

From: Rev. Dr. John R. Denninger
President, Southeastern District, LCMS

Questions for Nominees for LCMS Synod President
The Seventh Sunday of Easter
May 8, 2016

As the election of President of the LCMS looms, we give thanks to the Lord of the Church for each of you and your willingness to allow your name to go forward to serve in the role of our Synod President.

Delegates ask, "For whom should I vote?" The fairest way I know to respond is to give them your response to two questions that have bearing upon our work here in the Southeastern District. I know this is an imposition on your time and energy in your very busy lives. Nonetheless, I ask you to take a few moments to respond to our delegates as they seek to do the Lord's work in casting their ballots. Nothing formal is needed – you can shoot me a quick response via email. Your answers will be shared with all our congregations. Thank you for sharing your responses with us.

Setting Context for the Mission and Ministry within the Southeastern District

Our Shared SED Mission: In grateful response to God's grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Southeastern District connects people with Jesus.

Our Shared SED Vision: As we work together to connect our neighbors with Jesus, lives are transformed and God's kingdom is growing.

Currently the SED has 212 congregations, 90 schools and 45 missions. The boundaries of the SED surround 3878 zip codes. We estimate a ministry presence in 250/3878 zip codes. We have 10% of the USA population living within our District – in fact, no LCMS District serves a larger population than the SED. While not proven, we believe our 60,000 LCMS baptized members live in most, if not all 3878 zip codes. We believe the Lord is calling us to reach each one of his children with the precious news of Jesus' death and resurrection and the forgiveness of their sins and the opportunity to grow in grace. Over the next years, by God's grace, we seek to:

- Equip ordained, commissioned and lay people to recognize their vocation as those called to love their neighbor (specifically in neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools) [Matthew 22:37-39]
- Love, pray, and reach out to our neighbors and respond the opportunities the Holy Spirit provides to surround them with Jesus' love [John 13:34-35; Luke 10:5-6]
- Invest in a deeper way to those who respond to us as "people of peace" [Luke 10:5-6]
- Initiate a ministry of the Word, knowing this will be the means through which lives change [Isaiah 55:11] as they hear about the forgiveness through the cross and life through the resurrection
- Expand the ministry of 215 congregations beyond their walls into 500 new neighborhoods as the baptized members respond to the opportunities the Holy Spirit provides under the supervision of their pastor [Acts 1:8]
- Encourage many of these new missions to become Word and Sacrament communities and eventually chartered congregations for sustainability and growth of the mission [Romans 15:14-22]



Question #1:

In the 1990's the synod recognized the USA as the third largest mission field in the world, after China and India. In those years this mission was put in place:

"In grateful response to God's grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacraments, the mission of the The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is vigorously to make known the love of Christ by word and deed within our churches, communities, and world."

The question: If you are elected as President of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod for the 2016-2019 term, how will you lead the LCMS to fulfill the words of the LCMS mission, especially in light of the times in which we live?

Question #2:

In response to the 2013 Synod Convention Resolution 4-06A, a Task Force submitted a report and recommendations which ultimately will reverse the decisions of the Wichita Convention, 1989 which put a lay diaconate in place for our church body.

Significant to the conversation is: Augsburg XIV which says "nobody should publically teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call." Looking back in the Scriptures we recognize Jesus called and equipped 72 to go to the villages he had not yet visited [Luke 10:1-23]. In the days following Pentecost, the early church established the office of deacons and consecrated seven men to "serve tables", but are also noted for their involvement in a distinct Word and Sacrament ministry [Acts 6, 7,& 8].

While the SED seeks to expand the mission into 500 new neighborhoods, the fact is 6 out of 7 SED congregations were able to receive a seminary candidate and 2 out of 5 congregations were able to receive a vicar last month. The Placement Committee indicated class sizes hold no promise of getting larger – but in fact will be remain small, even getting smaller. We are a District of small and medium sized congregations which will struggle to support a pastor in the years ahead due to demographic, economic, cultural, spiritual challenge. Presently some of our congregations are now served only because we have a lay deacon serving them. We are concerned that we will continue to be able to serve our present congregations with a Word and Sacrament ministry along with the new missions we seek to plant. The recommendations of the Task Force seem to look beyond a present reality.

The SED Board of Directors submitted two overtures (Convention Workbook Overtures: 13-17; 13-18) calling upon the convention to retain the Lay Diaconate. Two Circuits submitted overtures suggesting significant change to the Task Force Recommendations or at least more study so as not to have a divided synod. (Convention Workbook Overtures: 13-27; 13-30; and 13-50).

The question: Our delegates want to know where you stand on the issue of our church body retaining licensed lay deacons?



**From: Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison
President, LCMS**

Dear Friends in the SED!

Thanks for the opportunity to address these questions. I'm quite familiar with your district, and last year's visitation provided significant time with your leadership. There I was informed of the strategies and efforts being undertaken. It was a pleasure to be there!

For the first question, I am simply providing an excerpt from my Convention Report, Part 1, in the convention *Workbook* (pp. 2–3). On program specifics, which “fulfill the words of the LCMS mission,” take a look at the pages on national work in the *Workbook* (pp. 18ff.), and especially the information on our new evangelism effort, “Everyone His Witness.” By the way, with regard to the material that follows, over the past decade or so, the SED is down about 13% in baptized membership, according to the best information I have at hand. While the SED is certainly unique, according to the numbers, it is not performing essentially different than other districts. The wonderful opportunities for outreach among the myriad of immigrants in the SED is the increasing reality of all our districts.

My response on the Licensed Lay Deacon issue was written specifically to your district's question.

The Lord bless all of you.
Pastor Matthew Harrison

Question #1

The question: If you are elected as President of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod for the 2016-2019 term, how will you lead the LCMS to fulfill the words of the LCMS mission, especially in light of the times in which we live?

De-mythologizing the Mission: The Brutal Facts of the LCMS Forty-year Decline

Folks, the LCMS has been declining for some forty years. No LCMS district has shown any increase in the number of the baptized in nearly twenty years. A couple of years back, I requested our internal Rosters and Statistics people do a thorough study on the performance of each district over the past forty years, with a focus especially upon the last decade. While districts vary in the percentage of decline, the trend line for all of them is the same. It's even the case in the two largest districts (Texas and Michigan), which have planted the most congregations over the past forty years. We noted that the decline of the two Iowa districts was identical from 2002 to 2012. This was intriguing because Iowa East tends to be quite conservative and Iowa West less so. This and other factors has led me to believe that our decline could hardly be pegged to close(d) communion, or worship practices, much less our doctrine or our biblical positions on social issues.

We commissioned two more very thorough demographic studies, which actually looked at the LCMS presence in *every* county of the United States. We have gleaned an enormous amount of information that will be very helpful in our mission to reach the lost. The second study noted something I find remarkable. Last year it took the Southern Baptists 47 adult members to gain one new adult convert. For the same period, it took the LCMS only 44 adult members to



gain one new adult member! The Mormons are at the top in outreach, gaining one new convert for every 40 adult members. **Who would have thought that the LCMS would have stronger outreach than the Southern Baptists!** But the following information is very sobering. Even if by some miracle of divine grace, we were to up our evangelistic efforts to equal the Mormons, *the additional members gained would only stem the decline for one year in two larger districts of the LCMS.*

The third demographic study really honed in on the landscape of the U.S. with respect to the birth rate. Americans, and particularly European descent Americans (95% of the LCMS), are not having children at even the replacement rate of 2.1 per family. 1959 saw the largest number of LCMS births and baptisms. Last year's number of LCMS births was down some 70% from 1959. Society has changed. Marriage is delayed. Education comes first. Debt affects marriage and families. Delaying marriage and child rearing means far fewer children. Children are very expensive. There is much, much more that we will share that is affecting the LCMS.

After the third study was done, I asked for just a little more information. I asked for a county-by-county report on the birth rates for each district area of the LCMS. Guess what? *The district/state with the highest birth rate in the past ten years (South Dakota), happened to be the best performing district of the LCMS (only a 4% decline from 2002-2012).* New Jersey had the lowest birth rate over the past decade, and the district accordingly showed the greatest losses over ten years (33%). What's more, **the performance of each district lines up almost exactly with the birth rate of each area.**

Some are crying foul, that we are letting these facts be known as though we are intent on foregoing evangelism and prohibiting birth control. Some are claiming that we are simply providing excuses, or are intent on some sort of legalism, e.g., telling people they have to have more kids. **Pure nonsense!** The Catholics prohibit birth control and their birth rate is the same as ours. In Jim Colin's outstanding book, *From Good to Great*, he says the first step in moving from a good to a great organization is to "acknowledge the brutal facts." The brutal fact is that the growth of the LCMS has overwhelmingly occurred via childbirth. The brutal fact is, we could elevate our evangelism performance to that of the Mormons, and we would still be looking at numerical decline in 33 of our 35 districts. Sober facts. **These are not excuses. These are facts.** I have raised this issue so that we can together make informed and wise decisions about our mission today in this nation. I'm done with myths. Adult conversions are and very significant secondary factor in the growth/decline of the Synod. Adult conversions mirror births/baptisms in part because these conversions very often happen as a result of a marriage or child birth. Outreach is vital.

This information should cause us all to be very circumspect on the convention floor, where it's common to hear that "we are declining [for this or that reason], so we should pass [or not pass] this overture." We are sharing these facts so that we can begin to address real issues, not myths. The fact is, we have fought, blamed and cajoled each other over myths not facts. And we have virtually ignored the issues of marriage and family throughout the period of our very decline because of these issues. The Bible has some good stuff to say about these issues, and it's time for us to have a good look at it.

These "brutal facts" make **Witness** (reaching the lost), **Mercy** (finding specific ways for each congregation to care for those inside and outside while witnessing to Jesus) and **Life Together** (making congregations healthier places, and continuing to get our synodical, doctrinal, financial and educational house together). We must continue to concentrate heavily upon:

1. Evangelism/outreach.
2. Re-invigorating congregations/assisting struggling congregations.
3. Healthy workers.
4. Intentional outreach to immigrant populations.
5. Church planting.
6. Resolution of internal issues which cause conflict.



The domestic challenges and opportunities

The “nones” (those 20% of all adults, and 30% of Millennials) who have no religious affiliation whatsoever, are not unified in their religious and social views. The famous 2012 study from the Pew Research Center showed that fully one-third of the “nones” are seeking church membership and hold traditional views on the social issues. The Pew report noted that the Anglo population of America continues to grow (though many rural areas continue to suffer population decline). The immigration reality is bringing people to us from everywhere, and these non-Anglos are often open to the Gospel of Christ. Our burgeoning international work and relations are bringing more and more domestic contacts with immigrants (e.g., from Sudan, Ethiopia, Madagascar, etc.). As New England District President Tim Yeadon noted recently, “We have a target rich environment.” It behooves *every* congregation, *every* pastor, *every* church leader, to seek ways to seriously evaluate context, quality, opportunities, strength of preaching, of education, outreach etc. There are many ways to do this, including our own “re:Vitality” (see below in the CMO’s report) in the Office of National Mission. Question: Do we really believe what Jesus said? “No one comes to the Father but by me” (John 14:6)? And do we really believe that “faith comes by hearing” (Rom. 10:17)?

Hold fast! (marriage and culture)

“Hold fast the confession,” the writer to the Hebrews tells us. Last year’s SCOTUS decision on same sex marriage is parallel to Roe v. Wade some forty years earlier. A progressive court—making up meaning for texts of the constitution, which contained no such meaning or intent—made a consequential decision severely impacting the moral nature of the country. When Roe passed, the progressives believed it was all over. Hospitals and doctors would all simply have to perform abortions. But what happened? In fact, the fight had just begun. Because of the conscientious objection of Christians and others, legal battles, state by state (and with a few incremental victories in the U.S. Congress), Christians won the right not to participate in the abortion machine. Forty years ago, *no one* would have thought a clear majority of Millennials would be pro-life. Technology is largely responsible for that (e.g., ultra-sound and other advances in medical imaging). Many are predicting a similar trajectory for the terrible Obergefell decision. Make no mistake, the struggle is coming our way. And the potential for conflict and damage is tremendous, particularly in our Concordia University System. Thank God, we have faithful and wise leaders! Stand fast!

Question #2:

Our delegates want to know where you stand on the issue of our church body retaining licensed lay deacons?

The 1989 Wichita resolution stated, “That the title deacon be established by which a layman would be addressed while he is temporarily serving in Word and Sacrament ministry “in exceptional circumstances or in emergencies.’ This title would distinguish him from an ordained pastor.”

Had we stayed within the parameters of the resolution, there might have been much less concern. However, since Wichita, such “temporary” situations have extended to decades in some circumstances. In other circumstances, men who have been removed from the clergy roster for cause have been made LLDs. In other cases LLDs perform pastoral acts in the presence of regular clergy. Above all, we have men who have in fact been diligently serving as pastors, are called “pastor” by their people, but who have none of the rights and privileges,



benefits and protections afforded by the Synod. It's time to follow our own public teaching and ordain them as pastors. In 1989 we did not have the Specific Ministry Pastor programs.

Jesus established the office of the ministry. "When he ascended ... he gave gifts to men ... He gave the apostles, prophets, evangelists, the pastors and teachers to equip the saints the work of ministry/service, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 2:8ff.). The church is the possessor of the "keys." "Tell it to the church ... whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven ..." (Matthew 18:17f.). Every layperson has the right and duty to speak the Gospel where he or she has been placed by God. There is nothing to prevent and everything to commend lay people in starting missions, Bible study groups, worshipping and praying groups right in their own homes if needed. We want *more* lay people trained in mission and outreach, and Synod is unleashing a marvelous tool this year to do exactly that. We want more lay people to be trained by district lay training efforts, not fewer.

What was originally viewed as "temporary" went to permanent, and left us violating both Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions teaching on the office of the ministry. "No one should preach or teach without a regular call" (Augsburg Confession 14). A "regular call," according to the Bible and our Confession means: 1. examination (Is he "able to teach" "above reproach" etc. 1 Timothy 3:1-7?); 2. call by a congregation (It is the call that makes a man a pastor.); 3. ordination (as the confirmation of the call and the recognition by the whole church of the ministry he does). Our Lutheran fathers recognized ordination as a salutary apostolic custom, but also recognized that it was schismatic to omit ordination. A man must be called and clearly put into the office so that no one may misunderstand (including the man!) what he is to be and to do.

I would urged those interested to listen to an interview I did on this topic at this address: (<http://issuesetc.org/2016/05/17/3-who-may-preach-and-administer-the-sacraments-in-the-church-pr-matt-harrison-51716/>); to read the FAQ in the convention *Workbook* on page ??: (<http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=4086>); and to watch a recent video interviewing a LLD on this topic (<https://youtu.be/ZjtPa-RTSyU>). There will also be a more recent set of FAQs published in the first issue of *Today's Business*.

I have come to realize that the LLD issue raises other perhaps even more fundamental issues. Some are convinced that our seminaries and the manner of training our pastors in residence is completely outmoded and should be replaced with a 100%, in-context training by local mentors. I have noted elsewhere that this model had been tried for decades on the mission field and has failed spectacularly to grow churches.

At just this moment, there is a huge and totally unprecedented shift in world Lutheranism. Churches, tiny and enormous, are coming to us for church fellowship, for theological assistance, and for faithful, basic teaching. Just a week ago I was informed that the district presidents of the 4.5 million Lutheran Church in Madagascar voted to seek fellowship with us. It is time for us to get back on the middle road with respect to the teaching and practice of the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions. If we ignore our own teaching at one point, I fear we shall much more easily ignore it at others. "A little leaven..."

A final word . . . we can be flexible enough for mission, and to sustain small congregations. *Not one* should or need to close as a result of the resolutions coming to the convention from Floor Committee #13 (Routes to Ministry). And we can eliminate internal tension, which has existed among us for nearly three decades. It's time. A simple colloquy can bring these men onto the roster of the Synod as SMP pastors, thus recognizing them for how most already function—as pastors. We've already budgeted funds in this fiscal year, and we'll budget more as needed in future years.



**From: Rev. Dr. David P. E. Maier
President, Michigan District, LCMS**

Question 1: If you are elected as President of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod for the 2016-2019 term, how will you lead the LCMS to fulfill the words of the LCMS mission, especially in light of the times in which we live?

If it would happen that the Holy Spirit through God's people would call me to serve as President of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the members of the SED could expect that I would continually seek God's heart and wisdom in His Word and through prayer and that I would lead as I have been led, and as I have led.

I would first make an appeal to the members and congregations of the LCMS to have a deliberate and focused study of God's Word and a time of prayer using the model of the apostles in Acts 1, as they waited upon the Holy Spirit for guidance and direction. Seeking first the kingdom of God and delighting oneself in the Lord (Psalm 37:4, 5) involves asking and letting God make His priorities our own. A person with God's priorities weeps over the lost, feeds the hungry, provides for the homeless, comforts the sick, prays for - and participates in - opportunities where the Gospel can be shared and proclaimed to all creation.

How thankful we should be that the light of God – His Son (John 8:12, 9:5); His Word (Psalm 119:105); His people (Matthew 5:14) - goes to the darkest places. He/it came to us. Jesus continues to establishes the church on the border of the kingdom of hell. He says, "*The gates of hell will not prevail against the Church.*" (Matthew 16:18) Why did He say that? Because the Church is pushing against the boundaries of the kingdom of darkness, **not** hunkering down. We need to speak the truth in love. Allow me to repeat that: We need to SPEAK the truth ... and we need to do that out of LOVE for God, His people, and for the world that God loved so much that He gave His one and only Son. God is sending His people into that dark pit of evil to go out and bring those that He loves and has chosen (only God knows) out of the darkness and into the light. God fears nothing and no one, and when we follow Him – wherever we go – it is never a safe place for the enemy – for Satan and his minions. God wants to make us dangerous.

To be sure, the Lord has not left us empty handed or perplexed, but has given exceedingly wonderful and numerous gifts to the church to fulfill the Great Commission. One of the greatest of these blessings is the gifted people of God that are members of our congregations. Within the church we understand these blessings to be: the ordained, the commissioned workers, and the laity. But, surely one of the most under-utilized resources of the LCMS are the laity. In the year 2017, when we celebrate the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation, we are being given a grand privilege to recognize and celebrate one of its major 'discoveries' and tenets – the priesthood of all believers. If elected I would work with those who are willing and seek to use all the gifts God has given the church to achieve His purpose of reaching the lost with the very Good News of Jesus and His accomplished work of redemption.

The Southeastern District's vision of congregations equipping people to develop mission outreach ministries in 500 new neighborhoods is a great model for the Synod. In order to "vigorously make known the love of Christ by word and deed within our churches (congregations), communities and world" ... we need all hands on deck.

Of course, cooperative work would be done with the LCMS Presidium, the 35 District Presidents, the Office of National and International Mission, and the entire LCMS staff, in



cooperation with the LCMS Board of Directors to develop a strategic focus with a clearly defined vision and outcomes to which I would be held accountable as the President of the LCMS.

Question 2: Our delegates want to know where you stand on the issue of our church body retaining licensed lay deacons?

Although this could be, and probably should be, a more detailed and in depth answer (I would recommend that delegates read "[Questions And ANSWERS on Lutheran DEACONS](#)" by John Juedes) here we go ... The future of the lay diaconate is one of the more important decisions facing this year's Synod Convention. The 2013 LCMS Convention put a Task Force (Task Force 4-06A) in place whose report and recommendations were made public last year. Although, I am grateful for difficult labors of that Task Force, I do not fully agree with all their recommendations and would seek to have them modified. At present, their recommendations reverse the decision of the 1989 LCMS Convention which permitted each district to provide training and supervision for lay deacons. With that recommendation in place LCMS districts were given the privilege of developing a program of licensing lay deacons

- to serve congregations that could afford a pastor,
- to help in planting new congregations, and
- to assist their pastor in a variety of tasks.

The Michigan District currently has around 58 lay deacons serving in these varied capacities, but I understand that the Southeastern District with its huge population in its geographic area, has only a few more than 20 lay deacons. The Mid-South District has around 25% of their congregations covered by LLDs and the Northwest District, with its vast landscape of Oregon, Idaho, Washington, and Alaska utilizes the largest number of deacons. These Licensed Lay Deacons are generally worker-priests, under or uncompensated, serve under the supervision of an ordained pastor, often assisting pastors at their home congregation's request. Highly trained, educated and certified annually, those they minister to (especially in less populated areas) often have no other recourse for Word and Sacrament ministry. I am thankful for their hard work and labor of love, allowing themselves to be used by God in surprising ways. Remembering Paul's words, "*I planted, Apollos watered,*" (1Cor.3:6) and Jesus' words to His disciples in *Mark 9:40*, "*for whoever is not against us is for us,*" is helpful.

Scripture introduces the concept of deacons in Acts 6. Most notable are Stephen and Philip. (It is interesting and instructive to read how Philip was used to proclaim the Word and baptize the Ethiopian official in Acts 8.)

So why the concern? Much of the concern revolves around the words of Augsburg Confession XIV: "It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call." Those who question or are opposed to lay deacons are concerned these words are being ignored.

1. I would suggest that there are a number of things that need to be considered when discussing Lay Deacons, how ministry should be done decently and in order, and also how the LCMS defines who has a regular call.
2. Regarding a regular call the early Christian Church did not have seminaries, synods, denominations, or credentialed rostered workers as we do. The tradition of our church has been to define "rightly called" with these three aspects:



- Examination and certification by one of our Seminaries in terms a candidates knowledge and lifestyle,
 - A call by a congregation, and
 - Ordination of a candidate which is recognized by the synod
3. We now live in the 3rd or 4th largest mission field in the world! As a church body (Synod) we should deliberately and prayerfully think about how we carry on ministry decently and in order - in a way similar to the church in Acts 6 - and subsequently determine what ministries and positions are needed to deal with the varied demographics (populace, cultures, ethnicities) where our congregations already are established ... OR WHERE FUTURE CONGREGATIONS NEED TO BE. God's Word, and our Confessions, allow us the freedom to do so.

How should we respond to these numerous and diverse needs? I believe that as a Synod we need to continually and prayerfully discuss ...

- how to support congregations that can no longer afford a full time pastor
- the mission opportunity that God has put before us in the United States! Luke 10 urges us to pray for workers in the harvest field because there IS a plentiful harvest! Rather than limiting the number of workers, we would be wise to follow the example of the leaders of the early Christian Church and consider how more of the laity can use the gifts God has given them to meet this mission need
- upholding the God-given office of the pastoral ministry while maintaining order in, and the flexibility of, the ministry that God has established. Paul writes in *Ephesians 4:11-13*: *It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

I would strongly encourage that there be uniformity across our Districts in the educational standards for, and continuing education of, deacons by asking our Concordia Universities – and the best of District Deacon education and licensing programs – to coordinate a standard curriculum, qualifications, and system for deacons. In this way we can have theologically-trained and licensed deacons – honored and recognized by the church – ready to serve the church.



From: Rev. Dr. Dale A. Meyer
President, Concordia Seminary

I have been asked to share my thoughts on several issues before our church, specifically these three: Generating a spirit for mission and evangelism, the Licensed Lay Deacon program, and ecclesiastical supervision.

About outreach: In his new book, “The Fractured Republic,” Yuval Levin says that nostalgia for the great years after World War II has led to America’s present dysfunction and pessimism about the future. While he’s talking about country and not our Synod, apply his thought to our thinking about the church and outreach. Demographics have changed, the church is no longer privileged in our society, church finances are challenging, and many churches are losing members, even closing. Nostalgia for the past blinds us to the possibilities of the present but it does something even worse. Nostalgia leads us to doubt the power of God’s Spirit to change the hearts of people who don’t know Jesus. “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3). During my years as Speaker of the Lutheran Hour, God taught me that wherever the Good News of Jesus Christ is present the Holy Spirit is present to work the miracle of faith. Jesus promises that His word will continue to advance. “This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations” (Matthew 24:14). Some people tell seminarians it’s a bad time to enter the ministry. I tell them it’s a great time to go out with confidence in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. “Say not, ‘Why were the former days better than these?’ For it is not from wisdom that you ask this” (Ecclesiastes 7:10).

Jesus Christ is “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24). No one can guarantee that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod will grow again. That would be presumptuous, but if we are going to live in a church that has a passion for mission locally and globally, it has to start with you and me living in “the fear and love of God.” The “fear of God” is not slavish fear, not cowering terror; it is awe and reverence that the great God comes to me, the worst of sinners – this has to be personal for every one of us – with unmerited forgiveness and salvation in His Son. Without that awe and reverence, what the Bible calls the “fear of God,” why should we love Him passionately? Without that fear of God, we easily slip into the idea that the church is ours, just as the Pharisees vainly imagined that they were in charge of the synagogue. Jesus said they knew “neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Mark 12:24). Without that fear of God, we can become uncaring about the unchurched in our communities and become smug in our Sunday sanctuaries. More than any other place throughout the Synod, our congregations, your congregation is the vital center for confidence to further the mission of the church through engagement with those who don’t truly know Jesus. Jesus told the first disciples to tarry in Jerusalem to receive the Holy Spirit for their mission to the world (Luke 24:49). Tarrying is still needed, gathering with fellow disciples in our congregations so that we stay tight with God’s love for you and for me (First Table of the Ten Commandments) and be motivated by the Gospel to reach out to others who don’t know Jesus (Second Table). Evangelism and mission is not the heart of our faith. That Jesus died and rose for my sins, for yours is the heart of our faith. With that gift of undeserved faith in our hearts, in awe and reverence “we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10).

About the Licensed Lay Deacon program: I was impressed when one of the regents of Concordia Seminary, talking about a different topic, said, “We must handle the things of the church carefully.” That’s also true for the Licensed Lay Deacon program. It too must be approached with the care that comes from the fear and love of God. I’m led to believe there is a significant consensus among those following this issue that those who regularly preach and



administer the Sacraments should be on the roster of ordained pastors in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. I agree. Our position grows out of Article V of the Augsburg Confession: “To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit. . . .” Article XIV then says, “Concerning church order they teach that no one should teach publicly in the church or administer the sacraments unless properly called.”

That said, great care should be taken in *how* we proceed to work toward the ordination of all who regularly preach and administer the Sacraments. Several points:

- Licensed Lay Deacons who are doing Word and Sacrament ministry are not being independent and unmindful of the whole church but acting according to a 1989 synod convention resolution. Both sides must work through this issue with gentleness and respect.
- As weighty as this issue is, more serious is the way we work toward a resolution. One side can get a majority of votes to impose its position on those who disagree. That would be handling the issue according to the law, and from the Bible we learn the principle “the law brings wrath” (Romans 4:15). A better way, more Lutheran will be to work patiently but persistently toward a fraternally reached resolution that most will embrace. “See peace and pursue it” (1 Peter 3:11).
- Hence I do not favor a cut-off dates. How could we appear before the Judgment seat of Christ and say that we passed a resolution that forbade Your Word and Sacrament from being ministered to people? A resolution to move toward ordination through practical ways (colloquy, SMP, CRM) without deadlines seems to me the most peaceful way forward. Progress should be reported to the 2019 convention.
- Our district presidents will be indispensable in working with each individual situation with the goal of pastoral ministry in mind. I have no doubt that the Council of Presidents takes this issue seriously and will be the primary entity in moving forward.

I heartily agree with the Task Force’s seventh recommendation: “Retention and Affirmation of District Lay-Training Programs.” “The task force recommends that a major emphasis in lay-training programs be placed on the role of evangelist and the task of outreach in an increasingly diverse and challenging United States” (page 247).

Finally on the deacon question, Martin Luther in his eleventh thesis for the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518 said, “Arrogance cannot be avoided or true hope be present unless the judgment of condemnation is fear in every work.” That means that this issue, as our regent said, must also be handled with great care. With grace, we can. Patience is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

About ecclesiastical supervision: A task force has proposed “To replace referral panels by restoring the right of accusers to appeal district president decisions to the president of synod” (Workbook, page 301).

I was privileged to serve as a synodical vice president under President A.L. Barry. A similar bylaw was in place at that time, as the task force correctly reports, and I can tell you from experience that the presidium spent an inordinate amount of time dealing with intractable issues that were referred to us from the people in the districts. Who were we, sitting in a room in St. Louis, to judge generally local issues? It was highly frustrating and the removal of this bylaw in



2004 was definitely the right thing to do. My experience aside, there are serious reasons why passage of this bylaw will harm our Synod.

This proposal is biblically questionable. In Matthew 18 Jesus tells us that one Christian should talk privately with his accuser. That may involve many conversations over a period of time, and private means that it shouldn't be spread abroad on the internet. It should be enough at this stage for third parties to know it's being addressed in the way Jesus directs. However, should there be no resolution, "take one or two others along with you" (18:16). If that fails, again it may well require several conversations over time, "then tell it to the church" (18:17). Now we have moved from closed door attempts at reconciliation to public knowing that reconciliation has failed thus far. But who is the "church"? Because the district president is the ecclesiastical supervisor of the area from which the situation arose, the district president represents the church, the Synod, in his area. The district president is not a sole actor. "Church" implies he consults, with circuit visitors and others. Should the district president's decision be received as unsatisfactory, the task force notes the current provision of a panel for appeal. God willing, all this will bring a positive conclusion to the matter, but "If he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (18:17). Our Lord did not say, "If he refuses to listen even to the church, take it to the synodical president." As the final ecclesiastical supervisor, the synodical president should see that the processes are being followed, not give every judgment himself. What fallible human could get that right? This proposal would change the very nature of our "walking together." Jesus' prescription keeps issues as local as possible, and so should we.

This resolution would be divisive. The Council of Presidents would inevitably form groups who agree or disagree with the synodical president's interposed actions. Our colleges, universities and seminaries, with their regents, administrations and faculties would know that the president can intrude in any matter on their campus, effectively disrespecting the governance of those institutions already spelled out in other bylaws in the Handbook. And imagine the fear of a pastor who knows that an informant in the area can bring heavy muscle to a situation that most needs fraternal talk among local brothers. Again, this changes the nature of our "walking together."

This is not to cut the president out. A president of the synod should have a relationship with all district presidents individually and with the Council of Presidents collectively that leads them to feel safe speaking with him about a troubled situation and he feels free to talk with them about concerns he has. That's the collegiality that has been a hallmark of the Synod for many decades, a fraternal "walking together" that is enshrined in various ways in the Handbook, and should be modeled by any president.

Finally to this question, I return to the book "The Fractured Republic" by Yuval Levin. Remember, he's writing about America's present dysfunction; he's not writing about the church. However, the church, our Synod, reflects American culture more than we like to admit. While we are not of the world, we are very much in the world (John 17:15). Levin writes, "As individualism further erodes the bonds that hold civil society together, people conclude that only a central authority can pick up the slack. That dangerous feedback loop keeps us from seeing the possibility of other sorts of solutions to the problems we face" (186f.). I believe this task force proposal for our church is "a dangerous feedback loop." The only "central authority" in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is supposed to be the Word of God as we subscribe to the Word in the Lutheran Confessions. Doctrine and practice should be decided by fraternal talk under obedience to the Word, not under compelled obedience to a person. Walther noted in his "Law and Gospel" that forced obedience is no obedience. Yes indeed, there are issues of



doctrine and practice that need attention. They'll always exist. The best way to address them is patient and prayerful attempts at persuasion by brothers and sisters who are ever careful about the church and ever conscious of the fear and love of God. To repeat Luther, "Arrogance cannot be avoided or true hope be present unless the judgment of condemnation is fear in every work."

In conclusion, I have written longer than I intended, and if you've read this far, thank you. God's will be done. St. Paul speaks about church workers in 1 Corinthians 3:11-13. "No one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. If someone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it." At this stage of my life I know the Judge is imminent, and I'm desperately looking to Him, to Jesus, as my only Savior. "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you" (Psalm 73:25). That's where I'm at.

Dale A. Meyer
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