



The Confessional Lutheran Letter

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About the Cover Artwork

The very symbolic artwork on the cover shows events spanning more than seventy years. It is by Leipzig engraver C. F. Boetius, and was prepared for the 1703 edition of the Book of Concord. At the top are pictured Electors Augustus I of Saxony who saw to the publishing of the Book of Concord in 1580, and Christian II of Saxony who ruled when it was republished in 1602. Between them is their coat of arms with the Reformation motto in Latin: “The Word of the Lord Remains Forever” (Isaiah 40:8). The figures holding the motto symbolize government’s duty to protect it’s people by force against invaders and to maintain peace internally. God’s covenant name (in Hebrew) and the symbol of the Holy Trinity are at the center.

Elector Augustus I is shown again in the background signing the Book of Concord, witnessed by Martin Chemnitz and Jacob Andreae, who both did extensive work on the writing of the Formula of Concord. In the foreground are Electors of Saxony Heinrich and John “The Steadfast” shown signing the Augsburg Confession. John preceded Heinrich and ruled when the Augsburg Confession was presented in 1530. They are witnessed by Luther and an angel holding a cross with the German inscription, “Through faith alone.” Luther points to Bible references of the Old Testament Reformation under faithful King Hezekiah. Stacked in front are the individual books contained within the Book of Concord. The Sacrament of the Altar, so central to the Reformation and the Christian faith, stands even farther forward.

Sermon for The First Sunday After Trinity

Reverend Robert Lawson, Jr. of St. Paul, Escondido, California

Genesis 15:1-6 / 1 John 4:16-21 / St. Luke 16:19-31

In the Name of † Jesus. Amen.

Dearly Beloved,

The next few Sundays continue the themes of Pentecost and Trinity Sunday by telling us more about the Holy Spirit’s work of creating and preserving the church. In other words, these Sundays focus on faith in Christ, and on the means by which such faith is

created and nurtured.

The story of the rich man and poor Lazarus divides neatly into two parts that treat each of these subjects. The first part is about justifying faith. As article 4 of the Augsburg Confession puts it:

Our churches teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works. People are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in His sight.

The second part of today's Gospel is about how we get such faith. Again, the Augsburg Confession states it so clearly:

So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given. He works faith, when and where it pleases God, in those who hear the good news that God justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake. This happens not through our merits, but for Christ's sake.

So we sing in one of Dr. Luther's prayerful hymns to the Holy Spirit:

*We now implore God the Holy Ghost
For the true faith, which we need the most,
That in our last moments He may befriend us
And, as homeward we journey, attend us.
Lord, have mercy! (TLH 231:1)*

Now, the two people in Jesus' story serve as caricatures, or exaggerations, that Jesus uses to illustrate His point. Certainly there are greedy rich people, but the poor are just as greedy, maybe more so. I mean, how does a politician get elected to public office these days? By marketing himself as a modern day Robin Hood. He'll take a huge chunk of wealth from those privileged fat-cats, and redistribute it to the poorer, "deserving" masses in the form of

entitlement programs. What else is socialism, anyway, but an institutionalized coveting of thy neighbor's goods? The fact is, greediness, lovelessness, and mercilessness are sins common to every class in society: upper class, lower class, and middle class.

This story isn't really about the tension between rich and poor, wealth and poverty. It's not even about luxury versus abject suffering. Money is not evil. Love of money is evil, but money itself isn't. Rich people die and go to heaven every day. Nor is poverty a sanctified life. Poor people die and go to hell every day. This parable is about how people get to heaven. It's about how sinners are regarded as righteous before God. It's about true justifying faith versus unbelief. The behavior of the rich man is a caricature of the unbeliever. I say it's a caricature because it all depends on whose doing the looking.

This story isn't really about the tension between rich and poor, wealth and poverty. It's about true justifying faith versus unbelief.

We look at how rich folks behave and what do we see? Is there really any rich man so miserly and so callous toward the suffering of his neighbors that he would allow a person to slowly starve to death in wretched sickness right on his own driveway without offering so much as a crust of bread to help? On the other hand, not even a rich man can help everyone in need who crosses his path. There are limits, after all. So we think.

But now look at it from God's perspective and keep in mind how God regards sinners as righteous in His sight. God has a law, and according to that law you must help everyone in need. Yes, everyone! You shall not kill. *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that ... we help and befriend our neighbor in every need. The rich man was a man in love with himself. He was a Pharisee who sought to justify himself before both God and men. He paid his taxes. He gave at the office. He gave at church—a tenth of all he owned and more. Surely he loved God, but he had done enough. He'd helped enough beggars. This beggar would

need to mooch off someone else. He, the rich man, was righteous. He was in the door.

But God has a law, and if you want to be righteous before God by keeping that law, then you must keep it perfectly. There is no such thing as, “I’ve done more good than bad.” There is no such thing as, “I’ve done enough.” When all is said and done, there is always more to do. That’s the Law’s way. You must help and befriend all your neighbors in every need. The rich man was a goat. He trusted in himself that he was righteous. The proof was all the good he had done. But all God saw was the one beggar laying right in front of him, whom he ignored, and that one failure merited him eternal punishment, for James says that if you keep the whole law yet stumble in just one point you are guilty of breaking the whole Law.

The problem with the rich man was his idolatry, his spiritual self reliance. God wants beggars who plead the mercy of Christ and He will have no regard for self-satisfied saints. So we sing in Mary’s Magnificat: “He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their throne and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich He hath sent away empty.” The rich man had no true love for God, for he had no faith in the love and mercy of God toward him. So, God had no regard for him. He didn’t even give him a name. He simply cast him into hell.

On the other hand, God knows the names of all his believers. They are named with the very name of the Triune God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,

Justifying faith is faith that throws itself upon this mercy of God in Christ Jesus

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spoken over them in their baptism. They are named with the name of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. They are Christians, marked by the sign Christ’s holy cross—the instrument of terrible poverty and cruelty and suffering and shame and death that He suffered for them, to redeem them from sin, death, and hell. Justifying faith is faith that throws itself upon this mercy of God in Christ Jesus. It’s faith that believes that God receives us into His favor and forgives our sins for Christ’s sake. That was the poor man’s faith, which is evident from the name Jesus gave him: Lazarus, which means, “God is my helper.”

Now again, Lazarus serves as a caricature, and it all depends on whose doing the looking. We don’t know the details of his life. Jesus doesn’t tell us why he ended up at the rich man’s doorstep where he lay day after day, homeless, starving, covered in sores. If we were the ones looking at poor Lazarus in those days, we might have seen a man whose desperate straits were his own fault. Maybe bad choices, instead of simple bad luck, had led him to this miserable end. But God has a different perspective, and his perspective is that it doesn’t matter. God looks at the heart. Whatever Lazarus did or didn’t do was all forgiven through faith in Christ Jesus. Lazarus was a beggar in spirit. He was a true son of Abraham because he had the same faith as Abraham. We heard in today’s Old Testament lesson that the aged, childless Abraham was told by God that he would be the father of many nations, that his descendants would be as countless



Detail from a woodcut by Dore’ depicting Lazarus at the door of the rich man’s house.

as the stars. Now Abraham had absolutely no evidence or experience to go on. He simply had to believe God's promise. Believe he did, and God credited that faith to him as righteousness.

Oh, and by the way, Abraham was a very wealthy man, not like Lazarus. But the trust of Abraham's heart was right. His trust was in God's promise of a Messiah. That made Abraham a free man in Christ. He was free to spread the wealth around, as he did with some strangers that showed up on his doorstep one day. Genesis 18 tells us that when the three strangers appeared Abraham literally ran out to them and compelled them to stay. "Please, sit down, friends, take a load off. Here, let me wash your feet for you. Oh no, it's no bother. It's my pleasure. Are you hungry? Of course you are. I'll fix you a nice, big meal. It's no trouble at all!" Abraham's faith; his trust in God as provider and Savior literally poured out of him in spontaneous acts of mercy and love toward these strangers. So we sing in the hymn *Salvation Unto Us Is Come*:

*The just is he—and he alone—
Who by this faith is living,
The faith that by good works is shown,
To God the glory giving; (ELH 227:8)*

*Faith to the cross of Christ doth cling
And rests in Him securely;
And forth from it good works must spring
As fruits and tokens surely;
Still faith doth justify alone,
Works serve thy neighbor and make known
The faith that lives within thee. (ELH 227:10)*

Abraham was righteous by faith alone. So was Lazarus. Lazarus trusted in God's promise that He would not forsake the lowly who have a humble and contrite and repentant heart. Even when all the evidence and experience of Lazarus' life said that God had forsaken him, he still clung to God's promise. By that faith he was accounted righteous before God. He was saved.

Now, the rich man, that self-righteous, arrogant, self-proclaimed saint? Even from hell his unbelief continues. And that brings us to the second part of this story which focuses on how we obtain justifying faith. The rich man was astonished at his punishment. He was angry and frustrated at this seemingly unjust turn of events. In desperation he cried out: "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." "What did I do to deserve this? I did everything right! Hey, that beggar did everything wrong. Send him down here to give me little relief." He still didn't get it. How could He? Surely he had gone to Synagogue his entire life where he had heard the Old Testament Scriptures - Moses and the Prophets. The trouble is he had heard, but he hadn't really heard. He had learned, but he did not understand. The Old Testament just like the New Testament preaches repentance and faith in the God Who saves sinners only on account of His love and mercy shown to the world in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The rich man cried out: "I beg you, father, that you would send [Lazarus] to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment."

"They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them."

"No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent."

"If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead."

Finally in the end, God's Word of repentance and forgiveness is the only thing that converts sinners from unbelief to faith in Christ. So that we may obtain justifying faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. Through the Word and Sacraments, as

<p>God's Word of repentance and forgiveness is the only thing that converts sinners from unbelief to faith in Christ.</p>

through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given. It is God the Holy Spirit who must do the work, and, as foolish as human beings might think it is, He will do it only through the Gospel and Sacraments that He Himself has given. In 1 Corinthians 1 St. Paul says: "It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, .because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:21-25). Miraculous works and visions and experiences simply will not convert those who refuse to be beggars and believe God's Word. Just think of all the miracles that God did throughout the Old Testament. Think of all the miracles Jesus did. He even raised another man named Lazarus from the dead. Did it convert the obstinate, hard-hearted Pharisees and priests? They only hated him more, as Paul says again in 1 Corinthians 1, "the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing" (1 Cor. 1:18).

There are no methods and gimmicks, no air-tight arguments, and no mighty displays of God's presence and power that can convince an unrepentant sinner to believe the Gospel of Christ. You can't argue someone into the faith; you can't entertain them and pander them into it, and you can't wow them into it. Without repentance, there is no life with God in Christ Jesus. The Lord has given us His Word and His sacraments. That's it! He has given us the Law that kills the sinner in his sin and breaks the sinner's pride, and He has given us the Gospel, that forgives the sinners sin and raises him back to life. There are no other means, methods, or techniques for building Christ's church and extending it. The only miracles God has provided are the miracles of repentance and faith.

Dear Christian friends, the final words that Martin Luther wrote before his death were found on a scrap of paper: "We are beggars, that is true." God grant that we always remain beggars just like Lazarus - helpless, weak and dependent on our Lord. God grant that we may be truly satisfied with no other food than that which comes from His table. Let us always there, at altar, lick the blood of Christ's holy wounds for our salvation, and let us eat the crumbs of the Bread of Life that satisfy completely. And let us pray:

*Lord, let at last Thine angels come,
To Abram's bosom bear me home,
That I may die unfearing;
And in its narrow chamber keep
My body safe in peaceful sleep
Until Thy reappearing.
And then from death awaken me
That these mind eyes with joy may see,
O Son of God, Thy glorious face,
My Savior and my Fount of grace.
Lord Jesus Christ,
My prayer attend, my prayer attend,
And I will praise Thee without end. (TLH 429:3)*

In the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Ghost.
Amen.

Report on the General Conference of the Association of Confessional Lutheran Churches

The annual general conference of the Association of Confessional Lutheran Churches was held at the East Central Public Library in Princeton, Minnesota on April 20th and 21st. Delegate attendees were Rev. Robert Lawson, Jr. and Mr. Scott Markel, PhD. of St. Paul Escondido; Rev. Robert Lawson, Sr. and Mr. Richard Scott of Christ in Princeton; Rev. Karl Heck and Mr. Robert Schlesselman of St. Timothy in Williamsburg; Mr. David Flitter of First American in Mayville, and Rev. Steven Brockdorf and Rev. Walter Anderson (lay delegate) of Reformation in Hillsboro. Also in attendance were Mr. Allen Kretzmann of Christ in Princeton and for a portion of our conference Rev. Mark Mueller pastor of Redeemer in Cambridge, Minnesota (ELDoNA).

During the conference we read *Unity, Union, and Unionism* a tract published in 1936 by the "Little" Norwegian Synod. This tract, available on the ACLC website, is as fresh today as it was when first published. It cautions against considering fellowship with those who do not carefully adhere to the Scriptures both in word and practice.

Some time was spent making final changes to the statement on confessional fellowship. Most of the changes made at the conference typographical as we discussed the wording of the statement intensely since a first draft was made at our annual pastoral conference in October. We were also reminded that the



From left to right: Rev. Robert Lawson, Jr., Rev. Em. Walter Anderson, Mr. Richard Scott, Mr. Bob Schlesselman, Mr. Allan Kretzmann, Rev. Robert Lawson, Sr., Rev. Steven Brockdorf, Guest Rev. Mark Mueller of ELDoNA, Mr. Scott Markel, PhD., Mr. David Flitter, and Rev. Karl Heck

statement is merely a reiteration of our commitment to our stated doctrine and practice of fellowship, since our official Doctrinal Statement adopted in 2008 is quite clear with regard to the Scriptural doctrine and practice of fellowship. The new statement was adopted unanimously.

After adoption of “A Statement on Confessional Fellowship,” we unanimously agreed to extend the hand of fellowship to the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America, since nothing further was seen by us to hinder the outward expression of fellowship with them.

We joyfully and officially received Christ Lutheran Church and

her pastor, Rev. Robert Lawson, Sr. into membership of the Association of Confessional Lutheran Churches. Christ Lutheran made application the previous spring, and Pastor Lawson was installed by two of our ACLC pastors.

Rev. Robert Lawson, Jr. stepped up as Superintendent upon the resignation of Rev. Rolf Preus. Mr. Josh Oswald was elected Treasurer, and Rev. Steven Brockdorf was elected Assistant Superintendent. Mr. Scott Markel, PhD. serves as our Secretary.

Pray God for more faithful Troublers of Israel

Rev. Karl J. Heck of Saint Timothy, Williamsburg, Iowa

Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, “Is that you, O troubler of Israel?” (1 Kings 18:17).

Nikolaus Selnecker (5132–1592) penned the following words of supplication in 1611:

*Lord Jesus Christ, with us abide,
For round us falls the eventide;
Nor let Thy Word, that heavenly light,
For us be ever veiled in night. (TLH 292)*

How appropriate are these words in our current day and age when we see the apparent eventide of confessional Lutheranism spreading across our own nation with various Lutheran church bodies gulping and swallowing the poison of popular trend and thought so as to

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purportedly remain relevant in these changing times. They twist, tweak, re-interpret, and outwardly change God’s Word in an attempt to retain the old members and attract the new members (2 Timothy 3:1–8; 4:3–4), all the while making the church into a business with a chief executive officer instead of a true pastor, trying to please the members and the comfortable bureaucrats/synodocrats in their prominent positions at one and the

same time.

In most of the Lutheran church bodies the leadership has a serious disconnect with Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions – both which they have sworn to uphold. And the membership of such bodies is as pluralistic in its beliefs and confessions as are the political parties in our state and federal government. They do not and can not speak with one voice, for the overwhelming majority no longer knows what they believe or why they believe what they believe; they merely blow with the changing winds scorching the landscape (Ephesians 4:14). So much for adherence to the unchanging Word in a changing world (1 Peter 1:25).

Certainly Elijah of old understood the decline of confessional theology in the nation of Israel as wicked King Ahab and his wife, Queen Jezebel, sought to capture and kill him. In spite of being numbered within the small remnant of faithful followers of the Lord, this prophet on the run and in hiding did not compromise the true confession for the sake of worldly comforts and fleshly security. He did not become an ecumenical or idolatrous whore in God's Holy Office in order to get along with the approved religious establishment—the prophets of Baal and Asherah (1 Kings 18:19), and the wishes and will of the public majority. By the grace of God, Elijah's confession was not for sale to the highest bidder offering the greatest creature-comforts and advancements. He would not bow to the powers to be in order to retain some kind of false sense of security in his own soul.

Elijah had a reputation, especially from those who were in secular as well as sacred authority, for being a *troubler of*

While the majority would try to hush him or diminish his voice or just plain ignore him, God's Word was still heard, and a remnant continued to trust in and follow the Lord God, and the Lord knew each of them and provided for them.

Israel. You might well say that he was a whistle-blower, a man

faithful to his divine calling, a man faithful to God alone. In essence, Elijah the prophet was married to the Lord and not to the secular or religious establishments, nor to his own flesh. Elijah went against the raging and torrential current. And while the majority would try to hush him or diminish his voice or just plain ignore him, God's Word was still heard, and a remnant—exceedingly small though it was—continued to trust in and follow the Lord God (1 Kings 19:18), and the Lord knew each of them and provided for them as their needs dictated.

Troubler of Israel could well be the title attached to all the faithful pastors of the Lord who today go against the current of the world and the current of the present entrenched religious establishments. By God's grace, just as with faithful Elijah of old, they take a stand on the inspired Truth of God and go forward in faith in spite of the mockery and persecution and other trials heaped upon them by the powerful majority calling for tolerance and excessive patience while the deadly poison continues to infiltrate the body—the flock. It is essential to remember that the pastor is to stand against all that which is contrary to the Holy Word. He is answerable to God who has called him into His Holy Office.

Through the centuries faithful pastors have been persecuted and killed for the true confession of faith, and often times by the religious establishment. One only needs to recall Martin Luther who was excommunicated and then had a death sentence placed on his head by the Roman Catholic Church. Or just consider those faithful clergy and laity who by God's grace signed their names in subscription to the Augsburg Confession, who put their vocations and their very lives on the line for the sake of confessing the truth in the face of visibly overwhelming odds. Let there be no doubt that as we have just passed the 480th anniversary of the *Presentation of the Augsburg Confession* on June 25th, these men could well be labeled *troublers of Israel* – and let us heartily thank the Lord our God for such committed and faithful troublers!

The poisonous IV drip of wickedness still continues to this day, sometimes turning into a stream, on the part of many church bureaucrats; faithful pastors are persecuted for remaining faithful

to the Lord who alone has called them. And such wickedness also continues to this day on the part of many congregations; faithful pastors are persecuted and wrongfully removed for being faithful and contending under-shepherds of the Good Shepherd. Indeed, the cost of discipleship is obviously increasing in our day and age.

As the summer months march on, some Lutheran church bodies will meet in convention. Pray God for more faithful *troublers of Israel* in these conventions, for pastors and laity who will not be afraid to stand up and be counted for pointing out error, calling errorists to task, and confessing the one true and saving faith no matter the personal costs in their church body or back home in their congregation(s). Pray God that more pastors in congregations will recall their vows to Him and by the working of the Holy Ghost through the Means of Grace be conscience-stricken to renounce public error publicly and walk forward in the Word and the Lutheran Confessions which are a correct exposition of the Word of God, no longer excusing or ignoring the leaven so prevalent amongst them.

Yes, pray God for more *troublers of Israel* that shall teach and preach and practice that which God has called them to proclaim and do, forsaking the synodical jargon, propaganda, and company line, as well as the popular but unscriptural societal teachings of the day, which are only the devil's propaganda designed to lead souls astray, forsaking the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). Pray God for more *troublers of Israel* who will have a Biblical conviction of conscience and follow in the steps of Elijah no matter the cost. For real *troublers of Israel* like Elijah are not common on today's landscape; most pastors today have become company men—hirelings—who are puppets for the hierarchy, tooting the company line rather than digging their heels and souls in, chewing on God's Word, and taking a firm stand against the unscriptural religious establishment to which they belong. Most pastors today choose to compromise their confession in order to ecumenically appease the world and their own flesh, ingesting the deadly leaven and unionistically incorporating the fleshly likes of the damnable prophets of Baal and Asherah.

We are living in the last days as is so clearly obvious not only in this devolving world, but also in the contending church militant. Sadly, most Lutherans today would be unrecognizable by the fathers of days gone by such as C. F. W. Walther, F. Pieper, Martin Chemnitz, and Martin Luther, to name just a few. Christ has told us that many will choose to travel the broad path and thus enter perdition (Matthew 7:13) in contrast to the few that will travel the narrow path and enter into life everlasting in heaven. Pray God for more *troublers of Israel* that indeed the small remnant may increase in number prior to our Lord's final return, that He would mercifully grant us undeserving sinners yet another Reformation. And then also, pray God to strengthen the faithful few *troublers of Israel* whom He has called to be His Elijahs in this increasingly barren wilderness. For only by God's grace can any pastor be an Elijah, a *troubler of Israel*, in this day and age.

The second verse of Nikolaus Selnecker's hymn of supplication reads:

*In these last days of sore distress
Grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness
That pure we keep, till life is spent,
Thy holy Word and Sacrament. (TLH 292)*

May God grant us—each and every one—the strength to continue forward in faith in Him alone as found in His precious and powerful Means of Grace wherein and through which He works change in hearts and lives that truly gives a lasting hope for the future. Our Lord promises to be with us always (Matthew 28:20) and to sustain us on the narrow path and in the trenches of this earthly journey as we live contending for the one true and saving faith. Yes, *pray God for more faithful troublers of Israel* like Elijah, men unashamed of the inspired Truth, and beg Him to open our ears and hearts to hear and learn and believe what is proclaimed from their mouths.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Report on the Conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! (Psalm 133:1). At the general conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America (ELDoNA), held May 12-14 at Salem Lutheran Church in Malone TX, such God-pleasing unity was officially recognized between the ACLC and ELDoNA. On May 13 it was decided that after three years of doctrinal discussion between our two groups, and after months of internal debate within the ACLC on the practice of church fellowship, there is now nothing hindering an expression of full communion. Thus, I was pleased to receive the right hand of fellowship from Pr. James Heiser (ELDoNA Superintendent) together with the rest of the ELDoNA pastors in attendance.



Pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America attending their annual conference.

It must be said that this is not fellowship forged through the crafty human processes of doctrinal compromise or agreements to disagree about various “minor” points of doctrine and practice. True and Godly fellowship between churches can never be produced in such ways! Rather, this is fellowship produced by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God as brothers in the faith

recognize that they hold to same pure Scriptural doctrine as it is rightly explained in the confessions of our Evangelical Lutheran Church.

That is indeed what was realized at the ACLC conference in April and then reciprocated at the ELDoNA conference in May. To quote from the resolution adopted by ELDoNA:

Whereas Scripture commands that we express fellowship where it exists; and *Whereas* we have met with the Association of Confessional Lutheran Churches (ACLC) to clarify questions of doctrine and practice; and *Whereas* we find that the ACLC doctrine and practice are scriptural and confessional; *Therefore, be it resolved that we extend the right hand of fellowship to the ACLC.*

So, what does church fellowship with ELDoNA mean for the ACLC? Before answering this question, perhaps a brief bit of background on ELDoNA would be helpful.

In July, 2005 a handful of pastors of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS) met in Niles, MI to discuss certain issues of controversy in the LCMS. It’s no secret that the LCMS has been a synod in turmoil for at least fifty years. While her official doctrinal statements have always been relatively confessional, for decades the LCMS has tolerated a wide degree of ungodly disunity in doctrine and practice. From extreme liberalism to solid conservative/confessional doctrine and practice, and everything in between – that is the hodge-podge that has been and is the LCMS.

The pastors who met in Niles, MI, each at various stages in their relationship with the LCMS, agreed to a set of doctrinal statements entitled, the *Niles Theses*. These statements addressed such matters as the Office of the Ministry, church fellowship, and the Lord’s Supper. They also began to make plans for a new church body, recognizing that that their time in the LCMS was coming to an end because they could no longer tolerate its deviations from the Word of God.

The next year (June, 2006) these pastors met at Salem Lutheran Church in Malone, TX. There they expanded on the Niles Theses, producing what is known as the *Malone Theses*. By that time all of

these pastors had either left or been removed from the LCMS. Thus, they were in a position officially to start a new confessional Lutheran church body. This they did by forming the *Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America*, appointing the Rev. James Heiser as their Superintendent or “Bishop.”

The ELDoNA is a ministerium of pastors serving independent churches, and just like the ACLC, it is a confessional Lutheran church body committed to being Lutheran, without apologies or excuses. To quote from their brochure:

In America, many “Lutherans” appear to want to be something else, and so they adopt the worship services of the Baptists or Pentecostals and are disinterested in biblical theology. Others weaken the doctrine even further, claiming that they are now agreed with the Roman Church concerning the doctrine of Justification. Others abandon any pretense of standing on the foundation of God’s holy Word, teaching the lie of theological liberalism which only views the Bible as one more man-made book of human “wisdom.” ... The Pastors of ELDoNA reject any surrender of Lutheran doctrine and practice. They believe that it is far past time for the Evangelical Lutheran Church to stand steadfast on the foundation of God’s Word, and to boldly confess that faithful exposition of Holy Scripture which is found in the Book of Concord (1580).

When ELDoNA formed in June, 2006, it consisted of a handful of pastors serving five churches nationwide. Presently, ELDoNA has fourteen pastors on its clergy roster, serving twelve churches and missions. If you would like to know more about the ELDoNA you can visit their website: www.eldona.org. There you will find an explanation of their governing structure as well as their confession of faith, and a wide variety of papers and articles dealing with various theological issues.

So, what does church fellowship with ELDoNA mean for the

ACLC? Well, first and most importantly, it means that we are in full communion. It means that our little group is not alone. We have brothers and sisters around the country who, by God’s grace, are committed to being faithful to the Word of God as we are. We have the same confession of faith, and thus, the members of their churches have an open invitation to commune at our altars, and we at theirs.



Superintendents Lawson (ACLC) and Heiser (ELDoNA) rose to sing the Te Deum Laudamus with the rest of the attendees after the official recognition of fellowship

Both ELDoNA and the ACLC are tiny, fledgling groups with no worldly power and prestige and with few material resources. Both groups are barely a dot on the map compared to the large Lutheran synods. No matter! When the lame man asked Peter and John for alms, Peter said to him: “Look at us. ... Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk” (Acts 3:1-6). What do we have compared to the LCMS, or the Wisconsin Synod, or the ELS? We have the pure, untainted teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Gospel that saves sinners from their sin and gives them eternal life.

Second, with this recognition of full communion, our fellowship has expanded beyond our little handful of churches and is now a somewhat larger handful. One of the purposes of forming church bodies is to do work that can more easily be done by several churches working together than by individual congregations. For instance, one of the issues the ACLC has had to grapple with is how to train pastors if and when the need arises. ELDoNA has already finalized plans for a seminary and will be presenting the ACLC with those plans at our pastors' conference in October.

Other areas of cooperation were also discussed at the ELDoNA conference touching things like publications, youth work and mission work. In the immediate future the ACLC has been asked to contribute, if possible, to a monthly devotional booklet that ELDoNA plans to make available beginning in September. I have already agreed to provide the devotions for the third week of September. Also, the pastors of ELDoNA have been invited to participate in our October pastors' conference and are scheduled to give two papers. It is our hope that such joint conferences will be regular, yearly events.

Seminaries, youth work, mission work, joint conferences, etc. Only time will tell whether the best laid plans of mice and men bear any fruit. In these last days of sore distress it seems that the larger church bodies are all bent on trading the truth for worldly influence and "success." Our God has been gracious to us by preserving among us His pure Word and sacraments. Both groups—the ACLC and the ELDoNA—are in His hands. We are under no illusions that He "needs" us to preserve His Church on earth, for since the beginning He has always kept a remnant for Himself and He will continue to do so with or without us. God will do with the ACLC and ELDoNA as He pleases and whatever the future holds, provided we stay faithful, it will be good in His sight. And so we sing:

*Preserve Thy Word, O Savior,
To us this latter day
And let Thy kingdom flourish,
Enlarge Thy Church, we pray.
Oh, keep our faith from failing,*

*Keep hope's bright star aglow.
Let naught from Thy Word turn us
While wand'ring here below. (TLH 264:1)*

What's Going On Among Lutherans?

This insight into why there are divisions among Lutherans comes to us from Rev. Dan Faugstad of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Lutheranism has described itself under the mastheads of "Grace Alone," "Scripture Alone," "Faith Alone," "Centered in Christ Alone." These "Alones" (or "solas") all confess the same truth. They all express the "one-sidedness" (the "monergism") of God's saving of the undeserving. We cannot have one without the other, that is, there is no grace of God apart from Christ—apart from His perfect life of righteousness for our benefit, His bitter passion and atonement for our sin. Christ alone removes every barrier that separates us from the holy God. There is no faith of any saving value apart from God's revealed word, Holy Scripture. We are saved by God's pure love and gift to us. *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast"* (Ephesians 2:8-10, NKJV). *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16). Saving the sinner is all God's doing. We have not done even a small part of it. His love toward us is to give us His own dear Son and with Him a kingdom everlasting.

The Father sends the fallen captives of the evil foe His only-begotten Son. God the Son took on human flesh and blood by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin. He was born in a stable at Bethlehem to serve us as our Brother and Redeemer. He kept God's holy commandments—for us, received in His own innocent body and soul the guilt of us all, and on a cruel cross, suffered the hatred, anger,

God the Holy Spirit works faith in us through the preaching and teaching of Holy Scripture alone.

and punishment we deserve because of our sins. Christ alone is our hope and righteousness, our certainty of God's mercy and forgiveness, our eternal salvation. Truly, what a Friend we have in Jesus. We receive what Christ has done for us with all His saving benefits, not by anything we have done, should have done, or even could do, but

freely and alone by believing God's word and promise. This saving faith is also God's gift, and no work of ours. "You He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and

sins" (Ephesians 2:1). God the Holy Spirit works faith in us through the preaching and teaching of Holy Scripture alone. This faith is alive and active, gladly receiving God's gracious word, repenting of disobedience, turning away from what is sin, and seeking God's forgiveness, help, and direction to love and do what He shows us is right. Our Beautiful Savior prays thus for us, His believers, His holy church on earth:

I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth (John 17:14-17).

The Christian religion has never been about demanding rights; that is the world's way. The Christian religion is about a humbled, honest, penitent heart seeking God's mercy and favor for Jesus' sake alone. It is the publican—the shamed, humble heart who pleads, "*God be merciful to me, a sinner!*" who goes to his house justified by God. The Pharisee, who wishes to justify himself by

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

all that he is and does, feels no need for the Great Physician to heal him. Our Lord asks a question we need to ask ourselves about the goal of our religion: "How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?" (John 5:44). What do we seek and whom are we trying to please? Jesus says, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33); and again, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

By "Grace Alone," "Scripture Alone," "Faith Alone," centered in "Christ Alone," that is the Christian faith; that is the Lutheran faith.

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