

## **District Convention 2009—Report of the President Introduction to Video Report**

Grace and peace be with you, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Many years ago the church of my forefathers in Serbin, Texas, split. The children from the school at the new church and the children from the original church threw rocks across the cemetery at each other. The new church later disbanded and went out of existence. The original church celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary several years ago. Very few people alive today can articulate what that controversy was really all about.

Challenges, struggles and conflicts have been an integral part of our Synod's past. Congregations and individuals in our Synod have disagreed, argued and even fought over many issues, resulting in family dissension and ecclesiastical division.

Much of that disharmony has resulted from serious doctrinal controversies, including church and ministry, the doctrine of election, church fellowship, and the authority of Holy Scripture. Other disagreements have been over practical or what we today consider relatively minor issues, including Boy Scouts, life insurance, dancing, women sitting in church with men, and the use of the English language.

Doctrinal unity in the LCMS remains a very important matter for the future of our Synod. As repeatedly written, resolved, and reaffirmed in our constitution, bylaws, doctrinal resolutions, and doctrinal statements, the LCMS is exceptionally united in what we believe, teach, and confess:

- That there is only one true and triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who created the world in six days.
- That the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, fell into sin by disobeying the command of God.
- That since the fall into sin, all people are born with original sin and are incapable of pleasing God by their own merits, works, or behavior.

- That God promised a Savior to Adam and Eve and, through them, to all people.
- That this Savior is Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, who died for the sins of the whole world.
- That only those who trust in His atoning work of dying on the cross will be saved eternally.
- That those who do not have faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior will not spend eternity in heaven, but eternal condemnation in hell.
- That we are saved by God's grace alone, without any merit or worthiness of our own.
- That we are saved through faith in Christ alone, not by our own efforts, works, or endeavors.
- That the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ is the doctrine on which the church stands or falls.
- That the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments are the inspired, inerrant, infallible, written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice.
- That the Lutheran Confessions are a true statement and exposition of the Word of God.
- That all the miraculous accounts recorded in Holy Scripture actually occurred.
- That Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
- That Jesus healed the lame, the deaf, and the blind, and raised the dead back to life.
- That Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried.
- That Jesus rose from the grave and ascended into Heaven.
- That in, with, and under the bread and the wine of Holy Communion, Christ is truly present as we receive His true body and blood for the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of eternal salvation.
- That the Bible teaches that abortion is not a moral option except as a tragically unavoidable by-product of medical procedures necessary to prevent the death of another human being.
- That homosexual behavior is contrary to the will of God and therefore intrinsically sinful.
- That marriage is a divine institution which binds one man and one woman together in a one flesh union not to be broken until death parts them.

- That all baptized Christians are members of the priesthood of all believers.
- That the Scriptures teach that while women are not to hold the pastoral office, they are free to use their God given gifts in service to the Lord and His Church in other biblically appropriate roles.
- That church fellowship has as its basis complete agreement in doctrine and practice.
- That Holy Communion, Holy Baptism, and the Word of God are the means through which God conveys to sinful human beings His grace—His undeserved love and forgiveness—and through which the Holy Spirit calls individuals to faith in Christ.

This is what we believe, teach, and confess. This is what I believe, teach, and confess. While this list is not intended to include every doctrine of the Christian faith, it serves to illustrate that we simply are not arguing or even debating the major doctrines of the Christian faith that are in contention in many parts of the Body of Christ. We are undeniably blessed with God given unity and harmony and have so much more that unites us than those things that would divide us!

At the same time, there are matters about which we in the LCMS are not in agreement, most notably:

- The administration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion, mainly the question of who should be invited or allowed to commune at the altar of our Lord in LCMS congregations.
- The service of women, mainly the question of in what roles and capacities Scripture allows or commends the participation and involvement of women in the church.
- Questions about proper forms of worship, mainly how much uniformity is necessary in the worship life of LCMS congregations, how much and what kind of diversity in forms of worship is acceptable.
- Inter-Christian relationships, mainly the question of how to remain a biblical, confessional, evangelical, Christian, Lutheran church body boldly confessing the truth in love, relating to other Christians and Christian churches while honoring our covenants of love to avoid unionism and syncretism.

In the years ahead our Synod will need to continue to work under Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions to achieve similar solidarity in these matters. Where Scripture speaks plainly and clearly to the question at hand, the matter is resolved. Where Scripture does not speak plainly, clearly, or at all to the question at hand, it behooves us as a group of rational, reasonable, Christian people to come to a godly and common sense conclusion regarding how to proceed with mutual respect and non-offensive conduct.

Recall with me the Holy Spirit-inspired words of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians:

*“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”* (Ephesians 4:1-6)

With these introductory comments, I now share with you the video portion of the report of the president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.