

Association of Confessing Evangelical Lutheran Congregations



Frequently Asked Questions

January 01, 2011

1. **What do we hope to accomplish?**

It is the hope of those joining together in the association of congregations that we make public the official and tolerated errors of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in such a way that a productive discussion can be held within and around our Synod to address, correct and resolve those matters that are in dispute among us. This is done with a Christian, fraternal, and loving intent, to restore the unity of our Synod in its doctrine and its practice.

2. **How do we propose to accomplish our goals?**

First, it is our intention to make the errors within our Synod public through the publication of those errors in a letter to all LCMS congregations. Then, in connection with that letter, we will seek to bring about a group of congregations that intends to fraternally request that our Synod correct those identified errors so that the unity of doctrine and practice might be restored within our Synod.

3. **Are the proposed actions by the ACELC schismatic?**

No. To be schismatic means that one is seeking to break fellowship or separate themselves from the Church without sufficient doctrinal cause. The ACELC is not suggesting that we break fellowship or separate ourselves from the LCMS at all, and therefore is not, and cannot be considered schismatic in any way.

Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, (Fifth President of the LCMS, President of the St. Louis, MO, Seminary, and author of *Christian Dogmatics* - the primary dogmatics textbook for all LCMS pastors), wrote in his well-known dogmatics work:

"By the term 'schism' we mean a division in the Church which God's Word does not enjoin, but which is begun by men for carnal reasons and therefore is sinful, e.g., a separation [emphasis added] because of differences in church customs, church terms, order of worship, etc. In practice it is important to distinguish between schismatics acting from spite and schismatics acting from weakness in Christian knowledge and prejudice. Such, however, as separate from a church body because it tenaciously clings to false doctrine are unjustly called schismatics, separatists, etc. This separation is commanded in Scripture (Rom. 16:17) and is the only means of restoring and maintaining true unity in the Christian Church."

In other words a schismatic person or group actually separates or seeks separation from their church body without doctrinal cause. **The ACELC is seeking to establish unity and healing in the LCMS, not separation.** To conclude that the ACELC is schismatic is also to conclude that no one may speak out against false doctrine as a group within our Synod and (for that matter), even those who speak out against false doctrine as individuals would logically also be subject to the same false claim.

It is not those who are seeking doctrinal unity on the basis of God's Word and our Lutheran Confessions who are bringing schism into the Church. Rather it is those who have intruded false doctrine or unbiblical practice into the Church that divides it. Claims by some that the ACELC is being schismatic are looking in the wrong direction, and are laying a false claim against the ACELC.

The ACELC is doing nothing more than following the Scriptural mandate that as Christians we are to speak out against false doctrine of every kind. God's Word makes it abundantly clear that this is a sacred obligation of every Christian – and most especially every pastor:

I Corinthians 11:18-19:

¹⁸ For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, ¹⁹ for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.

II Timothy 4:1-4:

¹ I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Romans 16:17:

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. 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.

Acts 5:29

But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men.

Augsburg Confession, Article XXVIII (Church Authority), 21:

http://s3.amazonaws.com/mychurchwebsite/c2001/ac_article_xxviii_church_authority_21.pdf

Preface to the Book of Concord, 5-6; 9-11:

http://s3.amazonaws.com/mychurchwebsite/c2001/preface_to_boc_5-6_9-11.pdf

Additionally, the ACELC seeks only to support the very first objective of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as stated in its own Constitution:

"The Synod, under Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions shall – 1. Conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3-6; I Cor. 1:10)...and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom. 16:17), and heresy;" (2007 Handbook, Article III, p. 11)

Thus, the actions proposed by the ACELC are only seeking unity, not division. We are complying with the clear biblical injunction that we speak the truth in

love and defend against false teaching – none of which divides the Church or is schismatic.

4. **Does this association of congregations intend to use the Synod’s appointed Dispute Resolution Process (DRP) to address the identified errors?**

No. In fact one of the errors we hope to correct is to bring correction to the DRP process so that it actually addresses disputes on the basis of Holy Scripture and our Lutheran confessions rather than giving pre-eminent consideration to the man-made Constitution and Bylaws of the LCMS. Sadly, the DRP has been demonstrated over time to fail in its task to settle disputes and to provide redress to those seeking correction to errors either adopted by the Synod officially or tolerated due to lack of proper biblical ecclesiastical supervision within the Synod. We intend to openly, publicly, and honestly address the Synod regarding these errors in other venues than the DRP simply because the DRP does not work and because the errors are public and need to be dealt with publicly.

5. **How will this association of congregations function as an organization?**

The effort to bring fraternal admonition will informally become an unincorporated entity at its Convening Conference. At that time we will form an organization of congregations which will then adopt its governance agreement, adopt the itemized list of errors, make any changes to our errors documents that may be needed, and move forward as a body to correct the identified errors. It is anticipated that congregations interested in joining the association will send its pastor and a lay delegate to the Convening Conference which is scheduled to be held March 1-3, 2010, in Kansas City, MO. These delegates, in turn, will elect leadership for the association which will then be responsible to the association meeting in conference annually.

6. **Are the errors needing correction well documented?**

Yes. Each and every error enumerated in our Fraternal Admonition document is well documented with specific examples of each error and including the identity of those congregations and/or individuals who are involved in such errors. No accusation will be made without this certain documentation.

7. **What is a congregation that wishes to join in the association of congregations’ effort obligating itself to do?**

Those congregations which have examined our materials and documents, are in full agreement with them, and wish to join together in common cause with other LCMS congregations to address and seek correction to the errors of our Synod, will commit themselves to sending their pastor and a lay delegate to the Convening Conference of the association and being a part of the concerted efforts of the association.

8. **Will those congregations joining in the association of congregations' effort be subject to scrutiny and perhaps criticism by the LCMS?**

On October 1, 2010, three representatives of the ACELC Steering Committee and three representatives of the Council of Presidents of the LCMS met for 4.5 hours. As a result of that meeting the following joint statement was issued:

"Report of the "Group of Six" – (Richard Bolland, Daniel Bremer, Ray Mirly, Herbert Mueller, Drew Newman, Russ Sommerfeld)

1. We met in St. Louis October 1, 2010, and had fraternal discussion.
2. All six agree we have theological issues that need to be discussed under the Word of God.
3. The way we pastors talk and think about one another needs also to be brought under the Word of God.
4. Together we seek and support a process of the whole Synod to come to agreement on and to resolve these issues under the word of God."

From this meeting, (especially item #4), it is clear that we are "together seeking and supporting a process of the whole Synod" to resolve the issues which divide our Synod. We are not, then at odds with the LCMS, but working in common cause with our Synod.

Will some within our Synod criticize our efforts? Sadly, that is the pattern of dysfunction into which our Synod has fallen due to the errors which have been permitted to exist among us, so yes, that is likely from some quarters.

Concerned Lutherans should also keep in mind what our first synodical President, Rev. Dr. C.F.W. Walther said in his fourth evening lecture in his book *Law and Gospel*:

"When a theologian is asked to yield and make concession in order that peace may at last be established in the Church, but refuses to do so even in a single point of doctrine, such an action looks to human reason like intolerable stubbornness, yea, like down-right malice. That is the reason why such theologians are loved and praised by few men during their lifetime. Most men rather revile them as disturbers of the peace, yea, as destroyers of the kingdom of God. They are regarded as men worthy of contempt. But in the end it becomes manifest that this very determined, inexorable tenacity in clinging to the pure teaching of the divine Word by no means tears down the Church; on the contrary, it is just this which, in the midst of greatest dissension, builds up the Church and ultimately brings about genuine peace. Therefore woe to the Church which has no men of this stripe, men who stand as watchmen on the walls of Zion, sound the alarm whenever a foe threatens to rush the walls, and rally to the banner of Jesus Christ for a holy war!...Let us, therefore, bless all the faithful champions who have fought for every point of Christian doctrine, unconcerned about the favor of men and disregarding their threatening. Their ignominy, though it was often great, has not been borne in vain. Men cursed them,

but they continued bearing their testimony until death, and now they wear the crown of glory and enjoy the blissful communion of Christ and of all the angels and the elect." (C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, Concordia Publishing House, pp. 28-30)

9. **What happens if congregations in the Synod do NOT heed the admonition? In other words, what would be the next step?**

We envision the outcome to be akin to what happened during the Predestination Controversy of 1877 when Synod responded by indicating that the six congregations that rejected the resolution of the Synod at that time were first allowed to remain in the LCMS, but were not permitted to either teach or publish their views. As a result, within a year they all excluded themselves from the Synod.

A little more background on how the Predestination Controversy was resolved by the Word of God: President C.F.W. Walther wrote scripture-based essays for both pastors and laymen explaining the theological errors of Calvinism and how the Lutheran teaching regarding eternal election was supported by the Word of God. Since the essays were based on God's Word, it was God's Word that resolved the issue.

10. **What would be considered actually heeding the admonition? Is it simply to have discussions go on and on, or is it actually seeing the Synod enforce a correction of those who are doctrinally in error?**

This is a difficult one to ascertain. In President Harrison's *It's Time* he indicates that the Koinonia Project is likely a ten year effort to patiently identify the issues, identify areas of agreement and specify those areas where genuine disagreement exists. A period of time will also be needed (included in the 10 year estimate) for Synod-wide study and discussion on the issues.

We are not certain of the final outcome of these matters; one possibility is Synodical convention resolutions that speak clearly to these issues and that reflect the consensus of the Synod, based on God's Word. Presumably, such a resolution would put those on notice whose doctrine and/or practice are not brought into conformity.

11. **How will we know if the Synod is ever actually following through on correcting these errors?**

We will know that the matter has been resolved when either a) following our deliberation of the matter we all come to a common Scriptural/Confessional understanding of the matter at hand and all agree on the proper practice of same, or b) those who disagree with our common understanding find that they can no longer in good conscience remain in our fellowship and leave.

12. **Who can I contact with additional questions or to support this effort?**

Any member of the ACELC Steering Committee. Contact information is at <http://www.ancelc.net/staff.php>.