

SOUTH DAKOTA DISTRICT PASTOR'S CONFERENCE

April 19, 2004

We Live Together As Brothers

The Lord be with you; and also with you.

My dear Brothers in the Office of the Public Ministry in the South Dakota District of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Grace to you and Peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ!

I begin with a Word of Scripture – Ephesians 4: 1-7

“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have receive. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as 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. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.”

You have invited me to help you deal with some difficulties that have risen in your district regarding how we work together as brothers in the one office of the public ministry, the pastoral office. One of your congregations brought an overture to your district that made several specific points.

- 1) If they become dissatisfied with the Pastor God has given them, people can easily go the church in the next town or down the street.
- 2) Pastors are divinely called to their own specific parishes.

- 3) Pastors who interfere in another man's business are interlopers.
Pastors should not be an outside influence on the members of another parish.
- 4) So called "sheep stealing" is not a good thing – though I heard it said that you can't steal a well-fed sheep.
- 5) Therefore, the congregation wanted the district to resolve that: "No pastor in our South Dakota District receive into membership any Christian who has not personally contacted their pastor to request a release or transfer..." "that all pastors follow the 'stages of admonition' as found in Matthew 18" and "that we work together as brothers in Christ by honoring each other's flocks without interference."
 - a. All of that is true
 - b. But it also makes me curious as to why this was brought as a resolution?

In many ways, when you have to bring a resolution to resolve something that should be self evident – it often points to a deeper malady.

That's why your floor committee wisely brought a resolution that called for a Pastoral Conference on this issue – rather than air it all out on the convention floor. We are here to talk about it – *inter nos* – between us – between us Brothers. (pause)

I claim no expertise on this except I came from more than 500 miles away. >>>>Say – does the level of expertise increase with the difficulty of travel? It does, however, bring me back to what my Father called "The Good Country" – North and South Dakota. Thanks for accommodating my need. Thank you

Here's how we want to come at the task.

- 1) We are Brothers living together under the Word of Christ – that is a gift of God's grace!

- 2) Together we want to seek help from God so that we might live out the gifts Christ has given.

In the first portion of the paper, I will set out some basic biblical and confessional ideals regarding the church and the pastoral office – things you and I already know, but sometimes forget, in other words, *prolegomena* – and from that develop some positive answers to the question – HOW DO WE DEAL WITH EACH OTHER AS BROTHERS?

I dare say that this exercise, by the time we have finished this first part, will begin to expose with the searchlight of God's Law some places where we may tend to get off track.

And then, in the second part of the paper, we will talk specifically about some of the friction points among us – indeed, some of the wrong approaches we fall into – and then ask again how God would lead us to deal with each other, and with our problems, as brothers in Christ. That, in fact, will be our key throughout. We are called to live together as brothers under the Word of Christ.

First, we have to begin with some thoughts on the nature of the Church.

Here is our Point #1 – The church, properly speaking, is the sum total of all believers in Christ Jesus, that is, all the “holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd” (SA III, XII, Tappert, p. 315), as Luther put it in the Smalcald Articles.

This teaching is attested over and over again in the sacred Scriptures and our confessions. Paul writes to the Colossian Christians: **3** [^]We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, **4** since we heard of ^gyour faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,

5 because of ^hthe hope ⁱlaid up for you in heaven.¹ Jesus promised: **27** My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand (John 10: 27-29).

Again, the Scripture says: **19** So then you are no longer ^dstrangers and aliens,³ but you are ^efellow citizens with the saints and ^fmembers of the household of God, **20** ^gbuilt on the foundation of the ^hapostles and prophets, ⁱChrist Jesus himself being ^jthe cornerstone, **21** ^kin whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into ^la holy temple in the Lord. **22** In him ^myou also are being built together ⁿinto a dwelling place for God by⁴ the Spirit.²

The church is all believers in Christ. The church is the place where God's Spirit dwells in all the believers together.

This church is the body of Christ. And this church is, we confess, HOLY!

How is the church HOLY?

The holiness of the church does not consist in works or ceremonies, but in the Word of God and true faith, as Luther writes in the Smalcald Articles (SA III, XII, Tappert p. 315). The church is holy because Christ daily washes all her members clean in His blood shed for the forgiveness of sins. For "Christ loved the church and ^hgave himself up for her, **26** that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by ⁱthe washing of water ^jwith the word, **27** so ^kthat he might present the church to himself in splendor, ^lwithout spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."³

¹*The Holy Bible : English standard version.* 2001 (Col 1:3-5). Wheaton: Good News Publishers.

²*The Holy Bible : English standard version.* 2001 (Eph 2:19-22). Wheaton: Good News Publishers.

³*The Holy Bible : English standard version.* 2001 (Eph 5:25-27). Wheaton: Good News Publishers.

This Church is precious to her Lord, as your overture quotes Acts 20:28 – “Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood.” Of this Church we confess in the creed that she is ONE, for she has one Lord and Bridegroom. This Church – all believers – is holy in the blood of Christ. This church is catholic because it is found wherever the Word of God is preached. And this church is apostolic because it lives by the apostolic doctrine and preaching of Christ crucified and risen.

So my brothers – in the church we are not just dealing with religious consumers, or customers, or pew sitters – but holy believers, blood bought souls.

Point #2 – Christ Himself gathers His Holy Church of holy believers by and around His Word and Sacrament, for through these means His Holy Spirit creates faith in people who hear the Gospel.

Again, you know the Scriptures. Paul writes: “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

14 But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him ^uof whom they have never heard?¹ And how are they to hear ^vwithout someone preaching? **15** And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ^w“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” **16** But ^xthey have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ^y“Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” **17** So ^zfaith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.⁴

⁴*The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (Ro 10:13-17). Wheaton: Good News Publishers.

Our confession states: The church is not merely an association of outward ties and rites like other civic governments, ... but it is mainly an association of faith and of the Holy Spirit in men's hearts.⁵

The Church, Melancthon writes, is "made up of men scattered throughout the world who agree on the Gospel and have the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same sacraments, whether they have the same human traditions or not."⁶ And again – "The Creed also defines the church this way, teaching us to believe that there is a holy, catholic church. Certainly the wicked are not a holy church!"⁸ The following phrase, "the communion of saints," seems to have been added to explain what "church" means, namely, the assembly of saints who share the association of the same Gospel or teaching and of the same Holy spirit, who renews, consecrates, and governs their hearts.⁷

So my brothers – the church is not a human organization but the body of Jesus, the fellowship of the holy ones.

Point #3 – The same Holy Spirit gathers these holy believers into local congregations, again by the same Word and Sacrament. That's why the Word purely preached and the Sacraments rightly done are the marks of the church.

The Church – namely, the holy believers – is always gathering into local congregations. Therefore, Paul writes, Paul writes: *to the churches of Galatia...*

⁵Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church* (Apology of the Augsburg Confession: 1, IV, 5). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

⁶Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church* (Apology of the Augsburg Confession: 1, IV, 10). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

⁷Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church* (Apology of the Augsburg Confession: 1, IV, 7-8). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

He can tell the Roman Christians to: Greet ^rPrisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, **4** who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. **5** Greet also ^sthe church in their house. ⁸

Where will you find the church? Where do you go to look for it? Only God can judge the faith in the heart. That's why we can only listen for someone's confession and look for the marks of the Church, God's Word and the Sacraments. You know the confessions as well as I. Though the church is an association of faith and the Holy Spirit, Melancthon writes in the Apology, "To make it recognizable, this association has outward marks, the pure teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments in harmony with the Gospel of Christ. This church alone is called the body of Christ, which Christ renews, consecrates, and governs by his Spirit, as Paul testifies when he says (Eph. 1:22, 23), "And he has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness," that is, the whole congregation "of him who fills all in all."⁹

Again, to Corinth, Paul writes... Because there is one bread, we who are many are ^cone body, for we all partake of the one bread.¹⁰

And, just as "the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, ^jso it is with Christ. **13** For ^kin

⁸*The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (Ro 16:3-5). Wheaton: Good News Publishers.

⁹Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church* (Apology of the Augsburg Confession: 1, IV, 5). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

¹⁰*The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (1 Co 10:17). Wheaton: Good News Publishers.

one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—¹Jews or Greeks, slaves¹² or free—and^mall were made to drink of one Spirit.”¹¹

Commenting on these verses, CFW Walther writes: Wherever, therefore, the Word of God is preached and Holy Baptism and the Sacrament of the body and blood of Christ are administered, there are members of the body of Christ. There we must assume: Here is a holy Christian Church.” (CFW Walther, Church and Ministry, p. 68)

So my brothers, no matter how small and down trodden she may appear, your congregation – your brother’s congregation – is part of the One Holy Christian Church.

Point #4 - Christ has given to His Church the power of the keys, that is, the authority to forgive and retain sins. Christians at all times have the right and duty to forgive one another in the name of Christ. At the same time the church is commanded by Christ to Call Pastors to carry out this authority publicly on behalf of all. Christ Himself, acting through the congregation, calls the Pastor to fulfill this office publicly, for the sake of all.

You know the passages here – Matthew 16; Matthew 18 and John 20. Walther insists that these passages show that Christ gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven to the church. There are those among us today who would say the keys are given only to the ministry, and that Walther’s book, Church and Ministry, should rather have been named, Ministry and Church.

¹¹*The Holy Bible : English standard version.* 2001 (1 Co 12:12-13). Wheaton: Good News Publishers.

But Walther is only being consistent with Melanchthon, in the Treatise, and ultimately with the Scriptures. Here is the passage from the Treatise:

“In addition, it is necessary to acknowledge that the keys do not belong to the person of one particular individual but to the whole church, as is shown by many clear and powerful arguments, for after speaking of the keys in Matt. 18:19, Christ said, “If two or three of you agree on earth,” etc.³ Therefore, he bestows the keys especially and immediately on the church, and for the same reason the church especially possesses the right of vocation. So it is necessary in these passages to regard Peter as the representative of the entire company of apostles, on which account these passages do not ascribe to Peter any special prerogative, superiority, or power.¹²

Tappert has “especially and immediately.” The Latin is principaliter et immediate, which has the meaning of “originally and directly.” The German text at this point reads “For just as the promise of the Gospel belongs certainly and immediately to the entire church,, so the Keys belong immediately to the entire church, because the Keys are nothing else than the office where by this promise is communicated to everyone who desires it (SA Tr 24, Triglotta, p. 510).

The keys are given to the church; just as the ministry of Word and Sacrament is given to the church. Here I also appreciate the thoughts of Herman Sasse, namely, that arguments as to which comes first, or which is more important – ministry or church – are not helpful. Sasse explains: “This office of the ministry does not at its very essence come into existence out of the will of the congregation; it is rather the creation of Christ. The relationship of office and congregation is to be understood in such a way that neither is present without the

¹²Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church* (The Smalcald Articles: 4, 24). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

other and neither is master over the other.” (Sasse, *The Lonely Way*, Vol. 1, p. 244) Where there is church, there will be the ministry.

The power or authority of the keys is the authority to preach the Gospel, to baptize, to remit and retain sins, to celebrate the Lord's Supper. This authority or power is given to the church directly from her Lord. By preaching the Gospel, administering the sacraments, and remitting and retaining sins the church opens heaven to those who believe the Gospel and through faith receive the Holy Spirit. The Office of the Keys “is the peculiar church power, which Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive the sins of penitent sinners unto them, but to retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent.” (Small Catechism) John 20:21-23 is the biblical text given in the Small Catechism. Therefore, when I as a Christian in my vocation as father forgive my son for the sake of Christ, I am using the authority Christ has given to the church to forgive sins. And the forgiveness given is the forgiveness of Christ.

At the same time, Christ also tells the church to Call pastors to carry out this authority publicly, on behalf of all. For again, where there is church - where there are believers - there will be the ministry. Melancton says in the Treatise... “For wherever the church exists, the right to administer the Gospel also exists. Wherefore it is necessary for the church to retain the right of calling, electing, and ordaining ministers.

This right is a gift given exclusively to the church, and no human authority can take it away from the church. It is as Paul testifies to the Ephesians when he says, “When he ascended on high he gave gifts to men” (Eph. 4:8, 11, 12). He enumerates pastors and teachers among the gifts belonging exclusively to the church, and he adds that they are given for the work of ministry and for building up the body of Christ. Where the true church is, therefore, the right of electing

and ordaining ministers must of necessity also be. So in an emergency even a layman absolves and becomes the minister and pastor of another. It is like the example which Augustine relates of two Christians in a ship, one of whom baptized the other (a catechumen), and the latter, after his Baptism, absolved the former.^{4 68} Here the words of Christ apply which testify that the keys were given to the church and not merely to certain individuals: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20).¹³

The local congregation is church on account of the believers found there – even if there are only two or three. Because of the believers there, the office of the keys is given to them. And because Christ has commanded the church to call pastors, every local congregation must establish in its midst the office of pastor. Paul writes to Titus: “**5** ^oThis is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and ^pappoint elders in every town as I directed you—**6** ^qif anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife,³ and his children are believers and not open to the charge of ^rdebauchery or insubordination. **7** For an overseer,⁴ ^sas God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not ^tbe arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent ^uor greedy for gain, **8** but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, ^vand disciplined. **9** He must ^whold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in ^xsound⁵ doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”¹⁴

The local congregation does not have the option not to have a pastor. Christ desires that every congregation be served by a pastor. Where there is Church, there will be the ministry. It is the command of Christ. A particular

¹³Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church* (The Smalcald Articles: 4, 67-68). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

¹⁴*The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (Tit 1:5-9). Wheaton: Good News Publishers.

church must have a pastor to serve as God's steward in that particular congregation.

One of the struggles we have for the future – and we face this in SID, too, we're just about 10 years behind you in South Dakota – one of the struggles will be to provide pastoral care in communities where the demographics do not allow for a full time pastor. We may have to be creative in how we fulfill this, but still, in some way every congregation needs a pastor – Called by God through the church to care for the blood bought people of God.

So my brothers! We dare never forget that my brother pastor in the neighboring parish has been entrusted with the care of those souls, just as I have been entrusted with the care of the souls of my parish.

Point #5 - The Synod and its Districts are intended to be a partnership in the Gospel, that is, a fellowship of congregations and pastors who share one confession, namely that of the Book of Concord of 1580.

All of us who are Pastors in the LCMS are brothers who have taken the same ordination vow and have signed the same constitution. I believe what Paul writes to the church in Philippi illustrates what ought to be the nature of our fellowship as a partnership in the Gospel encompassing pastors and congregations who share the same confession. **3** ^eI thank my God ^fin all my remembrance of you, **4** always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, **5** ^gbecause of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. **6** And I am sure of this, that he who began ^ha good work in you ⁱwill bring it to completion at ^jthe day of Jesus Christ. **7** It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you ^kin my heart, for you are all ^lpartakers with

me of grace, both ^min my imprisonment and in ⁿthe defense and confirmation of the gospel.¹⁵

That confession we share is outlined in our Constitution, Article II –

The Synod, and every member of the Synod, accepts without reservation:

1. The Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice;
2. All the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God, to wit: the three Ecumenical Creeds (the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed), the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Large Catechism of Luther, the Small Catechism of Luther, and the Formula of Concord.

So my brothers – We will seek always to put the best construction on our brother's actions because we do share our confession.

Point #6 - In this fellowship, Christ has made us brothers, brothers in His body, brothers who share one confession and brothers in His Office.

We are brothers baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, men who are baptized into the body of Christ by His Spirit.

That's why, "You are not to be called rabbi," Jesus told His disciples, "for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers." (Matthew 23:8). At another time, He said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant..." (Matthew 20:25-

¹⁵*The Holy Bible : English standard version.* 2001 (Php 1:3-7). Wheaton: Good News Publishers.

26). St. Paul urges the church in Philippi, “let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel” (Philippians 1:27). A little later, he writes to the same congregation, “complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...” (Philippians 2:2-5).

We are also brothers in one confession. For as members of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, we all share the same confession of Christ. We pastors have all taken the same ordination vow, made the same promises and signed the same constitution. These are the “covenants of love” we make with one another in the name of Christ.

No one has forced us to do so, but we have made these promises because we are convinced of the truth of Scripture as the Word of God and we subscribe the Confessions because they are a faithful exposition of Scripture for the sake of the Gospel.

So my brothers! That also makes us brothers in the one Office of Christ. We are called by God through His Church; ordained, that is put under orders by Christ through His bride, the Church. All of this is not just a nice, emotional catch-phrase, but it is the reality we confess, based on God’s Word.

We are brothers!

Point #7 – In this fellowship of brothers, each one of us is called to be faithful to Christ within our calling. Only Christ has given us our calling.

Acts 20:28 fits in once more here: **28** ¹⁶Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.¹⁶

When you were called to be pastor of a particular congregation, you and you alone are called to carry out that office (Amt) faithfully in that congregation. For that local congregation, to which Christ has given the power of the keys, has, at the command of Christ, called you to carry out the office of pastor in its midst. (This is why we spent a good deal of time talking about the nature of the church.) You are accountable to God who called you through your congregation. And you are accountable to your congregation to whom was originally given the power of the keys – accountable for how you carry out that office of giving away the Lord's gifts.

How can we sinners give out the gifts of God in a faithful manner? We are not ultimately faithful, but only Christ is faithful in our place. Scripture says, "May the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who called you is faithful, and He will do it." (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

Therefore, I believe, all our assumptions boil down to this:

So my brothers! Each one of us is accountable to God through our congregation for how we carry out the ministry. And each one of us would do well to remember that it is only in the faithfulness of Christ for us that any of us is faithful.

¹⁶*The Holy Bible : English standard version.* 2001 (Ac 20:28). Wheaton: Good News Publishers.

Point #8 – Christ gives us to each other as brothers, brothers in the body, brothers in our confession, brothers in Office. Why? In order to help us remain faithful to Him and to His Word.

Peter is writing to brother pastors when he says, “Likewise, you that are younger be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’” (1 Peter 5:5). And finally, in the same letter in which Paul describes the church as the bride of Christ whom He loves and for whom He gave Himself up to make her holy and to cleanse her by the washing of water with the Word, Paul also, “as a prisoner for the Lord” begs us “to lead a life worthy of the calling to which [we] have been called, with all humility and meekness, with patience, bearing with each other in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:1-3).

Jesus Himself, as our High Priest, earnestly prays the Father for us, “Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one,” and “sanctify them in the truth, thy Word is truth” (John 17:11b, 17).

This is not something esoteric that belongs only in the ivory tower. But Jesus is talking about real life, real congregations and real brothers. Let’s make it downright practical and concrete in this way – look around you today. These are your brothers. These are the men Christ has given you. These are your brothers in the body, in our confession, your brothers in Office.

The same Office of Word and Sacrament that has been committed to you in your parish has also been committed to each of them, by the same Christ and the same Spirit.

So my brothers! The same Lord who washes you and makes holy by His blood the believers in your parish also washes him and all the believers given to his care. The same keys given by Christ to your congregation and committed to you in your parish are also committed to him. The same promise to faithfully carry out the ministry according to Scripture and the confessions you made, your brother in the neighboring parish has also made. And the same Lord Jesus to whom you are accountable is also the Lord to whom he is accountable.

But our God is constantly working through means. So Christ has given us to each other as brothers in order to help each other remain faithful. By the way, this is not an option, not merely an opportunity, but this is the only way, because Christ has made us brothers.

In 1879, a mature, experienced CFW Walther wrote an essay, given to the newly formed Iowa District on the Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod. If you've never read this – you'll be surprised at how relevant it is to our situation today.

Here is something, Walther says to those who want to be completely independent of their brothers and their neighboring congregations. "At times we Missourians have been maligned in Germany as 'Independents,' but hanging such a label on us is an untruth. We do, indeed, insist that before God no congregation is dependent on any other congregation. The one has as many rights as the other. None can rule over another. That would be papistic, for the Roman church seeks to control every church in the world. In response our church has said, 'No, all churches are equal, and therefore independent.' But that is not the same as saying that congregations and churches cannot form a

larger union in order to promote the welfare of the church. After all, we solemnly declare that our Synod has no power over the congregations, but that we are only serving one another. It is not false independence for us to say, 'In matters of conscience every congregation is free from the rest,' provided we immediately add, 'nevertheless, we work together and elect officials.' God indeed did not institute this, but has left it to the freedom of the Christian church whether it wants to set one pastor over another and have head pastor, pastor, assistant pastor. Before God all pastors are completely equal. In the sight of God a president cannot accomplish one whit more than the lowliest bush pastor; however, for the welfare of the church we set up a system of supervision (*eine Ordnung*) so that the dear church does not become a Babel. It would be a disgrace to the name of Christ if His people were to live in such total confusion. No, the church must be beautifully united by the bond of love; it must work together under the best possible system of supervision." (Walther, *Essays for the Church*, Volume 2, pp. 54f).

**How do we do this? How do we deal with each other as brothers?
Better, how will Christ use us as brothers to help one another be faithful?**

Here are some general thoughts regarding our responsibilities to each other as brothers in office:

- 1) **We must be careful how we speak of one another** – because we are brothers in Christ. We must be careful what we call one another because each of us is someone for whom Christ died. Each of us is precious to Him. We must not call each other names or demonize those who are opposed to us. Even as we discuss differences, we must be careful to protect the reputation of a brother, because that's what he is – a brother. We hear Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 8:11-12 – "So by your knowledge this weak man is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and

wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.”

- 2) **We are mutually accountable to one another** and are called to live as brothers and sisters in a relationship of trust under the Word of God. When we hear something about a brother *or sister*, we are called to “put the best construction on everything.” We are not to spread rumors but when we have a question about someone, we are to go to the brother and speak with him privately. This also means that when a brother approaches us with a concern about something we have done or said, we do not ignore or belittle him because “we know we are right.” Instead we go together to the Word of God to examine the issue and find our answer. We must all recognize that just because we have God in mind when we are taking a course of action does not automatically mean that we are right. We realize instead that we need one another to help us remain faithful to the Word. We hear the Word of God which says, “By this we know love, that he laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.” (1 John 3:16).

- 3) When one of us develops an idea that may be different from what has been commonly accepted doctrine or practice, **we do not simply go forward on our own, but we bring it to our brothers**, remembering we are committed to the same confession and remembering how easy it is to develop blind spots. We are not alone. God has given us *to each other as brothers*. And here it is simply disingenuous to go only to brothers we are sure will immediately agree with us. I know this Scripture talks of physical needs but if it applies to the physical, how much more to the Spiritual? “If anyone has this world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” (1 John 3:17).

4) **We put away any sense of competition** among us. Yes, we are called to help each other grow, but because we are brothers, we are NOT competitors against each other. Jesus is first and we are His servants. We are co-workers with Christ and with each other. That's what Paul meant when he wrote: "What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters, and each shall receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:5-9). I know the situation Paul is addressing is most closely analogous to one pastor following another, but it also applies, I believe to fellow pastors working in the same area. That's why my brother in the neighboring parish – no matter how mistaken I may think he is – he is never my enemy. My enemy is Satan, the world and my sinful flesh. The last enemy is death – NOT my brother. When things are going well for my brother, I am called to rejoice with him, not be jealous. When he is struggling, I am called to help him, not knock him down further. And when he falls into sin, I am called to go to him as a brother – not go to others, but go to him. (Yes, if he needs to go to his bishop, I can help him do that, but he is my brother and I must go to him.)

Walther writes: "There are more Christians, also Lutherans, than you might think who are obsessed with the idea that the true church must consist of nothing but perfect Christians, that no Christian can have a shortcoming which is offensive to others, that there cannot be anything sinful in him. And that is simply impossible. So long as the church lives in the flesh, so long sin will manifest itself in its members. That is why God's

Word says, 'Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ' [Galatians 6:2]. There is no escaping the fact that, if you want to be a Christian, you must bear the burden which your brother imposes on you whenever you have contact with him. There will be things about him that you do not like. Sometimes he will do something that hurts and offends you. You must always remember, however, that you do the same to him. He, too, must bear *your* burden. And therefore it is a true characteristic of any group of Christians that each one bears the other's burden." (Walther, *Essays for the Church*, Volume 2, p. 55).

5) **When we do believe a brother or sister has given offense, we are called to go to that brother with the purpose of working to win him back, to be reconciled to him.** In just a little bit of light heartedness, I call this the "You Go Principle." Compare with me Matthew 18 and Matthew 5.

In Matthew 18 we read, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother" (Matthew 18:15). And the implication is, keep on going until you are reconciled or until it is abundantly clear that you cannot resolve it without help from others to discuss the issues in good faith.

And if you recognize that you are the one who has given offense, Jesus in Matthew 5 instructs, "If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24). Why? Because you have a brother with whom you need to be reconciled.

There are a couple of things I want you to notice about these two Scriptures. What does the Lord tell you? How do you treat a brother with whom

you have a difference or who has given offense? YOU GO! In Matthew 5 you are the offender – so you go to be reconciled to your brother. In Matthew 18, he has sinned against you. No matter. YOU GO! Why? He's your brother and you need to be reconciled to him. You need to gain him back as a brother.

A quick “aside” on Matthew 18: I cannot tell you the number of times I have heard Matthew 18 abused. The brother who is caught in some sin will protest, “You didn't follow Matthew 18!” Or the person who feels that the stages of Matthew 18 are like a checklist: “OK, I did that one, I can check it off and go to the next...” Until they get to what they really want to do – make him out to be a heathen and a tax collector.

No. What is the goal of Matthew 18? To win the brother back! To be reconciled in the peace of Christ who is our peace.

Several years ago I wrote, together with a board of elders in a conflicted congregation, a short study of Matthew 18 entitled, “Building Relationships in the Peace of Christ.” It is available upon request from the SID office or from our website: sid.lcms.org

The basic point is very simple. Whenever we deal with diversities and differences within our synodical fellowship – whatever the arena, whatever the relationship – we are called to treat each other as brothers, men who have one Lord and master – Jesus. When there are difficulties, we go to be reconciled.

Now some may ask at this point whether Matthew 5:23-24 or Matthew 18:15-20 actually apply in the case of a doctrinal offense, particularly a public one. When it comes to doctrine, don't we have the obligation to point out the

error publicly and speak the truth? Of course, we do. But do you read anything in Jesus' words in Matthew 18 or Matthew 5 that excuses us from going first to the brother when the difference is public doctrine? No. Love demands it – both our love for the truth and our love for the brother. When you become aware of a problem – you go!

Excursus

Here we have to take a little detour, an excursus, to deal with something where I believe we have gotten off track at times.

I am well aware here that our confession on the basis of Scripture makes a distinction between public and private offense. I have in mind the reference in the Large Catechism [Luther]: *“Where the sin is so public that the judge and everyone else are aware of it, you can without sin shun and avoid those who have brought disgrace upon themselves, and you may also testify publicly against them. For when something is exposed to the light of day, there can be no question of slander or injustice or false witness. For example, we now censure the pope and his teaching, which is publicly set forth in books and shouted throughout the world. Where the sin is public, appropriate public punishment should follow so that everyone may know how to guard against it”* (LC VIII, Kolb/Wengert, p. 424).

In his Pastoral Theology, John H.C. Fritz also uses the example of Paul confronting Peter before the whole group because Peter had given public offense to the Gospel (Galatians 2). So yes, there are times when that must be done, particularly when the Gospel is clearly at stake.

However, my brothers, I fear we too often have rushed to bring an offense to further public notice among us, when what would have been more helpful should have been further brotherly discussion under the Word of God instead. Listen carefully to the Lord's apostle, "Brothers, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

There are several things to note in this Scripture:

- 1) It refers to "any trespass." I hear no distinction between doctrine or life, public or private.
- 2) Go to each other in a spirit of gentleness, not pride.
- 3) Watch out, because the devil has a trap laid for you, too. A trap for your pride.

In other words, when you undertake to go to a brother or sister who has fallen into sin or error, or when you seek to correct the errors of others, you also put yourself in great spiritual danger. It's not that we should not go, but we must always do so in a spirit of humility in Christ. Our concern must be for the brother or sister, for those entrusted to his care if he is a pastor. Our desire must never be to lord it over him or her. Our purpose must be to gain the brother, not to justify ourselves; to win the brother, not merely to win the argument.

You see, my brothers and sisters, I fear that too often we have instead come to each other in a spirit of pride, not gentleness. We want to stake out the rightness of our own position rather than win our brother back. We want to defend ourselves rather than do what is good for the whole body.

JHC Fritz, who has much to say regarding dealing with public offense, also gives this fascinating caution: "The highest law, however, is under all circumstances the law of Christian charity (or love). If Christian charity therefore demands that a public offender be spoken to privately, it would be unjust at once to proceed against him publicly; for the purpose of church discipline is to bring a sinner to a knowledge of his sins and to true repentance. By bringing the case at once to the attention of the congregation (although according to the *letter* of Matt. 18 we would have the right to do so), we might keep the sinner from confessing his guilt..." (Fritz, Pastoral Theology, CPH, 1936, p. 237). We have to be careful that before we bring public charges against someone that we have first truly exhausted all avenues to speak to the brother in love, as a brother in Christ.

Let me put it another way. Luther used the Pope as an example in his commentary on the 8th Commandment in the Large Catechism. That should lead us to be extremely careful in how we invoke this passage of our confession to justify immediate public exposure or condemnation of the faults of fellow pastors in the Synod. You see, within the Synod especially we are talking about BROTHERS, brothers by Baptism, brothers in office, brothers who have taken the same vow. *Certainly, false doctrine or unfaithful practice cannot be ignored – not ever. But* should not love for the individual brother (as well as love for all the sisters and brothers) lead us to be very careful when we proceed publicly against another BROTHER? To do so only after every other avenue has been exhausted? And the danger to the church is clear?

Of course, the converse is also true (and this has been forgotten by many as well). Because we are BROTHERS, we are concerned about one another. When we see a brother doing something that may/will lead him or others away from the truth, we cannot stand idly by. He is a brother in Christ and must be approached with our concern - because he is a brother. We do not just let him

go his own way. And because we are brothers and sisters in Christ we hold ourselves accountable to one another and we are always open to brotherly admonition.

So, because we are brothers, we must be quick to go to one another in private. And then slow to take a matter public even when we may believe we have the right to do so. Why? Because we are brothers who are to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:3).

Let me close this first part of our presentation with another quote from CFW Walther, from his Essay to the Iowa District Convention in 1879. “My dear Brothers, let us be on our guard! Satan is sly. Right now we are Brothers, living together in peace and love. But Satan will most certainly lay for us snares by which he hopes to destroy the sweet, brotherly love, we now have in our hearts. We dare never think that it is enough if we just remain united in our faith and doctrine. No, once love has been destroyed, it won’t be long before one person believes what the other rejects, and the other teaches what the first considers an error. As the Apology testifies, quarrels and divisions because of personal sins can easily produce heresy.” (Walther, Essays For The Church, volume 2, page 56)

μη γενοιτο! My brothers, may God preserve us from such a fate...

Part 2

In this second part of our presentation, we want to talk about some friction points among us. But first, our assumptions:

We are brothers – brothers by baptism into Christ, brothers in the one Office of Christ.

We share the same confession of Christ because we do subscribe the Augustana and the Book of Concord in the same spirit of the authors of the Formula: “We are determined by the grace of the Almighty to abide until our end by this repeatedly cited Christian Confession as it was delivered to Emperor Charles in 1530. And we do not intend, either in this or in subsequent doctrinal statements, to depart from the aforementioned Confession or to set up a different and new confession.” (Formula, Preface 5, Tappert, p. 502).

Therefore, WHEN we deal with diversities and differences among us, we begin assuming we are brothers and sisters who share one confession of faith. This is not simply an opportunity. This is the only way – for Christ Himself has made us brothers.

We also developed the YOU GO principle on the basis of Matthew 5 and Matthew 18. It is what brothers and sisters do. When you become aware of a problem, YOU GO. You go to win your brother or sister back.

At a previous conference where I presented on Matthew 18, one of the brothers told the story of a church on the open prairies of North Dakota. [I believe it was near Ellendale, so it was just a stone’s throw from South Dakota.] The church building stood out there with nothing around it except for an iron fence to keep the horses from rubbing up against the building. But when you looked more closely, you could see a hard, worn path outside of the fence. That was because of a custom of that parish. If when you arrived at church you saw a brother with whom you were at odds, neither of you would go inside the fence to

the church, but together you would walk around the outside of the fence until you had resolved the issue. And if they were not done when it was time for church? Everyone waited, including the pastor, while these two brothers resolved their issues. That's what Matthew 18 and Matthew 5 are all about. That's how we treat each other as brothers. (By the way, when the story was told, one brother observed that we don't have the patience or the humility to do this.)

Again, I want you to hear me correctly on this. By bringing up Matthew 18 and Matthew 5, I am not thereby implying that Matthew 18 was or was not followed in any particular case in your midst. I do not have the knowledge to judge that for myself. My intent in writing is simply to help each of us hear the Word of God clearly today on how we are to deal with brothers.

(Three Wrong Approaches)

Perhaps another way to approach this is to describe three wrong approaches to working through our conflicts – three wrong approaches I see evident on the Synodical level.

Each one of these 3 wrong approaches, particularly when pushed to the extreme must be avoided – why?

Because we are brothers, brothers in the body, brothers living under one confession, brothers in the one office of Christ.

Once we have talked in general about wrong approaches and confessed our sins, we'll dig into what we are called to do as brothers.

- 1) The first wrong approach is to ignore differences – in other words, to live in denial even when it is obvious we have contradictory perspectives on what the Word of God means. To say, "Yes, I know

that my brother has a different approach, but so what? Just so long as he leaves me alone, I'll leave him alone.

- 2) The second wrong approach is to celebrate diversities of faith – to say, “isn't it wonderful the diversity we have in the church. You believe what you believe and I believe something else. After all, shouldn't there be many ways, and shouldn't we still get along?” Of course, I've drawn a caricature, but there are those who follow this approach (especially when someone has questioned their own particular “diversity”). A crass example of this is the liberal Episcopal Bishop who recently told his diocese that when you are faced with the choice of schism or heresy, you should always choose heresy over schism. Never mind the truth – we've got to stay together no matter what, even if the truth is denied.

- 3) On the other hand, it is also wrong to divide immediately because of differences – that is, to hold the opinion that as soon as we realize we do not think alike, we need to go separate ways. “I cannot agree with you, so you've got to go,” or as a letter to the editor in the Reporter put it a couple of years ago, - Just line the congregations up under position A or position B “We'll all just be better off if we divide the assets and form two groups and merrily go our separate ways!” (But who gets the debt? I ask... Then the fat will really be in the fire...)

Of course, I have couched each of these approaches in an extreme manner to demonstrate what happens when you take the portion of truth found in each one and push it too far.

- 1) For there are differences we can safely ignore. After all God's Word does not speak to every issue in the life of the church. Our confessions call

these things *adiaphora*. There are some issues in the church today about which the Bible does not give an answer. For instance, there may be more than one different practice that can convey the true doctrine.

Augsburg Confession Article VII has this in view when it says: "It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed every where."
(Kolb/Wengert, p. 42)

- 2) And there is a diversity of gifts we are called to celebrate. In many ways we are all different people with different gifts. We are not the same – thank God for that! We remember the words of the apostle, "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in every thing God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 4:10-11). We ought not have a diversity of doctrine, but there must be a diversity of gifts.

- 3) And finally, there does come a time when division is necessary – a time when the enemies of the cross of Christ must be marked out and avoided (Philippians 3:18; Romans 16:17), a time when we must with tears tell someone they have departed from the Word of God and the Gospel. For there is only one Gospel (Galatians 1:9), and the Word of God must be supreme among us. There is a diversity of gifts, but God's Word does not allow a diversity of doctrine or a deviation from sound practice. But talk of division should not even be spoken until and unless it becomes absolutely necessary.

I don't want this to side track us from our purpose, but allow me the opportunity to give brief examples to show how I believe we may have gone astray in each of these three areas:

- 1) In our communion practice across the Synod, it is no secret that we do have contradictory perspectives on what the Word of God requires for faithful practice of who should be communed at the altars in our churches. We haven't completely ignored this issue, but we have too long allowed it to go unresolved among us – thus confusing our lay people and increasing the tension among us. Our Synodical fellowship cannot bear, in my opinion, contradictory practices. We need to help each other come to greater understanding under the Word of God and our confession.

- 2) In some congregations of the Synod, the pastors have moved away from the historic liturgy in favor of what is called contemporary worship. I have no quarrel with a diversity of worship practices or Biblical worship forms, since human ceremonies do not have to be uniform. The congregations in my district use quite a variety of Biblical forms. But if any worship form subverts or marginalizes Jesus and His cross, we are no longer describing healthy diversity.

- 3) And with respect to the divisions within Synod, the case is made by some that we have for a long time been divided, that we are no longer united by our confession, but that the only thing that holds us together is our pension plan. In respect to our present controversies, some are asking whether or not now is the time to divide. "The various sides have staked out their positions," they say, "none of them will give, so we may as well recognize it and be done with it!" they say. Others will look with

condescension on those they feel are less enlightened than themselves and say, "The best response is just to ignore them."

I submit, NO. In fact, I pray fervently – Lord preserve us from such a fate. *Actually, my even greater fear is not that we will split in two, but that we will continue to have one organization, but it will be fractured into a thousand pieces. And we will have a situation where each man does what is right in his own eyes, where there is no real confessional fellowship, and our Synodical organization becomes simply a matter of convenience, not a positive confession of faith.*

What then are we called to do, my brothers? We have differences we ought not ignore, diversities we cannot celebrate and divisions we must not allow to stand.

I believe the answer is at one and the same time simple, yet also impossible for us – apart from Christ and His Spirit. The simple fact is, we pastors are called to deal with each other as brothers in Christ's office, members of the body of Christ. We share one confession of faith. We are called to display the fruit of the Spirit of God – "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." We must be known as brothers who live by, and live under the same Word of God. Brothers with one teacher, one master, one confession, one Lord. It's not just a possibility, but the reality we have been given in Christ Jesus, our Savior.

We are brothers.

Because of that, when we recognize differences, here is how we are called to go to one another to resolve those differences under the Word of God:

- We need to come together in a spirit of humility under the Word of God. We quoted earlier the first part of Peter's admonition concerning humility – "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'" Remember also what he says next: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you." (1 Peter 5:5-6).

- That humility has two sides – 1) We must be ready to put everything we think under the Word of God, to "take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). And 2) We must be willing to listen to our brothers and sisters, for God has given them to us to help us listen to the Word of God.

- We must each come with a desire to hear and confess together God's Word, no more, no less.

- In so doing, we must listen not only to ourselves, but *also* to the testimony of our Church in her confessions.

- We prepare for our discussion together by defining what the issue really is (something in our present controversy in Synod we have not done carefully). In other words, we have to define our terms and clarify what is really at issue – what are the questions? What are the real problems? What are people really saying?

- If we are talking about doctrine, we might also find it helpful to look at it in terms of Pieper's distinction between primary fundamental and secondary fundamental doctrines, non-fundamental doctrines, open questions, theological problems and adiaphora. To put it simply, how does the topic under discussion relate to the doctrine of justification by faith alone, the "article on which the church stands or falls"? How far a field are we from justification? Remember, there are situations where more than one practice may be able to convey the true doctrine.

- Then, we must listen carefully to the Word of God and to each other. A good exercise is to ask each group to state in non-pejorative terms the position of the other side – that way we are sure we understand what others are really saying. Even more, we must let the Word of God be just that – God's Word and the final authority. Remember, God's Word does not allow for a diversity of doctrine or a deviation from sound practice.

- That means we must be ready to put aside our own opinions and be ready to say together what God says. And if we conclude that God's Word is not clear on an issue, we must be ready for that also. In all cases, we seek the unity of the Church in the Word of God.

OK – now let's get down to the specific problems we are having in South Dakota.

List...

You don't want to reveal them? Hey, tomorrow I'm going home and I won't remember who said what...

Well, what about SID? Here are some things we struggle with.

Do you have any trouble with different standards for weddings?

How about people living together?

What happens when someone in one parish gets mad at their pastor for some reason. Then he or she runs to a neighboring pastor to complain. Does this ever happen in South Dakota? We have it too...

[Describe further the concerns of the SD overture.]

[Brothers draw line differently for unionism.]

[List the different things people talk about.]

When we deal with an issue – any issue – here are questions to ask:

What is the doctrinal issue here, if any? Are we agreed on the doctrine? Is there more than one practice that faithfully conveys the true doctrine? How can we help each other understand our practice? How can we learn to say the same thing and be “united in the same mind and the same judgment,” as the apostle writes? (1 Corinthians 1:10). Here's another interesting quote I found in Walther's 1879 Essay in Iowa... “To begin to live is not very difficult, but abiding in love,’ says Luther. Let us note that carefully, dear brethren! That we now love

one another requires no skill. But it 'is truly and art and a virtue' to abide in this brotherly love, for Satan will do everything to destroy this love. Finally, let us also note this extremely important axiom of Luther: 'Where this is no love, there doctrine cannot remain pure!'" (Walther, Essays for the Church, Volume 2, p. 58).

[Pause – look at the list we've made]

We are going to seek solutions to these things together, but before we do that, I have just a few more items to cover.

How does the church live? Only by the forgiveness of sins. Only by bearing with one another in love, for love covers a multitude of sins. The question is – how does remembering that Christ has given us to each other as brothers help us deal with these things?

[Point to the list]

What will brothers do?

- 1) Brothers will not allow members to divide them one from another, but brothers will go to each other. Brothers value each other as gifts of Christ to one another.

- 2) When people from another parish come and talk to us, brothers will not interfere in another man's business, but brothers will send the people

back to their pastor, or else will take the people back to visit with the brother. Brothers will not encourage people to switch congregations but will encourage people to go back to their pastor.

- 3) Remember, your Call is to your parish. His Call is to his parish. That's why we went through all that material on the nature of the church. You are accountable to God through your congregation as he is through his. Perhaps the best approach would be to talk together how you are going to deal with it together when someone – whether maliciously or not – seeks to divide you. Brothers will also meet regularly so that divisions do not arise. That's why we have circuits, so that brothers can work together. How much do you study the Word of God in your circuits?

- 4) Brothers will work together to develop a common approach to common problems. Example: developing a common approach to wedding situations. It may seem like a lot of trouble, but it is worth it. What is the value of brothers living together in unity?

- 5) Brother pastors will teach the members of their congregations...
 - 1) To pray for their sister congregations
 - 2) To be united with sister congregations in faith, life, service and witness
 - 3) As Walther writes, to agree with neighboring congregations "on their mutual geographical boundaries ... and no congregation should receive into membership those who live in the area of other congregations." (Walther, Walther on the

Church, "The Proper Form of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation..."p. 151). We are probably not able to follow the letter of this point, but we need to teach our people to honor its spirit. In other words, we urge people to be loyal to the congregation to which they belong. If someone desires a local transfer, they ought to be required to speak with and to explain to the pastor of the church they desire to leave their reasons why. Any transfers would need to be peaceful – done in the peace of Christ with all issues resolved (See Ephesians 4:28ff and Colossians 3:12-17).

- 4) Not to cast about for another pastor to do their bidding if they have a falling out with their own pastor.

- 5) But to go to one another in love.

- 6) Most importantly, brother Pastors will study Scripture together so that Christ will keep them united to one another and faithful to His Word.

Where does Christ give His gifts? In His Word.

Is peace among brothers our doing? Or is it a gift of Christ?

Where does Christ give that gift? In His Word.

Circuit Counselors – what is your program of study in the Word of God?
How will Christ give His gifts to you? How will you maintain the unity of Spirit in the bond of peace without the Word of God?

Here is another fascinating quote from one of our forefathers regarding this:

In 1884, after the *Gnadenwahllehrstreit* (Predestination Controversy) had come to an end, H.C. Schwan, who had succeeded Walther as President of Synod in 1878, commented on the unity of the Synod in his address to the convention:

What has kept us together until now was not our constitution, as good as it is, not the personality of those who bear the highest synodical offices. No, it was something radically different, something which God Himself has given us. This was the unity of spirit and faith. We remain together outwardly because we are one inwardly. Because of this, districts, congregations, and individuals can never be careful enough in whatever they are doing to maintain the bond of unity. Even though they may have the best intentions in undertaking certain items, if these are not properly thought through, and are not properly considered on the backdrop of love to others and with due respect to the welfare and furtherance of the whole [this unity cannot be maintained]. As long as we by God's grace remain one in heart and soul through the Word and faith, our bond of fellowship and the continued existence of the Synod will not be seriously challenged. If this [spirit] is ever lost, then no constitution will coerce those who rebel, and the resulting cooperation will be of no value. (H.C. Schwan's 1884 Presidential Address, quoted in A. Suelflow, Servant of the Word: The Life and Ministry of C.F.W. Walther, CPH, 2000, p. 133).

Where are we now? Have we lost that sense of unity in the Word of God?

Perhaps we have been led to confess that we have often acted as though we are no longer brothers in Christ. Each of us is called to examine ourselves to ask, to what extent have I forgotten that _____ is my brother *or* sister in

Christ. Remember, it's easy to point to another and see when we think he has forgotten – and because he seems to have forgotten, that's when I begin to feel justified in what I am doing to oppose him. Please hear the following questions as examples of this self-examination:

- Have I lost sight of the fact that we are brothers?
- Have I lost faith in the power of the Word of God to unite us?
- Have I tried to advance God's Kingdom and God's Word by political means?
- Have I begun to push my own opinion over the Word of God?
- Are my actions, my positions based on the whole counsel of God or only one part of it?
- Have I failed to ask my brothers *and sisters* to help me understand the Word of God more clearly? *All my brothers and sisters? Or just the ones who agree with me already?*
- Have I pulled back from my brothers when we do not agree so that I can just go and do ministry my own way without regard to my brothers?
- Have we been afraid of the hard work of the struggle to be faithful to the Word of God?
- Finally, have we pride-fully staked out our position and refused really to listen to our brothers?

My brothers, that was the Law. The Law leads to repentance. In fact, the Law kills, so that the Spirit may bring life.

This is not a sermon, but I have to bring you some Good News! “Now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.” (Ephesians 2:13-16). Jesus is our peace, Jesus is the bond between us. Jesus has connected us, made us brothers. Jesus will enable us to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace.

That’s what the Word of God says. But how much do we believe the Word of God? Sometimes what happens in a controversy is that we become so enmeshed in the destructive back and forth that we despair of any kind of resolution. We fail to see the power of God at work through all of this – sometimes because of us, sometimes in spite of us. We wonder why we are in our present controversy and wish it could have played out differently. We forget that God is working all things for our good – even this – by using it to drive us more deeply into His Word. For it is only in the Word of God that we will be united. It is only in the Word of God that greater harmony and trust will be restored to our Synod! Only in the Word of God can brothers find ways to resolve issues like this.

Yes!

But can God's Word really do that? is the nagging question in our hearts!

When is the last time you sang the hymn – “A Mighty Fortress”? Do you remember stanza, I believe, #3?

Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us.

We tremble not, we fear no ill – they shall not overpower us.

This world's prince may still, scowl fierce as he will.

He can harm us none. He's judged, the deed is done.

One little word can fell him.

In German, it's woertlein – one little word.

I believe it is in the Table Talk (somewhere in the Weimar Ausgabe) – if not, it should be – someone asked Martin Luther, what is that one little word that sends the devil away?

What do you think he said?

The word is LIAR!

Devil, you lie when you say I cannot trust the Word of God. Devil, you lie when you tell me Jesus didn't do it all. Devil, you lie when you say that brothers and sisters cannot dwell together in unity.

Devil, my Jesus called you a liar and a murderer from the beginning – that's what you are! YOU are my enemy, NOT my brother or sister in Christ.

And you know what? When you call the devil what he is, he cannot hide any more. He's got to go.

So I believe God's purpose in this is to expose the schemes of the devil and to drive us together, deeper into God's Word. (But how long does it take? How long did the Apostles meet in Acts 15? We have to keep at it. We have only just begun.)

[OK – now let's look at this list and develop some things we will do as we remember that we are brothers..., brothers in Christ's body, brothers in our confession and brothers in office.]

[Work on list]

What needs to be done to resolve these issues or to prevent them from happening in the first place. What will you – with help of the Spirit of God – do to address the items on the list.

You see, my sisters and brothers, I am convinced that we must not allow our Synod to divide any further. I pray there will be many other efforts to come together. We have to hold onto each other for dear life and RESOLVE divisive issues under the Word of God. Our desire must be, as the Apostle writes, to “destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). Please remember that all of us are susceptible also in this way: Satan is often very sly to take even our best-intentioned efforts and twist them to his purposes. We must be constantly aware of his designs to thwart God's Kingdom and God's will. We must guard our lips and guard our hearts and pray God's constant protection and forgiveness for our minds, our will, our actions.

Once more we go back to 1 Peter, the fifth chapter. Here our Lord's Apostle instructs us how to approach one another to resolve diversities and differences in our midst:

“Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time He may exalt you. Cast all your anxieties on Him, for He cares about you. Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, establish, and strengthen you. To Him be the dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 5:5-11).

“Behold, how good it is when brothers dwell together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1).

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Herbert Mueller

Easter 2004

Living Together As Brothers in Christ - Part 1

1) Introductions

2) Basic Assumptions

Point #1 – The church, properly speaking, is the sum total of all believers in Christ Jesus, that is, all the “holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd” (SA III, XII, Tappert, p. 315).

Colossians 1:3-5; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27
Ephesians 5:25-27; John 10:27-29

Point #2 – Christ Himself gathers His Holy Church of holy believers by and around His Word and Sacrament, for through these means His Holy Spirit creates faith in people who hear the Gospel.

Romans 10:13-17; Apology VII&VIII

Point #3 – The same Holy Spirit gathers these holy believers into local congregations, again by the same Word and Sacrament. That’s why the Word purely preached and the Sacraments rightly done are the marks of the church.

Romans 16:3-5; Apology VII&VIII

Point #4 - Christ has given to His Church the power of the keys, that is, the authority to forgive and retain sins. At the same time the church is commanded by Christ to Call Pastors to carry out this authority publicly on behalf of all.

Matthew 16, 18; John 20; Treatise; Titus 1:5-9

Point #5 - The Synod and its Districts are intended to be a partnership in the Gospel, that is, a fellowship of congregations and pastors who share one confession, namely that of the Book of Concord of 1580.

Philippians 1:3-7; Constitution, Article II

Point #6 - In this fellowship, Christ has made us brothers, brothers in His body, brothers who share one confession and brothers in His Office.

Matthew 23:8; 20:25-26; Philippians 1:27; 2:2-5

Point #7 – In this fellowship of brothers, each one of us is called to be faithful to Christ within our calling. Only Christ has given us our calling.

Acts 20:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

Point #8 – Christ gives us to each other as brothers, brothers in the body, brothers in our confession, brothers in Office, in order to help us remain faithful to Him and to His Word.

1 Peter 5:5; Ephesians 4:1-3; John 17:11, 17

3) So how do we deal with each other as brothers?

- a. We are careful how we speak of one another.
- b. We are mutually accountable to one another.
- c. We bring questions to our brothers.
- d. We put away every sense of competition among brothers.
- e. When offense has been given, we go to the brother. The “You Go” Principle.
Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-20

4) Excursus on the Large Catechism, 8th Commandment

Galatians 6:1

Small Group Discussion

*(Discuss the questions below in the light of the portion of the presentation you have just heard. There are more questions here than you will be able to cover in the time allotted. Pick at least two questions, but **always include the last question!** Thank you.)*

Part 1

Begin by silently considering whom you may have offended in any way. Is there anyone against whom you are carrying ill will? How will you go to him or to her? Pray about this as a group.

List issues within your Circuit and District that have the potential of dividing brothers and sisters from each other. Why are these issues divisive? How will you address the divisions you have identified in your area? What will you do to help address them as brothers and sisters in Christ? How will you go?

We do have issues of doctrine and practice among us. Do you believe also that how we engage one another on these issues is also “an issue”? Why or why not? Discuss.

How do we hold onto each other as brothers and sisters and help each other hear the Word of God clearly? How do we ensure that it is truly the Word of God that rules among us?

What is your vision of how we need to walk together as a Synod? How do we get there? Discuss.

You hear it said, “But Matthew 18 is for private matters – this is a public doctrinal offense. I have to take it public!” Consider: Do Matthew 5 and Matthew 18 apply to cases of public doctrinal offense? How should Luther’s comments in the Large Catechism on the 8th Commandment be applied to our Synodical fellowship? How does Galatians 6:1 apply to disagreements of doctrine or practice?

How does Ephesians 1:9-10 apply to the LCMS at the present time? (See also Ephesians 4:1-6)

Living Together As Brothers in Christ - Part 2

- 1) **We are brothers...**
- 2) **Three wrong approaches**
- 3) **Because we are brothers, here is how we are called to come together to resolve issues**
 - A. In a spirit of humility under the Word of God.
 - B. We must listen to the Word and listen to our brothers.
 - C. Come with a desire to confess the Word.
 - D. Listen to our church in her confessions
 - E. We define what the issue really is.
 - F. How close to justification are we?
 - G. Let God's Word be the final authority.
 - H. Say what God says, no more, no less.
- 4) **What are the issues here in South Dakota?**
- 5) **More Questions to ask:**
 - A. What's the doctrinal issue, if any?
 - B. What are the doctrinal reasons for your practice?
 - C. How can we help each other understand our practice?
 - D. How can we learn to say the same thing?
- 6) **How does remembering that Christ has given us to each other as brothers help us deal with these things?**
 - A. Brothers will go to each other.
 - B. Brothers will not interfere.
 - C. Brothers will meet regularly.
 - D. Brothers will work to develop a common approach to common problems.
 - E. Brothers will teach their congregations
 - F. Brothers will study the Scriptures together.
- 7) **What are some approaches we could take to these issues we have listed, as brothers?**
- 8) **Law and Gospel/Confession and Absolution**
- 9) **The power of the Word of God.**
- 10) **We have no other choice!**

Small Group Discussion

Part 2

The three wrong approaches are so seductive because they each have a grain of truth in them. Discuss each of the following questions in light of that fact:

1. Are there differences we ought not to have ignored? By what criteria do we decide whether or not a difference can be ignored?
2. Are there diversities we ought not celebrate? Diversities of faith or of gifts?
3. Are we running from each other too quickly or are our differences in the LCMS too great to overcome?

Explain your reasons for answering as you did.

Do you see how we have a dual problem, each side of which often exacerbates the other? We have doctrinal differences on several important issues. But we also have forgotten how to deal with each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. Discuss.

The Council of Presidents, in November 2002, adopted the following statement:

***To Restore Harmony and Trust within The Lutheran Church –
Missouri Synod for the Sake of Christ's Mission***

Because Jesus Christ is our peace and has made us one, the Council of Presidents renews its commitment to lead the Synod in addressing:

- 1. The need to work toward agreement in doctrine and practice.*
- 2. The need to provide safe places for responsible theological and doctrinal discussion on the basis of the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.*
- 3. The need to avoid party spirit, rancor and name calling and to treat one another in Christian love.*
- 4. The need throughout the Synod for God's people to seek that humility which leads to genuine repentance and forgiveness.*
- 5. The need to support the President and all other elected officers of the Synod in every effort to focus our church on the Great Commission and to work for harmony within the Synod.*

What would you like to tell the Council of Presidents as it moves forward to live out its statement from November 2002? What can your circuit do to live out this ideal? What should be discussed at future theological conferences? How?

What groups need to come together in your area to help each other hear the Word of God clearly? Confess Christ faithfully? How will this be done? What will you do? How does 1 Peter 5:6-11 apply to the LCMS at the present time?