

**Evidence of Errors in
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod**



**Association of Confessing Evangelical
Lutheran Congregations**

IX. Ecclesiastical Supervision

**December 20, 2010
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Note: This document is one of several ACELC documents on evidence of errors in the LCMS. As the documents are completed they will be posted to the ACELC web site at <http://www.ancelc.net/>. Topics include:

- Pure Doctrine
- Holy Communion
- The Divine Service and Liturgical Offices
- Unionism and Syncretism
- Service of Women in the Church
- The Office of the Holy Ministry
- The Unbiblical Removal of Pastors from their Calls
- The Church’s Mission and Her Evangelistic Task
- Ecclesiastical Supervision
- Dispute Resolution

Additional topics may be added as needed. If you have a comment, question, or concern, please contact the ACELC (<http://www.ancelc.net/>). Your input will be seriously considered.

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The references from the Lutheran Confessions include some words or passages from the German 1580 or Latin 1584 edition, these are set apart with < >.

Record of Document Updates

Version	Changes/Additions	Date
December 20, 2010	Original Document	December 20, 2010
February 14, 2011	Update on Communion Statement, page 12.	February 14, 2011

A Fraternal Admonition to Correct the Errors of Our Beloved Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Preamble

"And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship in the breaking of bread and in the prayers." Acts 2:42

C.F.W. Walther, (first President of the LCMS), wrote:

"A fellowship in which the Word of God is fundamentally falsified, or in which a fundamental falsification of it is tolerated, is not a true orthodox church, but a false, heterodox church or sect."

(Essays For the Church Vol I, "Communion Fellowship," Concordia Publishing House, 1992, p.207)

Presented in this document are concerns over variant teachings and practices by some pastors, congregations, and institutions of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. These errors have largely been ignored and even tolerated by those elected for the supervision of doctrine and practice in our fellowship. Even the Synod itself in convention has adopted resolutions that violate our fidelity as a synod to Holy Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions.

Many attempts have been made to address and correct these errors. Numerous pastors, laity, congregations, respected doctors of the Church, circuits, district pastoral conferences, even sister synods and their pastoral conferences have taken public issue with these errors and the recent "positions" the LCMS has taken in its past conventions, but to no avail. Districts also have sought redress of these errors through resolutions and overtures to the Synod in Convention only to have them never come to the convention floor for consideration.

In addition, various publications and organizations have attempted to address the adoption of worship forms, texts, and ceremonies that come from alien and errant confessions - as to whether this may be done without also adopting their error. Church history and the inseparable correlation between doctrine and practice teach us that how we pray and worship is in fact our faith, our belief, and our confession (*Lex orandi, lex credendi*).

At stake is the very doctrine upon which the Church stands or falls - the genuine confession of justification by grace alone through faith alone for the sake of Christ's death and resurrection alone. As the Lutheran Confessions state, "this article of justification by faith is the chief article of the entire Christian doctrine." [SD III, 6] When this chief article is at stake so also is the evangelical mission of the Church in our midst, and likewise the ongoing presence of the marks of the Church, and thus the LCMS as a light of the true Gospel of Christ.

Therefore we are compelled out of faithfulness to Holy Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions (to which The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod claims fidelity) to seek Biblical reproof and correction of these errors. Our cause is to offer a fraternal critique of our teaching and practice, and to call our much loved Missouri Synod, her pastors, congregations, and institutions to repentance and back to what she has previously claimed as her source and norm of faith and life – Holy Scripture and its correct exposition, the Book of Concord of 1580.

In this process we seek not to contend over the trivial, nor matters merely of denominational custom or tradition, but over those matters that challenge our very fidelity to the changeless faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). It is our intent to hold the LCMS to the Scripturally faithful teaching of the Book of Concord as catholic teaching and not simply something that we, as Lutherans, believe. Thus, when we speak of theological "positions" and the "position of synod," this should be understood as nothing less than what the Athanasian Creed calls "the catholic (or universally held) faith."

It is our sincere prayer that the LCMS would give serious and fraternal consideration to the words here given according to their benevolent intention. Our mission/purpose is to restore what has been compromised – that is a fellowship of unabashed confessional Lutheran congregations in North America and throughout the world for the sake of our children and grandchildren – and yes, for the life of the world. *May God the Holy Spirit, through the Word of Law and Gospel, call, gather, enlighten and sanctify the Church gathered within the Missouri Synod!*

(Please note: All evidence for the existence of error is only illustrative, not exhaustive.)

IX. Ecclesiastical Supervision:

- **Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions teach that a Christian is personally responsible for his own sinful actions. In 2003, the Commission on Constitutional Matters issued a binding opinion that if a Synodical worker has his or her ecclesiastical supervisor's permission for something they have done, they cannot be held accountable for their actions even if such actions constitute false doctrine and/or errant practice. The Synod in convention has been prevented from correcting this error by convention floor management which disallowed the consideration of overtures which had been submitted specifically to correct those errors. We reject the toleration of this error.**
- **Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions teach that the local congregation and its pastor are the full manifestation of the Church in that location, and therefore have the right and obligation to discipline its workers, and conduct the ministry of Word and Sacrament without interference from extra-congregational, man-made institutional authority. Recently the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) issued a binding opinion (04-2387 issued in 2004) stating that District Presidents may assert their right to take control of a congregation, bypassing the pastor, duly elected boards, and the voters' assembly to do so. We reject this error.**
- **Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions expressly teach a practice of Closed Communion. Today some District Presidents fail to provide ecclesiastical supervision when this practice is violated. We reject the toleration of this error.**

A. Original Position -

- The original position of the LCMS is that visitation pastors were to provide ecclesiastical supervision over the pastors in their areas on behalf of the Synod and on behalf of the brother pastors within the circuit. Additionally, the ecclesiastical supervision was also understood to occur within the context of Circuit Conferences (Winkels) in the normal course of sharing casuistry concerns among the brethren.
- Additionally, it has been the theology of the Christian Church since Apostolic times to understand that the full manifestation of the Church is seen in the local congregation which together with its required pastor constitute the fullness of the Church in that locale. It is within the context of this Church (Pastor + People), that all Christians are responsible for judging doctrine within the congregation.

1. The Witness of Holy Scripture:

Deuteronomy 24:16

¹⁶ Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin.

Romans 14:9-12

⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. ¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; ¹¹for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." ¹²So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Acts 20:27-31

²⁷ for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. ²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears.

Romans 16:17-20

¹⁷ I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. ¹⁸ For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. ¹⁹ For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil. ²⁰ The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

II Corinthians 6:14-17

¹⁴ Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵ What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

"I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ¹⁷ Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, ...

Galatians 1:6-12

⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—⁷ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

¹⁰ For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. ¹¹ For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

II Thessalonians 3:6

⁶ Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.

Titus 1:5-9

⁵ This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—⁶ if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery

or insubordination. ⁷ For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

Titus 3:10

¹⁰ As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

2. The Witness of the Lutheran Confessions:

Apology, Articles VII & VIII, The Church, 22

[22] Just as the Church has the promise that it will always have the Holy Spirit, so it also has warnings that there will be wicked teachers and wolves [Acts 20:29]. Yet, the Church in the proper sense has the Holy Spirit. Although wolves and wicked teachers run rampant in the Church, they are not properly Christ's kingdom. Just as Lyra also testifies when he says:

The Church does not consist of people in power or ecclesiastical or secular dignity, because many princes and archbishops and others of lower rank have been found to have apostatized from the faith. Therefore, the Church consists of those persons in whom there is a true knowledge and confession of faith and truth.

We have said nothing more in our Confession than what Lyra says here.

Apology, Article XIV – Order in the Church, 24-28

[24] In Article XIV, we say that no one should administer the Word and Sacraments unless he is rightly called. The adversaries accept the article, but on the condition that we use canonical ordination. About this subject we have often testified in this assembly that it is our greatest desire to keep Church orders and ranks, even though they have been made by human authority. We know that Church discipline in the manner laid down in the ancient canons was set up by the Fathers for a good and useful purpose. [25] But the bishops either urge our priests to reject and condemn the doctrine we have confessed or, by a new and unheard-of cruelty, they put the poor innocent men to death. These causes hinder our priests from recognizing such bishops. The cruelty of the bishops is the reason why the canonical government, which we greatly desired to keep, is dissolved in some places. Let them see how they will answer to God for tearing apart the Church. [26] In this matter our consciences are not in danger. Since we know that our Confession is true, godly, and catholic, we should not approve the cruelty of those who persecute this doctrine. [27] We know that the Church is among those who teach God's Word rightly and administer the Sacraments rightly. The Church it is not with those who try hard to wipe out God's Word by their orders and also put to death those who teach what is right and true. Toward them even the very canons are gentler, even though they do something contrary to the canons. [28] Furthermore, we want to declare again that we will gladly keep Church and canonical government, so long as the bishops stop attacking our churches. Our request will acquit us, both before God and among all nations forever, from the charge that we have undermined the authority of the bishops. People will acquit us when they read and hear that, although protesting against the unrighteous cruelty of the bishops, we could not obtain justice.

Power and Primacy of the Pope, 49; 59-60

[49] To these errors, two great sins are added: (a) The pope defends these errors by unjust cruelty and the death penalty. (b) He grabs the decision away from the Church and does not permit religious controversies to be judged in the right way. Indeed, he argues that he is above the council and can rescind the decrees of councils. Church law sometimes shamelessly says this. But the evidence shows that the popes act even more shamelessly...

[59] Those who agree with the pope and defend his doctrine and false worship [*Gottesdienst*] defile themselves with idolatry and blasphemous opinions. They become guilty of the blood of the godly, whom the pope persecutes [see Acts 9:1, 4-5; I Corinthians 11:27]. They detract from God's glory and hinder the Church's welfare because they confirm errors and crimes through all generations.

[60] The Gospel assigns to those who preside over Churches the command to teach the Gospel [Matthew 28:19], to forgive sins [John 20:23], to administer the Sacraments, and also to exercise jurisdiction (i.e., the command to excommunicate those whose crimes are known and to absolve those who repent).

Power and Primacy of the Pope (The Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops) 67

⁶⁷ Wherever the Church is, there is the authority to administer the Gospel. Therefore, it is necessary for the Church to retain the authority to call, elect, and ordain ministers. This authority is a gift that in reality is given to the Church. No human power can take this gift away from the Church. As Paul testifies to the Ephesians, when "He ascended ... He gave gifts to men" (Ephesians [4:8]). He lists among the gifts specifically belonging to the Church "pastors and teachers" [4:11], and adds that they are given for the ministry, "for building up the body of Christ" [4:12]. So wherever there is a True Church, the right to elect and ordain ministers necessarily exists.

Large Catechism, The Commandments, 279-280

[279] Further, Christ teaches, "But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses" [Matthew 18:16]. So the person concerned in this matter must always be dealt with personally, and must not be spoken of without his knowledge. [280] But if that does not work, then bring it publicly before the community, whether before the civil or the Church court. For then you do not stand alone, but you have those witnesses with you by whom you can convict the guilty one. Relying on their testimony the judge can pronounce sentence and punish. This is the right and regular course for checking and reforming a wicked person.

Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration - Summary, Rule and Norm, 10-11

[10] Other good, useful, pure books, expositions of the Holy Scriptures, refutations of errors, and explanations of doctrinal articles are not rejected by this point. As long as they are consistent with the above-mentioned type of doctrine, these works are considered useful expositions and explanations. They can be helpful. What has been said so far about the summary of our Christian doctrine is only intended to mean this: we should have a unanimously accepted, definite, common form of doctrine. All our evangelical churches should confess it together in common. Because this Confession has been derived from God's Word, all other writings should be judged and adjusted to it to determine the extent to which they are to be approved and accepted.

[11] For this purpose we brought together the above-mentioned writings: *the Augsburg Confession, Apology, Smalcald Articles, Luther's Large and Small Catechisms* as the frequently mentioned summary of our Christian doctrine. This was done because these have always and everywhere been regarded as the common, unanimously accepted meaning of our churches. Furthermore, they have been signed at the time by the chief and most enlightened theologians, and they have held sway in all evangelical churches and schools.

Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Summary, Rule and Norm, Antithesis, 14

[14] It is not only necessary that the pure, wholesome doctrine be rightly presented for the reservation of pure doctrine and for thorough, permanent, godly unity in the Church, but it is also necessary that the opponents who teach otherwise be reprov'd (I Timothy 3; [2 Timothy 3:16;] Titus 1:9). Faithful shepherds, as Luther says, should do both things: (a) feed or nourish the lambs and (b) resist the wolves. Then the sheep may flee from strange voices (John 10:5-12) and may separate the precious from the worthless (Jeremiah 15:19).

3. The Witness of the History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod:

- a. Three of Synod's objectives as stated in Article III (Objectives) of the LCMS Constitution:
 - i. **Handbook of the LCMS 2007, Article III (Objectives), 1.**
 "Conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3-6; 1 Cor. 1:10), ... and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom. 16:17), and heresy;"
 - ii. **Handbook of the LCMS 2007, Article III (Objectives), 8.**
 "Provide evangelical supervision, counsel, and care for pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers of the Synod in the performance of their official duties;"
 - iii. **Handbook of the LCMS 2007, Article III (Membership), 9.**
 "Provide protection for congregations, pastors, teachers, and other church workers in the performance of their official duties and the maintenance of their rights;"
- b. **Handbook of the LCMS 2007, Article XI (Rights and Duties of Officers), B. (Duties of the President), 1.**
 "The President has the supervision regarding the doctrine and the administration of
 - a. All officers of the Synod;
 - b. All such as are employed by the Synod;
 - c. The individual districts of the Synod;
 - d. All district presidents."
- c. **Handbook of the LCMS 2007, Article XI (Rights and Duties of Officers), B. (Duties of the President), 3.**
 "The President has and always shall have the power to advise, admonish, and reprove. He shall conscientiously use all means at his command to promote and maintain unity of doctrine and practice in all the districts of the Synod."
- d. **Handbook of the LCMS 2007, Article XII (Districts of the Synod and their Regulation), 7.**
 "The district presidents shall, moreover, especially exercise supervision over the doctrine, life, and administration of office of the ordained and commissioned min-

isters of their district and acquaint themselves with the religious conditions of the congregations of their district. To this end they shall visit and, according as they deem it necessary, hold investigations in the congregations. Their assistants in this work are the circuit counselors...”

e. **C. F. W. Walther**

Let no one think that it has not been so among us. We must not despise the importance of the office of Visitors, even if its value is not always immediately apparent. For example, let us say that a dear brother who visited us perhaps gave us some good advice, cheered us up, or lifted our spirits simply by coming. And if he says, “Oh, dear brother, I also have the same problems you have,” and he sees then that others are faring the same as he, then already there is more than a small blessing in such a visitation.

Besides, we must remember: Such offices are especially important for the future. If we fail to set up such offices now, when by God’s grace we are all united, then untold harm can result therefrom. Now is the time for us to hold fast to such established practices, so that they will be there when at some time false spirits have insinuated themselves. For such arrangements are not for the zealous, who are on their knees day and night [in prayer] that they may be found faithful; they are rather for those who get weary and exhausted with teaching, keeping watch, praying, and studying [*Forschen*]. The devil can again blow out the whole light for us, and unity may turn into such Babylonian confusion that we are appalled. Therefore we must do all [we can] to ward off such danger. Then, if it still doesn’t work, well – we didn’t give birth to the Church, and we can’t preserve it. We must commend it to God and see that we save our souls.

We know how little Luther thought of human ordinances [and] how he hated it that some wanted to make the Church’s welfare dependent on rules and organizational structures. But how highly this same Luther speaks of the office of Visitor! He ascribes the terrible deterioration under the papacy primarily to the deterioration of this institution. Therefore let us cling tightly to it [*darob halten*]. And also this synod will certainly do it with the help of God.

The Preface to *The Book of Concord* says:

We likewise purpose to cooperate with one another in the future in the implementation of this effort at concord in our lands, according to our own and each community’s circumstances, through diligent visitations of churches and schools, the supervision of printers, and other salutary means. If the current controversies about our Christian religion should continue or new ones arise, we shall see to it that they are settled and composed in timely fashion before they become dangerously widespread in order that all kinds of scandal might be obviated [Preface to *The Book of Concord*; Tappert, 14].

As soon as the Formula of Concord had been accepted, it was evident that visitations were necessary. Therefore, in the name of their Christian people, the Christian princes said: “We likewise purpose to cooperate with one another in the future in the implementation of this effort at concord in our lands ... through diligent visitations of churches and schools.” The Church has simply always had the same needs. What our dear forebears felt, that is what we also feel. Therefore we intend to follow in their footsteps and use the means they found trustworthy. (“Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod” in *At Home in the House of My Fathers*, trans. by Matthew C. Harrison, pp. 251-52)

B. Position Advocated and/or Practiced Today -

1. In 2003, the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) issued an opinion that allows one immunity from his sins when under the advice of his Ecclesiastical Supervisor. CCM Opinion 02-2309, of January 20-21, 2003, page 2:

“...the Synod is precluded from taking any action to terminate the membership of its member who, when performing his/her official duties, follows the advice and counsel of the ecclesiastical supervisor designated by the Synod.

“It would be inconsistent with the above constitutional provisions to place the membership of an individual or congregation at risk where that member relies on the ecclesiastical supervision and counsel of the person called and chosen for that role or function. If an act is in fact contrary to Article XIII of the Constitution, the member who acted cannot be charged since he or she acted according to the advice of his or her ecclesiastical supervisor.”

Resolution 7-02 (To Affirm Ecclesiastical Supervision) was presented to the 2010 Convention. The Committee on Ecclesial Matters wrote an introduction that acknowledged that several overtures were submitted requesting “...the convention overrule CCM Opinion 02-2309 and other related opinions dealing with ecclesiastical supervision and expulsion of a member who, when performing his or her official duties, follows the advice and counsel of the ecclesiastical supervisor designated by the Synod.” (*Today's Business Proposed Resolutions 2010*, p.117).

The Committee's conclusion to their introduction to 7-02: "CCM Opinions 02-2296, 02-2309 and 02-2320, issued over seven years ago, have been reviewed by two subsequent conventions of the Synod, but they continue to attract attention and misunderstanding as evidenced by the overtures to this convention. Based upon the extensive review of these and related CCM opinions by previous conventions, as well as the CTCR, COP and COS, Floor Committee 7 [Ecclesiastical Supervision] recommends the adoption of Res 7.02." (*Today's Business Proposed Resolutions 2010*, p.119.)

The final Resolve of 7-02 reads as follows: “...and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod affirm that CCM Opinion 02-2309 and related opinions should not have been and shall never be understood to grant immunity to any member of the Synod, or to allow such member to act with immunity, or to give permission to act contrary to the Holy Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, the Constitution, or the Bylaws of our beloved Synod.”

Not only did the 2010 Convention affirm the CCM ruling regarding the Yankee Stadium event (958/189), but they rejected consideration of a substitute resolution that would have overturned CCM Opinion 02-2309 (465/646). Here is the substitute motion that the convention voted not to consider:

“**Whereas**, CCM Opinion 02-2309 and related opinions were rendered prior to the adoption of 2004 Res. 8-01A; and

“**Whereas**, CCM Opinion 02-2309 and related opinions continue to cause consternation in some quarters of our Synod; therefore be it

“**Resolved**, that the Synod in convention overturn CCM Opinion 02-2309 and related opinions.”

What has now resulted in the LCMS is at best confusing, and in reality, contradicting. CCM Opinion 02-2309 states that one who errs under advice of his ecclesiastical supervisor “cannot be charged.” This is immunity. Immunity simply means “officially granted exemption from legal proceedings.” Synod Resolution 7-02 states that CCM Opinion 02-2309 “shall never be understood to grant immunity.” How are these statements to be reconciled so that our elected ecclesiastical supervisors can render sound supervision not only for the sake of Biblical faithfulness and synod unity, but for the very souls they supervise? It is erroneous to think that a person ignorant of their offense before God is not still held accountable to God. When Abraham lied to Abimelech that his wife, Sarah, was only his sister, and Abimelech took her for himself, God came to Abimelech and said he was a “dead man” for what he did (Genesis 20). It was the same with Isaac and his wife Rebekah (Genesis 26). A person guilty of sin, even if they were counseled otherwise and initially unaware of their offense, is still accountable for that sin. Christian love does not grant immunity in such cases, but holds one accountable for the sake of that person’s needed repentance and absolution. That is the purpose of proper ecclesiastical supervision. These conflicting rulings are an unfortunate sign of a synod becoming ever more entangled in its human bureaucracy than enlightened by God’s Word.

2. The CCM has also ruled that an Ecclesiastical Supervisor has the right to go into a congregation and take control of it, bypassing everyone that has any official standing in the congregation—the pastor, boards, and even the voters' assembly. That is, a District President can go into a parish and determine that a discontented minority is “the Church” and encourage them to set up a conventicle until their pastor can be removed.

The pertinent CCM Opinion for the above, which is binding on all in the LCMS until it is reversed, is “Question Regarding the Relationship of the Circuit Counselor to Member Congregations (04-2387),” May 20-24, 2004. The key portion of the ruling is “The Bylaws do not define the term ‘proper channels’ and thus the procedure to be used in the investigation is chosen by the District President or his representative and does not necessarily require the initial contact or meeting to be with any particular person or group.” This means that in spite of the Bylaws specifying that the District President must go through the proper channels to schedule a meeting, that term now simply means that he may do as he pleases, including bypassing the proper channels.

3. A third area where Ecclesiastical Supervision is sorely lacking in the LCMS today is in the area of our practices relating to Holy Communion. God’s Word and the Lutheran Confessions clearly teach closed communion and the LCMS has officially affirmed that fact numerous times. (See ACELC Evidence of Errors in the LCMS – II. Holy Communion (<http://www.ancelc.net/message2.php?topicID=6891&>) for numerous biblical and confessional citations affirming closed communion.)

Even though the LCMS professes closed communion, there is no apparent ecclesiastical supervision from the President of Synod or most District Presidents when this doctrine is violated. Some LCMS churches are open about their violation of this orthodox practice.

Evidence of this Error:

[February 2011 update from the ACELC: *When we first published this document in December 2010, we included the following communion statement from a church in Minnesota:*

“COMMUNION PREPARATION: The Lord’s Supper is Christ’s true body and true blood in, with, and under the bread and wine. This sacrament is a special blessing for God’s people: our sins are forgiven, our weak faith is strengthened, and our resolve to live for the Lord is renewed. We are worthy to receive this sacrament when we have faith in these words, “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

All who confess with us this understanding of the Lord’s Supper are welcome to receive the sacrament. Visitors who wish to continue to commune with us on a regular basis, or those who have questions are encouraged to speak with one of the pastors.”

The ACELC has subsequently learned that the quoted statement, used prior to June 2006, is no longer being used. A succeeding pastor promptly changed the statement to bring the church’s practice into line with LCMS doctrine. The previous pastor has left the LCMS.

We rejoice that the statement is no longer being used and commend the current pastor and the congregation for their faithful action. We also commend the presiding Circuit Counselor for his prompt, sincere, and faithful action in seeking to address this matter, including his correspondence with the ACELC in bringing this to our attention and allowing us to make this clarification. It is not the intent of the ACELC to harm the good name of any pastor or congregation faithful in their doctrine and practice. Therefore, because the statement and practice in question have been corrected, we apologize for any harm done to the good reputation of the pastor and/or the congregation. We very much appreciate the fraternal and sincere way in which all parties involved dealt with one another in resolving this matter and hope that other problems in the LCMS can likewise find such resolution.]

- a. **Living Savior Lutheran Church, Fairfax Station, VA:** Communion Policy as stated on their web site at <http://www.livingsaviorlutheran.org/who-info.html>:
“Everyone who is a baptized Christian, repents of sin, believes in the real presence of Christ's body and blood in, with, under the bread and wine of the Holy Communion is cordially invited to receive the Lord's Supper at Living Savior.”
- b. **Son of Life Lutheran Church, Boynton Beach, FL:** Communion Policy as stated on their web site <http://www.sonlifelutheran.org/communion.html>:
“Our Beliefs: Holy Communion is celebrated at Son Life Lutheran Church in response to Jesus' invitation, “Do this often... in remembrance of Me.” In preparation we acknowledge our sinful condition and our need for forgiveness. We believe that Jesus Christ is the only Savior from all sin, Satan and death. We believe that the Risen Lord Jesus is really present in the Sacrament and that with the bread and wine we receive His true body and blood (“in, with and under”). We trust with glad confidence His Word, “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” We also resolve to dedicate our lives to the services of Jesus Christ in His Body, the Church, by regular group worship, sacrificial giving, and thankful living.

“Visitors: if you share these beliefs with us, you are welcome to the Communion rail. Common cup, individual cups and grape juice are available.”

- c. **St. Mark Lutheran Church, Eureka, MO** (Printed in bulletin). “Communion Note: Because of God’s high standards for those desiring to partake of Holy Communion (The Lord’s Supper), please consider the following questions as you prepare:

1. Am I a sinner?
2. Am I sorry for my sins?
3. Do I believe Jesus died and rose again for my sin?
4. Do I intend, with God’s help, to change my sinful life?
5. Do I believe Jesus’ Body and Blood are present with the bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper?

“According to God’s Word, anyone who is able to answer “yes” to these questions is properly prepared to receive the Lord’s Supper with blessing. It is our practice to commune those in 7th grade and older who have been baptized and instructed in the Bible teachings about the Lord’s Supper. (For those who for medical or personal reasons are unable to receive wine, grape juice is available. Please speak to one of the pastors for information about receiving grape juice instead of wine.) If you have questions about our teaching or practice regarding the Lord’s Supper, please speak to one of our pastors. Thank you.”

(Note: See more examples in the ACELC document Evidence of Errors in the LCMS: II. Holy Communion at <http://www.acelc.net/message2.php?topicID=6891&>, item B.)

4. Following is an example of an LCMS church where doctrine and practice do not follow God’s Word and the Lutheran Confessions.

Saint Paul Lutheran Church, Westport, CT. (Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Church District - SELC). Some quotes from Saint Paul’s web site (<http://www.stpaulwestport.org/>) as of mid-October 2010:

“St. Paul is a place where the traditional, contemporary, sacramental (sic) and spirit-filled converge. ...

“Connected to this is St. Paul Westport's understanding that we are a HOUSE OF HEALING. ...

“Charismatic Gifts - We distinguish between the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5) that every Christian will produce; the God given talents (Matthew 25) that are to be consecrated and given back to God for His glory and praise; and the Gifts of the Spirit (I Corinthians 14) that God gives as He wilts (sic) for the edification of the Body of Christ. ...

“A Night to Honor Israel, The Concert Hall at the Norwalk Town Hall, Speakers include Robert Stearns of Eagles’ Wings and a Representative of the Israeli Government. ...

“Me [Rev. Paul Teske, pastor at Saint Paul Lutheran, Westport, CT] being baptized in the Holy Spirit in 1994.

“Alpha - An opportunity to explore the meaning of life - Call the church office for the next start date. For Adults and Young Adults. At an Alpha course people explore the Christian faith in a relaxed setting over ten thought-provoking weekly sessions, ...”

From Rev. Paul Teske's testimony at

http://www.stpaulwestport.org/tinymce/jscripts/tiny_mce/plugins/filemanager/files/Pastor_Paul_Testimony.pdf.

"I called my friend, Bruce Hughes, and asked him if there would be anyway (sic) to get seating at the Benny Hinn Healing Crusade in Baltimore the next week. I had such a strong unction that if I went to this crusade, God would touch me. Bruce told me that he would have our names added to the list. I informed my church leadership that I was going to the crusade and would be gone for a few days. ...

"The crusade started. Toward the end, Benny called all of the Pastors forward for a blessing. Rivers [Mrs. Paul Teske] and I walked to a place under the pulpit and stood there. Hundreds came for a blessing. Rivers and I had previously been blessed by Pastor Benny in New Jersey and New York City crusades where he had laid hands on us three consecutive times in each service. ...

"The flow of the Spirit began to move as we entered into worship. Without warning, I was touched by the power of God. While standing, I began to shake in a way that I cannot duplicate this day. This lasted for about five minutes. Rivers immediately sensed, as I did, that I was being healed. Pastor Benny called out a word of knowledge for several healings including someone with a brace. ... "

From www.PaulTeske.com:

"Last night, we had guest speaker, Catherine Brown, at our Wednesday Night Healing Service. Catherine is from Scotland and has an international ministry. She moves in the Prophetic and Healing. She is frequently featured on the Elijah. After an anointed time of worship, she shared a powerful message which stirred up faith and positioned people to receive from God. Dozens came forward for healing and deliverance. She, along with our regular healing teams, prayed until 11PM. ...

"I spoke at *St. Paul Episcopal Church in Darien, CT, Sunday night on healing and deliverance. ...

** (FYI: St. Paul Darien has an incredible history of the Holy Spirit moving in the early days of the charismatic movement. ...)

"Since his healing on May 28, 2004, Pastor Paul has traveled to teach and minister in over forty countries on six continents and ministered in venues including: healing crusades in large stadiums; teaching, demonstration and imparting the gifts he received to others in churches, camp meetings and homes; television and radio; seminars; and teaching in Bible schools, seminaries and colleges. ...

In addition, he [Rev. Paul Teske] has witnessed thousands give their lives to Jesus as He confirmed the Gospel with signs, wonders and miracles."

From <http://paulteske.tumblr.com/>:

"While teaching on healing and deliverance to a group of Panamanian leaders in a local church, I noticed that a young pastor seemed to have a very sheepish demeanor. At the end of the teaching (sic), I prayed for healing for the leaders. The host pastor's wife had an arm issue—she had not been able to lift her arm above her chest. Instantaneously, she was healed. She shot her arm up and began to praise God for the miracle of healing. Everyone was thrilled for her and for witnessing the Power of God move so readily.

“I continue to watch the young pastor to monitor his reaction. He had a glazed look. I asked him to place his hands in mine and to stare into my eyes. I asked him if he was experiencing fear. He told me that he was always fearful. (I am speaking to him through a Spanish translator.) I ask him if he wanted the spirit of fear to leave and he said yes. I then told him to command the spirit of fear to leave him in the name of Jesus. He could not speak. I told him again and he still could not utter a word. I told the translator to tell him to repeat after me. The translator said he was, but the man could not speak.

“I then commanded the deaf and dumb spirit to come out of him as well as the spirit of fear. Slowly, he began to speak the words he was being directed to pray. He was not completely freed of this tormenting spirit, but it was a start. I told the host pastor that he must follow up with the young pastor and continue to pray for him to be delivered of these oppressive spirits. Until he is free, he is going to be extremely limited in his ability to minister to others.

“Healing comes in five areas—emotional, psychological, relational, physical and spiritual. All are necessary to make us fit and healthy to serve God...all are equally important. To neglect one while addressing other areas is hot (sic) good...we must be made whole in every aspect of our being through the power of Jesus Christ.”

5. Approximately 60-70 LCMS congregations are members of the non-Lutheran (American Evangelical) Willow Creek Association. According to the “Who We Are” section of the Willow Creek Association web page:

The Willow Creek Association (WCA) is a not-for-profit organization that exists to maximize the life-transformation effectiveness of local churches. We do this by stirring up and calling out the core leadership of churches around the world, encouraging them to follow their “holy discontent” as they build life-changing communities of faith. We then equip these leaders with next-step solutions to impact spiritual transformation of their people, their communities, and the world.

The rest of the “Who We Are” can be found at <http://www.willowcreek.com/about/>. Missing from this methodology for “maximizing the life-transforming effectiveness of local churches” is the very means by which any such thing can be done. Along with the Willow Creek “Statement of Faith” (http://www.willowcreek.com/about/statement_faith.asp) we find no mention of the efficaciousness of God’s Word as the means by and through which God creates, sustains, and preserves faith and all growth of such faith. Nor do we see any mention of Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord’s Supper as God’s means of grace through which only, His Word and Sacraments, can there truly be any conversion, transformation, or sanctification of the sinner. This simply means that the underlying source, or means, by which they seek to grow faith and the church is rooted in and left to man’s will and efforts through sociological principles and strategies. This is a fundamental error that overthrows the very “faith” it seeks to cultivate and grow, as in every case where Law and Gospel are confused.

The WCA Chairman of the Board is Bill Hybels, a well known reformed church growth advocate who uses such sociological principals to change and transform the church in order to make it more appealing to the world. By the use of such means, and in rejection of the true means of God’s grace, His Word and Sacraments, Bill Hybels and others like him, not only change and transform congregations in order to attract the world, but in fact does so

into the image of the world itself, a world of self-means and self-righteousness, which is nothing other than advancing the false religion of man, where what man does for God trumps what God does for man through His means of grace. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are stripped of their gracious content and blessing and reduced to mere spiritual exercises of the person by which he grows his faith. What is "done for Christ," trumps what "Christ is doing for us," in both growing the church and growing faith in the person. This is a fundamental error.

The principles of church growth and faith growth of the Willow Creek Association and Church Growth Movement cannot supplant, be placed side-by-side, or even blended with God's true way and means of converting and transforming man without great harm to both faith and the Gospel. Scripture continually warns us against the leaven of the Pharisees, that a little leaven leavens the whole lump, and that such false teachers who teach a doctrine different from what we have rightly been taught, no matter how well-intended, are to be avoided (Rom. 16:17).

Why would an LCMS congregation seek membership in WCA? In November 2010, LCMS District President David P.E. Maier was asked about this; following is his reply:

Thank you...for your question regarding Lutheran congregations who are members of Willow Creek Association. The actual number of Michigan District congregations that are WCA members is 12 out of 380 congregations. These congregations will utilize WCA materials in many and various ways only after screening them and then removing or rewriting contrary theology. They simply follow the pattern of Dr. Martin Luther who took what is good and helpful and leaving what is not. One of the reasons pastors attend the seminary is to be able to discern and glean what is helpful for their congregation and point out what it not. I hope this is helpful to you.

It is true that Martin Luther did revise the errors of the Roman Mass in establishing the Deutsche Messe (German Mass). Part of his reforms also included revising and reforming catechetical materials. It is also true that Luther did this work for the correction, edification, and benefit of the Church as a whole. Correcting errant materials also included pointing out the errors to the people so that they became educated in the Truth and avoided the errors. Christian love and charity commend us to do so.

Joining a known heterodox organization to get access to their materials based on an errant theology is simply unwise and contrary to our common fellowship and confession. Do such churches then also follow Martin Luther's lead by pointing out the WCA's errant theology to them? What are these churches taking from their association with the WCA? What is it in the WCA resources that is lacking in Lutheran resources? Does Lutheran doctrine really need to be blended (or leavened) with heterodox methodology?

Further, "...follow[ing] the pattern of Dr. Martin Luther..." has been used before to defend the use of Rick Warren's "The Purpose Driven Life/Church." But the problem remains. You cannot take a theology that is anti-sacramental and somehow make it "Lutheran." The theology of the WCA and the Church Growth Movement is steeped in Arminianism (man's free will to convert and sanctify himself by his choice and life for Jesus). This errant theology is completely antithetical to the Gospel (God's conversion and sanctification of man through His gift of faith given and worked through His Word and Sacraments). In other words, these are competing theologies. One seeks to convert and feed the Old Adam (Arminianism), and the other seeks to put the Old Adam to death and raise up and feed the New Man (Law and Gospel of Lutheranism, i.e., of the New Testament faith).

Belonging to and using materials from a heterodox organization violates our Synod Constitution (Article VI) for conditions of membership:

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

2. Renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description, such as:
 - c. Participating in heterodox tract and missionary activities.
4. Exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymnbooks, and catechisms in church and school.

Congregations that hold membership in heterodox organizations and use their materials will no doubt create confusion among its members and others in their fellowship about what is a right confession and practice when participating in such an association. This may lead laity to believe that Willow Creek is a doctrinally acceptable organization.

C. ACELC Response:

1. Regarding CCM Opinion 02-2309 (2003), Advice and Counsel from an Ecclesiastical Supervisor.

In spite of the errant Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) opinion (B., 1., above), God's word is clear that each person is responsible for his own sin.

¹⁶Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin. (Deut 24:16)

⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. ¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; ¹¹for it is written,

"As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,
and every tongue shall confess to God."

¹²So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. (Rom 14:9-12)

No case concerning Ecclesiastical Supervision has demonstrated more clearly the Synod's reliance upon man generated bylaws, resolutions, and CCM opinions over the Word of God than the exoneration of District President Rev. Dr. David Benke for his participation in "A Prayer for America," and this in spite of the Dispute Resolution Panel's (DRP) own words.

Two points in the decision are pertinent for establishing this matter.

First, the DRP writes, quoting a January 10, 2003, letter by Rev. Dr. Samuel H. Nafzger: "The Synod itself determines what it understands the Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions to teach ... by majority vote" (p. 7 of April 10, 2003 Decision of DRP). The letter by Dr. Nafzger regards especially the passage of Resolution 3-07A in the 2001 Convention, which the DRP states on page 6: "meets the criteria of a doctrinal resolution of the Synod and as such is to be honored and upheld until such time as the Synod itself amends or repeals it."

Thus, we see that a convention consisting of ~ 1,200 delegates, less than 10% of the Synod's membership, has decided a doctrinal matter that is being interpreted in such a way as to oppose the very Scriptures listed above.

Second, and this is the clincher, the DRP writes in the first paragraph of the "Conclusions" section of their decision: "While it is true that only The Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions are the basis of membership in or expulsion from the Synod, it is also true that the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod represent the

collective study and will of the members of the Synod as to what the Scriptures say and how its members covenant together to teach and practice its doctrines.” (p. 12)

Then, demonstrating that Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions play a subordinate role to the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod, under the Decision paragraph on page 13, the DRP writes:

“...the Panel concludes that there is not sufficient reason or evidence according to the Synod's Constitution and Bylaws for suspending Rev. Benke.”

(**NOTE:** For a more thorough review of this case, the reader is referred to the ACELC document Evidence of Errors in the LCMS: X. Dispute Resolution at <http://www.acelc.net/message2.php?topicID=6891&>, item B.)

2. **Regarding CCM Opinion 04-2387 (2004), Proper Channels.**

The fact that “The Bylaws do not define the term 'proper channels' ...” by no means authorizes an advisory organization (Synod) to ignore proper channels in the congregations' right to self-government. Article VII of the LCMS Constitution states:

“Article VII Relation of the Synod to Its Members

1. In its relation to its members the Synod is not an ecclesiastical government exercising legislative or coercive powers, and with respect to the individual congregation's right of self-government it is but an advisory body. Accordingly, no resolution of the Synod imposing anything upon the individual congregation is of binding force if it is not in accordance with the Word of God or if it appears to be inexpedient as far as the condition of a congregation is concerned.”

Put another way by our Synod's chief dogmatician, Francis Pieper:

“All government of the Church which does not bind the consciences of Christians to Christ's Word, but to the word of men, is pseudo-government” (*Christian Dogmatics*, 2: 394).

3. **Regarding Holy Communion Practices.**

Sufficient documentation and response to the topic of open versus closed communion has been given earlier in this document under item B., 3., and in ACELC Evidence of Errors in the LCMS – II. Holy Communion (<http://www.acelc.net/message2.php?topicID=6891&>)

Our response is repeated here:

What has been a faithful and God-pleasing practice throughout the history of the Church (Closed Communion), has degenerated into a culturally conditioned practice of trying to keep everyone happy without any true, pastoral regard for the Word of God or the spiritual welfare of those coming to our altars. Pastoral discretion and granting “emergency” exceptions to otherwise unprepared communicants, has been given broad latitude in our day, and essentially disregards the practice of Closed Communion altogether. This is simply a capitulation to both the whims of culture and the ecumenical influences of liberal theology borne out by the fact that this practice is more congruent with the sentimentality of today than with Lutheran theology.

We add one final thought on Holy Communion:

Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions expressly teach a practice of Closed Communion. Today some District Presidents fail to provide ecclesiastical supervision when this practice is violated. We reject the toleration of this error.

4. **Regarding Errant Doctrine and Practice (e.g., Saint Paul Lutheran, Westport, CT.).**

The “ministry” of Paul Teske in question has been ongoing since 2004. It is difficult to believe that the SELC District President is unaware of Rev. Teske’s ongoing ministry that incorporates the philosophy and methodology of what is in essence the Charismatic Movement. Very simply, where is the ecclesiastical supervision?

5. **Regarding LCMS churches belonging to the Willow Creek Association.**

There has been great concern in some quarters of our synod and its leadership about congregations associating together for purposes of addressing error in our synod fellowship and restoring in the LCMS the orthodox doctrine and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. At the same time there has been little if any corresponding concern about LCMS congregations associating with heterodox teachers and churches that in essence deny the true Gospel and hold all manner of false doctrine and practice. As Christians of the New Testament faith, we are commanded and commended by God not only to **not** “associate” with such teachers and churches, but so too to desire and seek their repentance and correction. Without the latter is to simply by complicity affirm them in their error. The same goes for any lack of proper ecclesiastical supervision required by our fellowship obligations where these errors and associations are known. Therefore we highly exhort, and for the sake of Christian love, peace and charity, so also highly encourage those charged with ecclesiastical supervision of these matters to exercise what has been entrusted to them. We do so especially for the sake of those who by such associations are endangered by the errors and deceptions inherent in all false doctrine and practice.