

A Way Forward with the Harmony Task Force Report and the “Koinonia” Project

Relationship of the Report of the Harmony Task Force and the “Koinonia” Project

Introduction

“Jesus is our peace...” “[Bear] with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 2:14; 4:3)

This brief white paper, referenced in President Harrison’s letter, provides the context for the introduction to the Synod of the Report of the Task Force on Synodical Harmony together with the most recent draft of the “Koinonia Project” concept paper. Please see the companion documents included with the President’s letter. The Report of the Task Force on Synodical Harmony was presented to the Council of Presidents and Board of Directors in November 2010 as a final report. The “Koinonia Project” concept paper, however, represents our present thinking regarding this project proposal. Please remember that the “Koinonia Project” itself is still in the design and development phase. This draft has been presented in a number of venues, yet we are still seeking further input and collaboration in the development. For instance, the draft indicates the necessity of consulting seminary and university faculties, a facet of the development and collaboration that has not yet taken place, though we are very much committed to doing so. Please read these papers together so that you have a picture of how the one will carry forward the work of the other. Pay particular attention to the section below entitled “A Proposal for a Way Forward” which suggests, in part at least, how this might be done.

Background

- The 2007 Synod passed resolution 4-01A calling for a task force to seek strategies for harmony in the Synod.
- The Chairmen of the Council of Presidents and the Board of Directors each appointed three representatives to a task force in the fall of 2007. This group of six invited six more to participate. President Paul Sieveking of the Iowa District West served as chairman of this Task Force. We thank them for their hard and difficult work.
- The Task Force heard personal testimony from 29 different people from across the Synod, plus written testimony from many more. We thank them for their faithful participation.
- Pastor Matthew Harrison, then Executive Director of LCMS World Relief/Human Care (not knowing what the Task Force would do), wrote an essay entitled, “It’s Time,” calling for a “Koinonia Project” designed to engage the Synod in theological discussion regarding divisive issues. This essay was provided to the Task Force.
- The Task Force on Synodical Harmony presented a preliminary report to the Synod (see 2010 Convention Workbook, pp. 74f).

- The 2010 Synod adopted Resolution 7-01 encouraging the Task Force to develop strategies to enable the Synod to work toward greater harmony, and to make its report available to the members of the Synod.
- The President's Office, even before the new administration was installed, began developing the details of a "Koinonia Project." The concept paper presented with this report is part of that on-going work.
- The Task Force on Synodical Harmony presented its final report to the Board of Directors and the Council of Presidents in a joint meeting in Nashville, TN, November 18, 2010.
- The Board of Directors and the Council of Presidents directed the Task Force on Synodical Harmony to meet with representatives of the President's Office to discuss the Task Force's final report, including ways to mesh the Task Force's recommended strategies with the "Koinonia Project" being proposed by the President's Office.
- President Paul Sieveking and First Vice President Herbert Mueller met in St. Louis January 5, 2011, to discuss how this might be done. They noted the following:
 - The Task Force believes they have fulfilled their charge – they were to present suggested strategies. They have done so and believe their work is now finished.
 - There is no need to spend the money to bring even a portion of the Task Force to St. Louis to meet with the President's Office since President Sieveking has represented the Task Force well.
 - Deciding how the Task Force Report goes out to the Synod should be the responsibility of the President's Office in consultation with the COP and BOD.

A Proposal for a Way Forward

- 1) The testimony of the 29 people who testified before the Task Force on Synod Harmony should be sealed in the Archives of CHI for at least 25 years. Each of the people who came before the Task Force did so on the promise of anonymity and confidentiality.
- 2) The Task Force Report and this suggested approach have been discussed at the BOD and COP meetings in February 2011, together with the recommendations for the implementation of the Task Force's strategies and the "Koinonia" Project, and will be discussed further in the near future.
- 3) After this consultation, the Task Force Report and strategies are herewith being published on the Synod's Web Site by the President's Office together with the following:
 - Recommendations for how the strategies suggested might be followed, including also:
 - The present version of the concept paper describing the "Koinonia" Project proposed by the President's Office, outlining a clear way forward (funding also needs to be sought for the project).
- 4) We note that Lent, beginning with Ash Wednesday, March 9, 2011, is a season of repentance. The life of a Christian is one of repentance and forgiveness, but we ask that particularly in Lent 2011 all pastors, Synod and District leaders, as well as congregational leaders in their meetings and private devotions consider how we have sinned against the body of Christ (see the sinful behaviors outlined in the Task Force's Report).

- 5) At this point, we suggest that people read the full Report of the Task Force on Synodical Harmony before continuing further with this paper. Focus particularly on the sins exposed, the strategies suggested and, above all, the forgiving grace of God in the shed blood of Christ on His cross. This report must be received and considered with great care even as we move forward with the “Koinonia Project.”

Strategies Suggested by the Task Force

In the following numbered paragraphs, we quote first the suggested strategies of the Task Force for Synodical Harmony, listing below each strategy recommendations for how the individual strategies might be implemented. The strategies are included in *italics* with possible recommendations listed in “bullet points” below each one.¹

1) *Synod-wide studies of the Scriptures and the Confessions, including studies by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, covering specific topics such as; the 8th Commandment, a theology of diversity, Christian virtues and civility, the political culture of the church, accountability and harmony.*

- The President’s Office, together with the Council of Presidents and the CTCR, will need to discuss how this might be done – e.g. writing, editing, funding, etc.

2) *Our seminaries and universities include these topics in the formation of our clergy and professional workers.*

- The President’s Office will need to work with the Seminary and University Presidents and Academic Deans to consider how this might be done.

3) *Training & modeling for and by the Council of Presidents, the Circuit Counselors, and all other church leaders.*

- The Council of Presidents will need to make the discussion of how this will be done a top priority.

4) *A Code of Conduct, developed with input from across the Synod, adopted by the Synod, in which we express common expectations of one another and seek to hold ourselves and one another accountable for appropriate behavior.*

5) *Those who are charged with ecclesiastical supervision must be trained to hold us all accountable when our actions and attitudes are inappropriate.*

- The Council of Presidents might examine the fine work done in the Michigan District on a “Code of Conduct” (see also #4).
- Perhaps the COP Document from the 1980s, “Commitments of the Shepherd,” should be revised and updated.
- Both of these documents could be studied and recommended by a group in the “Koinonia” Project.
- The Council of Presidents will need to have ongoing discussion and study of the task of holding church workers accountable for their teaching and life.

6) *The need for continuing education.*

- Pastors Conferences, Circuits, Congregations, District Conventions, Seminaries, and the Council of Presidents all should discuss how this need can be stressed. However,

¹ Report of the Task Force, pages 17f.

someone needs to take this on so that it is not lost in the shuffle of all the other responsibilities we all have.

7) The *clergy* must recognize their responsibility and engage in working toward greater harmony within our Synod.

- The might begin with the call for a “season of repentance and prayer” in Lent 2011 (though repentance and forgiveness in Christ are always an on-going need).
- We might ask the Council of Presidents to ask all District Pastoral Conferences to discuss the Report of the Task Force and the proposal for a Koinonia Project.
- Perhaps a Circuit Winkel Bible Study series on the topics of concord and harmony might be prepared.

8) The *dialog* must include all positions, at every level of the church; within our congregations, circuits, auxiliaries, Synod-wide theological convocations and smaller focus groups as well.

- It is imperative that we begin the “Koinonia” Project to get at the sources of the theological tensions among us.
- The dialog engendered by this project must be comprehensive, as this strategy suggests.
- Please refer at this to the latest draft of the concept paper for the “Koinonia” Project.

9) *Communication* is a key issue. We need to learn to use the media appropriately-officially and unofficially.

- Pastors Conferences, Circuits, Congregations, District Conventions, Seminaries, and the Council of Presidents all should discuss how this need can be stressed. However, someone needs to take this on so that it is not forgotten due to all the other responsibilities we all have.

Next Steps...

After reading again the “Final Report of the Task Force on Synodical Harmony,” please read and study the latest draft of the concept paper for the “Koinonia Project” also included with this package. Both the Board of Directors and the Council of Presidents, are studying the draft and working with the President’s Office to carry this forward. The paper presents the beginning of a way forward for the implementation of these strategies and for the theological dialog recommended by the “Koinonia Project” (also referenced in the task force’s report).

*Yours in Christ,
+ Herbert Mueller
First Vice President, The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod*