Koinonia in Lutheranism
ACELC Free Conference, April 17, 2013
Rev. Clint K. Poppe

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Acts 2:42

God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. 1 Corinthians 1:9

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Philippians 2:1-2

“A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.” Martin Luther

Fellowship. Koinonia. Life Together. These words and topics have always been prominent in Lutheran theology and practice, but especially so in the LCMS in recent years. A few years ago, Rev. Matthew Harrison issued a paper titled “It’s Time, LCMS Unity and Mission, The Real Problem We Face and How to Solve It” and outlined his plan for addressing the problems before us. He began by stating the obvious, calling the thing what it actually is:

Let’s be honest. There are enduring divisions in the Synod, and these divisions not only make our life together bitter, they consume our energy, and they cripple our ability to share the Gospel in its fullness with a world that has never been so open to what we have in Christ as Lutherans. Our disunity is killing us and our mission effectiveness – and at just the wrong moment!

His words were refreshing, to say the least, especially after many years of hearing that the differences in the LCMS were minor compared to those dividing other Christian denominations or that our divisions were simply matters of practice and not doctrine. Rather than apologizing for being distinctively Lutheran Christians, Harrison’s words were and still are a clarion call for courage to be who we are, “This is the moment for us to be exactly who we are. So it is past time for us to come to an agreement about exactly who we are. There is too much at stake for us, by God’s grace, not to make every attempt to get this moment right.” How do Lutherans deal with divisions and resolve conflict? The Word of God!

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3 Harrison, 3. Emphasis in the original.
4 Harrison, 7-8.
5 Harrison, 5. Emphasis in the original.
No one group in the Synod has moral hegemony or superiority. We are all pure sinners, in need of pure grace. Our fundamental problem is unbelief. We do not believe the Word of God actually can and does unite us. Only if we are united by the Word of God can we begin the long journey of becoming the community of faith and love we so desire to be.\(^6\)

We must finally admit that going the route of political coercion to secure Synod unity has failed, is failing, and will always fail. Our only hope is repentance, and then looking to the Word of God.\(^7\)

Using Lutheran history as a model, Harrison clearly contrasted two very different approaches to unity, Jacob Andreae and Martin Chemnitz. The years following the death of Luther were filled with controversy and division. Powerful personalities and theological double speak ruled the day. If Lutheranism was to survive, there must be true unity, but how could this happen in the face of seemingly hopeless division?

There were two distinct attempts at unity – 1568–72 and 1573–77. The first attempt was spearheaded by Jacob Andreae. Andreae noted that the continued squabbling over doctrine was deeply corrosive to the church, convincing many that even the possibility of doctrine and doctrinal unity was only a mirage. Such controversy, Andreae recognized, made people indifferent to doctrine. He believed that peace in the church was most vital so that the church could give a unified witness to the world over against its opponents. Yet he suggested following a model similar to one used to obtain political peace, and was convinced that “therefore peace is primarily a problem of organization [i.e. structure!].” But his approach failed. He “beat around the bush” and “left most of the basic problems unresolved.” The second attempt succeeded when, under the influence of Martin Chemnitz, points of controversy were set out not only in positive terms (theses) but also in negative terms (antitheses) – that is, the clear rejection of errors. Chemnitz was part of “a rising opposition to Andreae’s efforts in behalf of concord at that time, and led to an outright rejection of any unification ‘based on generalities.’” While Andreae, proceeding politically, was “very sensitive about any kind of criticism” of his work, Chemnitz by contrast, invited extensive discussion with and between those who disagreed, although “in a certain sense he was more intolerant. [Yet] he never dictated! Instead, he discussed until the disputed points were so clear that either his opponents could agree with him or they at least had to respect his judgment.”\(^8\)

Harrison proposed, in a sense, a 21\(^{st}\) century Formula of Concord approach,

It wasn’t until all sides agreed to proceed in this manner with each controverted issue that real agreement could be forged. It was an approach both doctrinal and honest about real differences. And this is how we must proceed to deal with the matters which beset us now. It is time for us to move beyond political efforts and especially “generalities.” It is time to stop “beating around the bush.” It is time for a serious, decade-long effort – a non-politically organized and driven effort to regain theological and practical unity in the Synod. This route is the hard route. It will take time and effort. It will take courage. It will take men and women of integrity. It will also result in a Synod 85% united and on the path to even greater unity, precisely at a moment when such unity is needed like never before – so that we can cease the incessant, internal

\(^6\) Harrison, 8.
\(^7\) Harrison, 11.
\(^8\) Harrison, 9.
wrangling, and take advantage of the open doors which the Lord is holding before us. The Lord’s mission of the Gospel will advance toward eternity, despite us. He’ll get it done with or without us. If we turn from that sacred mission, he will raise up others to accomplish it. Will we be part of it?⁹

What he proposed was a “Koinonia Project”¹⁰ modeled after the Formula of Concord; a ten year approach to identify the divisions among us and bring unity, true unity in doctrine and practice, under the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions. He even gave specifics of how this Koinonia Project would come about,

The goal of the first year would be simply to identify the issues that trouble – to begin to formulate the “status of the controversy.” The dialogue must agree that there are two texts which must be dominant in dealing with the issues: the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions, in that order. Given the near confessional authority granted several writings of Luther by the Lutheran Confessions, and the official status of some of C. F. W. Walther’s writings in the Missouri Synod, these documents would also have to be dealt with. Admittedly, the even more fundamental question of what any biblical or confessional text can mean in this post-modern world, would have to be met head-on. The goal would be to draw as many as would listen and learn into the discussion toward concord via articles and Bible studies, at times stressing this or that viewpoint, but working toward honesty and finally unity.

The second year would simply be devoted to formulating the “affirmatives” and the “negatives.” What in fact can be, and actually is affirmed and or rejected by all, or nearly all parties at the table? As the affirmations and the status of the controversy (points at issue) are identified, so also then the points of disagreement will become all the clearer. A yearly report (via an inexpensive, Web-based delivery) would present to the Synod the progress of the dialogue for critique. The national effort could seek input from local efforts and find the best work on the local level. The goal would simply be to come to a point of doctrinal agreement which is God-pleasing and sufficient for both God-pleasing Christian freedom and also God-pleasing uniformity of doctrine and practice: Unity in and for Mission. I would not call the new document a formal confession, much less desire to put it on the level of the Confessions of the Book of Concord, or even give it the status of other quasi-confessional documents in the history of our Synod. It would simply be a document which would describe the unity we have already expressed in the Bible and Book of Concord and how we shall affirm that unity by the way we live together in love and mutual support.

This will take time. The Formula of Concord was not produced overnight, but its blessings have endured for centuries. We must have the same foresight. Christ may return tomorrow, and we must strive to live, work and proclaim the Gospel as if we knew that were the case. But he may not return for 500 years! Our forefathers laid the groundwork carefully for a unity in the Synod which only began seriously slipping away about a century after the Synod was founded.¹¹

People responded overwhelmingly to his message and proposal and in 2010, Matthew Harrison was elected Synodical President of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. In the four and a half years since “It’s Time”

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⁹ Harrison, 10.
¹⁰ Harrison, 11-16.
¹¹ Harrison, 12.
was published and the nearly three years since President Harrison’s election, much has happened with regard to Koinonia in the LCMS. 1st Vice President Herbert Mueller was placed in charge of the Koinonia Project, and he has written and spoken extensively throughout the Synod. His original proposal, or concept paper as he likes to call it, has undergone draft after draft after draft, the latest being version 10.1, although at the writing of this paper I could only find version 9.0 on the synodical web site. The goals of the project, as stated by Mueller on the Witness, Mercy, and Life Together blog, remain unchanged.

**Purpose:** The “Koinonia Project” is a long term initiative of the Office of the President of the Synod developing spiritual and theological solutions under the Word of God for some of our long term spiritual and theological issues in the Synod. The project fosters theological study and discussion groups at many levels designed to bring together capable and respected people to study God’s Word and the Confessions of our church so that, by God’s grace, we come to clear agreement on 1) the points at issue, 2) what we confess together, 3) what we reject and 4) what we will therefore do together, on the basis of Scripture and our Confessions. This effort to do so we have chosen to call “The Koinonia Project” because we pray God will build and strengthen our unity in the Word of God and our fellowship, our “koinonia” together.

But the language on the blog site is at places starkly different from the way President Harrison clearly and simply outlined the project, “Actually, the “Koinonia Project” will become, we pray, an opportunity for a cultural shift among us, a positive change in our shared expectations.” It appears that President Harrison’s simple (and inexpensive) proposal for working through the divisions in the LCMS has come face to face with the bureaucracy, structure and polity of the very same LCMS. Again from 1st VP Mueller’s blog:

A Concept Paper for the project is available on the Synod’s website, www.lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=1041. The effort arises from the work of the “Harmony Task Force” appointed in response to 2007 Synod Resolution 4-01A and from a paper produced by President Matthew Harrison in 2009 entitled “It’s Time.” The “concept paper” has been reviewed a number of times by the Synod Praesidium, by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), by the Council of Presidents and by an “advisory group” of pastors and district presidents. A final draft will be put up on the website soon.

Is the Koinonia Project falling prey to the very thing that President Harrison warned us about in It’s Time? Despite the noblest of intentions, these divisions shift the institution’s attention away from the congregation as the primary locus of mission and mercy, to itself – to the preservation of the bureaucracy, to structure and bylaws. *Sola structura!*

Other approaches have been tried in recent years, including the most recently resolved effort to have members of the Board of Directors and the Council of Presidents lead the effort to deal

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13 Ibid. Emphasis in the original.
14 Ibid. Emphasis in the original.
15 Ibid. Emphasis in the original. This paper is dated August 26, 2011.
16 Harrison, 4. Emphasis in the original.
with the tough issues. I wish it well. With all due respect, however, I don’t expect much to be gained, and I’ve yet to speak to anyone else who honestly does either. One problem with this approach is that it is located within a realm perceived to be politically charged and strongly affected by and subject to the influence and use of power. That does not mean the attempt should not be made, and precisely there. It does mean, however, that any expectations for significant, nonpolitically-influenced processes and outcomes must remain very low. And so far, I’ve heard little to nothing of the involvement of the seminaries.\textsuperscript{17}

At the most recent synodical convention, delegates gave President Harrison a maze of new structure to wade through, accepting some of the Blue Ribbon Task Force’s recommendations for change and rejecting others. He also inherited a financial situation that was extremely challenging. But President Harrison had it right when he said:

“Structure is not our fundamental problem. Our fundamental problem is one of repentance and lack of faith in the power of the Word to unite even us. Because we cannot hear God’s Word, we cannot hear one another.”\textsuperscript{18}

Hearing God’s Word. Letting God’s Word have its way with us. God’s Word guiding and shaping our discussions with each other. Allowing God’s Word to clean out our ears so that we can hear one another. This approach is simple, beautiful, and God pleasing. So, one must dare to ask, what happened? Why has President Harrison’s original timetable been jettisoned and after nearly three years we are “We are just getting started. Just barely?”\textsuperscript{19} Why are we on draft proposal 10.1 with the promise of more to follow? The answers are not so simple.

The first answer is power. It is clear that there are several different power struggles going on in the process. Some question whether the Synodical President has the authority to establish an initiative so sweeping and widespread as the Koinonia Project. Some want synodical resolutions rather than Presidential directive. Some want the Council of Presidents to be in charge. Others want the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) to head the effort. Some like the status quo and would prefer to celebrate our differences rather than seek some sort of perceived “lockstep uniformity.” Perhaps we should get a Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) ruling to clear up the matter. Confused by all this? Join the club. It appears that the Koinonia Project has become bogged down in a quagmire of questions regarding power and authority and jurisdiction (and with those come the questions of credit and/or blame). Perhaps we need to repent and trust the power of God’s Word to unite us as one? We can’t because we’re not sure if the Bylaws will allow it. Good grief.

\textsuperscript{17} Harrison, 8.
\textsuperscript{18} Harrison, 14; 15. Highlighted in the original.
\textsuperscript{19} \url{http://wmltblog.org/tag/koinonia-project/} October, 2012.
But power and power struggles are not the only issues seeking to derail the Koinonia Project before it really gets started. Have you tried to have a theological conversation in the LCMS recently? It is becoming increasingly difficult. We have become a “big tent” of diverse doctrines and practices. People have their own little “affinity group” that they feel “safe” in and are very reluctant to venture outside the safety net of the group. Each group has its own distinctive vocabulary and litmus test for membership. To be seen with someone from a different or opposing group is a near mortal sin; to converse with or dine with someone outside the group in nearly unforgivable. If you think I’m exaggerating, test me out at the next pastor’s conference. See if the people there aren’t naturally flocking together in their official or unofficial affinity groups. Then, try to engage someone in an unfamiliar group; enter into the conversation or ask to sit at their table. The reaction will tell you all you need to know. Or try this the next time you know of a congregational pastoral vacancy. Suggest a PLI pastor for consideration as vacancy pastor at a liturgical congregation or a liturgical pastor for a congregation with full blown contemporary worship. It won’t happen, will it? Why? In spite of all our talk about synod, we are in reality splintered to the point where we have many, many, little “synods” within our Synod. It’s pretty hard to enter into meaningful theological conversation when differing groups are stereotyped and demonized. It’s depressing when a brother or sister in Christ intentionally turns their back on you or won’t even shake your hand. Perhaps we need to repent and trust the power of the Word to bring about healing and reconciliation? We could, maybe, but only if the group thinks it is a good idea. Lord have mercy.

A close reading of Koinona Project Concept Paper Draft 10.1 raises many other questions when compared to the original It’s Time proposal. Rather than following the example of the honest and at times heated debates of Martin Chemnitz and the Formulators, there is a constant emphasis that people must “know how to play nice with others” and multiple references to the “Task Force for Synodical Harmony appointed by the Board of Directors and the Council of Presidents in response to 2007 Synod Resolution 4-01A.” There is even a proposed “Code of Conduct” for participants and a short lesson on group dynamics. Sadly, neither Martin Luther nor Martin Chemnitz would be allowed to participate in this process, but Melancthon and Andreae might be “nice” enough to get to play. It appears that theology must bend to etiquette. Mueller even appeals to the “theological conferences held in recent years” as a positive example to follow; the very same approach that Harrison said had little hope of success! Why did President Harrison give this past effort such

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20 Mueller, 10, 11,
21 Mueller, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 11, 14, 15.
22 Mueller, 7, 16.
23 Mueller, 12.
24 Mueller, 17.
25 See footnote 17.
a weak endorsement? Because it was “perceived to be politically charged and strongly affected by and subject to the influence and use of power.”

The most recent proposal has more references to the COP, BOD, CTCR, Bylaws, and Task Forces than references to Holy Scripture. To quote President Harrison, “Sola structura.”

There are many good things in 1st Vice President Mueller’s most recent draft, but there are many concerns and inconsistencies as well. The fact remains that for whatever reason or reasons, the Koinonia Project is still, after all this time, merely a concept, an idea, abstract. There are several pilot projects going on, including one in my home district, the Nebraska District. I wish I could give you a detailed report of what has happened in the nearly two years that they have been meeting, but each of the members has had to sign a promise of strict confidentiality. Only pastors are involved, no laymen. Several months ago we were given a brief verbal report by the District President, who runs the pilot project meetings and picks the members. We were told that on the topic of vestments, there is agreement that they fall into the area of adiaphora. What a relief. However, I could find no written confirmation of any Koinonia Project activity on our District Web site. I had great hopes for the Koinonia Project as outlined by President Harrison in It’s Time. I barely recognize it in draft 10.1. Sadly, I must quote President Harrison again, with regard to what his original proposal has morphed into, “With all due respect, however, I don’t expect much to be gained, and I’ve yet to speak to any one else who honestly does either.”

I still firmly believe that President Harrison had it right in It’s Time. I believe that, in a true spirit of the theology of the cross, he honestly assessed the problems and divisions before us and gave a simple, non-bureaucratic proposal to restore God’s gift of koinonia among us. The approach that brought us the Formula of Concord can and will work among us, I am thoroughly convinced. It will be hard work, to be sure, and it will take time, but under God’s Word and the Lutheran Confessions, Christ can and will unite us as one; true koinonia. Perhaps, just perhaps, we could return to It’s Time one more time. In outlining his details for how the Koinonia Project might come about, President Harrison offers this seemingly random thought,

“In fact, given the current status of things, it might even be best if this group were to form of its own accord, and thus without the accusation or even suspicion of machination.”

What President Harrison describes here, I’m sure quite unaware, is the ACELC, the Association of Confessing Evangelical Lutheran Congregations. That is who we are and that is why we are here.

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26 Harrison, 8.
27 See footnote 16.
28 Harrison, 8.
29 Harrison, 11.
30 I have given the detailed history and purpose of the ACELC in my paper, Barking Dogs and A Three Legged Hog here: http://www.acelc.net/page/2012_conference_papers
The ACELC has done everything in the open, holds no secret meetings, and posts everything on our website. We are a grassroots effort bound together by Christ and His Word and a deep love for our church. We followed the advice of many churchmen in the LCMS and timed our first mailing, *A Fraternal Admonition*,\(^{31}\) to be sent at a time when no one could legitimately claim that it had political motives. We brain stormed what we perceived as clear, demonstrable errors in our beloved Synod and organized them into ten specific categories.\(^{32}\) This was not a difficult task. Ask any layman in our Synod about the divisions among us and many will simply say, “wine, women, and song.” These errors and divisions have been brewing among us since the Statement of the 44 (some might say even earlier) through the Seminary Walkout and Seminex to Yankee Stadium and now Newtown. I think 70 years should be enough time to identify the point of issue and make a clear statement of the controversy. For doing this we have been maligned and ostracized. We have been harshly criticized by people who later admitted they never even bothered to read what we have put forward. We have been privately commended and then later publicly condemned by the same people. It matters not. We are not seeking to please people or get elected or appease a massive donor base. Our only goal is to be faithful to Christ and His Word and make the good confession. We believe that there is never a bad time to make the good confession. We stand before the world, admitting that we are poor miserable sinners in need of daily repentance and forgiveness. We have nothing to say on our own merit, but cling to the merits of Christ and humbly speak the Words He graciously gives and placed in broken vessels like us. I was once asked by a District President what it would take for the ACELC to go away, “to simply go away.” I replied, “That’s simple. Have each District President agree that the errors we have identified are truly causes of division among us and commit themselves to working to resolve them under God’s Word and the Lutheran Confessions.” He smiled, slapped me on the knee and said, “I think we both know that will never happen.” While his response made me incredibly sad then and still does, my offer still stands. When the primary ecclesiastical supervisors in our synod, the district presidents, agree that the errors we have identified and clearly documented are indeed causes of division, breaking our God-given koinonia, and pledge themselves to serious resolution of the errors under God’s Word and the Lutheran Confessions, there is no need for the ACELC to exist. Until that time our work must continue. Why, because each day that error continues unchallenged and unchecked, the roots of that error grow deeper and deeper and precious souls, blood bought souls, are placed in harm’s way. Because God’s Word is God’s Word, not ours, and we have been called to be stewards of the mysteries of grace.\(^{33}\)

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\(^{31}\) [http://www.acelc.net/page/acelc_admonition__error_documents](http://www.acelc.net/page/acelc_admonition__error_documents)

\(^{32}\) Ibid.

\(^{33}\) Some have speculated that in light of the seeming lack of ecclesiastical supervision and church discipline, perhaps the LCMS is afraid to use or has lost the binding key. If the binding key is lost, what does that say about the loosening key? This is a very serious thought to consider.
There was a time when the seminary faculties were a reliable and dependable voice speaking to the issues of the day and offering theological opinions or Gütachtens regarding matters of doctrine and practice. Just over a year ago, on behalf of the ACELC, I requested a Gütachten from the four North American seminaries regarding the internal COP document, “The Divine Deposal/Dismissal of Ministers of the Word and Sacraments.” Some have characterized the document as “a play book for firing your pastor.” My first response was from Edmonton, telling me that it was an American issue and to keep the matter in house. The second response was from St. Catharine’s. We were directed to a very helpful journal article on the matter, authored by one of the leading theologians in the Lutheran Church Canada. After repeated requests a response finally came from Ft. Wayne. They were considering the matter and would get back to me. This past January I reminded President Rast that it had been ten months and I was still waiting. He told me he was intentionally dragging his feet on the matter and offered an explanation only if I promised that it would be “off the record.” Our conversation occurred, appropriately, in the men’s restroom. To date, after repeated requests, I have received no acknowledgment of any kind from St. Louis.

The ACELC has received much criticism for being “self-appointed watchdogs,” “Pharisees,” “holier than thou,” attempting to “set President Harrison’s agenda” and especially for “not working within the system.” None of these accusations are accurate, as even a quick reading of our documents would clearly show. We have asked several district presidents as well as 1st Vice President Mueller and President Harrison to examine our documents and correct us if we are in error. We have been told of no error or concern with any of the content of our materials. In many cases we have been commended for the content. We are criticized not for the message, but the method.

Immediately upon the forming of the ACELC we began working hard to follow our agreed upon church polity wherever possible. We have sent all of our documents, on repeated occasions, to the COP and Presidium. We filed three official dissents with the CTCR: August 3, 2001 (Service of Women in the Church); December 22, 2011 (Unionism and Syncretism); and January 24, 2012 (Lay Ministry). President Harrison made a personal phone call to me, thanking me for the work of the ACELC and commending us for sending our dissents to the CTCR. My initial contact with the CTCR Executive Director Joel Lehenbauer gave me great hope and led me to believe that the CTCR would use our dissents as an opportunity for a sweeping and thorough

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34 Dr. Will Sohns, former district president of the Wyoming district, for a meeting of the LCMS Council of Presidents, Apr. 23, 1990. Later, the paper was revised, Nov. 15, 2005. The Council of Presidents adopted Sohns' paper, and now uses it extensively to handle conflicts between congregations and pastors. The paper has never passed doctrinal review or been approved by Synod in Convention.

examination of at least one if not all three of our areas of concern. Then, silence. No word of any kind for seven months. In January of this year I asked for and received a few minutes for a face to face meeting with Executive Director Lehenbauer. He apologized for not getting back to me sooner and promised a response to all three dissents soon, within 30 days. I was surprised by this since months earlier he stated that he had several questions from the CTCR to clarify the specific concerns we raised in the dissents. He said that the CTCR had taken our dissents seriously and that I would be “mostly pleased” with the CTCR responses. Each of the three CTCR responses was basically the same. We were told that many of the issues we raised were matters of “ecclesiastical supervision” and outside the parameters of the CTCR. We were commended for our “concern to uphold a biblical and confessional theological understanding” of the matters and for the “fraternal spirit of our conversations” and our “deep concern for the well being of the Synod.” However, were given a response not to be considered a “formal response,” and told that our dissents should be considered “best understood as evidence of the need for further study and discussion in the Synod on matters such as these.” In other words more talk, more study, no clear word on these very serious issues. We were asked to hold our dissents “in abeyance” and wait for the continued work of the CTCR and the concept paper called the Koinonia Project and in the mean time continue to study and discuss the matters. Needless to say, I was not “mostly pleased.” I continue to be profoundly disappointed.

Fellowship. Koinonia. Life Together. Is there any hope? I admit the picture appears bleak. But I urge you to take heart in the promises of God! Koinonia is His possession and His gift to us. We do not create koinonia by our hard work or our politicking or even our act of confessing. We simply cling to the promises of God, promises that His Word will endure forever, that in Christ unity is perfected, and that He will never leave us nor forsake us. We continue to make the good confession, in season and out of season, and by God’s grace and strength to strive to always call a thing what it is. Take a look around. In a very real and practical sense, the Koinonia project as proposed by President Harrison is up and running. I would humbly submit to you that

36 See note 33.
37 “Temporary inactivity, cessation, or suspension.” www.dictionary.com
38 “A preacher must not only feed the sheep so as to instruct them how they are to be good Christians, but he must also keep the wolves from attacking the sheep and leading them astray with false doctrine and error; for the devil is never idle. Nowadays there are many people who are quite ready to tolerate our preaching of the Gospel as long as we do not cry out against the wolves and preach against the prelates. But though I preach the truth, feed the sheep well, and give them good instruction, this is still not enough unless the sheep are also guarded and protected so that wolves do not come and carry them off. For what sort of building is it if I throw away stones and then watch another throw them back in? The wolf can readily tolerate a good pasture for the sheep, he likes them the better for their fatness. But what he cannot endure is the hostile bark of the dogs.” What Luther Says, Volume 2, (St. Louis: CPH), 1959, 1053. Quoted in C. F. W. Walther: The American Luther, Essays in Commemoration of
the ACELC is the Koinonia Project outlined in *It’s Time*. I would urge you also to listen to the voices of our Lutheran fathers who fought many of the same battles, endured many of the same challenges, and were tempted just as we are to lose hope. From the Lutheran Confessions:

“In order to preserve pure teaching and fundamental, lasting, God-pleasing unity in the church, it is necessary not only to present the pure, beneficial teaching correctly, but also to censure those who contradict it and teach other doctrines (1 Tim. 3:9; Titus 1:9). For as Luther states, true shepherds are to do both: pasture or feed the sheep and ward off the wolves, so that they may flee from other voices (John 10:4b-5, 16b) and ‘separate the precious from the vile’ (Jer. 15:19).”

From Luther:

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the Word of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Him. Where the battle rages there the loyalty of the soldier is proved; and to be steady on all the battle front besides, is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.

Luther again:

“Yes, who of us would have begun to preach if we had known in advance that so much misery, sectarianism, offense, blasphemy, ingratitude, and malice would ensue? But now that we are preaching, we must take the consequences and remember that this is not a human venture and that it does not depend on human power, but that the Holy Spirit Himself must do and preserve it. Otherwise we could not bear this and carry it out.”

C.F.W Walther:

“When a theologian is asked to yield and make concessions 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 downright 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 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, then, my friends, likewise hold fast the treasure of the pure doctrine. Do not consider it strange if on that account you must bear reproach the same as they did. Consider that the word of Sirach, chap. 4,33: ‘even unto death fight for justice, and God will over-

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41 LW 24:358.
throw they enemies for thee,’ will come true in our case too. Let this be your slogan: Fight unto death in behalf of the truth, and the Lord will fight for you!”

Again Walther:

“It is God’s command that we teach pure doctrine. That cannot be done if we are silent about false doctrine. Error will creep in unnoticed if we don’t constantly testify against it. It is the duty of every Christian to help maintain pure doctrine, and that is why every Christian must continue to study this doctrine… Since, on the one hand, the cause of separation lies with the sects themselves, because they are the ones departing from the truth, and on the other hand, it is true love when we bear witness, all this should fill us with joyful courage to continue our witness and to grow in zeal.”

From Herman Sasse:

What is to be done? What are we to do, dear brethren, who have been entrusted with the ministerial office of the Lutheran Church in times so decisive for the Church and the world? Nothing would be more wrong than if we were to wait for others to act. The Word Conference will take its course in accordance with the law by which it was guided at the outset. We cannot expect it to know what the church of the Formula of Concord is and to act accordingly. ... From it we can expect an inner renewal of Lutheranism as little as from any other ecclesiastical organization, including that of our own church. Nor can we expect anything at all, from our bishops, synods, church presidents, and faculties.

Again Sasse:

What should we do, in this situation of our church? And that means all of us, dear brothers, every pastor, every teacher of theology, who knows about the responsibility which he bears. We must first free ourselves of the superstition that what is to be done must and will be done by others, as those who are called to do something. The bishops and the great church presidents will do nothing. None of them before Hanover (when the meeting is commenced) will stand up and state a simple and clear profession of the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper of the Lutheran Confessions, or profess its ecclesiastical consequences. Not one. At the meetings of the old World Convention, such a thing could still happen. Today there is no longer a Hein or a Reu. Even the great theologians will, when it comes to this question, grow very quiet. The times in which the professors were confessors are gone… So we must all speak, and in advance!

And finally Friedrich Wyneken (through Matthew Harrison):

And why do we hold so firmly to our confession, that we happily endure the hatred of the world and also of the rest of Christianity, which is difficult to bear? Why, with God’s help and grace, would we suffer persecution and death before we would give up even a small part of that confession? We do so because we have come to make the truth set forth in that confession our own, not in times of good leisure and rest, like we might appropriate other natural or historical truths. The Holy Spirit has revealed this truth to us in the midst of the burdens of trou-

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42 Law and Gospel, Mueller trans., 28.
43 The True Visible Church, Theses V, Western District Convention, 1867 – Essays For The Church, Volume I, CPH 1992, 123.
44 Herman Sasse, Letters to Lutheran Pastors, Volume I. CPH 2013, 15.
bled consciences, as our only salvation. The Spirit has through the Word borne witness to the truth in broken and troubled hearts. Our consciences are bound to the Word, and therefore to the confession of the church. As poor, forlorn, and condemned men, we have learned to believe in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. The peace of conscience, the peace of our souls, the hope of eternal blessedness, our very being and life, hang on this truth. To surrender it would be to surrender our salvation and ourselves for time and eternity.

Therefore neither can we let go of the most insignificant portion of the confession, because the entire series of the individual teachings of the faith are for us one chain. This chain not only binds our understanding in the truth, it binds our consciences and lives. The loss of an individual part of the same would break this chain, and we would be torn loose from Christ, tumbling again into the abyss of anxiety, doubt and eternal death. Therefore we hold fast to our confession, as to our very life.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{46} Harrison, 16.