



CALIFORNIA-NEVADA-HAWAII DISTRICT

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH-MISSOURI SYNOD
2772 CONSTITUTION DRIVE, SUITE A
LIVERMORE, CA 94551

June 1, 2016

Dearest brothers and sisters in Christ,

Grace, mercy, and peace be multiplied onto you through God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

In just over two weeks you will have opportunity to cast an electronic ballot to elect the next president of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. One of the results of synod's restructuring efforts six years ago was to enable each LCMS congregation to participate in electing the Synod President through the voting delegates it sent to its respective District Convention. I encourage you to exercise the right and privilege our Synod has provided to us. I have included information in this letter that I hope assists you in making a wise and prayerful decision. The Lord bless you to that end.

According to our Synod's Bylaws, the names of the top three candidates nominated (who consent to serve if elected), are placed on the ballot. The three candidates have responded to nine questions on various topics important to our people. Click on the links below for their responses.

[Biography - Matthew Harrison](#)

[Biography - David Maier](#)

[Biography - Dale Meyer](#)

Included for your consideration is the Report of President Harrison to the Synod. You can download the entire workbook including the President's Report from Synod's website. To just read President Harrison's Report, please click the link below:

[President's Report - Upon This Rock](#)

The following sections of President Harrison's Report hold particular significance for our CNH churches:

"Demythologizing the Mission" (p.2)

The Domestic Challenges and Responsibilities (p.2)

"Convention Challenges: Licensed Lay Deacons" (p.4)

"Confederation?" (p.5)

The election of the Synod President in previous convention years did not draw significant attention from the majority of our congregations. The election took place at the Synodical Convention through indirect (electoral circuit delegates) rather than direct participation of each congregation. Furthermore, the Synod President exercised an indirect role in the life and ministry of our churches and rostered workers. The principle of congregational self-governance being essential to the formation of our Synod designated synodical leadership to an advisory role. Article VII of our Synod's Constitution spells out the relation of the Synod to its members:

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.

I am deeply concerned that this relationship may be substantially impacted by this coming Synodical Convention. At our recent meeting (April 2016) the Council of Presidents (COP) learned that President Harrison formed a special task force a year ago (April 2015) to review the Bylaws governing dispute resolution and ecclesiastical supervision in our Synod. The report and recommendations of the task force can be read in the Convention workbook, pp. 297-307. In short, if the recommendations of the task force are approved by the convention, they will grant the Synod President excessive power, authority and control over the pastors, commissioned ministers and congregations of the LCMS (see below for more explanation).

I shared my concern with President emeritus Walt Tietjen and with our CNH Vice-Presidents. All of them encouraged me to share it with you as well. While contemplating a letter to you, I received a memo from Synod President emeritus, Jerry Kieschnick, expressing similar concern over the same matter. His letter received wide circulation in the Synod so it is possible that you already have a copy. I am attaching a copy of his letter for those of you who have not read it.

My concern with the task force's report is that it challenges a key premise upon which our Synod is built. That is, the belief that the Lord speaks directly and personally to His people through His clear, infallible Word given to all the baptized, and that He does not speak to us *primarily* through bishops. Synodical Presidents and District Presidents are *advisory* to the congregations. Thus the right and responsibility to judge doctrine and to hold accountable our pastors and teachers belong to the saints to be exercised *primarily at the local level*. While the task force's report commends our current process of dispute resolution and the adjudication of doctrinal concerns, it notes the following:

On occasion in recent years, however, we have experienced isolated difficulties with our processes, particularly the Bylaw section 2.14 process, "Expulsion of Congregations or Individuals from Membership in the Synod." While isolated, these cases have revealed shortcomings in the bylaws governing these processes and a need for critical changes to address certain areas of concern. This report of the Task Force on Dispute Resolution, appointed by the President of the Synod in April 2015, identifies those areas of concern and addresses them by offering proposals for changes to pertinent Bylaw sections.

The report proposes the consolidation and centralization of authority in the office of the Synod President in several ways:

- Granting direct involvement of the Synod President in the ecclesiastical supervision of congregations and individual members of the Synod. Presently, such spiritual and theological oversight is granted by the LCMS Constitution and Bylaws to the Synod's 35 district presidents who are elected by district conventions.
- Granting a member of Synod who is accusing another member of false doctrine to appeal directly to the Synodical President for action if the accuser believes the district president(s) involved have failed or refused to act. Under the current Synod Bylaws (2.14), District Presidents are responsible to determine whether there is sufficient rationale and evidence to proceed with an accusation. Often, in the adjudication of these accusations we call upon (by blind draw) a "referral panel" of three Circuit Visitors from our respective districts to advise us in the matter.
- The task force recommends that the use of these referral panels be omitted from the process and instead allow the accuser to appeal directly to the President of Synod.

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- Substantially changing the current composition of panels appointed to adjudicate cases involving the suspension of synodical members on the grounds of teaching/practicing false doctrine. Instead of having a panel of two District Presidents and a lay reconciler hear the case, the task force recommends having a panel of *experts* appointed by the Synod President to hear it. The task force's reasons are as follows:

Given the extremely important matters that are decided by these panels (removals from membership in the Synod), the task force advocates that their composition be reconsidered. Because these panels most often hear and decide matters of doctrine and practice, efforts should be made to obtain the service of the most knowledgeable persons in those areas for panel service. And because these panels must make objective decisions after hearing testimony and evaluating evidence, efforts should be made to obtain the service of those with aptitude, training, and/or experience in such areas.

- Granting the national president and vice-presidents authority to review every case of ecclesiastical supervision involving congregations or individual members already addressed by a district president. Furthermore, the President of the Synod would have authority at any time to initiate action to remove any individual member or congregation from the Synod.

Given both the gravity of this concern and the widespread reaction to it across the Synod, the three presidential candidates have been asked to respond publicly. I will forward to you what they share if they choose to respond. While in St. Louis this past weekend, I was able to speak personally with Dr. Dale Meyer and President David Maier about my concerns with the task force's report. They both expressed similar concern with the task force's recommendations.

To all of the above, I simply encourage you to exercise the privileges and responsibilities that are yours as electoral delegates representing your individual congregations.

Please participate in the election of the President of Synod. Follow carefully the procedures that the Secretary of Synod is providing to you. Please contact the Rev. John Standley, our CNH Secretary, or Rita Konda in my office if you have any questions.

Though there is a great amount of information, please read the recommended materials as well as other materials available to you in the Convention Workbook in order to make an informed decision regarding the leadership of our Synod.

Prayerfully consider the relationship you believe your Synod should foster in order to encourage our congregations in their participation in our Lord's mission. Pray to our Lord that His Spirit guides you and all of the other electors in choosing a president who will faithfully shepherd our Synod according to His Word.

Continue to pray for the Synod as we prepare for our national convention and as we convene in Milwaukee, WI, July 9-14.

Our district staff continues to pray for you, electors, and for all who will gather in Milwaukee, that the Lord bless you with all that you need to serve faithfully. Thank you for the time and attention that you are giving to your congregation and Synod in serving. Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen

In Christ,



Robert D. Newton
CNH District President