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## **Praesidium responds to concerns posed by former CCM members**

*An open letter to the Synod by three former members of the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) has recently been widely disseminated. These are brothers in Christ, respected fellow members of the Synod, who are entitled to their opinions regarding the election of the President—as is every member of the Synod. However, we also ask that all the members of the Synod prayerfully and with open minds consider the following information.*

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### ***What precipitated the need for taking a look at the dispute resolution process as it currently exists in our Bylaws?***

The suggestion to examine the current Bylaws on dispute resolution came from President Harrison when the system had exonerated a pastor who was publicly and aggressively teaching that the Bible has errors, that women should be ordained, that homosexual activity is not sinful, and that evolution is true. Prior to all of this, President Harrison had patiently arranged for this man's dissent regarding *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles* (which rejected the errors of Seminex and was adopted by convention as official Synod doctrine in 1973) to be considered by the CTCR. After the CTCR unanimously rejected the dissent, President Harrison—in a spirit of patience, and hoping to win the brother—requested that the CTCR staff (the Rev. Dr. Joel Lehenbauer and the Rev. Larry Vogel) and two seminary professors serving on the CTCR (one from each seminary) meet privately to try again to win the brother. All efforts failed. After the brother's exoneration by a panel, a new case was filed regarding his teachings on evolution. As a result of this last case, however, the individual in question was removed from the Synod. It was in this context, after some five years dealing with the problem, that President Harrison appointed a task force to examine the current Bylaws and make recommendations for improvement.

### ***Does President Harrison, then, prefer a wholesale revision of the Bylaws regarding dispute resolution?***

No. In his report to the Synod, President Harrison stated: "I am not in favor of wholesale revision of our dispute resolution and ecclesiastical supervision processes. Our current system has many valuable attributes. I did, however, appoint a task force to evaluate the

system and make some suggestions, which they have done” (*Workbook*, pp. 297ff.).

***After the task force completed its work, did President Harrison recommend that all of the conclusions of the task force report be adopted?***

No. In examining the report of the task force, President Harrison made a single suggestion that, should Floor Committee 12 adopt the task force recommendation to restore the right of an appeal by an accuser, the authority for action should rest with the entire Praesidium and *not* the Synod president alone.

***Why, then, are there mistaken conclusions and confusion regarding all of this?***

The letter circulated by former CCM members apparently was based on the task force report alone, and not on President Harrison’s modest request for change, nor on the actual proposal to go before Synod in convention. Floor Committee 12 (Ecclesiastical Supervision and Dispute Resolution) has examined all sides of this issue and has prepared Resolution 12-01 (*Today’s Business*, p. 153f), which is very clear and well worth reading in order to clear up any confusion.

***What does Resolution 12-01 actually propose?***

Resolution 12-01 proposes to restore the right of an accuser to appeal to the Praesidium, if the district president declines to act. This, in fact, was the arrangement that Synod had for decades, from before 1956 up to 2004, based on the President’s general responsibilities articulated in Article XI of the constitution. During the time this option for appeal was available, it was actually used quite rarely.

***If Resolution 12-01 is passed, will it take away from district presidents the ability to exercise ecclesiastical supervision of individual members in their districts and concentrate it instead in the Office of the President or the Praesidium?***

No. The district president still has full ecclesiastical supervision over all of the congregations and rostered church workers of his district, as well as the full authority to take appropriate action. If, however, a district president *fails* to take action in a matter involving doctrine, the accuser then would have the right to appeal to the full Praesidium (not the President). The Praesidium would then decide whether the case should be closed or should move forward.

***What about the president’s role in the new structure of Synod?***

A fair evaluation of the past six years will show that President Harrison continues to be very judicious and careful in the exercise of presidential responsibility under the 2010 restructuring of Synod. As evidence, please note how well the Offices of National Mission and International Mission are functioning on our behalf.

- [Reporter Insert - June 2016: Board for International Mission](#)

- [Reporter Insert - May 2016: Mission Work Today](#)

Note also the evangelical visitation of the districts carried out by President Harrison and the Synod vice-presidents in the triennium just ending. This was not done to prescribe, but rather to listen, to learn, and to provide Christ-centered encouragement from Holy Scripture. In point of fact, this visitation was received exceptionally well in every district.

***Does President Harrison seek to restrict congregations, districts and others in mission efforts?***

Again, the plain and simple answer is no. Concerns over Bylaw 3.8.3 have arisen regarding the need for coordination and collaboration in the foreign mission fields, all for the sake of our partners and for the sake of the mission. The Board for International Mission (BIM) has developed careful policies that do not restrict but enhance the mission.

- [LCMS Best Practices in Short-Term Mission](#)

A very helpful FAQ has also been prepared.

- [FAQs regarding CCM Opinion 14-2724 on Bylaw 3.8.3](#)

In fact, the CCM opinion on Bylaw 3.8.3 clarified that mission societies, auxiliaries (LWML, LLL), and Recognized Service Organizations (RSOs) are in no way restricted by the bylaw. The CCM also requested that the BIM develop appropriate policies. Those policies allow for dual calls by the BIM and districts or congregations. The net result is that opportunities for collaboration between the BIM, districts, congregations, and other entities have been clarified and greatly expanded, while protecting the rights and interests of partner churches.

***Why is it so important to have a united and coordinated mission effort internationally?***

There have been a number of instances where some of our folks have acted in international fields in ways that have severely disrupted our relationships with partner churches. Independent and uncoordinated efforts have also been undertaken with charismatic and other non-Lutheran churches and societies, with seminaries even being planted. Sometimes our folks engaged in joint work with ELCA partner churches while our own partner churches were ignored, causing some offense. Such situations have forced LCMS mission staff to commit significant time and resources to remedy situations and restore appropriate relationships. The assertion that there is some new effort to restrict mission is ironic in light of the fact that our international mission efforts are mushrooming each day, with more congregations and districts partnering in these efforts than ever before. Three years ago some 900 congregations were supporting LCMS missionaries. Now that number is well over 1300.

***What about those studies of Article VI and Article VII of the Synod's constitution?***

The Office of the President and others are working on those studies, and it is true that they have not been completed. To do a truly thorough job has turned out to be more difficult than it first appeared. Despite the delay in completing the study, a number of resources have been produced to assist members of Synod in the study of Article VI.

<http://www.lcms.org/churchfellowship>

The Office of the President is working to complete these studies and present them to the Synod during the first year of the next triennium.

### ***What is this about some new form of closed communion being imposed?***

It is not true that President Harrison has been seeking “to impose a form of ‘closed communion’ inconsistent with Synod’s historical practices.” Under normal circumstances, members of the LCMS and those in fellowship with the LCMS commune in our churches, though we have always also given room for pastoral discretion. President Harrison has simply been asking that congregations and pastors exercise true pastoral discretion in the admission to the Supper—specifically that, at the very least, visitors be encouraged to speak with the pastor or elder prior to approaching the altar. This is Synod’s historic practice, as evidenced by the many resolutions of the Synod over the years. In 2013, the convention by a 77 percent margin referenced resolutions on close(d) communion as passed by previous conventions and asked President Harrison to work with district presidents to ensure better practice on this issue. In 2015, the CTCR released expanded guidelines based upon the 1993 CTCR document on model communion statements. The 2015 Guidelines for Communion Statements provides tools for evaluating and adapting communion statements for the seasonal and local context.

- [Guidelines for congregational, district and synodical communion statements](#)

### ***Anything else?***

The members of the Synod may have honest disagreements over who might best serve as president of the Synod. This is not unusual, since we have three excellent candidates this year. That’s why we have an election. That’s why the Synod’s publications, *Reporter* and *The Lutheran Witness*, both have a set of Q&As from all three men whose names are on the ballot. That’s why we encourage all to pray for the Spirit’s guidance as they vote. Everyone should examine the answers all three have given through these official channels. But let’s also be honest about the actual record. Let’s make up our minds and hearts about this matter on the basis of honest information, not unfounded accusation or innuendo. Regardless of which candidate you support, it is vital that we avoid the devil’s snare.

May our gracious God preserve us and, by His Word and Spirit, lead us to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3) and mutual love in Christ. We all stand as sinners equal under the cross, called to REPENT of our sin, to CONFESS Christ as the Rock of our Salvation, and to REJOICE in His forgiveness.

God’s peace be with you, in Jesus!

Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison  
President

Rev. Dr. Herbert C. Mueller, Jr.  
First Vice-President

Rev. Dr. John C. Wohlrabe, Jr.  
Second Vice-President, Great Lakes Region

Rev. Dr. Daniel Preus  
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