COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY AND CHURCH RELATIONS
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

WHAT IS THE CTCR?

The Holy Christian Church consists of all those—and only those—who trust in God's Son, Jesus Christ, as their Savior from sin. It is called into being, nurtured, and extended by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel in Word and Sacraments. Because the church's life is so intimately involved with these means of grace, it must take special care that they are not falsified or distorted in any way as the church reaches out to people living in a particular time or place. A church body that prizes the Gospel will therefore be concerned about theology.

Moreover, because Christians are "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3), a Christian church seeks to deepen and strengthen in every way possible its own internal unity and also its relationship with other Christian church bodies. Such a church body is therefore vitally concerned with proper church relations.

In order to provide leadership in dealing with the Synod's needs and opportunities in the areas of theology and church relations, the Synod established the Commission on Theology and Church Relations in 1962. Since that time, the Commission has provided reports on a number of significant theological issues and has been the Synod's primary agency for monitoring the Synod's ecumenical relationships with other Christians. Most of the CTCR's reports, along with other theological documents and resources, are available on the CTCR's website at http://www.lcms.org/ctcr.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE CTCR

The membership of the Commission is carefully chosen so that it is as representative of the Synod as possible. In addition to the president and first vice president of the Synod and the presidents of the Ft. Wayne and St. Louis seminaries (who are advisory members), the membership of the Commission is made up of sixteen voting members: four lay persons, four pastors (two of whom must be parish pastors and one of whom must be a district president), one parish teacher, four seminary professors, one college or university professor, and two others. Five of these members are elected by the Synod convention, four are appointed by the seminary faculties, four by the Council of Presidents, and three by the president of the Synod. Because of his responsibilities, the Assistant to the President for Church Relations also regularly consults with the Commission. Because of its membership and the way it is chosen, the Commission represents a microcosm of the Synod itself.

DUTIES OF THE CTCR

The major functions and duties of the Commission are stated explicitly in the *Handbook* of the Synod (3.9.5, 3.9.5.2, 3.9.5.2.1, 3.9.5.2.2, and 3.9.5.3) as follows:

3.9.5 The Commission on Theology and Church Relations exists to assist congregations in achieving the objectives of Article III 1 and 6 of the Constitution of the Synod and to assist the President of the Synod in matters of church relationships.

3.9.5.2 The Commission on Theology and Church Relations shall assist the President of the Synod at his request in discharging his constitutional responsibilities for maintaining doctrinal unity within the Synod.

3.9.5.2.1 The Commission on Theology and Church Relations shall provide guidance to the Synod in matters of theology and church relations.

(a) It shall bring matters of theology and church relations through special studies and documents to the membership of the Synod and to conferences.

(b) It shall refer theological issues and questions to the proper individuals or groups of individuals for additional study.

(c) It shall suggest and provide studies of contemporary issues, including also current social issues, as they affect the church and as the church may affect such social issues.

(d) It shall foster and provide for ongoing theological education through institutes, seminars, and other means.

(e) It shall obtain and study theological treatises, conference papers, and similar documents and studies.

3.9.5.2.2 The Commission on Theology and Church Relations shall assist the President of the Synod at his request in discharging his constitutional responsibilities for maintaining doctrinal integrity as he relates to other church bodies.

(a) It shall address itself to and evaluate existing fellowship relations for the purpose of mutual admonition and encouragement.

(b) When a church body applies for formal recognition of altar and pulpit fellowship with the Synod, such recognition shall be proposed at a convention of the Synod only after the approval of the commission.

(c) When a small, formative, emerging confessional Lutheran church body (identified as such by the President of the Synod as chief ecumenical officer) requests recognition of altar and pulpit fellowship with the Synod, and after consultation with the Praesidium and approval by the commission, such recognition may be declared by the President of the Synod subject to the endorsement of the subsequent Synod convention.

(d) When a mission of the Synod applies for formal recognition as a self-governing partner church, such recognition shall be proposed at convention of the Synod by the Board for Mission Services with the approval of the commission.

3.9.5.3 The Commission on Theology and Church Relations shall assist congregations and ordained and commissioned ministers of religion in fulfilling their commitment to witness publicly and privately to the one and only Gospel set forth in the Holy Scriptures specifically as they carry out their responsibilities relating to membership in societies, lodges, cults, or any organizations of an unchristian or anti-Christian character to which the Synod has declared itself firmly opposed.

STRUCTURE AND ACTIVITY OF THE CTCR

The Commission seeks to carry out these functions and duties by meeting together four times during each year. The sixteen voting members of the Commission are assigned by the plenary commission to one of three standing committees:

Committee I — Church Relations
Committee II — Theology
Committee III — Church and Society

The Commission was not established by the Synod to function as a kind of "Roman curia" or "ecclesiastical Supreme Court" that issues final answers to all kinds of questions. Nor is it charged with responsibilities of ecclesiastical supervision or doctrinal review of materials produced by Synod entities. Rather, the CTCR is a service agency of the church that seeks to give the church guidance and direction on theological, ethical, and ecclesial matters that have been referred to it by the Synod itself or its official entities. It does this primarily by preparing documents that address specific theological issues of relevance and concern to the church. In the performance of its tasks, the Commission currently has the services of two full time executives, a part-time executive assistant, an administrative assistant, and an administrative secretary.

CURRENT ASSIGNMENTS

Listed below are some of the most significant assignments on the Commission's agenda at the present time:

Committee I

1. "Inter-Christian Relationships" (1981 Res. 3-03A; 1992 Res. 3-14)
2. SMP/Ordained Diaconate (Synod President)
3. Study on "Priesthood of All Believers" (2007 Res. 1-03)
4. International Conference on Confessional Leadership (2013 Res. 4-04)
5. Guidance for Responsible Communion Practice (2007 Res. 3-09)
6. Fellowship Requests (Lutheran Church in Norway [LCN]; Lutheran Church in East Africa [LCEA]; Indonesian Lutheran Christian Church [GKLI])
7. Address Questions re Licensed Lay Deacons (2013 Res. 4-06A; cf. 1989 Res. 3-05B)
8. Work with President and ILC to Promote Confessional Lutheranism Worldwide (2010 Res. 3-02)
9. Work with ILC in Preparation of "Study Resources" for 2017 Celebration of Reformation (2007 Res. 3-02; 2013 Res. 3-15)
10. To Study Article VI of LCMS Constitution (2010 Res. 8-30B)
11. Study and Guidance on Confession and Absolution (2013 Res. 4-13)

Committee II

1. Women Teachers of Theology (Synod President)
2. Prepare New Studies on Biblical Interpretation (2010 Res. 3-07)
3. Relationship of Man & Woman (1995 Res. 3-10; 2010 Res. 3-06; 2013 Res. 4-11A)
4. Address Women in Combat (2013 Res. 2-12A)

Committee III

1. Relationship Between Science and Theology (CUS, 2009; 2013 Res. 4-15)
2. Hostility Toward Christianity (CTCR, 2008)
3. Request for Opinion on "House Churches" (NJ DP, 2013)
4. Monitor Evaluations of Societies, Lodges, Cults, and Religious Organizations (2007 Res. 3-08—ongoing work)
5. Provide Assistance Regarding Bioethics (cf. 1977 Res. 3-26—ongoing work)
6. Update Synod's Catechetical Materials (2013 Res. 3-13A)
7. Study of Baptism—Doctrine and Practice (2013 Res. 4-08A)

ONGOING ASSIGNMENTS

A. Internal Church Relations

In any church body, but particularly one with a membership as large as the LCMS, there will be disagreements about various matters. Sometimes these disagreements are on relatively minor matters, but at other times they touch deep issues. One of the tasks of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations is to attempt to provide guidance in addressing the problems that cause such polarization. This is done through providing forums and conferences for the discussion of the most critical issues that are troubling our people.

B. Partner Church Relations

Through the Commission the Synod devotes considerable time and effort to improving and deepening relationships with our partner churches, that is, the 33 churches with which the Synod is in altar and pulpit fellowship. For a list of LCMS Partner Churches, see http://www.lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=1372.

In 2008, a new office was created (Director of Church Relations—Assistant to the President), so that full-time attention could be given to the ever-increasing challenges and opportunities in world Lutheranism today. The Executive Director of the CTCR and the Director of Church Relations work closely together with each other and with the President of the Synod in addressing these needs and opportunities.

A meeting of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) is held every two years so that the leaders of the ILC's 34 member churches (most of whom are partner churches of the LCMS) can discuss common problems and seek common solutions that are faithful to the Word of God, see http://www.ilc-online.org/.

C. Other Lutheran Bodies

The CTCR also monitors discussions with Lutheran church bodies and groups with which the Synod is not in altar and pulpit fellowship. In North America these include the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the North American Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The Commission also monitors the work of other Lutheran organizations and groups (e.g., Lutheran CORE, Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ [LCMC]). In so doing it seeks: (1) to recognize obstacles to and opportunities for altar and pulpit fellowship; (2) to support and encourage faithfulness to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions; and (3) to consider ways in which we can work with fellow Lutherans in external matters without violating doctrinal integrity.

Internationally, the Commission has regularly reviewed the structure and functions of the Lutheran World Federation, and has continued to monitor developments in this organization. Over the years, the Executive Director of the CTCR has often represented the Synod as its official observer at the general assemblies of the LWF. CTCR staff members have also engaged in various conversations and meetings with representatives of large and growing Lutheran church bodies such as the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, the Lutheran Church of Tanzania, the Malagasy Lutheran Church, and others. Such contacts have increased significantly recently due to strong opposition by many LWF churches to the Church of Sweden's and the ELCA's sexuality decisions of 2009.

D. Other Christian Churches and Groups

Although the LCMS is not a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) or the National Council of Churches (NCC), the Commission makes an effort to keep abreast of the latest developments within these groups. At the request of the President and the CTCR, the Executive Director of the CTCR participates in meetings of the NCC's Faith and Order Commission and, when possible, attends meetings of groups such as the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and Christian Churches Together (CCT).

Through the CTCR and the President's office, the Synod takes part in various ecumenical discussions and dialogs. In past years the Synod has participated in discussions with Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, Methodists, the Orthodox, Baptists, the Reformed, and Evangelicals. The LCMS is currently involved in theological discussions with the Anglican Church in North America and with the North American Lutheran Church. In addition, there is hope for theological conversations with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church on such topics as natural law and the responsibilities of Christians and Christian churches in matters of public policy. The goal of these dialogs is for our churches to gain a greater understanding of and appreciation for one another, to affirm each other insofar as we are able, and "to cooperate in externals" where that is feasible and can be done without theological compromise.

In short, the CTCR is one of the Synod's key agencies for guiding and directing its contacts with other Christians. This contact is important not only to show continued interest in and concern for fellow Christians, but to bear witness to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as we know it in the Holy Scriptures.

E. Religious Organizations and Movements

The 2001 Synodical Convention adopted Res. 7-27A "To Combine Commission on Organizations and Commission on Theology and Church Relations." This resolution assigns to the CTCR the responsibility, formerly given to the Commission on Organizations, to "assist congregations and ordained and commissioned ministers of religion in fulfilling their commitment to witness publicly and privately to the one and only Gospel set forth in the Holy Scriptures specifically as they carry out their responsibilities relating to membership in societies, lodges, cults, or any organizations of an unchristian or anti-Christian character to which the Synod has declared itself firmly opposed" (Bylaw 3.9.6.3). In carrying out this responsibility, the Commission has constructed a special website providing evaluations from a Lutheran theological perspective of a broad range of religious organizations and movements – both Christian and non-Christian. More than thirty evaluations are now available, including such recently prepared evaluations as Islam, Latter Day Saints and the Human Potential Movement.

F. Other Responsibilities

1. CTCR Sponsored Conferences, Consultations, and Convocations
2. Theological Opinions
3. Recognition of Altar and Pulpit Fellowship and Partner Church Relationships (Bylaw 3.9.6.2.2)
4. Expressions of Dissent (Bylaw 1.8)
5. Task Force and Special Assignments

Dr. Joel D. Lehenbauer
Executive Director
Commission on Theology and Church Relations
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
1333 S. Kirkwood Road
St. Louis, MO 63122
E-mail: ctcr@lcms.org

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ROSTER
COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY AND CHURCH RELATIONS
2013 - 2016 Triennium

Membership consists of 16 voting and 4 advisory members.

COP REPRESENTATIVE
Cripe, Rev. Terry

LAYPERSONS
Farney, Mr. Kirk (Cmte. III Chair)
Pitkus, Dr. Andrea
Schwarz, Mr. Jeffrey
Yow, Jr., Dr. Jesse

ORDAINED MINISTER
Rosin, Rev. Dr. Robert (Secretary)

PARISH PASTORS
Dargatz, Rev. Robert
Pullmann, Rev. Arlo

PROFESSORS
Bartelt, Rev. Dr. Andrew (Vice Chairman)
Fickenscher II, Rev. Dr. Carl
Gieschen, Rev. Dr. Charles (Cmte. II Chair)
Oschwald, Rev. Dr. Jeffrey
Penhallegon, Rev. Dr. Philip

TEACHER
Hardy, Mr. Timothy

ADDITIONAL PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTEES
Egger, Rev. Thomas
Ziegler, Rev. Dr. Roland (Cmte. I Chair)

ADVISORY
Harrison, Rev. Dr. Matthew
Meyer, Rev. Dr. Dale
Mueller, Jr., Rev. Dr. Herbert
Rast, Rev. Dr. Lawrence

STAFF
Lehenbauer, Rev. Dr. Joel
Vogel, Rev. Larry

ELECTED BY CONVENTION (5) 2 parish pastors; 1 parish teacher, 2 laypersons (6 year terms / max. of 12 consecutive years)	**CURRENT TERM EXPIRES**	
Dargatz, Rev. Robert	2019	(1st of 2 potential terms)
Hardy, Mr. Timothy	2016	(1st of 2 potential terms)
Pitkus, Dr. Andrea	2019	(1st of 2 potential terms)
Pullmann, Rev. Arlo	2016	(1st of 2 potential terms)
Schwarz, Mr. Jeffrey	2016	(1st of 2 potential terms)
ELECTED BY SEMINARY FACULTIES (4) 2 faculty members from each seminary 3 year terms / max. of 9 consecutive years)		
St. Louis:		
Bartelt, Rev. Dr. Andrew	2016	(2nd of 3 potential terms)
Oschwald, Rev. Dr. Jeffrey	2016	(2nd of 3 potential terms)
Fort Wayne:		
Fickenscher II, Rev. Dr. Carl	2016	(2nd of 3 potential terms)
Gieschen, Rev. Dr. Charles	2016	(3rd of 3 potential terms)
APPOINTED BY PRESIDENT (3) 1 college/university faculty members; 2 others (3 year terms / max. of 9 consecutive years)		
Egger, Rev. Thomas	2016	(2nd of 3 potential terms)
Penhallegon, Rev. Dr. Philip	2016	(1st of 3 potential terms)
Ziegler, Rev. Dr. Roland	2016	(2nd of 3 potential terms)
ELECTED BY COUNCIL OF PRESIDENTS (4) 2 ordained ministers (one from COP); 2 laypersons (3 year terms / max. of 9 consecutive years)		
Cripe, Rev. Terry	2016	(1st of 3 potential terms)
Farney, Mr. Kirk	2016	(3rd of 3 potential terms)
Rosin, Rev. Dr. Robert	2016	(3rd of 3 potential terms)
Yow, Jr. Dr. Jesse	2016	(2nd of 3 potential terms)

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