

Date: June 8, 2016

Open Letter to: Members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
From: Former members of the Commission on Constitutional Matters
Subject: The Election of the President

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Grace and peace to you through our Lord Jesus Christ!

The undersigned circulated an open letter to the Synod last week. We felt compelled by Christ's love and a life lived for Him (2 Cor. 5:14-15) to write to you words of encouragement and words of concern as you prepare to cast a vote for electing the President of the Synod. A number of responses have been circulated, including one from the Praesidium, all of which confirm our urgent concerns regarding centralization of authority. While not wanting to get into a factual debate about some of the historical or factual assertions contained in that response, which would be impossible in this small space, we feel that a brief response highlighting some of the comments made could prove helpful.

- **Distinction between Dispute Resolution and Expulsion.** First, let us be clear that it is not the Dispute Resolution Process that is creating the concerns about what is being reviewed and which the President proposes to revise. That process is described in Bylaw 1.10. Rather, as a result unsatisfactory to the President in an expulsion proceeding (the details of which, because of privacy and privilege concerns, are not to be made public), under the expulsion Bylaw 2.14, it is the expulsion process which is under review. The issue of ecclesiastical supervision authority and responsibility is significantly different in these two processes, and should not be confused.
- **Allowing appeal to the Praesidium.** The Synod's Constitution, Article XII 7, assigns responsibility for ecclesiastical supervision to the District Presidents, and to the Synod President the duty to provide ecclesiastical supervision of the District Presidents. The Vice-Presidents of Synod have no ecclesiastical responsibility or authority under our Constitution. The Praesidium consists of the Synod President and the Vice-Presidents, who only "represent him in all his functions" and which Vice-Presidents are not charged to assist him in ecclesiastical supervision (Constitution Article XI C). We were aware of the actions of Floor Committee 12's Proposed Res. 12-01 when we sent our open letter.ⁱ
- **Personal dissatisfaction in a particular case.** Synod has devised procedures to balance our Constitution's provisions for protection of members (Art III 7), the conditions of membership (Art VI), ecclesiastical supervision of members (Art XII 7) and the authority to expel (Art XIII). The goal is always winning back an erring member through counsel and admonition based on the Word of God and convincing. Care is to be taken to protect reputations and avoid violation of the 8th Commandment (for example, see Bylaw 2.14.7.8). The Synod spends considerable time and effort to train Reconcilers, members of Panels and Final Hearing Panels, all of whose good faith and judgment are to be honored and respected. In violation of these principles and Bylaw 3.1.6.2(c), President Harrison has made public accusations while a matter was pending and has encouraged publicity and even the inclusion of overtures violating this bylaw, subjecting himself and the Synod to civil action.
- **President's actions under the new structure of Synod.** Much of what occurs at the Synod level is never known to the congregations, individual members or laity, particularly when the checks and balances even in our information systems through the Lutheran Witness and the Reporter are effectively controlled by the President. Those actions of which we are at least partially aware include:
 - Selection of an Eastern Regional Vice-President contrary to the expressed desires of every Eastern Region District to be represented, as well as most of its circuits and congregations
 - Removal and replacement of every single regional director and their director in our foreign mission fields, whose combined international mission service when removed exceeded 100 years
 - Removal of Human Resources leadership in the International Center who had information related to questionable activities of Rev. Harrison prior to his being elected President
 - Entering into secret protocols that have never been made public, prohibiting individual members from involvement in specific foreign mission fields without the express authorization of the OIM
 - Control of the editorial policies of the Reporter and Witness (Why are letters critical of the President's actions not seeing the light of day?)
 - Support of attempts to terminate long-standing congregational support of mission efforts not coordinated through the OIM
 - Attempting to make the OIM the controller of mission efforts of all individual and congregational members, rather than serving as a resource to encourage and provide assistance for those wanting to follow God's call to such efforts

- Failure to work cooperatively in the appointment of new presidents at various Concordia Universities
 - Attempting to gain authority to appoint 2 regents to each of the Concordia Universities
 - Cooperation with non-RSO entities such as Balance Concord in the sending of books written by the President timed to arrive right before an election
 - Speaking at the annual meeting of Brothers of John the Steadfast despite pastoral counsel from members of the COP that he should not be a speaker
- **Restriction and control of International and National Missions.** Let there be no misunderstanding. The theoretical basis of the Synod usurping and taking control of the role of individuals and congregations in international missions can just as easily be applied to missions within the United States. Re-read CCM Opinions 14-2724 and subsequent pronouncements from St Louis, including proposed 2016 Res. 2-06, page 54, 2016 Today's Business. CCM Opinion 14-2724 reflects the influence of the President even on the CCM, which Commission has historically been able to maintain its independence and fulfill its assigned function as a part of the checks and balances historically recognized by Synod. This is an attempt to centralize control by attempting to make the OIM the controller of mission efforts of all individual and congregational members, rather than serving as a resource to encourage and provide assistance for those wanting to follow God's call to such efforts. The role of the Synod is to facilitate, not control, the mission efforts of its members.
 - **United and coordinated Missions Internationally.** If the Synod leadership wants to complain that congregations or members are undermining synodical efforts overseas, it ought to share its secret protocols and communicate with members. Such concerns may provide good reasons for ecclesiastical supervision and input, but not for control or making more difficult the task of answering the call of the Great Commission.
 - **Closed Communion.** Having acknowledged President Harrison's failure to fulfill his commitment, his repeated neglect to complete a Synodwide study of Article VI mandated six years ago, which is a foundation of our understanding and practice of close(d) communion, the Praesidium now suggests that what President Harrison is proposing does not deviate from existing doctrine and practice. If there is no change being proposed, then why is the convention being asked to consider any resolution? And if he is attempting to promote unity, why is President Harrison promoting the resolution without first completing the study, as he promised? And how are we to have a uniform understanding and ability to properly analyze the resolution without first having participated in the study?
 - **Anything Else?** While the Praesidium touts the publication of views from the three candidates for President, it fails to explain why dissenting views have not been given voice in Synod's publications in the last six years. If we are prevented from speaking the truth in love, we open ourselves to the devil's inroads. Only if we are able to speak our differences with open hearts, seeking God's wisdom, using the Word of God and convincing, will we ever be able to maintain our unity and faithfulness as the small part of the holy catholic church we are called to be.

As former members of the CCM, we encourage your prayers for election of an evangelical Christ-centered President with a mission heart who will also act in accordance with Synod's Constitution (our covenant), see to it that the Resolutions of the Synod are indeed carried out, and provide leadership for the unity and mission of the Synod. Thank you again for the privilege of pouring out our hearts.

In Christ's love,



Rev. Dr. Wilbert Sohns



Rev. Philip J. Esala



Daniel C. Lorenz, Esq

ⁱ For reference to the position of the other two candidates for President, please also see <http://michiganintouch.com/uncategorized/statement-concerning-ecclesiastical-supervision/>, including Rev. Dr. Dale Meyer's blunt assessment that - "This proposal is biblically questionable... This proposal would change the very nature of our "walking together."... This resolution would be divisive... 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."