

AALC - LCMS DISCUSSIONS

March 7- 8, 2006

St. Louis, MO

TOPIC:

RELATIONS WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS

presented by:

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PROLEGOMENA (From our founding documents):

INTER-CHURCH COOPERATION:

L.C.U.S.A.

That The AALC seeks cooperation with Lutheran Council U.S.A. wherever it feels it is not compromising its stand.

- A. Military Chaplaincy which already includes Lutheran Church Missouri Synod
- B. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS)
- C. Lutheran World Relief

ALTAR FELLOWSHIP

We have officially inquired into pulpit and altar fellowship with the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, Wisconsin, Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, Conservative Lutheran Association and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

This association will not become a member of the above organizations and will not support by representation, money, or service, the above organizations.

LUTHERAN INDEPENDENT MINISTRIES

The AALC acknowledges and is supportive of the L.B.I. (Lutheran Bible Institute) movement.
The AALC acknowledges and is supportive of the World Mission Prayer League.
The AALC acknowledges and is supportive of the Lutheran Evangelistic Movement
The AALC acknowledges and is supportive of other conservative-Evangelical Lutheran independent organizations.

INTER-CHURCH COOPERATION

We do affirm the Lutheran position of "Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran Pastors." We also recognize that while we use sound judgment with regard to Scriptural and doctrinal integrity, it will be appropriate at times to allow the witness of others in our pulpits.

We will cooperate with reformed Pastors in community events such as ministerial meetings, graduations and other celebrations.

(from The AALC Declaration of Faith and Policy and Position Statements, XII. INTER-CHURCH COOPERATION, page 5 - as prepared prior to and stated at The AALC Constituting Convention, November 7, 1987)

COMMENTARY:

It is obvious from the above statement that we in The AALC are fairly limited in the depth and breadth of our statements relative to many of the specifics about cooperation with other Christians. In spite of that, these statements have served us well in the past and will provide us with a lot of room for growth, as is the case in having the privilege of being part of these talks with the LCMS.

It should also be noted that, in spite of the brevity of our formal statements, it is our strong Scriptural and Confessional stance that has enabled the Lord through His means of grace to call us “out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9), even as it has bound us together into the mystery of oneness which is His body, the Church, and seated us together “in the heavenly place” of Word and Sacrament (Ephesians 2:6).

Therefore, we in The AALC would affirm that our relationship with other Christians is founded upon and presupposes what the Apostle Paul calls, “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). It is a given among Christian people who are members of the *Una Sancta* by grace through faith in Jesus Christ who is the head of His one body, the Church.

As a result, we are to “seek peace and pursue it” (Psalm 34:14) when it comes to our relationship to other Christians, not so that we might compromise our position, but so that we can offer a witness that endeavors to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) among the members of this body which already exists by the re-creative power of God the Holy Spirit and without whom, as we confess in the Third Article of the Creed, “we cannot believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to Him.”

Furthermore, as indicated in the above-stated founding documents, from the beginning of The AALC, it seemed good, right and salutary to affirm the so-called Galesburg Rule in managing our relationships with other Christians. What prevailed was a sense that this would enable us to continue the strong Scriptural and doctrinal stand which would mark our identity as Lutheran Christians. The measurement of “sound judgment” was as strong a barometer as could be agreed upon, given the nature of our polity and the desire for autonomy among our congregations. And the allowance for “the witness of others in our pulpits” was deemed to be appropriate only “at times,” rather than on a regular basis.

More troublesome has been the reference above to cooperation with “reformed Pastors.” Historically, this cooperation has been directed toward events other than worship, as is indicated in the above wording (e.g., cooperative efforts for food pantries, fixing up homes in a community and raising awareness on topics of national and international import). We have found that many ministerial alliances in given communities are able to get more done by focusing on cooperative work projects, more so than being inclined to have various congregations run to an altar to demonstrate solidarity via worship events. Of course, where our congregations face issues relative to combined worship activities would be on the occasion of major holidays. As we no doubt would all agree, over the years, few congregations have been able to dodge the “community Thanksgiving service” bullet. Our experience has been that even some non-Lutheran pastors can find this tiresome after awhile. Interestingly enough, when we see how this plays out in some of our communities, it turns that it’s not always the “Lutheran guy” who balks at some of these combined worship requests or who is accused of being stand-offish.

In addition, there are also para-church efforts which our congregations have come to

support in some instances. These would be efforts to direct ministry to teenagers, alcoholics, the homeless, crisis pregnancy efforts, etc., which can easily be expected to transcend denominational lines and doctrines. We would say that our congregations would err towards the greater good of help for people in trouble as part of our Christian witness.

On that basis, we have sought and will continue to seek to address anything that might fall under the topic of ecumenical issues in light of Scripture and the Confessions. In fact, our vision for ministry over the next three years (“Moving Forward in Ministry”) will serve as a banner which underlines that fact. And under that banner, our leadership is committed to a Scriptural and Confessional witness that seeks to be both incarnational and missional in all our endeavors, especially in our relationships with other Christians.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Gregory J. Gerendas