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**From: The Messiah Lutheran Church Elder Board, Wilmington, NC**

**To: The Messiah Lutheran Church Congregation, Wilmington, NC**

**November 10, 2025**

**Subject: U.S. Flag Placement**

During the 17 Aug 25 Messiah Lutheran Church congregational meeting, a motion was made to move the U.S. Flag from its current location, in the church lobby, to the front of the sanctuary. An amendment to the motion was made to have the elders, who are responsible for assisting the pastor with worship services, to consider options for moving the U.S. flag into the sanctuary. Additionally, the motion was amended to include a Christian flag in the sanctuary. The motion, as amended, to have the Elders consider moving the American Flag and the Christian Flag into the Sanctuary passed.

The Elder Board met on 11 Sept 25 and 6 Nov 25 and entered into detailed discussion and debate on this topic. Prior to the meetings, the elder board researched LCMS guidance on flags in the sanctuary. Additionally, during our meetings and prior to our discussions, all were reminded that Messiah's main focus is our mission: "To lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ." Jesus commanded this for His church and His followers prior to His ascension, and it is our responsibility to measure everything we do against this Great Commission. The Elder Board approached the discussion by using these guiding questions to help us reach a decision: "How does not having a flag in the sanctuary negatively impact leading people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ?" and "Does having a flag in the sanctuary create a potential stumbling block for people as they grow in their relationship with Christ?" The discussion also revealed that the current location of the U.S. Flag, in the church lobby, was an intentional decision made in 2012 and is in line with the theology and beliefs of our pastor.

The Elder Board requests that each member of the congregation prayerfully consider these two questions, the referenced discussions in this letter and your personal understanding of our church mission, to come to your conclusion on this matter.

**Additional Discussion Points:**

LCMS guidance is neutral on this and many churches have flags displayed. This practice mainly stems from patriotic pushes from World Wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Christian flag is designed to balance the flags and not of any standing in the LCMS. While this issue is a matter of adiaphoron (matters that are neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture), when we understand how the U.S. flag fits within the context of our church's mission, we also become aware of how it may negatively impact someone growing in a relationship with Jesus Christ, possibly dissuading someone, and therefore could work against the Great Commission.

The U.S. flag can represent many positive feelings of patriotism, history and freedom for people. It can also represent negative feelings because our country's flag can mean many different things to different people. In recent times it has been viewed by some as a symbol of division, defined by political parties, partisan beliefs, and cultural shifts. The separation of church and state can become a confusing issue when symbols such as the flag are placed within the confines of worship spaces. The church of Jesus Christ is a body made up of all nations, all tongues, and all races, and the presence of one flag can inadvertently paint the picture of unacceptance within our church. Today, the U.S. flag unfortunately cannot communicate one constant message as feelings toward the flag change from time to time.

We must all consider Scripture as it relates to this topic because as Christians we are called to adhere to God's word when relating to issues in our modern times. Certain biblical passages argue against national symbols by emphasizing the priority of God's kingdom over earthly nations or the risk of idolatry. Below are some relevant passages:

1. Exodus 20:3-5 (The Ten Commandments) "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make an image for yourself in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them..."
2. Acts 15:19 "Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God..."
3. Romans 14:13 "Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother."
4. John 18:36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."
5. Galatians 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."
6. Colossians 3:2 "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."
7. Revelation 7:9-10 "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb..."

The elders also discussed what the first century disciples might have thought of this question and that in Revelation the letters to the seven churches discussed how each of the named churches in Asia Minor were performing, John pointing out how some were beginning to stray from Jesus and his word by allowing outside influences into the church.

As noted in the LCMS guidance, it may be time to reconsider this short-lived tradition among us (Lutherans never did this prior to World War I, and then only in America). One may observe that many congregations today, when considering a sanctuary renovation or even building a new sanctuary, will opt to display the flag in a location other than the sanctuary. Many will place a flag outside of the building or perhaps in the lobby. In such ways, we can demonstrate our patriotism but not blur the distinction between the kingdom of Christ with the kingdom of the world/government.

Additionally, Lutheran Seminaries and the LCMS Headquarters Chapel in St. Louis do not display national flags inside their sanctuaries but do so in their lobbies.

**Conclusion:**

Everything in our sanctuary has a specific place and purpose and should make it easy for people to grow in their faith or turn to Jesus.

After prayerful consideration, the elder board concluded that not having a flag in the sanctuary does not hinder our mission in any way, while having a flag present could create a potential stumbling block for some believers and nonbelievers which could negatively impact their growing relationship with Jesus Christ. Therefore following extensive discussion and having fully considered the options of moving the U.S. flag, the elder board recommends keeping the U.S. Flag in the lobby and to not display a Christian flag.

Our current placement of the U.S. flag does not detract or diminish from our mission yet continues to serve as a symbol of our love and devotion for our country and the patriotism we feel as collective members of the congregation.