

# President's Leadership News



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## Our Synod's future

I am very optimistic about the future of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod!

I say this because we have been so greatly blessed by God. We have His holy Word and Sacraments, the means of grace. He has granted us a unique understanding of Law and Gospel, sin and grace, justification and sanctification, with a special focus on the theology of the cross. He has given our Synod doctrinal clarity and doctrinal unity that are the envy of many other church bodies.

This isn't the end of the list of special blessings the LCMS has received. This year I attended 23 of our Synod's 35 district conventions, which were held between January and July. At those conventions, I met not only many wonderful pastors and other church workers, but also many outstanding laypeople. The men and women of this church body are incredibly gifted and unwaveringly committed to the mission and Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are devoted to Christ and are active in sharing their faith and serving others in their communities in the name of the Lord. These gifted and talented individuals give me great hope for the future of our Synod.

We also have an incredible system of education. From our preschools, elementary schools, and high schools to our universities and seminaries, we have a wonderful educational system. Our pastors and commissioned ministers have outstanding theological expertise, are established solidly in the truths of Scripture, and are trained to apply God's Word in their own lives and in the lives of those they serve.

We are working to better equip our people to reach out with the Gospel to the culture around us. The Holy Spirit continues to work through the Gospel to change the lives of people, moving them from condemnation to redemption and from despair to hope.

The Spirit of God is alive in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod! And wherever His Spirit dwells, there is great hope for the future.

Christian church bodies from around the world regularly knock on our door. They seek our assistance, very often with such matters as theological education and church



Jerry Kieschnick

planting. Some of these are emerging Lutheran church bodies in other countries which seek financial assistance for support of their meagerly compensated pastors. Others are established Lutheran churches, some larger than the LCMS, that are challenged by theological directions and decisions being made by some of their church partners. All are coming to us because they recognize our Synod's solid Scriptural and confessional foundation and are looking to us for leadership.

Without a doubt, we have opportunities and challenges. I shared some of these in my report to the district conventions, and I do so now in this issue of *President's Leadership News*.

The days immediately ahead promise to be a time of Gospel advancement that could be unparalleled in the history of our Synod or even of the Christian church. Together with our 30 partner churches and with emerging Lutheran church bodies, we are part of God's mission to set the world ablaze with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

So, I am very optimistic about the future of the LCMS! I believe God has great things in store for us as we work hard and love large, not being fearful, but remaining faithful to the mission task of our Lord Jesus Christ—sensitively, humbly, boldly, courageously, evangelically, and unapologetically proclaiming the Gospel.

It is a humbling privilege and awesome responsibility to serve as president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. As the Lord continues to give health and strength, opportunity and calling, I look forward to exciting years ahead as together we vigorously make known the love of Christ by word and deed within our churches, communities, and the world!

Jerry Kieschnick

John 3:16-17

Lives Transformed through Christ, in Time ... for Eternity!

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## Culture offers 'trouble'; we deliver hope

*This is an edited and abridged version of the report I presented via video to each of this year's 35 district conventions. The full report is available for viewing or download in video format on my Web site: [www.lcms.org/president](http://www.lcms.org/president)—G.B.K.*

My dear Christian friends, I am here to tell you, as I have before, that there is trouble in "River City." The trouble is . . . the decline of Christian belief, presence, and influence in our communities and the accompanying moral decay of our culture.

Media biases against Christianity are undeniable. Public expressions of family values are often in conflict with biblical norms. Attitudes toward the church in the United States are marginal at best and condescendingly discriminating at worst. Religious beliefs are being defined by personal whims and philosophies, not by the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God.

We are at a defining moment in the history of our culture and the role of our Synod in it. How will we intentionally and strategically engage with the Gospel of Christ a culture that is at best indifferent and at worst downright hostile toward the Christian faith?

How we respond is one of the biggest issues our Synod faces today. It is my prayer, encouragement, and firm belief that we will face it by responding with hope.

We deliver hope to people because our God is a God of hope who has a plan for our future. This hope is based on God's grace through our Lord Jesus Christ. This hope is in the One who calls us to salvation through the waters of Baptism, empowers us by the Holy Spirit to live out our Christian faith in word and deed, and emboldens us "vigorously to make known the love of Christ within

our churches, communities, and the world!"

In many ways, we are living in a present-day Babylon, strangers in a godless and foreign land. Yet, God has called us to engage our culture with the Gospel, even as he called His people at the time of the Babylonian exile (ref. Jer. 29:4-7 ESV).

We are to live out our divine calling as Christian families and Christian communities in the places where we reside. We must actively engage our culture by seeking the welfare of the cities and communities in which we live and by praying to the Lord on behalf of the people who live there, including those of ethnicities and backgrounds that are vastly different from ours.

I firmly believe God has a plan for hope and a future for each of us and for our Synod. His plan includes motivating us through the Gospel to work toward bringing all His people into fellowship with Him. That is the goal of the *Ablaze!* movement with its targets of reaching 100 million people worldwide with the message of the Gospel, beginning 2,000 new congregations and revitalizing the mission of 2,000 existing congregations in this country, increasing the number of career missionaries on foreign mission fields, and increasing support for our 30 partner church bodies throughout the world.

*Ablaze!* is about **outreach**—sharing Law and Gospel so that sinners may repent and be baptized. *Ablaze!* is about being **accountable**—caring enough about people who are dying and going to hell to share with them the Christ-centered hope that is within us!

This mission of outreach is being

accomplished while we simultaneously uphold our Scriptural and confessional beliefs. The Word we proclaim and confess is both confessional and missional, because our God is the God of Truth and the God of Mission.

This is the hope we have for our world—Jesus Christ, our ever-present help in trouble. Let there be no doubt, we live in a world filled with trouble. But we also live in the grace and presence of our God, through Whom alone we have hope and a future!

My challenge to you is to be engaged fully in the plan of God as the people and congregations of the LCMS—to be engaged fully in the ONE Mission of seeking for Christ people who are lost and without hope; sharing with them the ONE Message that Jesus Christ, and He alone, is the Savior of the World and that He is their Savior; and doing so as ONE People, forgiven through Christ's love, suffering, death, and resurrection—and striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel.



President Gerald Kieschnick delivers his report in June to the South Wisconsin District Convention.

■ Photo by Ron Kamprath

### LCMS MISSION STATEMENT

In grateful response to God's grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacraments, the mission of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is vigorously to make known the love of Christ by word and deed within our churches, communities, and the world.



ONE Mission: [God] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. • 1 Tim. 2:4 (ESV)

ONE Message: ...[I]n Christ God was reconciling the world to himself • 2 Cor. 5:19 (ESV)

ONE People: Standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel . . . • Phil. 1:27 (ESV)

# Synod exceptionally united in what we believe, teach, confess

The following thoughts were presented at this year's district conventions as an introduction to the video report of the Synod president.—G.B.K.

Many years ago, the church of my forefathers in Serbin, Texas, split. The children from the school at the new church and the children from the original church threw rocks across the cemetery at each other during recess. Eventually, the two churches reunited, and the united congregation celebrated its 150th anniversary several years ago. Very few people alive today can articulate what that controversy was really all about.

[Rev. Michael Buckhorn, who at one time served as pastor of the Serbin congregation, wrote to me after the Texas District Convention, "At some point, the things which divided them were not as important as what united them. . . . To me, it demonstrates that it is possible by the power of the Spirit (and in some cases the passage of time) to get past the divisiveness so that God-pleasing unity can be restored."]

Our Synod has seen challenges, struggles, and conflicts throughout its history. Congregations and individuals have disagreed, argued, and even fought over many issues, resulting in family dissension and ecclesiastical division.

Much of that disharmony has resulted from serious doctrinal controversies.

Other disagreements have been over matters that we today might consider relatively minor, including Boy Scouts, life insurance, dancing, women sitting in church with men, and the use of the English language.

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

- That there is only one true and triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who created the world in six days.
- That the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, fell into sin by disobeying the command of God.
- That since the fall into sin, all people are born with original sin and are incapable of pleasing God by their own merits, works, or behavior.
- That God promised a Savior to Adam and Eve and, through them, to all people.
- That this Savior is Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, who died for the sins of the whole world.
- That only those who trust in His atoning work will be saved eternally.
- That those who do not have faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior will not spend eternity in heaven, but eternal condemnation in hell.
- That we are saved by God's grace alone, without any merit or worthiness of our own.
- That we are saved through faith in Christ alone, not by our own efforts, works, or endeavors.

- That the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ is the doctrine on which the church stands or falls.
- That the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments are the inspired, inerrant, infallible, written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice.
- That the Lutheran Confessions are a true statement and exposition of the Word of God.
- That all the miraculous accounts recorded in Holy Scripture actually occurred.
- That Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
- That Jesus healed the lame, the deaf, and the blind, and raised the dead back to life.
- That Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried.
- That Jesus rose from the grave and ascended into heaven.
- That in, with, and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion, Christ is truly present; we receive His true body and blood for the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of eternal salvation.
- That the Bible teaches that abortion is not a moral option except as a tragically unavoidable byproduct of medical procedures necessary to prevent the death of another human being.
- That homosexual behavior is contrary to the will of God and therefore intrinsically sinful.
- That marriage is a divine institution that binds one man and one woman together in a one-flesh union not to be broken until death parts them.
- That all baptized Christians are members of the priesthood of all believers.
- That the Scriptures teach that while women are not to hold the pastoral office, they are free to use their God-given gifts in service to the Lord and His Church in other biblically appropriate roles.
- That fellowship with other church bodies has as its basis complete agreement in doctrine and practice.
- That Holy Communion, Holy Baptism, and the Word of God are the means through which God conveys to sinful human beings His grace—His undeserved love and forgiveness—and through which the Holy Spirit calls individuals to faith in Christ.

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

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

- The administration of Holy Communion, mainly regarding who should be invited or allowed to commune at the altar of our

Lord in LCMS congregations.

- The service of women, mainly in what roles and capacities Scripture allows or commends the participation and involvement of women in the church.
- Questions about proper forms of worship, mainly how much uniformity is necessary in the worship life of LCMS congregations and, on the other hand, how much and what kind of diversity in forms of worship is acceptable.
- Inter-Christian relationships, mainly how to remain a biblical, confessional, evangelical, Christian, Lutheran church body boldly confessing the truth in love and relating to other Christians and Christian churches, while honoring our covenants of love to avoid unionism and syncretism.

In the years ahead, our Synod will need to continue to work under Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions to achieve solidarity also in these mat-

ters. Where Scripture speaks plainly and clearly, the matter is resolved. Where Scripture does not speak plainly, clearly, or at all, it behooves us as rational, reasonable, mature Christian people to come to a godly and common-sense conclusion regarding how to proceed with mutual respect and non-offensive conduct.

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

## The Synod's finances; how ministry is funded

With the economy in the news, it's not surprising that at conventions I often was asked about the Synod's finances. What might be surprising, though, is that our country's economic woes may have less to do with the Synod's finances than the way our national and international work is funded.

Each year about \$1.4 billion are received in the offering plates of our congregations. Of that amount, approximately 5 percent, or \$70 million, is forwarded by congregations to the 35 district offices for the work carried out through the districts and national Synod. The districts, in turn, decide how much to forward to the national office.

This year, the total pledged by the 35 district offices to the national and international work of the Synod totals some \$19 million—less than 1.5 percent of what originally was placed into the offering plates by the people of God in our congregations.

The Synod's Board of Directors allocates this \$19 million in *unrestricted* (or *undesignated*) dollars to the program boards and other agencies of the Synod for their national and international work. This fiscal year, the Board of Directors adopted a balanced budget of \$81 million. Quite obviously, the \$19 million in unrestricted monies received from Sunday-morning offerings is not nearly enough to meet this budget for our joint work of mission and ministry. This leaves a balance of \$62 million that must be raised from direct gifts.

This is why you and I, as members of LCMS congregations, receive letters and phone calls requesting direct, *designated* gifts for the work of the Synod's program boards (e.g., for missions and human care). Similar requests are received on behalf of our seminaries, universities, and other underfunded ministries.

A related question I often receive is why the Synod through its national budget does not fully fund our seminaries and universities. The hard facts are that the combined budgets of our seminaries alone total \$36 million. With only \$19 million in total *undesignated* funds, simple math tells us that even if *all* of the *undesignated* dollars forwarded to the Synod were to be given to the seminaries, these

dollars would fund only about half of their budgetary needs. And, there would be nothing left for any of the other work assigned by the congregations of the Synod to our other agencies and ministries.

Leaving the Synod's boards, officers, and other agencies with no option but to generate their own financial support is an obvious shift from the way the Synod funded its ministries in the past. In 1973, for example, the Synod received \$24 million in *undesignated* gifts for its collective work. Adjusted for inflation, the \$19 million received today is the equivalent of only about \$5 million in 1973 dollars. The *undesignated* financial support received this way just does not begin to accomplish as much today as it did in the past.

What's more, some of our congregations give nothing to support mission and ministry on the district and national levels—not one thin dime! In some cases, most congregation members are not even aware of this fact. In other cases, congregation members and pastors state various reasons for this non-support. But as members of the Synod, these congregations have the same rights and privileges—for example, voting at conventions and calling church workers trained at our schools—as congregations that do contribute to our joint work.

Along with rights and privileges come duties and responsibilities, one of which is to support the organization to which one belongs. This is true of every organization of which one is a part. It is true also in our Synod. If you are a member of a congregation that is not contributing to the joint work of our district and national Synod, I invite you fraternally and evangelically, prayerfully and carefully, to reconsider this decision. We truly can do more together than we can apart.

That said, I do thank sincerely all who are faithful in their support of the national and international work we do together in the LCMS.

During these difficult economic times and in the days ahead, we continue to rely on our gracious God to provide for the work of His kingdom. I give thanks to God for your partnership in His ministry of reconciliation of the world through Christ and for our role as His ambassadors of that reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:17-21).