



THE
LUTHERAN CHURCH
Missouri Synod

Letter to the Church

Moving Forward in Military Chaplaincy without the ELCA, Beginning 2012

July 18, 2011

Chaplains are missionaries, unique missionaries, serving as “pastors in uniform” to our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines. Chaplains are a special breed. They serve God and country under unique and often difficult circumstances around the world.

Pan-Lutheran cooperative ministry began in May 1941 during the Second World War when the Missouri Synod joined the National Lutheran Council. The work of the Council advanced cooperative ministry for all participating Lutheran bodies during and following the war. In 1967, pan-Lutheran ministry became the Division of Service to Military Personnel (DSMP) under the new Lutheran Council USA (LCUSA). For the next twenty years, cooperative ministry continued under LCUSA between the three major Lutheran denominations at that time: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), The American Lutheran Church (ALC) and the Lutheran Church in America (LCA). In 1988, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) was formed out of the LCA and the ALC. The previous cooperative working arrangements continued with some modification, such as joint-communion services no longer being held annually at the four Lutheran chaplain conferences (Europe, Far East, West Coast, East Coast) due to growing doctrinal differences between the church bodies.

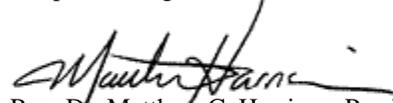
Today, like two ships at sea sailing apart on different compass headings, the ELCA and the LCMS have lost sight of each other. The two churches are pursuing different courses in our ministries to military members. The doctrinal differences and tensions have been exacerbated by the position of the ELCA on same-sex unions and the imminent repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” In addition, the ELCA has made its direction clear by the mutual decision between the ELCA and the Episcopal Church in the USA (ECUSA) to hold joint denominational training conferences together beginning in 2012.

After thorough examination by the LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces committee (MAF) of all pertinent cooperative ministry issues among military chaplains and with input from all LCMS chaplains now serving on active and reserve duty, I am announcing today that the past cooperative working arrangement between our two church bodies with respect to the military chaplaincy can no longer be supported. Beginning in 2012, and for the foreseeable future, the LCMS will conduct its chaplain training conferences unilaterally.

In garrison or in the field, Lutheran chaplains will continue to minister to all Lutherans in uniform and exercise proper pastoral discretion on a case-by-case basis in the administration of Word and Sacrament ministry, taking into account the individual circumstances of each case. Our chaplains will continue to follow the Military Chaplain guidelines as approved by the Synod. While we recognize the service of ELCA personnel, we can no longer commend our LCMS military personnel to ELCA chaplains without increasing and grave reservations.

This decision has not been made lightly. We proceed in full recognition of the many fruitful years of cooperative work the participating Lutheran Church bodies have shared, tempered by the growing doctrinal divide in teaching, preaching and application of the Word of God.

It is my sincere prayer that the Lord of the Church would continue to guide, keep and bless His people according to His plenteous grace in Christ Jesus, our Lord.



Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, President
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