

**Task Force for Synodical Harmony
Report to the Board of Directors and Council of Presidents
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod**

A PROGRESS REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON SYNODICAL HARMONY

INTRODUCTION

The 2007 national convention of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod adopted Resolution 4-01A:

Resolved, that the Council of Presidents and Board of Directors as elected leaders of the Synod be given the responsibility to initiate a specific plan for the sake of the whole church to restore harmony in our Synod; and be it further

Resolved, that they bring together a representative group of respected leaders throughout this church for a summit, and that at the end of this summit these church leaders present to the Council of Presidents and to the Board of Directors a strategy toward harmony that demonstrates how this great church body can provide a God-pleasing witness of our confession and practice; and be it finally

Resolved, that the product of their coming together honor the Scriptures and Confessions and dishonor the work of Satan that diverts us from the “way of the Lord.”

In response to this resolution the Council of Presidents and Board of Directors chartered a group of 12 leaders in the Synod with the task of recommending “a strategy for harmony.” Three of these leaders came from the Council of Presidents, three from the Board of Directors, and six from the church at large. This group of 12 constitutes the Task Force on Synodical Harmony.

Early in our work, the task force members realized that we needed a common language for communication with the church and with one another. Three concepts that kept reappearing in our conversations were unity, concord, and harmony. We often used them interchangeably with some confusion and miscommunication. It was extremely helpful in our work to develop a clear definition for each of the concepts. These can be summarized below:

- *Unity*: The oneness that all believers in Christ have with each other through Spirit-given faith in Jesus created through the means of grace. “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:4). This unity cannot be seen by human eyes, but we confess it by faith: “I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic church” (Nicene Creed).
- *Concord*: The oneness that believers in Christ seek to manifest and express in their confession of the Gospel and “all its articles” (FC SD X, 31). The church’s unity as confessed in the Creed is a “given.” Concord in doctrine and confession is a goal that we “strive to maintain” (Ephesians 4:3) by God’s grace on the basis of his Word. St. Paul urges the Christians at Corinth—and us—to speak the same thing, to avoid divisions, and to be perfectly united in the same mind and judgment (1 Corinthians 1:10-11). The Book of Concord sets forth what we in the LCMS continue to affirm without qualification as a “single, universally accepted, certain, and common form of doctrine,” drawn from the Word of God, that bears faithful witness to the oneness of doctrine and confession that serves as the basis for true concord in the church.

- *Harmony*: The oneness that believers in Christ seek to manifest and express in their life together as God’s people. Paul urges those who are united in Christ and who seek to manifest that unity through concord in doctrine and confession to be eager to maintain this unity “in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). He reminds the Christians at Corinth that Christ-like attitudes and behavior are crucial to their efforts to maintain doctrinal concord (1 Corinthians 13). Above all, says Paul in Colossians, “put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:14). “Paul urges that there be love in the church to preserve harmony... lest the church disintegrate into various schisms and lest enmities, factions and heresies arise from such schisms” (Ap. IV, 232).

In summary, unity focuses on our oneness with Christians everywhere by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Concord focuses on our oneness in doctrine and practice. Harmony focuses our life together in Christ to be characterized by Christ-like attitudes, particularly love. These definitions helped us focus on a Biblical understanding of harmony and its relationship to unity and concord.

Task force members also reached some initial conclusions as we considered our charter. These observations were foundational for our work:

- While we will look at what divides and alienates us from one another, we must not ignore the abounding grace of God among us. God’s people still gather around the Word and the Sacraments to be graced with His forgiveness and together move forward in God’s mission in the world. The treasure of the church is still ours – the glory and grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- While disharmony in the synod is nothing new (an undercurrent of quarrelling, rumor, and unkind words being present through most of our synod’s history), in recent years it has deepened to the point of being destructive of both our unity in Christ and our concord in doctrine and practice.
- We are convinced that until we find a way to speak and to listen to one another in love, little hope exists for moving toward greater concord in doctrine and practice. Luther’s insight is compelling: “Where there is no love, there doctrine cannot remain pure” (see AE 24, 246).
- We also believe that conflict can be a blessing in the church. Historically, the church has taken quantum leaps out of its conflicts. The debate at the Jerusalem Council clarified the church’s doctrine of salvation and united her in mission. The Arian conflict of the 4th Century led to a Trinitarian confession in the Nicene Creed. The conflict over justification in the 16th Century led to the Reformation and the Lutheran Confessions. Closer to home, the LCMS conflict of the 1970’s yielded a church with a more clearly defined theology of the authority of the Scriptures.
- Disharmony in the LCMS is not just about what we say and what we do with one another; it is about the way we are with one another. It is a concern for our character as Christians who share a common loyalty to the Scriptures and the confessions and to walking together as a synod.

PROCESS

Resolution 4-01A directs the following: “Resolved, that they (the Council of Presidents and Board of Directors) bring together a representative group of respected leaders throughout this church for a summit.” With the approval of the Council of Presidents and Board of Directors, task force members proceeded to extend the number of “respected leaders” beyond themselves. The “summit” of Resolution 4-01A would become a process of listening to voices from across the synod.

The task force sought to listen to what we perceive to be a representative group of LCMS leaders. Each of these leaders was invited to make a presentation to the 12-member Task Force, responding to the question: “What do you suggest as a strategy toward greater harmony in the LCMS?” Presenters were given 20 minutes for their presentation, followed by 30-40 minutes of conversation with the task force. Each of the 29 presenters appeared alone with the task force members and was given assurance of the anonymity of their presentation. We express our gratitude to them for their preparation, time, and wisdom.

These presentations were made in St. Louis September 2-3 and October 28-29, 2009.

Each presentation was transcribed verbatim for members of the task force, who in turn individually summarized in writing what we had heard from the presenters. These summaries provided invaluable perspectives on the disharmony present in synod. From these presentations and summaries, the task force identified key aspects of synod’s disharmony.

ASPECTS OF THE PRESENT DISHARMONY IN SYNOD

Below are the seven aspects of disharmony in the LCMS that the task force heard in the process detailed above. The descriptors are not presented in any rank order of importance.

1. *Inability to Deal with Diversity.* While most (not all) presenters agreed that our church is blessed with amazing concord in matters of doctrine, all recognized that we see diversity among us in practices. These practices relate to such issues as; admission to Holy Communion, worship substance and style, the Office of the Public Ministry and the role of laity, and the service of women in the church. Some of these practices are closely tied to our doctrinal beliefs—hence a concern among some of our presenters about unhealthy “doctrinal diversity” in the Synod. Others are simply a matter of tradition and preference. Holding high the values of preserving uniformity and tradition, we have not learned how to address diversity among us—whether it is perceived to be “doctrinal” or “non-doctrinal.” The same difficulty with diversity is apparent in the lack of inclusion in leadership positions experienced by women, ethnic minorities, and the young.
2. *A Lack of Civility.* Simple Christian virtues like kindness and gentleness are often lacking in our dialogue, especially among LCMS clergy. Rumors, sarcasm, and satire characterize much of our conversation over our differences. At times there is an actual breach of the commandments as lies and slander seem to become the expected behavior among us. Reflecting the same incivility we see in the political world today, our church has conformed to the world’s standards of character and conduct when confronting our differences. Paul’s descriptive words in 1 Corinthians 3:3 seem especially appropriate here: “You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?”

3. *A Politicized Culture.* National and some district conventions have become more politically charged than ever. Political lists have become the norm. The LCMS is becoming a denomination of parties, each seeking to elect its own candidates as leaders. In recent decades, the parties in power are perceived to proceed with a “scorched earth” policy, totally disenfranchising the losing party. Rather than valuing all the voices in the LCMS, the “losing” voices are silenced until they can amass enough votes to gain power and do the same to the other party. Helpful here is Jesus’ description of “the rulers of the Gentiles who lord it over them” (Matthew 20:25).
4. *Primarily a Clergy Problem.* Repeatedly, the task force heard that the problem of disharmony in the LCMS is primarily a clergy problem. Certainly lay people have participated in our synod’s disharmony as well, but pastors seem to be in the forefront of practices and attitudes unbefitting God’s people. While some clergy may contend that “anything goes” when fighting for truth, such an approach ignores both our unity and concord as Christians and as confessional Lutherans. Is there something in the personality of some of our pastors that brings on an attitude of judgment, criticism, and elitism toward other pastors? Is there something lacking in pastoral formation at our seminaries that allows pastors to enter the ministry with little appreciation for collegiality and mutual encouragement? The apostle Paul counsels the young pastor Timothy: “And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently teach in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 2:25-26). Have many of our clergy lost their confidence that gentle teaching from the Word is the way to truth?
5. *Poor Communication across “Party Lines.”* Though some progress has been made through theological convocations in recent years, we still seem unable to communicate well across the lines that divide us. We have lost the ability or the will to listen. We also balk at true transparency, often failing to speak the truth in love with one another (Ephesians 4:15), a sign of spiritual immaturity. The task force is eager to find ways by which healthy communication can happen among us. Whatever process may be developed, it must be centered in the Word and the Sacraments, prayer, and confession and absolution.
6. *Lack of Accountability.* Pastors causing disharmony by sinful attitudes and behaviors must be held accountable. Currently no code of conduct exists for LCMS pastors, especially as it relates to collegiality and public behavior. With no standards for reference, it becomes difficult to hold one another accountable. No matter the person’s “party” within synod, there must be consequences for sinful behavior. District Presidents and Circuit counselors, who serve as ecclesiastical supervisors in our synod, have this responsibility and must exercise it. They must admonish, teach, encourage and model “churchmanship”. Where lay people are concerned, local pastors and elders are responsible for this accountability.
7. *Distrust.* The product of the above is a deep distrust among clergy. The years of many pastors spending a decade together in pastoral formation are gone. Pastors don’t get to know each other as they did in the past. Even within circuits they have little contact with one another’s families. This distancing of clergy and years of politicization have led to a damaging distrust, which makes communication and a commitment to civility very difficult. The task force is eager to recommend ways by which trust can be built or enhanced among both clergy and lay people.

NEXT STEPS

The task force intends to continue working to develop specific strategies which address these aspects of disharmony in the LCMS. Presentations before the task force included not only these aspects of disharmony but also suggestions to move us toward greater harmony.

As the task force continues to meet, we will ultimately present a plan to the Council of Presidents and the Board of Directors. It is our prayer that the strategies identified will enable us to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

Surely our unity in Jesus Christ and our concord in doctrine are treasures to be cherished and preserved. And surely God’s mission on earth unites us in a common cause with eternal consequences. May the harmony we share as we walk together increasingly enhance our unity and concord for the sake of God’s mission.

Members of the Task Force for Synodical Harmony

Paul Sieveking, Chr. (Council of Presidents)
Ken Hennings (Council of Presidents)
Dean Nadasdy (Council of Presidents)
Kermit Brashear (Board of Directors)
Betty Duda (Board of Directors)
Roy Schmidt (Board of Directors)
Wally Arp (At Large)
Tom Cedel (At Large)
Eloy Gonzalez (At Large)
Joel Lehenbauer (At Large)
Linda Reiser (At Large)
Glen Thomas (At Large)

2010 CONVENTION ACTION

The 64th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod adopted **Resolution 7-01 “To Encourage Task Force on Synodical Harmony”**

“**Whereas**, The 2007 LCMS convention, by adoption of Res 4-01A, directed action to initiate a specific plan to restore harmony in our Synod for the sake of the whole church; and

Whereas, In response to Res 4-01A, the Council of Presidents and Board of Directors chartered a group of twelve leaders in the Synod with the task of recommending “a strategy for harmony”; and

Whereas, The “Progress Report of the Task Force on Synodical Harmony” has been published as a report to this convention (2010 CW, pp 74–76); therefore be it

Resolved, That the aforesaid report be made available to members of the Synod by publication on its Website; and be it further

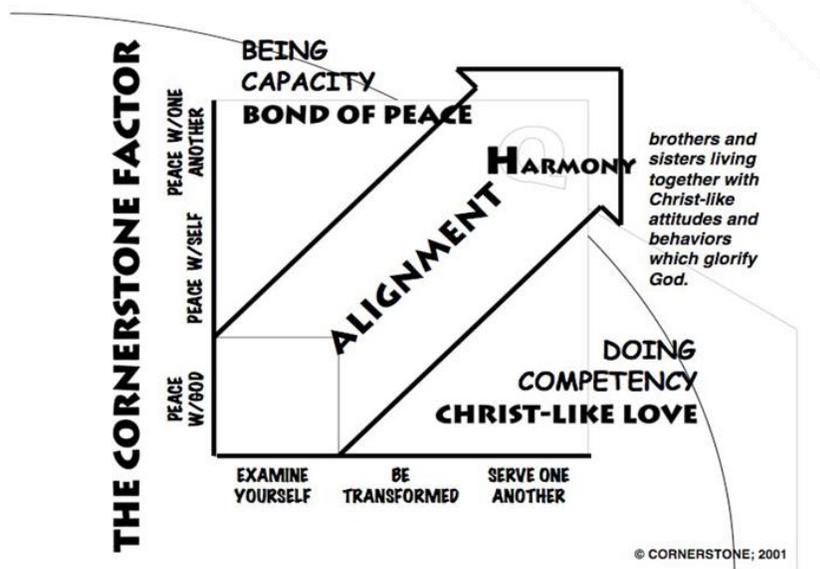
Resolved, That the task force be encouraged in its continuing work of developing specific strategies to move us toward greater harmony in the LCMS; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod at large be encouraged to continue its efforts to be in harmony with one another

Action: Res 7-01 was adopted as presented [Yes: 799; No: 254])”

A FINAL REPORT

Encouraged by the action of the 2010 Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (Resolution 7-01) the Task Force continued its work. We first developed a model to guide the process for crafting specific strategies to address each of the “Aspects of the Present Disharmony in Synod” identified through the "hearings," as described in our progress report. We found the following model beneficial to our work.



SOME DEFINITIONS

Once again the members of the task force recognized the need for a common language for communicating with the church and with one another. Through our ongoing study of Scripture, we adopted the following definitions:

PEACE WITH GOD. . .

Process toward the “Bond of Peace” begins as God makes peace with us through Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2: 14-16)

PEACE WITH SELF. . .

Inner peace, rooted in Christ’s forgiveness, results in personal wholeness and wellness. (Colossians 3:15)

PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER. . .

Peace with God and peace with self empowers us for wholeness in our relationships with others. (Romans 12:18)

BOND OF PEACE. . .

By His Spirit Christ binds us together in peace. (Ephesians 4:3)

EXAMINE YOURSELF

Christ-like love for others begins with God’s judgment on our failure to love others as Christ has loved us, leading us to examine ourselves and humbly recognize our sins. (Lamentations 3:40; James 4:10-11)

BE TRANSFORMED. . .

Christ-like love flows from hearts and minds that have been renewed in repentance, which include faith in God’s promises and continual transformation by the power of God’s Spirit. (Romans 12:2)

SERVE ONE ANOTHER. . .

Christ-like love is demonstrated by humbly serving others. (Galatians 5: 13-15; I John 4:19; John 15: 9ff)

CHRIST-LIKE LOVE. . .

By His Spirit Christ empowers us to love others as He first loved us. (Colossians 3:15; John 15: 9ff)

HARMONY. . .

Brothers and sisters living together with Christ-like attitudes and behaviors which glorify God. (for a fuller definition see the “Progress Report” page 2)

THE PROCESS

The Task Force then developed a simple, straightforward process to further clarify potential approaches for addressing each of the seven aspects of disharmony.

- **Define the aspect.**
- **Identify the shortcomings.**
- **Articulate the future.**
- **Select Indicators of Success.**
- **Determine the path.**
- **Assign responsibility.**

INABILITY TO DEAL WITH DIVERSITY

Define the aspect.

- As a Synod, we have not learned how to address diversity among us—whether it is perceived to be doctrinal or non-doctrinal. The same difficulty is apparent in the lack of inclusion in leadership positions experienced by women, ethnic minorities, and the young.

Identify the shortcomings.

- The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod does not have a history of diversity.
- There are deep disagreements among us about diversity, what it means, and how to deal with it.
- The simple solution is that we want the diverse to join/agree with us.

Articulate the future.

- The LCMS holds fast to its doctrinal confessions, celebrates Christian freedom, and reflects the changing demographics of the United States.

Select Indicators of Success.

- The LCMS is a multi-racial, multicultural, less monolithic, more polyglot church body.
- Our ethnic and gender diversity is represented at all levels of synod.
- At the same time, differences in doctrine and practice are dealt with evangelically.
- The LCMS is a growing, thriving church body faithfully proclaiming the Gospel in a diverse world.

Determine the path.

- A Synod-wide study of Scripture and the Confession on God-pleasing diversity.
- Determine what is appropriate diversity and what is inappropriate, unscriptural diversity.
- Seek common understanding in practice.
- Seminaries prepare clergy to go out into an increasingly diverse culture.
- Actively seek, recruit, and fund a more diverse population of students for our universities and seminaries.
- Involve diverse groups in the work on these issues.

Assign responsibility.

- Ask The Commission on Theology and Church Relations to produce a study on “The Theology of Difference.”
- Our seminaries must continue to implement changes in pastoral formation which prepares our clergy for a diverse church body.
- Ultimately, each of us, every Synodical entity, and every congregation needs to recognize and celebrate God-pleasing diversity. (Revelation 7:9-10)

A LACK OF CIVILITY

Define the aspect.

- Incivility is demonstrated by the lack of Christian virtues such as respect, self-control, kindness, fairness, and gentleness in our interaction with others and in our communication about others.

Identify the shortcomings.

- Rumors, lies and slander are rampant among us.
- We reflect the rudeness of the society around us.
- We have failed to put the best construction on everything.

Articulate the future.

- The culture of the LCMS is more civil as we practice Christian virtues in our interactions with one another.

Select Indicators of Success.

- Uncivil behavior is respectfully and fairly challenged.
- People speak well of each other, even across party lines.
- Our communication addresses the issue and not the person.

Determine the path.

- A Synod-wide study of Christian virtues (e.g. “Commitments of the Shepherd” adopted by the COP in 1991).
- Expectations for civil behavior will be included in a Code of Conduct (e.g. “Partners in Ministry—Ethical Conduct...” for workers and congregations adopted by The Michigan District 2009). This approach must allow for expressing concern for the spiritual health of pastors and others who may have participated in uncivil behavior. Confession and absolution is the heart of this.
- Studies for the Pastoral and Professional Worker Conferences and/or District Conventions. These must allow for self-examination and transformation.
- COP training regarding ecclesiastical supervision and common implementation.
- Circuit Counselors Conference to provide training and resources.
- Develop a set of norms for Synodical and District Boards and Committees.
- Produce a sermon series on Christian virtues for use throughout the Synod.
- Articles on civility are written for Synodical publications.
- Provide guidelines for Synodical Conventions, District Conventions for civil behavior.
- Work with the Auxiliaries to produce resources for their societies and members.
- Seminary training must expose students to these concepts.

Assign responsibility.

- Partner with Commission on Ministerial Growth and Support and others.
- Include these topics for discussion on COP program.
- The COP, the BOD, and the Office of The President must lead our Synod by serving as models of God-pleasing behavior.

A POLITICIZED CULTURE

Define the aspect.

- “Churchmanship” has been replaced by a factionalism and party spirit that pervade the LCMS resulting in a win/lose mentality that distracts from our unity, concord, and mission.

Identify the shortcomings.

- Our politicized culture consumes energy and resources.
- It results in contentious conventions.
- It is often focused on personalities.
- It has created a “win/lose” mindset that often results in “scorched earth” policies.
- We focus on power and control rather than servanthood.
- Candidates cannot be nominated or elected without party backing.
- It has fostered false dichotomies.

Articulate the future.

- Differing opinions become assets for building the church.
- Conventions become times of celebrations and encouragement.
- Leaders seek to serve the whole church.
- Resources are aligned toward the mission.

Select Indicators of Success.

- Synod walking together toward (a) common goal(s).
- Greater respect within the Synod for differing points of view.
- Identification with a party does not preclude serving the whole church.

Determine the path.

- Acknowledge, respect, and seek to include all of the parties within the Synod.
- Articulate and teach the positive tensions that have characterized our Synod (e.g. law/gospel, confession/mission).
- Review and refine (redefine if needed) the offices of Synod and District President.
- Teach “servant leadership.”
- Train leaders for dealing with a political culture (e.g. “Partners in Ministry Ethical Conduct...”-- Michigan District).
- Nominating Committees seek nominees to serve the whole church--not the parties.
- Seek input and learn from our partner churches (e.g. Mekane Yesus).

Assign responsibility.

- Ask the CTCR to produce a study on “The Political Culture of the Church.”
- The seminaries must teach our clergy how to live within a politicized culture.
- The COP, the BOD, and the Office of The President must lead our Synod by serving as models of God-pleasing behavior.

PRIMARILY A CLERGY PROBLEM

Define the aspect.

- Belying, belittling, betraying, slandering and speaking evil of others is exemplified by clergy in the LCMS resulting in practices unbefitting God's people.

Identify the shortcomings.

- Some of our clergy seem to lack the skills to interact peacefully.
- They often display arrogance, self-righteousness, and a lack of humility.
- In their zeal to defend the "truth" they often adopt an "anything goes" approach.
- In presenting their own position they often misrepresent the position of others.

Articulate the future.

- Clergy of LCMS lead the way in defending others, speaking well of them and taking words and action in the kindest possible way and seek to understand and relate to others especially in areas of difference.

Select Indicators of Success.

- Clergy seeking opportunities to know, understand and dialogue with people before making judgments or publicizing criticism.
- Evidence of personal contact with verification of facts and positions.
- Able to state the other's position in a thoughtful, caring, and honest way.
- Pastors encouraging one another to evaluate their words and behaviors in light of the 8th Commandment.

Determine the path.

- A Synod-wide study of the Scriptures and confessions regarding the 8th Commandment in the context of all vehicles of communication especially the hi-tech options available today.
- Emphasis on study of 8th Commandment and application of it in pastoral formation in LCMS.
- Intentionally bring together known opposing parties in the church for open dialogue to demonstrate helpful communication that seeks greater understanding of others' positions.
- A synod wide, yearlong emphasis addressing 8th Commandment application through all entities and publications.
- District Presidents encouraging those in their districts who are involved in divisive communication to ensure they have full understanding of other's position.
- An annual review of behaviors and words of entities of Synod to assess how we are doing with 8th Commandment.
- Synod consider requirements for ongoing education and recertification that addresses this issue and others.
- Perhaps a Synod-wide call for a "cease-fire" and reconciliation talks.

Assign responsibility.

- Intentionally unassigned.

POOR COMMUNICATION ACROSS PARTY LINES

Define the aspect.

- We do not communicate well across the lines that divide us. We have lost the ability or the will to listen. We also balk at true transparency, often failing to speak the truth in love with one another (Ephesians 4:15).

Identify the shortcomings.

- We communicate poorly because we are not speaking, listening, and understanding.
- Communication is often practiced exclusively with like-minded individuals.
- Communication is often done through non-transparent means (e.g., e-mail, blogs) with an inherent lack of accountability.
- We sometimes refuse to communicate – evidenced in verbal and non-verbal manifestations (absenting oneself from contact with others).

Articulate the future.

- Our communication is characterized by speaking the truth in love and listening with the desire to understand.

Select Indicators of Success.

- Leaders who hold opposing views come together for the purpose of dialogue and deeper understanding of one another's views.
- Members of opposing parties are able to express accurately the position(s) of one another.
- Even those with opposing views participate in activities (e.g., Winkels) where fellowship includes speaking the truth in love with one another.
- Fellowship (enjoying the God-given bond we share).
- Our communication is rooted in confession and absolution, in the Word and Sacrament.

Determine the path.

- The Synod's expectations for appropriate communication are articulated in a "Code of Conduct."
- Appropriate communication in the church is part of the formation of church workers (Concordia University System and Seminaries).
- The leadership of our Synod (The COP, BOD, pastors, and congregational leaders*) must lead by example.

Assign responsibility.

- The LCMS President, District Presidents, and the entire system of ecclesiastical supervision must be involved.
- The Seminaries and the Concordia University System must teach appropriate communication within the church.
- Ultimately, every one of us must hold ourselves accountable for our own communication, especially as it reflects the 8th Commandment.

LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Define the aspect.

- In the LCMS we often fail to “submit to one another” (Ephesians 5:21) and to hold one another accountable for attitudes and behaviors detrimental to the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of one another and harmony in the church.

Identify the shortcomings.

- Our actions often reflect attitudes of apathy, arrogance, conceit and lack of Christian love.
- We isolate ourselves, personally and emotionally, from those who differ with us.
- There seems to be an absence of collegiality or even fundamental relationships.
- We lack a set of agreed upon standards or a code of conduct.
- We fear God-pleasing confrontation.
- The dispute resolution process may hinder simple accountability.
- We are unwilling to invest the time needed to hold one another accountable and resolve our disputes.
- We fail to recognize this as a spiritual problem.

Articulate the future.

- The LCMS is characterized by a culture of willing, mutual, and respectful accountability that glorifies God and nurtures harmony in the church.

Select Indicators of Success.

- A set of standards (Code of Conduct) is adopted.
- Better relationships between pastors.
- Training for Council of Presidents and Circuit Counselors in ecclesiastical supervision.
- Pastors are open and welcome the concept of accountability.
- The Dispute Resolution Process is renewed and used appropriately.
- The LCMS is recognized throughout the church and the world for its civility.

Determine the path.

- A Synod-wide study of Scripture that creates a Biblical case of submission, accountability, and harmony.
- Produce a set of standards (short, succinct, focused on civil behavior with a pastoral tone, emphasizes this is a spiritual issue). The focus is more than just accountability.
- Training for COP and CC around accountability and ecclesiastical supervision.
- Dispute Resolution is reviewed and renewed.
- An awareness campaign that allows for input and feedback.
- Accountability within the Synod is included in the formation of future church workers. It could be included in the outcomes of what is expected in graduates. .

Assign responsibility.

- Ensure the assignment includes people from diverse viewpoints.
- Ask the CTCR to consider a Theological Convocation on Harmony.
- District Presidents include this in training CC and other professionals.

DISTRUST

Define the aspect.

- Suspicion, accusation, poor communication, unhealthy relationships and inappropriate behaviors threaten our Synod's harmony.

Identify the shortcomings.

- We doubt one another's faithfulness.
- Often our attitudes and behaviors are unworthy of trust.
- Our workers feel threatened and unsafe in ministry.
- Our lack of trust results in unhealthy pastor/people relationships.
- Lack of deep relationships among clergy results in further isolation.
- We have minimized the importance of trust.

Articulate the future.

- The LCMS recognizes the importance of trust and works hard to build trust and earn trust in clergy and lay relationships.

Select Indicators of Success.

- Pastors and laity are held accountable for not being trustworthy.
- Pastors and laity are committed to building relationships that foster trust.
- Less anxiety, fear, resentment and insecurity at all levels of Synod.

Determine the path.

- Train circuit counselors in a process to build stronger relationships within their circuits.
- Provide safe settings for addressing issues in ministry or personal life.
- Provide opportunities for genuine theological dialogue as having integrity in itself.
- Look for working models in other denominations and partner churches.

Assign responsibility.

- District Presidents.
- Circuit Counselors.
- Commission on Ministerial Growth and Support Staff.

THEMES, PATTERNS, THREADS

The next step in our process was to seek common themes that are repeated across the seven aspects of disharmony. We identified and prioritized them according to the following criteria:

- 1 Immediate vs long-term impact
- 2 Strongest, significance, scope of impact
- 3 Probability of success
- 4 Need greatest impact for least effort
- 5 Simple easy first steps
- 6 Strongest impact on clergy

STRATEGIES

The task force presents to the Council of Presidents and to the Board of Directors a strategy, more specifically a number of strategies, toward harmony that demonstrate how our great church body can provide a God-pleasing witness of our confession and practice. We pray that our work together will honor the Scriptures and Confessions and dishonor the work of Satan that diverts us from the “way of the Lord.”

- 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.
- 2) **Our seminaries and universities** include these topics in the formation of our clergy and professional workers.
- 3) **Training & modeling** for and by the Council of Presidents, the Circuit Counselors, and all other church leaders.
- 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.
- 6) The need for **continuing education**.
- 7) The **clergy** must recognize their responsibility and engage in working toward greater harmony within our Synod.
- 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.
- 9) **Communication** is a key issue. We need to learn to use the media appropriately--officially and unofficially.

THE KOINONIA PROJECT

We invited First Vice-President, Herbert Mueller to join us at our September 22-24, 2010, meeting. He presented a concept paper on “The Koinonia Project,” part of President Harrison’s three point vision: **Witness, Mercy, and Life Together**. We shared with Vice-President Mueller the continuing work of the task force since our progress report.

We are encouraged that “Life Together” (koinonia) is to be a major focus of the Synod as we face the future. We believe that the work this task force has done over the last triennium can be a key piece toward improving our life together in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Our work, as we have understood our charge, has focused on harmony. Early in our work we defined harmony as, “The oneness that believers in Christ seek to manifest and express in their **life together** as God’s people. Paul urges those who are united in Christ and who seek to manifest that unity through concord in doctrine and confession to be eager to maintain this unity “in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). He reminds the Christians at Corinth that Christ-like attitudes and behavior are crucial to their efforts to maintain doctrinal concord (1 Corinthians 13). Above all, says Paul in Colossians, “put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:14). “Paul urges that there be love in the church to preserve harmony...lest the church disintegrate into various schisms and lest enmities, factions and heresies arise from such schisms” (Ap. IV, 232).”

After many meetings, hours of listening to viewpoints representing a broad spectrum of the Synod, a great deal of study, and prayer, we remain convinced that:

- Until we find a way to speak and to listen to one another in love, little hope exists for moving toward greater concord in doctrine and practice. Luther’s insight is compelling: **“Where there is no love, there doctrine cannot remain pure”** (see AE 24, 246).
- While we will look at what divides and alienates us from one another, we must not ignore the abounding grace of God among us. God’s people still gather around the Word and the Sacraments to be graced with His forgiveness and together move forward in God’s mission in the world. The treasure of the church is still ours – the glory and grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Members of the Task Force for Synodical Harmony

Paul Sieveking, Chr. (Council of Presidents)
 Ken Hennings (Council of Presidents)
 Dean Nadasdy (Council of Presidents)
 Kermit Brashear (Board of Directors)
 Betty Duda (Board of Directors)
 Roy Schmidt (Board of Directors)
 Wally Arp (At Large)
 Tom Cedel (At Large)
 Eloy Gonzalez (At Large)
 Joel Lehenbauer (At Large)
 Linda Reiser (At Large)
 Glen Thomas (At Large)