the love of Christ with those in need, particularly in ways that clearly demonstrate the source of such faithfulness and generosity. “The love of Christ constrains us” (2 Corinthians 5:14). “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

My counsel is for Floor Committee 6 to consider resolutions that would

- thank God for the creative, generous, tireless support of the Synod, its individual members, congregations, districts, institutions, and organizations for congregations, schools, and individuals in the Southern, Florida-Georgia, and Texas districts who suffered damage, destruction, and devastation from hurricanes during the past triennium;
- assist congregations to respond to undocumented immigrants and, in consultation with the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, provide practical and theological guidance regarding immigration and ministry to immigrants;
- articulate the position of the LCMS regarding stem-cell research, referencing the statements released by the Office of the President of the Synod, prepared in consultation with the CTCR;
- address the issue of placement of children in same gender/homosexual contexts, referencing the CTCR opinion on this question;
- encourage continued and expanded ministry to armed forces personnel and their families; and
- encourage implementation of professional church-worker sabbatical guidelines.

Floor Committee 7—Planning and Administration

Planning and administration should enhance and not inhibit the mission of the church. At the same time, proper and diligent concern for biblical principles, balance of power, reduction of bureaucracy, and facilitation of mission and ministry are vital for responsible and accountable functioning of the church.

My counsel is for Floor Committee 7 to consider resolutions that would

- provide a specific bylaw process for removal of officers, board and commission members “if circumstances require it...in accordance with Christian procedure” (LCMS Constitution Art. XI A);
- implement recommendations of the Commission on Structure regarding various bylaw amendments;
- amend bylaws regarding the doctrinal review process;
- address recommendations regarding convention voting delegate representation;
- address concerns regarding various convention procedures and bylaws; and
- address inequality of terms of office, authority, and voting rights of members of boards and commissions, including officers of the Synod.

Floor Committee 8—Synod Structure and Governance

The complex, complicated, and even sometimes seemingly convoluted system of church structure and governance with and under which we operate in our lives together in the Synod is currently in a process of review by the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Synod Structure and Governance, which I appointed during the past triennium. The interim report of the BRTFSSG is included in the *Convention Workbook*. Any amendments to the structure and governance of the LCMS must be accomplished with proper and diligent concern for biblical principles, balance of power, reduction of bureaucracy, and facilitation of mission and ministry.

Of particular note is the report of the committee created by Res. 7-02A of the 2004 convention, which all voting delegates received in a separate mailing from the committee. The report speaks for itself and was adopted unanimously by a committee of representatives from the board of directors, district presidents, corporate Synod executives, and the office of the President of Synod, following consultation with the Council of Presidents and the Commission on Constitutional Matters.

My counsel is for Floor Committee 8 to consider resolutions that would

- accept and implement the recommendations in the 7-02A committee report;
- declare dispute resolution via lawsuits as contrary to our Synod agreements and encourage use of Synod’s dispute resolution process to resolve differences among us;
- address concerns regarding the process for dispute resolution and expulsion;
- address concerns and affirmations regarding various CCM opinions;
- address concerns regarding the inclusion in congregational constitutions of certain terms descriptive of Holy Scripture; and
- call for a special convention to amend Synod structure and governance.

Overtures Not Approved for Inclusion in Convention Workbook

A word is in order at this point regarding overtures submitted to the Synod that do not appear in the *Convention Workbook*. Part of the responsibility of the office of the Synod President in the procedure and process of overture review is dictated in the Bylaws of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. One such dictate is outlined in Bylaw 3.1.6.2 of the *2004 Handbook*. This bylaw reads, in part,

- (c) The President of the Synod shall determine if any overture contains information which is materially in error or contains any apparent misrepresentation of truth or of character. He shall not approve inclusion of any such overture in the *Convention Workbook* and shall refer any such overture to the district president who has ecclesiastical supervision over the entity submitting the overture for action. If any published overture or resolution is found to be materially in error or contains a misrepresentation of truth or of character, it shall be withdrawn from convention consideration and referred by the President of the Synod to the appropriate district president for action.

In reviewing the overtures submitted for convention consideration, it was determined that some overtures contained “*information...materially in error or...apparent misrepresentation of truth or of character.*” In accordance with this bylaw, those overtures were referred to the respective district president who “*has ecclesiastical supervision over the entity submitting the overture for action.*” I did not thereby suggest any specific action on the part of the district president but only referred the overtures to the district president’s office in fulfillment of this bylaw requirement.

In further accordance with the bylaw directive, these overtures were not approved for inclusion in the *Convention Workbook*. My office communicated to the district president and congregation or other entity submitting it the specific objectionable feature(s) of the overture. Some of the congregations and entities resubmitted revisions of those overtures with the objectionable components revised or removed for consideration as late overtures. The resubmitted overtures that were subsequently approved, along with the other approved late overtures, will be submitted to you for your consideration and work this weekend and will also be printed in the first issue of *Today’s Business*.

In all cases, in an effort to honor what I perceive to be a genuine concern on the part of the congregation or other entity submitting overtures containing objectionable features, I decided to forward the unprinted overtures in question to the proper floor committee for whatever action it may deem appropriate. Similarly, the late overture submissions not approved for inclusion in *Today’s Business* will be forwarded to the proper floor committee for apt consideration.

The action of reviewing all the overtures submitted for consideration was undertaken in the spirit of the scriptural exhortations, as well as in light of the resolves of 2001 Convention Res. 7-04A, a copy of which is included as Appendix II to this report. It is my prayer that all our actions be guided continually by the inspired words of the apostle (quoted in Res. 7-04A) who wrote, “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:1–2).

In Conclusion

Notwithstanding the areas and expressions of concern that must be addressed at the 63rd Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod through the actions and decisions of the delegates in response to the resolutions you will present, I do not hesitate whatsoever in saying to you that I am highly encouraged and hugely excited about the future of our Synod!

- We have much for which to be thankful throughout the 160 years of our existence!
- We have been and remain faithful to Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions!
- We have been aggressive and progressive in mission endeavors for more than 100 of those years!
- We have the respect of many church bodies throughout the world, both Lutheran and non-Lutheran!
- Our counsel, resources, and support are frequently and regularly sought by Christians across the face of the globe, both Lutheran and non-Lutheran!

- Our most productive years of mission and ministry are just ahead!

These are obviously optimistic observations and positive projections that will not automatically, instantly, or easily be achieved. Why might this be the case? Sometimes I perceive that we in the LCMS are our own worst enemy and that our mission and ministry endeavors are limited and perhaps even stymied primarily by our seemingly incessant inability to live together in peace and harmony. Surely that is the evil intention of Satan himself, who would love nothing more than to see our congregations, professional church workers, and people embroiled in internal bickering, unChristian backbiting and unflattering bellyaching about and with one another. My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, these things simply should not be!

Most respectfully and quite sincerely, I invite and encourage each and every one of you to join me in a godly crusade to alter the rapidly diminishing but still existent negativity and lack of basic Christian demeanor that too often attempts and frequently succeeds in defining the culture of our Synod, beginning with this Floor Committee Meeting Weekend and continuing through and beyond the 63rd Regular Convention of the LCMS. I do so with painful cognizance of my own sinfulness and daily awareness of my own imperfection. I also do so with joyful assurance of the grace of God in my life, made new each day with the reminder that I am a baptized child of God, redeemed from sin and Satan by the blood of Jesus Christ, my Lord. And I boldly and happily remind you of the same eternal blessings that are yours through that very same grace of God in Jesus Christ, your Lord.

As individually and together we “*...vigorously make known the love of Christ by word and deed within our churches, communities, and the world,*” we will, by the grace of God, see One Message—*Christ!* as the message for our life and the reason for our existence! May God grant it to be so, in the name of Jesus! His Love Is Here for You!

Appendix I

Report

CONVENTION DELEGATE REVIEW COMMITTEE

Appointed by the President of the Synod

May 14, 2007

The Convention Delegate Review Committee has been asked by the President of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod “to take whatever steps it deems appropriate in the process of assuring the Synod that [the 2007 convention delegate selection process] has been done properly, decently, in good order, and in accordance with the covenants of love by which we in the LCMS have agreed to work together.”

The undersigned committee met via telephone conference call on May 3, 2007, to determine the steps it would take to carry out its assignment. It was agreed that a three-member subcommittee would meet at the Synod’s International Center on May 7 and 8 to review the 2007 convention delegate records. The subcommittee’s findings were then discussed by the full committee during telephone conference calls on May

10 and May 14. The committee submits the following report to the Synod.

I. No evidence was found of collaboration between the Office of the President of the Synod and the presidents and boards of directors of the districts regarding the seating of delegates to the 2007 convention.

- Cases identified by Frederic Baue in his "Update on Circuit Exceptions for the 2007 LCMS Convention" as problematic and requiring additional exceptions were found to have reasonable explanations as a result of data provided during the delegate certification process.
- The official records provided by the President's office offered no indication of collaboration between the President's office and district officials. Because all other related communication was oral in nature, no additional records were available for review.

II. The 65 electoral circuit exceptions granted for the 2007 convention of the Synod were granted according to the provisions of Bylaw 3.1.2.

- Records in support of the exceptions granted were found to be in good order, in every case including all appropriate documentation of district board actions requesting exceptions and the granting of exceptions by the President.
- All electoral circuit exceptions were granted within the parameters established by Bylaw 3.1.2, which provides no limitations on the number of exceptions that may be granted.
- Limitations self-imposed by the President were announced repeatedly in his reports to the Council of Presidents and were generally followed. The President provided reasonable explanations for three exceptions to those limitations upon request of the subcommittee.

III. The pertinent paragraph in the agreement that accompanied the settlement of the recent lawsuit was honored in the process used to grant electoral circuit exceptions for the 2007 convention.

- The requirements provided in Bylaw 3.1.2 for the granting of exceptions were followed, and evidence demonstrates that districts were repeatedly encouraged to realign circuits to avoid the need to request electoral circuit exceptions.
- A written reminder was offered to the Council of Presidents on at least one occasion (and the President reported numerous oral reminders on other occasions) calling attention to the provision in Bylaw 3.1.2 that advocates the joining together of adjacent visitation circuits to form an electoral circuit when electoral circuit requirements cannot be met by one or both visitation circuits.

IV. The Convention Delegate Review Committee did not have time or opportunity to review the circumstances surrounding the extensive realigning of circuits that went on during the triennium to verify that all such alignments were done properly.

Districts may only realign circuits by convention action unless such authority has been specifically delegated to their boards of directors (CCM Opinion 03-2368).

These realignments have often only minimally met (and at times have even fallen short of) Bylaw 3.1.2 requirements, resulting in an increase in the number of delegates to the 2007 convention despite a reduction from 88 (2004) to 65 (2007) in the number of electoral circuit exceptions requested and granted.

V. The Convention Delegate Review Committee recognizes that a comprehensive study of concerns associated with the Synod's delegate representation process is needed, such as is included in the overall study currently underway by the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Synodical Structure and Governance. A number of general observations surfaced during the committee's research that beg further attention by the task force in the interest of fair representation at national conventions.

- Delegate exceptions are at times being used to alleviate other concerns, including "adequate representation" for ethnic and other interests at national conventions. Exceptions requested for such purposes appear to elevate other concerns above the clear interest of Bylaw 3.1.2 in equitable representation based solely upon numbers of congregations and confirmed members.
- The provision of Bylaw 3.1.2 advocating the combining of adjacent visitation circuits to form electoral circuits is not being given first attention as the to-be-preferred remedy when one or both of the visitation circuits do not meet requirements for an electoral circuit. This is evidenced by the fact that 65 electoral circuit exceptions were requested and granted for the 2007 Synod convention compared to only 16 times that adjacent visitation circuits were combined to form an appropriate electoral circuit. The granting of exceptions over the years has in reality become the rule, while the rule provided by the bylaw (to join adjacent visitation circuits) has in reality become the exception.
- Statistics demonstrate that, in general, districts with already greater-than-average per-communicant representation at Synod conventions are also the districts that have been requesting and receiving the greatest number of exceptions, thereby further increasing their delegate representation advantage.

It is this committee's hope and prayer that its efforts and this report will help to assure the Synod in general and the delegates to the 2007 convention in particular that the delegate body that will meet in Houston this summer has been selected "in accordance with the covenants of love by which we in the LCMS have agreed to work together."

Dr. William Hoesman, President, Michigan District;
Chairman, Council of Presidents

Dr. Larry Stoterau, President, PSW District; Vice
Chairman, Council of Presidents

Dr. Robert Kuhn, LCMS President Emeritus;
Chairman, LCMS Board of Directors

Rev. James Fandrey, Luth. Heritage Foundation;
Vice Chairman, LCMS Board of Directors

Dr. Raymond Hartwig, LCMS Secretary
 Dr. Thomas Kuchta, LCMS Vice-President—Finance—
 Treasurer
 Dr. Albert Marcis, SELC District President Emeritus;
 Chairman, LCMS Commission on Constitutional
 Matters

Appendix II

2001 Convention Proceedings

To Promote Truth and Integrity in Convention Overtures

RESOLUTION 7-04A

Overture 7-126 (CW, pp. 282-83)

WHEREAS, St. Paul says in Eph 4:17-5:2, “So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ‘In your anger do not sin’: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God”; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Martin Luther says in his explanation of the Eighth Commandment, “We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way”; and

WHEREAS, The convention manual is published under the editorship of the Secretary of the Synod, subject to the approval of the President of the Synod; and

WHEREAS, Misleading and untrue material has appeared in synodical overtures; and

WHEREAS, The inclusion of such untrue and misleading information can do irreparable harm and is a sin against God, individuals, and entities of the Synod; therefore be it

Resolved, That those who submit convention overtures assume complete responsibility for the truthfulness of information contained therein; and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.19 c be amended as follows:

PRESENT/PROPOSED WORDING

Overtures with reference to a case in which a member has been suspended or expelled and which is at present in the process of or subject to appeal, as well as overtures which, upon advice of legal counsel, may subject the Synod or the corporate officers of the Synod to civil action for libel or slander, or which contain libel or slander, shall not be accepted for convention consideration; and be it further

Resolved, That Bylaw 3.19 be amended to add:

PROPOSED WORDING

The synodical President shall determine if any overture contains information which is materially in error, or contains any apparent misrepresentation of truth or of character. He shall not approve inclusion of any such overture in the convention manual and shall refer any such overture to the District President who has ecclesiastical supervision over the entity submitting the overture for action. If any published overture or resolution is found to be materially in error or contains any misrepresentation of truth or of character, it shall be withdrawn from convention consideration and referred by the President of the Synod to the appropriate District President for action.

and be it further

Resolved, That the other provisions of Bylaw (3.19) be relettered; and be it finally

Resolved, That all action taken in this resolution shall be used to help carry out “The Great Commission” and shall not in any way detract or distract from the primary mission of God’s kingdom here on earth. We will remember 1-02!

Action: Adopted (10)

(The resolution was adopted without amendment [yes: 746; no: 303]. The final resolve is added as required by Res. 1-02, adopted by the convention in an earlier session.)

Part III

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

The year was 1941, during World War II. The conditions of world unrest caused questions and fear to lie upon the hearts and minds of the people, not unlike those causing trouble and restlessness in the lives of people in our world today.

During June of that year, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod gathered in convention in Fort Wayne, Indiana. President John W. Behnken, who had served as pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church here in Houston, the host congregation for yesterday's communion service, addressed the delegates. His words were timely for his audience and also speak to the conditions of the world in which we live today. Here is part of what he said:

For the second time within the short span of twenty-five years our beloved Synod is in convention at a time when practically the whole world is in the throes of a destructive war. No one can foretell what the future may bring.

The Church dare not brush aside the horrible realities of war with a mere shrug of the shoulder. They are laden with lessons which call for earnest consideration. Unquestionably, the Savior's specific reference to wars and rumors of wars as a forerunner of the approaching dissolution of this world demands serious consideration at this time. These catastrophic conditions seriously affect also the work of the Church. For us Christians the question arises, How are we to carry on the Lord's work during such abnormal days? . . .

[Behnken continued.] What shall we say when we view the situation within the church today? I am not referring to the situation throughout Christendom in general, but am addressing this question to our own church body. At the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Synod, Doctor Walther preached an earnest sermon calling for repentance. He told the great number of delegates that our church and our people were no longer what they were when God brought them to our shores. The devotion to God's Word, the interest in God's kingdom, the earnest desire to serve the Lord in genuine godliness, were waning. What shall we say today? . . .

And what shall we say about the pronounced decline in stalwart godliness of life? Where is the sharp line of demarcation which should be drawn so clearly and distinctly between the life of the world and the life of Christians? When you listen to the conversations of our Lutherans, when you think of the excessive drinking and sinful pleasures, the greed and the selfishness, the gambling and dishonesty, the loose morals, and in fact, the general worldliness which has crept into our circles, not merely among the young, but also among older people, does it not fill your heart with deep concern? Furthermore, consider the disrespect for the ministers of the Word, the cheapening of the Gospel ministry, so manifest today. Think of the little interest manifested in thorough Christian education. *Statistics speak aloud and present an awful indictment.* Think of the lack of zeal for the extension of God's kingdom. We are told that, while Rome burned, Nero fiddled. While the world today is afire, and while millions are running headlong into the flames of hell, what have we been doing? *Oh, where is that burning passion for souls which ought to be ablaze within the heart of every member of our Synod?* [emphasis added]

These words from President Behnken's address have proven timeless even as citizens of our country have experi-

enced not only world wars but also conflict after conflict, even to the current day in which, once again, our country is embroiled in an international conflict, similar to and yet vastly different from previous wars. But in addition to our concern for national safety and homeland security, consider the lethargic response of the contemporary Church to a lost, immoral, decaying and dying world that fares no better than when the cry of 1941 was heard: *"Oh, where is that burning passion for souls which ought to be ablaze within the heart of every member of our Synod?"*

The awful indictment of statistics today echoes the cries that were shouted in 1941. You know the story. You've heard it before. The baptized membership of congregations in our Synod continues to slide as it has for the past 35 years. The confirmed membership and average weekly worship attendance of the congregations in our Synod also continue to decline.

And all of this in the face of a growth spurt that has seen the population in our country mushroom to more than 300 million people. When one compares the growth and size of our country to the impact we have made as a voluntary association of congregations, ordained and commissioned ministers in its midst, we are barely a blip on the screen of recent history.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this ought not to be! I believe God has called us to instill *within the heart of every member of our Synod a burning passion for souls—hearts that will be ablaze* with the purpose of taking the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every hill and every valley, every city and every community in our land!

But we cannot do this alone. It will be accomplished by the very *hand of God.*

- It will happen as we come together in the power of the Holy Spirit fervently and faithfully preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments.
- It will happen as we move beyond the complacency and parochialism that have plagued us in the past.
- It will happen as we realize the great blessings God has given our Synod and the crying need, more pronounced every day, for us to share these gifts with the world.
- It will happen as we address the reality that for most of our 160 years as a Synod we have been a confessional Lutheran Church in a mostly Christian country, while in the past few decades, and certainly today, we are faced with learning how to be a confessional, evangelical Lutheran Church in a largely unchurched, pluralistic, postmodern, narcissistic country, where Muslims, Mormons, and those claiming "no religion" are the fastest growing religious groups in our nation.
- It will happen as we trust in God—overcoming our fears, ceasing our internal warfare, willing to abandon unfaithful and unfruitful methods of the past.

I believe even the first President of our Synod, Dr. C. F. W. Walther, would see things differently today than he did more than a century and a half ago when he is reported to have said, "If ever our Synod should lose the German language, it will be in danger of losing the Gospel."

Boldly, we must grasp the new opportunities that await us from Almighty God—moving forward for the sake of

Christ. For, as Jesus said, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).

But to be readied for such a future, we must first kneel before our merciful God in repentance and pray that He will cleanse us from the iniquity that separates us from Him. And then pray further that He will lead us to do the “good works he has prepared in advance for us to do.” In his 1941 address, President Behnken summarized this so clearly when he wrote:

Must not God look with disfavor upon us! Indeed, we, too, have added to the guilt which provoked God to scourge the world with cruel war. We need to repent. Like David of old, we must plead with God, “Purge me with hyssop”; “wash me”; “cast me not away from Thy presence”; “deliver me from blood-guiltiness.” God grant that such a fervent, heartfelt, penitent plea may characterize our present synodical convention. . . .

. . . From the deepest depths of penitence we may rise to the most glorious heights of divine assurance, and such a note of positive assurance should dominate our hearts . . . David prayed for forgiveness. He was confident and assured that, though his sins were great and though he deserved only God’s righteous wrath and punishment, yet the Lord would show mercy. He stated: “I shall be cleansed”; “I shall be whiter than snow”; “make me to hear joy and gladness”; “restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation.”

David was assured of new courage and willingness to carry on the work of the Lord. Great eagerness to serve his Lord characterized his restoration to the joy of salvation. Even so, you and I should realize even better that it is our privilege to serve in the kingdom of God, yes, that this is the paramount purpose and objective of our life. We must permit nothing whatsoever to remove this goal from our view. In the world today, so terribly upset and out of joint, it requires special willingness and courage to serve Christ.

My appeal today as we begin our time together echoes the words of President Behnken, as I ask with you that the Lord will grant us “special willingness and courage to serve Christ.” I pray that He will make us courageous leaders for His Church, like the apostles and the prophets, being assured that He will give success for the good of His Church and the glory of His kingdom.

This is Part III of the President’s Report to the 63rd Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. In other parts of the President’s Report, printed in the *Convention Workbook* and in the first issue of *Today’s Business*, I have addressed a number of matters that I will not repeat in great detail in this report. I share with you here a few brief but important perspectives on some of these matters:

Holy Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and Our LCMS Covenants of Love

For 160 years, by God’s grace, our Synod has firmly and faithfully expressed our individual and collective confession:

The Synod, and every member of the Synod, accepts without reservation:

The Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice and all the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God . . .

That is your confession. It is my confession. It is our Synod’s confession. I thank God for it and, along with you, live my life and conduct my ministry in accord with this confession.

In addition to Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, members of the LCMS voluntarily agree to honor and uphold our “covenants of love”—the Synod’s Constitution, Bylaws, doctrinal statements, doctrinal resolutions, and opinions of the Commission on Constitutional Matters. I am aware of no one in this Synod who wants to elevate these or any other documents to the level of Scripture and the Confessions.

The main purpose served by these subservient documents is to determine whether or to what degree we in the Synod agree on what the Scriptures teach concerning matters of doctrine or practice. We have agreed together to honor and uphold these “covenants of love.” We have agreed that “The Synod, in seeking to clarify its witness or to settle doctrinal controversy, so that all who seek to participate in the relationships that exist within and through the Synod may benefit and may act to benefit others, shall have the right to adopt doctrinal resolutions and statements which are in harmony with Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions” (Bylaw 1.6.2). And we have agreed to authorize elected and appointed officials to interpret these “covenants of love” between Synod conventions.

Synods and councils can and do err. Where such error is believed to be the case, the Synod has provided a process whereby individual or congregational members may express their dissent from a stated position of the Synod. In those cases, it is the responsibility of the dissenter to persuade the Synod, on the basis of Holy Scripture, that the stated position of the Synod is in error. While every member of the Synod is entitled to his or her personal opinion or interpretation of what the Scriptures teach, a major strength of our Synod is to provide a common confession of faith, thus avoiding what occurred in the period of the judges, where everyone did what was right in his own eyes. We have agreed together that “while retaining the right of brotherly dissent, members of the Synod are expected as part of the life together within the fellowship of the Synod to honor and uphold the resolutions of the Synod” (Bylaw 1.8.1).

Doctrinal Solidarity

From time to time, we read or hear concerns about doctrinal division in the LCMS. On many occasions, I have spoken and written about the blessing in our Synod of doctrinal solidarity, including my report to the 62nd Regular Convention of the Synod. I thank God that the members of our Synod agree, with very few exceptions, on the major doctrines of our faith.

In the 160 year history of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod there have been times of major doctrinal controversy concerning, among other matters:

- The doctrine of the church and ministry
- The nature and authority of the pastoral office
- The doctrine of election
- The role and function of extra-confessional doctrinal statements in the life of the church
- The authority of Holy Scripture

The Synod's history reminds us that there have been theological and doctrinal disputes both inside the Synod and between the Synod and other bodies, generating fervent argument and resulting in bitter divisions and fractured fellowships. Yet our Synod has endured in remaining true to our Scriptural and Confessional principles.

While most of the issues mentioned above are no longer in contention, we nevertheless continue to experience in our Synod today disagreement and divisiveness regarding numerous other issues, mostly regarding the practical application of our doctrinal principles. A few examples will suffice:

- Close Communion—There is little if any disagreement among us on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper as a sacramental gift of God's grace for repentant Christians wherein the body and blood of our Lord are truly present in, with, and under the bread and wine for the forgiveness of sin and assurance of life eternal. But there is significant disagreement regarding the policies of admission to Holy Communion, namely, who should be allowed or even encouraged to receive the Sacrament at the altar in our congregations, campus ministries, and military chaplaincies.
- Church and Ministry—Despite our theological clarity on the subject, there exists in some corners of our Synod a lack of agreement regarding the role, responsibility, authority, and accountability of both the office of pastor and the role of laity in the church.
- The Service of Women in the Church—Since 1969, our Synod has expressed its collective belief on the teaching of Holy Scripture, allowing women to vote and hold congregational offices, but not to occupy the pastoral office. Yet some in our Synod would severely restrict the involvement of women in the church at many levels, while others would favor no restrictions at all.
- Worship—Disagreement exists on whether certain contemporary worship expressions employ doctrinally pure resources faithfully and whether certain traditional worship expressions do so meaningfully and effectively.

Notwithstanding the difficulty created by these serious matters among us, the fact remains that the LCMS enjoys a doctrinal unity unequalled in most parts of the Christian Church. We simply are not arguing or even debating the major doctrines of the Christian faith that are in contention in many parts of the Body of Christ. We are undeniably blessed with God-given unity and harmony and have so much more that unites us than those things that would divide us!

In the years ahead, our Commission on Theology and Church Relations, Council of Presidents, seminary faculties, Synod leaders, ordained ministers, commissioned ministers, and lay leaders will need to continue to work under Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions to achieve similar solidarity in the matters of practice or application of doctrine on which we do not yet have unanimity.

Dispute Resolution

Our Synod has provided a very specific process for the expression of dissent: "the Synod, in the spirit of 1 Corinthians 6, calls upon all parties to a disagreement, accusation, controversy, or disciplinary action to rely exclusively and fully on the Synod's system of reconciliation and conflict

resolution . . . the exclusive and final remedy for those who are in dispute" (Bylaw 1.10.1.1).

In response to a series of questions regarding the meaning of our covenants of love in dispute resolution, our Synod's Commission on Constitutional Matters provided the following answers:

- All members of the Synod are required to resolve all matters of dissent or all disputes by the avenues and structures available to them as set forth in the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod without resorting to secular courts and without resorting to avenues, means, structures, or communications that are foreign or contrary to the synodical agreements and which are not in harmony with the polity of the Synod.
- A lawsuit is not a legitimate avenue of dissent.
- In the agreement to live and work together, a member of the Synod is required to rely exclusively and fully on the Synod's system of reconciliation and conflict resolution . . . unless the dispute is one concerning property rights or contract arrangements.
- The use of the Synod's conflict resolution procedures is the exclusive and final remedy for those who are in dispute.
- The Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod provide disciplinary measures against any member who violates the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod.

This convention has the authority to overrule these opinions of the CCM. If that were to happen, the convention would need to bring forth a different interpretation of Holy Scripture in 1 Corinthians 6 than has been the understanding of our Synod for many, many years.

While making every effort to speak the truth in love, I believe I need to say one more thing about this matter. The lawsuit filed this past triennium against me, against First Vice-President Diekelman, and against the Synod itself by some 90 individual or congregational members of the Synod, and the subsequent motion filed by four members of our Synod's Board of Directors to intervene after the lawsuit was dismissed, were, as was expressed by eight national church leaders prior to the filing of the lawsuit, "needless and divisive," and, as was reported by the Vice-President—Finance—Treasurer in his convention report, very costly to the Synod. My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, there is a better way:

If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and this in front of unbelievers! The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. . . . And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:1–7, 11)

That is a better way.

Inter-Christian Relationships

The twenty-first century LCMS is faced with being an orthodox, confessional, evangelical Lutheran Church in a country where most of its citizens are no longer Christian. People around the world and in our country are being exposed to many non-Christian beliefs and groups, including Muslims, Mormons, and atheists. One may even ask, to borrow the words of President Behnken, "How are we to carry on the Lord's work during such abnormal days?" I believe strongly that we carry on this work by communicating clearly and courageously the truth that Christ alone is the only Savior of the world. We do this in witness to non-Christians and Christians alike.

We in the LCMS are part of the visible Christian Church on earth, a recognition that creates a very real tension among us. Why is this so? Because the Christian Church on earth includes churches we consider heterodox, having wrong teaching. Some in our Synod would have us avoid at all costs any contact with such Christian churches. Others want our Synod to be at least minimally involved in certain circumstances and situations with other Lutherans and also with non-Lutheran Christians in order to honor our belief in the Holy Christian Church and in order to confess our orthodox faith to those we consider heterodox. The presence of these varying viewpoints has resulted in a divisive atmosphere that has hindered our fellowship and our collective work in mission as a Synod.

To keep this dilemma from hindering our effectiveness in outreach to the world and to provide a faithful confession to other Christian churches, such disagreements among us must be resolved. As was so poignantly noted in the Report of the Task Force on Funding the Mission, no plan "is capable of fully succeeding in an organization that is seriously divided and engaged in issues that divert their energies away from the mission." The matters of inter-Christian and interchurch relations, unionism, separatism, participating in events or services involving non-LCMS Christian participants, etc., that are creating division among us need biblically based resolution.

A resource titled *Witness & Worship in Pluralistic America* (Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 2004) provides both proper caution and evangelical encouragement in our endeavor to reach consensus in such matters and to reach people around the world with the Gospel of Christ. The following statement is an example. "The Great Commission obligates the church to be *in* the world without becoming *of* the world in order to witness *to* the world."

Speaking With One Voice, in Christian Love

Witnessing to the pure Gospel, "One Message—*Christ!*", in a pluralistic America brings challenges and difficulties. In order to face and overcome them, it is imperative that we speak with one voice, in Christian love.

Regarding this necessity, Dr. Walther said at the first convention of the Iowa District in an essay titled "Duties of An Evangelical Lutheran Synod":

My dear brothers, let us be on our guard! Satan is sly. Right now we are brothers, living together in peace and love.

But Satan will lay for us snares by which he hopes to destroy the sweet, brotherly love we now have in our hearts. We dare never think that it is enough if we just remain united in our faith and our doctrine . . . It is frightening what harm can result when members of a church organization do not vigilantly guard their fraternal love. (Essays for the Church by C.F.W. Walther, Vol. II, p. 56, CPH, 1992)

Again, regarding the vital importance of purity of doctrine communicated in peace and unity, Dr. Walther states: "A fifth major duty is that it [the Synod] strive for peace and unity in the truth in its midst." He quotes Luther: "Where there is no love... doctrine cannot remain pure!"

Then Walther says,

We dare never think it is enough if we just remain united in our faith and doctrine. (Essays for the Church Vol. II, CPH, 1992)

We love because Christ first loved us. In response to God's love in Christ, we are motivated to do good works, to perform good deeds, to accomplish objectives of Christian love, mission, education, and mercy. In congregations, districts, and organizations across our land, LCMS people, individually and collectively, are involved in doing just that.

While I could tell you stories about LCMS congregations and members, allow me to share with you these brief video clips depicting such works, deeds, and accomplished objectives that embody the mission of the LCMS in various settings across our Synod. [Video clip]

These are only a few of the thousands of similar yet unique ways in which people in the LCMS are sharing the love of Christ every day. The "One Message—*Christ!*" is in their hearts and on their lips. Christ's love makes a difference in people's lives today and will continue to make a difference in people's lives in the future.

The Future of the LCMS

So what does the future look like for the LCMS? What are your and my hopes and dreams for our Synod in the years ahead? President Ronald Reagan once said, "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like in the United States where men were free."

Like freedom, any organization is never more than one generation away from extinction. The same may also be said of any part of the visible Church on earth. We cannot assume just because an organization has existed for centuries in the past that it will continue to exist for centuries more in the future. "It must be fought for, protected, and handed on."

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is a voluntary human organization, without which the Holy Christian Church might very well be able to exist. Yet I believe God has called the LCMS into existence for a purpose that has not yet been fully accomplished. The glorious Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, proclaimed in the LCMS in its truth and purity, "must be fought for, protected, and handed on." We have the promise of Christ that even the gates of hell will not prevail against His Church. But those

gates of hell are fighting tooth and nail against the Gospel in our world and in our culture.

God has blessed our Synod for more than 160 years with a pure and proper understanding of the Gospel and the Sacraments, informed by a pure and correct interpretation of God's revealed, inspired, inerrant, infallible Word in Holy Scripture. He has called us to share that message with a world largely full of people who live in depression, despair, doubt, and disbelief, headed without faith in Christ toward eternal death. And He has called us to do so, both faithfully and fruitfully, in a country and culture that is vastly different from that which existed 160 years ago, and in many cases, largely indifferent, if not downright hostile, toward the Church and the one message of Christ we proclaim.

We must move into the future with courage and wisdom, with boldness and resolve. We need *courage* to look at ourselves frankly and honestly with a willingness to change what needs to be changed and to retain what needs to be retained. That is the charge given to the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Synod Structure and Governance as it takes a critical look at the way the Synod is structured to determine if there is a better way, a more efficient way, or even a more godly way that we can equip and govern ourselves for the mission God has given us. It will take courage for us to engage a future filled with change and uncertainty.

We need *wisdom* to survey the present with an eye on the future to determine the doors of opportunity God is opening for us in mission and ministry. The Blue Ribbon Task Force on Hispanic Ministry has received that charge in relation to the fastest-growing population group in our country, now comprising 15 percent of the population of the United States. Wisdom is necessary if as a church we are to minister effectively among and with people of Hispanic origin and, of equal importance, those of other ethnic descents, including Asian, Indian, African, and European.

We need *boldness* to engage a culture in sharing the hope of Christ that is within us with other people so they can encounter Christ. We must engage mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, young and old, friends and neighbors, co-workers and students with the one message of Christ. With boldness we engage the people of our world under the shadow of the cross with the forgiveness of sins given freely by grace in Water and Word, in Bread and Wine in our congregations and new mission plants.

We need *resolve* to hold firm to the foundation of our faith, to allow no compromise of the truth of God's Word, to hold fast the doctrines that define us as a confessional, evangelical Lutheran church. We need resolve to "preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." We must resolve to "know nothing else but Christ

and Him crucified" as the strength and the power and the might of our message to the world.

With courage and wisdom, with boldness and resolve, we are here for the 63rd Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to do our part to strengthen Christ's Church on earth, to bring the light of Christ to those who live in darkness, to proclaim the truth of God's love in Christ sensitively, humbly, boldly, and courageously. We have "One Message—*Christ! His Love Is Here for You!*" This is our confession of faith so vital for achieving our God-given mission to share that faith. For without the message of Christ we have no power or strength with which to accomplish the one mission of reaching lost people—in our own communities, in our country or around the world—with the Gospel of Christ.

It is my prayer that as courageous leaders in the church today, we will seize the unprecedented opportunity before us in the land where God has placed us. We must recognize that God has called us to "such a time as this" so we can pull together to guide this church body we know and love as The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod through this course of history in the mission God has set before us.

For the sake of the Gospel, I invite you to focus on the *one mission of Christ* with a common vision and a common strategy for vigorously making known the love of Christ in our churches, communities and the world. I also urge you to keep our mission centered in the power of the *one message* that Jesus Christ alone is the Savior of the world—because He is, and He must be made manifest.

This will be no easy undertaking. We recognize what the Scriptures make known—that we are at war with the principalities and evil forces of this age. Spiritual warfare will rage as long as Satan is allowed to roam on this earth. But, "scowl fierce as he will"; "he can harm us none"; "the victory has been won"; "one little word can fell him!" That word is *Christ!*

The final words of President Behnken's address to the 1941 convention seem quite appropriate for us today. He wrote:

World conditions today present seemingly insurmountable obstacles, but they are not insurmountable for our God. Staggering difficulties confront us, but our blessed Redeemer, who is the Head of His Church, can surely remove them. The forces of hell may wage an unabating and relentless warfare against us, but with Christ at our side, we are assured of victory. Here on earth we must continue as the Church Militant; but as certain as eternity will dawn, so certain are we that we shall be the Church Triumphant.

May God help us in this task, so that he, who has "made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, . . . may bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Ephesians 1:9–10). Thank you and God bless us in the days, weeks, months, and years ahead as we proclaim "One Message—*Christ! His Love Is Here for You!*"

Gerald B. Kieschnick, *President*

CONVENTION SERMONS

1. Opening Convention Worship Celebration

ONE MESSAGE—*CHRIST!* HIS LOVE IS HERE FOR YOU!

Text: 1 John 4:9-11

This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

- It is by God's grace that we receive what we do not deserve: forgiveness of sins, fullness of life here on earth, and eternal salvation with God in heaven.
- It is by God's mercy that we do not receive what we do deserve: God's wrath, displeasure, and eternal punishment.
- It is in God's grace and mercy that we receive His peace, the peace that passes all understanding, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

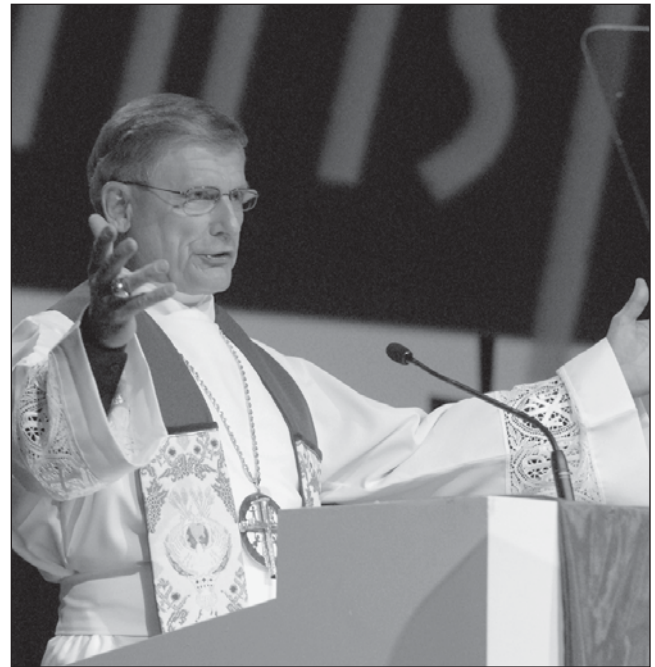
Welcome to this 63rd Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, held in the Texas District, which last year celebrated its 100th anniversary as a district of the LCMS. Houston is a special place of blessing to me. It is the city of my birth, Baptism, confirmation, and ordination, all at St. Matthew Lutheran Church, located a few short miles directly south of this convention center. I pray that your time here in Houston will be a blessing to you and through you to many.

By now you may already have discovered that people in Texas talk differently than other folks. For example, when greeting another person, many in other parts of the United States are accustomed to saying "Good morning!" Or, "How are you today?" But in Texas, folks often greet each other, employing a little Texas drawl, with the words, "Whaddya' say?" That's abbreviated Texan for "What do you say?" or "What's up?" or "How's life?"

"Whaddya' say?" That phrase is not only a Texas expression that you might hear during your days in Houston. It is also a phrase that finds usage within the context of many of life's changing and challenging moments. "Whaddya' say?"

It was Thursday, September 28, 2006. Two days earlier, I had experienced an unpleasant taxi ride in a Chicago All Star cab, prompting me to reserve a return trip to O'Hare airport with a different taxi company. But that morning, for a reason unknown to me at the time, I decided to cancel the new reservation and again called All Star Cab Company for the trip. I casually asked the driver how his life was going these days and was struck by his reply: "Not so good since my brother died suddenly two weeks ago."

In the conversation that ensued, I learned that the driver, Brad, and his brother, Greg, had been baptized at



St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Schaumburg, Illinois, but had been inactive in the church since they were teens. He asked, "Do you know anything about the Lutheran Church?" I said, "A little." After I tried to explain The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the office of its President to Brad, he said, "So you're a pastor?" I said, "Yes." He then said, "Pastor, I haven't been able to sleep since Greg died, because I don't know where he is. Can you help?"

Whaddya' say to a middle-aged man who lost his brother from a heart attack, is scared stiff of death himself, is uncertain whether his brother is in heaven, and, more to the point, whether he himself will someday be in heaven? Whaddya' say?

On Sunday, January 7, of this year, I was scheduled to leave St. Louis for Dallas on a 5:25 p.m. American Airlines flight for a week-long leadership conference with the LCMS Council of Presidents. That afternoon I decided to fly standby on an earlier flight in order to arrive in time for an informal gathering that I otherwise would have missed. After everyone else had apparently boarded, the attendant called my name and gave me a boarding pass for 10-B. After I had taken my seat, a disheveled young lady approached, with a boarding pass for 10-A. She was dressed in jeans and T-shirt, hair in a frazzled pony tail, no makeup, appearing quite shaken and upset.

After she buckled her seat belt, I asked if she was going home to Dallas. She replied, "No, sir, I'm going to Iraq." I then noticed the U. S. Marine Corps logo on her T-shirt. I asked how long she would be there. She answered, "Two years, sir." I inquired how long she had known she would be going. She

said, “I got a phone call at 10:13 last night, sir.” I asked who she was leaving in St. Louis. She answered, “My husband Stanley, 10-year-old son, Dillon, and 11-year-old daughter, Jordan, sir.” She talked about her life, her childhood, her family, her anxieties, her fears, her hopes, and her dreams. I thought she was coming to grips with her fears when she said her brother-in-law had just returned from Iraq two weeks earlier. But then she added, “He came home in a casket.”

Whaddya’ say to Jeri Kelly, a 26-year-old wife and mother of two children who was on her way to serve her country at war in a far away place, leaving behind her home, her family, her life? Whaddya’ say?

These real life stories are reminders to me of the power and relevance of the theme of this convention: “One Message—*Christ! His Love Is Here for You!*” We have a response for the “Whaddya’ say?” situations in the lives of those we know or meet, including ourselves. We have a response for a world full of people who are facing real issues of life and death every day, experiencing fear, anxiety, loss, trauma and tragedy, wondering whether there really is life after death and where those they love are spending eternity. We have a response that can be abbreviated quite simply in this phrase: “One Message—*Christ! His Love Is Here for You!*”

We in the LCMS are blessed, privileged, and challenged “vigorously to make known the love of Christ, by word and deed, within our churches, communities, and the world.” The *One Message* we have for this task is the message of “Christ” and “His Love.”

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle John addresses the person and work of Christ, focusing specifically and powerfully on the power of God’s love, made known to mankind in the person of Christ. The *One Message* we receive and proclaim is God’s love for the whole world, fulfilled in the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. God showed His love among us through Christ, whom He sent into the world as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Love is not that we loved God—that was not possible, because in our sinful nature, we are spiritually blind, dead, and enemies of God. Love is that God loved us—that’s not comprehensible, but it is very real because of God’s grace in Christ.

The power of the *One Message* of Christ’s Love is that this love, unlike what the world defines as love, is not self-focused or self-satisfying. Christ’s love is self-sacrificing. The Greek word *agape* means just that—love that is not self-serving, but self-giving, love defined in that memorable passage in John 15:13: “Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends.” That’s precisely what Christ has done for us on Calvary’s cross—not only for us, but also for all the people of the whole world. His death on the cross assures us of life, with abundant blessing here on earth and perpetual blessing someday in heaven.

So where can this love be found? It is given solely by God’s grace in Word and Sacrament—*sola gratia*—“without any merit or worthiness in us.” Out of His mercy and grace, God looks with favor on our lives and forgives our transgressions through Christ. God’s gift of love in Christ, totally undeserved, is real!

Yet, people in the world too often are “looking for love in all the wrong places.” Many people, young and old alike,

look for love fulfillment in many and various ways, only to be left empty-hearted following failed self-serving relationships, vaporized chat room connections, and shattered dreams so delusional and unrealistic that they could only be portrayed and realized through fantasy in a movie or TV soap opera. Many turn their lives toward things they believe might fill the void—accumulation of bigger, better, and faster possessions; overeating; excessive drinking; or abuse of controlled or uncontrolled substances—all to no avail. Whaddya’ say to folks who are “looking for love in all the wrong places?” Whaddya’ say?

We have “One Message—*Christ! His Love Is Here!*”

- Christ’s love is here—in God’s holy, inspired, inerrant, infallible Word, bringing hope, comfort, and assurance in time and for eternity.
- Christ’s love is here—in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, that “special washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit,” sealing us with God’s promise of new life in Christ.
- Christ’s love is here—in public worship, as we confess and repent of our sins of commission, omission, and no mission, and receive God’s full and free forgiveness in Christ.
- Christ’s love is here—in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, in which we receive the very body and blood of our Lord Jesus, in, with, and under the common earthly elements of bread and wine, for the forgiveness of our sin and assurance of life eternal.
- And Christ’s love is here—in the mission and ministry of individuals, congregations, schools, institutions, organizations, and auxiliaries of the LCMS, all of whom are called to focus on proclaiming “One Message—*Christ! His Love Is Here for You!*”

On Monday, August, 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina, the costliest and one of the deadliest hurricanes in the history of the United States, struck the Mississippi and Louisiana Gulf Coast. Nearly every levee in metropolitan New Orleans breached as Hurricane Katrina passed east of the city, subsequently flooding 80 percent of the city and many areas of neighboring parishes for weeks. Over 1,800 people lost their lives in Hurricane Katrina and in the subsequent floods.

On Friday, May 4, 2007, in Greensburg, Kansas, 95 percent of the town of 1,500 was destroyed and the other 5 percent severely damaged by a category E-5 tornado with estimated winds of 205 mph. Ten people lost their lives. Everyone in town lost their homes and virtually all their possessions. Our LCMS congregation, Peace Lutheran Church, was reduced to two big piles of rubble.

Whaddya’ say to folks who lost their homes, their possessions, their loved ones, their jobs, their church, their hopes for the future as a result of such horrific storms? Whaddya’ say?

“Christ’s Love *Is Here!*” In response to such disasters, millions upon millions of dollars have been received for assistance through the local, regional, and national relief agencies of our Synod. Thousands upon thousands of volunteers from congregations and districts of the LCMS have contributed, and are still contributing, hours upon

hours of time and energy to help re-establish devastated areas, rebuilding homes and churches and lives. Congregations open their buildings and their arms to receive those who have become homeless. Christ's love is here! It is made known in His Word and is being manifested through His people with this message in their service and on their lips.

Christ's love is here! It is here in accord with His promise. It is here for all who call upon His name. His love finds expression in and through our lives. So how about your life? How's your faith and love in Christ? Is it strong and sure? Or weak and wobbly? Is the presence of God and His love in your life real, personal, and meaningful? Is His love finding expression in your life? Or is God a handy but far away presence, to be consulted only in time of despair, depression, death, or even much less serious need or want? Is His love here?

We must confess that we have not always lived or loved as if Christ's love is here. We lay bare our souls as we confess that we "are poor miserable sinners." We confess to God that we "have sinned against [Him] in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved [Him] with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve [His] present and eternal punishment."

But then we hear those precious words of absolution: "Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you *all* your sins. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." And we remember once more the "One Message—*Christ! His Love Is Here for Me!*"

All this is a simple but strong and sincere reminder that as Christians we have "One Message—*Christ! His Love Is Here for You!*":

- Assuring you in moments of doubt and disbelief;
- Upholding you in times of trial and temptation;
- Embracing and empowering you for mission and ministry.

For that empowerment, John clearly focuses his Spirit-given words. "*This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*" He also writes, in the 19th verse of this same chapter, "*We love because He first loved us.*" His love compels us and propels us to proclaim the light of Christ's love to all who live in the darkness of doubt and disbelief.

Non-believing people of the world are wondering and wandering in their effort to discover love, meaning, and acceptance, often turning to movements or groups based on beliefs

absolutely contrary to what we in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod believe, teach, and confess. For 160 years, we in the LCMS have firmly believed and proclaimed the truth of God's love in Jesus Christ, expressed so clearly in the words of Jesus himself: "*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.*" (John 3:16-17)

We have *ONE Mission*—to be *ABLAZE!*—on fire with the love of Christ—our hearts burning within us in seeking the lost for Christ with the power and presence of the very Spirit of God in our lives, on our lips and in our labors! We proclaim *ONE Message*, that Jesus Christ alone is the only Savior of the world! We are *ONE People*, united by God's love in Jesus Christ through His work within us in Word and Sacrament!

So whaddya' say? As best I could from the back seat of a taxi in Chicago traffic, I explained to Brad the grace of God, His promise to us in Holy Baptism, and the assurance of His promise of eternal salvation to those who accept His gift of faith in Christ. As we arrived at O'Hare, I asked Brad if I could pray for him. He readily agreed, so I prayed right there in the back seat of a taxi at O'Hare airport, with horns blaring behind us, for a measure of the peace of Christ that passes all understanding. When I told Brad about my change of plans that morning and my decision to call All Star Cab, I said, "I really don't know why I was in your cab this morning." Brad said, "I know why, Pastor Kieschnick. I needed to hear the words of comfort that you shared with me."

So whaddya' say? As best I could from seat 10-B on American Airlines, I shared with Jeri Kelly in seat 10-A the love of God in Christ, His assurance that He will never leave us nor forsake us, and His promise, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die" (John 11:25–26). When I told Jeri that I was originally scheduled for the 5:25 flight but had boarded this 4:25 standby flight, I said, "I really don't know why I was on your flight this afternoon." Jeri said, "I know why, Pastor Kieschnick. I needed to hear the message of assurance that you shared with me."

So whaddya' say? In times of such "divine appointments" that God sends your way, remember these words—the theme of this 63rd Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod: "One Message—*Christ! His Love Is Here for You—For Me—For the World!*"

The peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus! Amen!

Gerald B. Kieschnick, *President*



2. Memorial Service

Christ, The “I AM” of Resurrection and Life

Text: John 11:25–26

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”

I. What Is the Background and Occasion of This Theme?

During His earthly ministry, Christ referred to Himself at times as “I am.” Some familiar references are herewith given: “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). “I am the bread of life...I am the living bread that comes down from heaven” (John 6:35, 41). “I am the Good Shepherd that lays down His life for the sheep” (John 10:11). Once again in this special memorial service, we hear Jesus Christ saying, “I am the resurrection and the life.”

Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, and a beloved friend of Jesus, is dead. When Jesus arrives in Bethany, Lazarus was buried four days earlier. Martha met Jesus near the burial place, saying, “If you had been here, my brother would not have died” (John 11:21). Jesus responded, “Your brother will rise again” (John 11:23). Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (John 11:24). Jesus replied empathetically, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies.”

This scripture is timely and appropriate for this memorial service. As we recall our loved ones’ heavenly home-going, it is indeed comforting to hear and know that our divine and gracious Savior, the Great “I am” is still in charge. Even though our loved ones sleep in graves, the “I am” in charge neither slumbers nor sleeps, but speaks to us triumphantly, “I am the resurrection and the life.”

II. How Is This Scripture Realized as Truth?

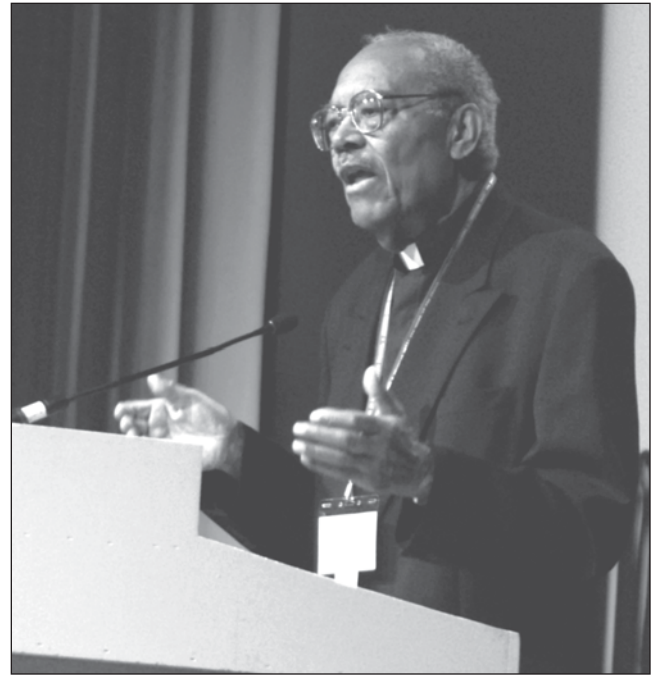
Jesus spoke these paramount words to Martha: “He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies” (John 11:25). Showing His concern, care, and compassion, Jesus wept, cried, had weeping eyes. When He had come to the tomb, He prayed to His heavenly Father. Afterwards, Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” And Lazarus came forth, alive!

Dealing with the resurrection of the dead was nothing new to Jesus. Jesus told the two disciples of John the Baptist, “Go and tell John what you see and hear, the blind receive sight, the lame walk..., the dead are raised” (Matt. 11:4–11) Moreover, Jesus raised Jairus’s daughter and the youth at Nain from the dead.

We as people die because of sin with which we are born and experience in life, and thus we suffer death. God’s Word says, “The wages of sin is death.” But then we hear, “The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

Jesus suffered and died for our sins, but He rose on the third day. Now He says to His followers in Rev. 1:17–19, “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One. I was dead, and I am alive forever and ever.”

This is the ultimate truth. We do not have to be like Pilate and ask, “What is truth?” We do not have to be like ancient philosophers that say, “Search for truth.” We do not have to bask in the Shakespearian words “to thine own self be true,



then thou shall not be false to any man.” We do not have to be ashamed to disagree with the postmodernists that truth is what brings us satisfaction, or whatever we want it to be—no, we are not existentialistic! To be on the safe side: we are to hold on to Jesus, who declares: “I am the way, the truth and the life.” (John 14:6) “Continue in my word...the truth...” (John 8:31–32).

III. How Is the Response of Faith to Be Absolute?

Jesus says, “Whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:26). A firm response is called for, and that is the kind of response Martha gave. Martha’s response was not a twiddling of the fingers, no stuttering, no asking for time to think. Martha responded in faith unhesitatingly and forthrightly: “Yes, Lord...I believe that you are the Christ, The Son of God” (John 11:27).

We learn from Martha as our mentor. Our faith in the life connected with the resurrection is to be beyond question or doubt. Our faith in the resurrection and the life is to be firm, resolute, and absolute. We are to heed the words of St. Paul in 1 Thess. 4:13–14: “Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep or to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him.” May we realize in the triumphant words of St. Paul, “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54–57).

Jesus is the “I am” of the resurrection and life. This has a solid scriptural foundation. This is proved to be an absolute truth. This calls for faith in Jesus Christ for eternal life. Amen.

Robert H. King
Fourth Vice-President
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

