

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.

1. **Passages from Scripture** that testify about Ecclesiastical Supervision. [* Pages 4-5]

Deuteronomy 24:16	Galatians 1:6-12
Romans 14:9-12	II Thessalonians 3:6
Acts 20:27-31	Titus 1:5-9
Romans 16:17-20	Titus 3:10
II Corinthians 6:14-17	

2. **The Lutheran Confessions and the History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.** [* Pages 6-9]

Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XIV – Order in the Church, 24-28 (by Philipp Melancthon)

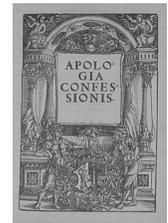


[24] In Article XIV, we say that no one should administer the Word and Sacraments unless he is rightly called. The adversaries accept the article, but on the condition that we use canonical ordination. About this subject we have often testified in this assembly that it is our greatest desire to keep 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.



The Constitution 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 2010, 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 2010, 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 2010, 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 2010, 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 ministers 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...”

C. F. W. Walther (First President of the LCMS) “... 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. ...”

3. **Evidence for the Existence of this Error.** [* Pages 10-17]

- a. 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.”

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? ...

- b. Another 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> → Key Documents → ACELC Admonition & Error Documents) for examples of open communion in the LCMS and numerous biblical and confessional citations affirming closed communion.)

4. **The ACELC Concerns.** [* Page 17-19]

- a. **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. [See Deut 24:16; Rom 14:9-12.]
- b. **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 (Relation of the Synod to Its Members) states: “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.”
- c. **Regarding Holy Communion Practices.** 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.

* Asterisks refer to page numbers in the ACELC *Evidence of Errors in the LCMS: IX. Ecclesiastical Supervision* document. You are encouraged to download the entire document from <http://www.ancelc.net/> → Key Documents → ACELC Admonition and Error Documents. The online version contains the full text of all Bible passages, Lutheran Confession citations, examples, quotations and sources for all the citations and quotes.