

Trinity Te Deum

The official newsletter for Trinity Lutheran Church

Rev. Paul R. Harris – 512-453-3835 Church; 512-251-4204 Home
Sunday School and Bible Study 9:15 AM – Divine Service 10:30 AM

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April - May 2013

The ACELC Conference

April 16-18 Trinity will host the Association of Confessing Evangelical Lutheran Church's conference on worship. There will be papers on the central questions of worship, contemporary worship, traditional worship, high church worship, and an attempt to bring it all together. These papers will be followed by a panel discussion and a Workshop on Worship. The papers have been written by LCMS pastors from all over the country. Our own Rev. Philip Hale will give a paper on Tuesday afternoon. In addition there will be Matins and Vespers each day. These will be conducted the way we normally do. I will be the liturgists. Bart Goddard will be the cantor. Three of the sons of our congregation will be preaching as will I.

You, the members of Trinity, are invited to any and all of the conference that you would like to attend. Many of our members have signed up to help. They will be wearing burnt orange polo shirts generously provided by one of our members with the ACELC logo and Trinity Lutheran Church monogrammed on them. There is no charge for members of Trinity to attend.

You are also invited to the banquet Wednesday evening at 7 PM at Schultz's. This is hosted by the ACELC, so it will cost you. Tickets are 30 dollars per person for beer and BBQ. You have to sign up in advance to purchase tickets.

Because we would like to provide an opportunity for the sons of our congregation now in the ministry to rub elbows with us, Trinity will host a get-together Tuesday evening after Vespers at Trinity. This is free to you. We will have our home brewers, as well as Pastor Phil Hale, offering the fruits of their labor for your sampling. There will be food provided too. There is a sign-up for this special Gemütlichkeit.

Many of our members have pitched in to clean, to repair, to paint, and to spruce up our facilities. It is a big undertaking for a congregation our size to host such an event as this. I have been very pleased at the willingness to pitch in.

The full schedule for the conference is below.

Conference Schedule

***“CHRIST FOR US:
The Divine Service”***

Trinity Lutheran Church, Austin Texas - April 16-18, 2013

Hosted by the Association of Confessing Evangelical Lutheran Congregations (ACELC) - an Association of LCMS congregations for the addressing of error toward unity in The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod

TUESDAY, APRIL 16, 2013.

8:00 – 9:30 a.m. Registration and Refreshments (snacks and drinks)

9:30 – 10:15 a.m. Matins

10:15 – 10:45 a.m. Welcome and Conference Introduction

10:45 – 11:00 a.m. Break (drinks)

11:00 – 12:00 p.m. Identifying the Central Questions (Rev. Rick Sawyer)

12:00 – 1:00 p.m. Lunch

1:15 – 2:15 p.m. Contemporary Worship (Rev. David Langewisch)

2:15 – 2:45 p.m. Break (drinks)

2:45 – 3:45 p.m. Traditional Worship (Rev. Phil Hale)

3:45 – 4:15 p.m. Break (snacks and drinks)

4:15 – 5:15 p.m. High Church Worship (Rev. Dr. Rick Stuckwisch)

5:30 – 6:15 p.m. Vespers

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17, 2013.

8:30 – 9:15 a.m. Matins

9:15 – 9:30 a.m. Announcements

9:30 – 10:30 a.m. Concordia in Lutheran Worship (Rev. Bryan Wolfmueller)

10:30 – 11:00 a.m. Break (snacks and drinks)

11:00 – 12:00 p.m. Panel Discussion (Sawyer, Langewisch, Hale, Stuckwisch, Wolfmueller)

12:00 – 1:00 p.m. Lunch

1:15 – 3:45 p.m. Worship Workshop

3:45 – 4:15 p.m. Break (snacks and drinks)

4:15 – 5:15 p.m. Koinonia in Lutheranism (Rev. Clint Poppe)

5:30 – 6:15 p.m. Vespers
7:00 p.m. Banquet: **My Time with the Presidents** (Rev. Dr. Tim Rossow)

THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 2013.

8:30 – 9:15 a.m. Matins
9:15 – 9:45 a.m. Break (drinks)
9:30 – 11:00 a.m. Announcements, ACELC Business
11:00 – 11:30 a.m. Break (snacks and drinks)
11:30 – 12:30 p.m. ACELC Business
12:45 – 1:30 p.m. Vespers

Is Living Together “just another sin”?

Posted on January 14, 2013 by Rev. Paul R. Harris

In light of what the LCMS Catechism says about the office of the keys, I think every lay person has a right to know whether their pastor knowingly communes those living together, i.e. committing fornication. Here’s what the LCMS says she confesses about the Office of the Keys:

“I believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.” So if your pastor is communing openly, unrepentant fornicators he is NOT excluding them and therefore whom he includes and excludes is suspect.

This judgment would be upon a pastor who has this ingenious, or

disingenuous depending on your view, way of dealing with live-in couples. When they present themselves for marriage he takes them into the sanctuary, has them kneel at the altar confessing their sin, and then he “spiritually” marries them. The public, civil, legal ceremony takes place whenever the couple wants and they go on fornicating. What a genius this man is! No wonder he occupies a high place in the Confessionals pecking order. The only problem is he stops at issuing spiritual marriage licenses. Why not give spiritual driver’s licenses, spiritual building permits, spiritual medical licenses?

The above judgment goes for another pastor who has for years been communing a fornicator. He does so because she is the daughter of a prominent member and he doesn’t want to split the congregation. John the Baptist was willing to risk a split head to speak against Herod’s illicit marriage, but this pastor, another confessional leader, is no John the Baptist and is not functioning as a called minister of Christ either. You know how he defends his sin? Living together is just one sin among many; why focus on just that one. Well it ’tis and it ’tisn’t.

The latest edition of *Law and Gospel* has Walther quoting the Smalcald Articles III, III, 44: “The Holy Spirit does not permit sin to have dominion, to gain the upper hand so it can be carried out, but represses and restrains it from doing what it wants. If sin does what it wants, the Holy Spirit and faith are not present” (Emphasis in Walther, 236).

The editor’s footnote 19 is very helpful in explaining this. People often say, “Well I knew I shouldn’t flip that person off and I did it anyway, so that willful sin is just as bad as two people living together.” Let me quote the footnote at length: “The understanding of willful sin does not necessarily

include what one does when the rational will recedes in favor of emotion, such as for, passion, partisan fervor, and ignorance.

Christians may also have sins of weakness, meaning the wicked thoughts that may arise suddenly from the sinful flesh but are not acted upon. In contrast to this we have the conscious premeditated sins of Judas (Matthew 26: 14-16) and Absalom (2 Samuel 15). One can group together murder, rebellion, adultery, robbery, and any sin that requires planning. A true believer cannot plan and do evil acts. Those evildoers stand condemned, each by his own conscience.”

That guy who suddenly curses that driver, that gal who finds herself gossiping again, that other guy who falls into porn, and that other gal who falls into lust are not the same as that guy and gal coming from their place of fornication, sitting through a Law and Gospel sermon, presenting themselves at the Lord’s Table for Communion, receiving the same and then returning to their house of fornication knowing full well what they are doing there. The mere fact that they always tell you “they plan on getting married” is proof that they plan on fornicating right up till then. (I find it funny that the movies always portray habitual fornicators as abstaining the night before their wedding.)

But this post is not about the fornicators, but about the pastors who are communing them knowingly and willingly. The judgment of Ezekiel 3 is upon you. You may be able to dodge this post but you won’t that judgment.

Trusting God’s Means of Grace in Evangelism

Among many of the congregations of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, evangelism has become the hallmark of their purpose for existing as a congregation. Becoming "Missional" has become the mark of "successful" congregations, while those congregations who have not demonstrated numerical growth have been identified as "dysfunctional" or in need of "revitalization" (a case in point is the work of the "Transforming Churches Network"). In order to become more "Missional," many LCMS congregations have radically changed the way they "do Church."

It was for the ostensible purpose of achieving numerical growth that many congregations of our Synod abandoned or limited the use of the historic liturgies of the Church and often redefined the role of the pastor as being the one who is called to feed God's sheep by rightly proclaiming the Word of God and administering the Sacraments to one who is called primarily to work within the community to evangelize for new members. Other congregations restructured their governance to become "Mission Outposts" to the community in which the Lord has placed them. Counting "Critical Events" (one person sharing their Christian faith with another) became the subject of a Synodically posted "Tote Board" (which has now thankfully been removed from the Synod's website).

Many District Presidents jumped on the "Missional" bandwagon, openly promoting such changes, while those pastors and congregations which opted to conduct their ministries by concentrating on the marks of the Church (Word and Sacrament) as a primary focus were often seen as obstacles standing in the way of "progress" in achieving a new "Missional" Synod. Such pastors were often either not placed on call

lists or else described in their District President's evaluation to a calling congregation as "inflexible" or "rigid." Sociological studies from the Barna Group (which showed the shrinking numbers of people coming to Church) were often employed by some District Presidents as a way of demonstrating that pastors weren't carrying out their jobs of adequately adapting to our culture, when all these surveys really reveal is that our culture is simply becoming more secular.

Behind all this was a clear "warning" that if we did not become more "Missional" and become more proficient at our evangelistic task, that there would be people going to hell who otherwise wouldn't go there at all. This is nothing more than a guilt trip – not to mention false doctrine! From Holy Scripture we learn that not a single one of God's elect will ever be lost and that their number is set before the foundations of the world were laid. As our Lord put it:

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." (John 10:28-29)

This is most certainly not Calvinism's double predestination! Rather this is quite simply what Scriptures tell us regarding God's desire that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth – that of all whom God has graciously called, gathered and enlightened, He will lose not a one. (I Timothy 2:4 and Luther's Small Catechism)

Sadly, many aspects of our Synod's attempts to become more "Missional" reflect an errant theology of glory rather than the Biblical doctrine of the theology of the cross. The theology of glory (as

Luther ably pointed out) is all about what we do to grow the Church rather than what Christ has done to grow the Church. The theology of glory is all about how "successful" our congregations look to the world with growing numbers in attendance in worship, ever larger budgets, and ever expanding facilities that appeal to the world's expectations about how the Church ought to look. How very different this is from what Holy Scripture says about how the Church will look in the end times.

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved." (Matthew 24:9-13)

Or as our dear brother, Martin Luther put it: "Since the Gospel is so despised, I suppose that Judgment Day is not far away ... God's Word will decline again and fall; and, because of a lack of upright and faithful servants of the Word, a great darkness will come. Then the whole world will turn wild and epicurean and will live wild and abandoned lives in all security. But then the voice will come and ring out 'Behold, the bridegroom cometh' for God will not be able to put up with conditions any longer." (*What Luther Says*, # 2166, Concordia Publishing House, p. 697.)

Rather than embracing the theology of glory as a model for our evangelistic task, let us rather embrace a theology of the cross! What does such a theology look like in practice? First, it trusts in the power of God's means of grace to accomplish what God promises. Pastors are called primarily to faithfully feed God's sheep with

His precious Means of Grace – Word and Sacrament. It is then that these well-fed sheep will naturally share that faith with others in their various divine vocations in whatever venue God has placed them. The divine vocations of God’s people are the sacred places in which we all live: family, friends, career, leisure, recreation, in Church, etc. It is in these places where the powerful witness occurs in already existing, credible relationships in the home, at work or wherever we may happen to be. This is precisely the way the early Church grew – and grew exponentially!

By the way, numerical growth is not promised us by God in every time and at every place. Such growth comes only where, when, and as He wills it. Again, quoting Dr. Luther: “...the preaching of the Gospel is not a constant, permanent, and continuing proclamation. The Gospel is rather like a pelting rain that hurries on from place to place. What it hits it hits; what it misses, it misses. But it does not return nor stay in one place; the sun and heat come after it and lick it up. Experience also teaches us that in no section of the world has the Gospel remained pure and unadulterated beyond the memory of a man. On the contrary, it stood its ground and flourished as long as those remained who had brought it to the fore. But after they had passed from the scene, the light also disappeared. Factious spirits and false teachers immediately followed.” (*What Luther Says*, # 1742, Concordia Publishing House, p. 573.)

As Lutherans, we joyfully proclaim and give witness to the Gospel of salvation whenever and wherever the Lord gives us the opportunity in our God-given vocations. It is our great and high privilege to be the instruments of His grace in such circumstances. However, there is no need to resort

to the theology of glory with respect to our evangelistic efforts. Instead, we must rest secure in the theology of the cross and trust God’s Word that He will bring about the result He intends.

As Isaiah the prophet said: “For as the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10-11)

Rev. Richard A. Bolland
Assistant Pastor - Emeritus
Gloria Christi Lutheran Church
Greeley, Colorado

A Change in Feast Days

Dear Members of Trinity,

Something nice happened in January, which you may not have noticed. Epiphany fell on Sunday this year, so rather than having an evening service, with a special meal beginning after 8:30, we had our special service in the morning, at the regular Sunday time, and had the meal start at a more reasonable time. Also, our cooks didn't have to take an afternoon off work to prepare the meal. We have some members who do not like to drive at night and some members with small children who need to be in bed, so having the meal earlier in the day allowed more people to attend, enjoy themselves, and still get home at a decent hour.

So what has happened is that we have accidentally discovered something which Luther observed 500 years ago, when he said that special services should be moved to the preceding Sunday for the sake of servants and others who would have difficulty attending a service in the middle of the week. The Board of Elders met on March 19th and discussed this issue. We have two services every year to which this principle applies: Ascension is always on a Thursday and Epiphany is always on January 6th. Trinity normally has a special meal associated with these two holy days. The Board of Elders decided that, given the success of this year's Epiphany, Trinity should try moving both the Epiphany and the Ascension service to the previous (or perhaps the next) Sunday.

Therefore, beginning with the upcoming Ascension Service, we will observe Ascension and Epiphany on Sundays, rather than the middle of the week. We hope this allows more people to attend and to make attendance a bit more leisurely. If we find we don't like the switch, we can always change back.

Board of Elders

The Reality That Awaits Women in Combat

A Pentagon push to mix the sexes ignores how awful cheek-by-jowl life is on the battlefield.

By RYAN SMITH

America has been creeping closer and closer to allowing women in combat, so Wednesday's news that the decision has now been made is not a surprise. It appears that female soldiers will be allowed on the battlefield but not in the infantry. Yet it is a distinction without much difference: Infantry units serve side-by-side in combat with artillery, engineers, drivers, medics and others who will likely now include women. The Pentagon would do well to consider realities of life in combat as it pushes to mix men and women on the battlefield.

Many articles have been written regarding the relative strength of women and the possible effects on morale of introducing women into all-male units. Less attention has been paid to another aspect: the absolutely dreadful conditions under which grunts live during war.

Most people seem to believe that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have merely involved driving out of a forward operating base, patrolling the streets, maybe getting in a quick firefight, and then returning to the forward operating base and its separate shower facilities and chow hall. The reality of modern infantry combat, at least the portion I saw, bore little resemblance to this sanitized view.

I served in the 2003 invasion of Iraq as a Marine infantry squad leader. We rode into war crammed in the back of amphibious assault vehicles. They are designed to hold roughly 15 Marines snugly; due to maintenance issues, by the end of the invasion we had as many as 25 men stuffed into the back. Marines were forced to sit, in full gear, on each other's laps and in contorted positions for hours on end. That was the least of our problems.

The invasion was a blitzkrieg. The goal was to move as fast to

Baghdad as possible. The column would not stop for a lance corporal, sergeant, lieutenant, or even a company commander to go to the restroom. Sometimes we spent over 48 hours on the move without exiting the vehicles. We were forced to urinate in empty water bottles inches from our comrades.

Many Marines developed dysentery from the complete lack of sanitary conditions. When an uncontrollable urge hit a Marine, he would be forced to stand, as best he could, hold an MRE bag up to his rear, and defecate inches from his seated comrade's face.

During the invasion, we wore chemical protective suits because of the fear of chemical or biological weapon attack. These are equivalent to a ski jumpsuit and hold in the heat. We also had to wear black rubber boots over our desert boots. On the occasions the column did stop, we would quickly peel off our rubber boots, desert boots and socks to let our feet air out.

Due to the heat and sweat, layers of our skin would peel off our feet. However, we rarely had time to remove our suits or perform even the most basic hygiene. We quickly developed sores on our bodies.

When we did reach Baghdad, we were in shambles. We had not showered in well over a month and our chemical protective suits were covered in a mixture of filth and dried blood. We were told to strip and place our suits in pits to be burned immediately. My unit stood there in a walled-in compound in Baghdad, naked, sores dotted all over our bodies, feet peeling, watching our suits burn. Later, they lined us up naked and washed us off with pressure washers.

Yes, a woman is as capable as a man of pulling a trigger. But the goal of our nation's military is to fight and win wars. Before taking the drastic step of allowing women

to serve in combat units, has the government considered whether introducing women into the above-described situation would have made my unit more or less combat effective?

Societal norms are a reality, and their maintenance is important to most members of a society. It is humiliating enough to relieve yourself in front of your male comrades; one can only imagine the humiliation of being forced to relieve yourself in front of the opposite sex.

Despite the professionalism of Marines, it would be distracting and potentially traumatizing to be forced to be naked in front of the opposite sex, particularly when your body has been ravaged by lack of hygiene. In the reverse, it would be painful to witness a member of the opposite sex in such an uncomfortable and awkward position. Combat effectiveness is based in large part on unit cohesion. The relationships among members of a unit can be irreparably harmed by forcing them to violate societal norms.

Mr. Smith served as a Marine infantryman in Iraq. He is now an attorney.

A version of this article appeared January 23, 2013, on page A15 in the U.S. edition of The Wall Street Journal, with the headline: The Reality That Awaits Women in Combat. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB1001424127887323539804578260132111473150.html>

Joint Prayer Service

Pastor Philip Hale
St. Paul, Bancroft; St. John, Lyons,
NE

You may remember the controversy in our church after the

9/11 prayer service in 2001. Unfortunately, after another sad tragedy, the Newtown school shooting, the LCMS is in the news again because of doctrinal disagreement. I realize that times like this are emotionally charged and you may have strong feelings one way or the other, but note that we, as followers of Christ, are not to get our beliefs from our own hearts, nor from the news, but Christ Himself who speaks in Scripture. Let's take a step back and consider what is actually the issue here and why there is disagreement.

Before we can see the source of disagreement, we must consider what actually happened. On December 16, just days after the shooting, there was a prayer service or vigil. Clergy representing Christian churches and non-Christian religions were present. It was organized and planned. President Obama gave a message. Rev. Rob Morris, the pastor at the LCMS church in Newtown, read Scripture and gave the closing benediction. That may not seem sinful to you, but what does our Lord say?

LCMS President Matthew Harrison wrote a letter saying that what Pastor Morris did was improper. It said, in part:

I asked Pastor Morris to apologize for taking part in this service. I did this for several reasons:

I believe his participation violated the limits set by Scripture regarding joint worship, particularly with those who reject Jesus (Romans 16:17), and was thus a violation of Article VI of the LCMS Constitution. Pastor Morris's participation gave offense in the Synod, something we are to avoid, even if we are doing something we believe might be appropriate (1 Corinthians 8). I most sincerely desire to avoid deep and public conten-

tion in the Synod. Our mission is too vital, our fellowship too fragile for a drawn out controversy.

What is interesting is the the news media did not get too worked up over our official teaching. Instead, they couldn't believe that Pastor Morris would dare apologize to those who were offended at his participation. Rev. Morris did apologize, but not for his participation, just insofar as it gave the wrong impression. Here is one media reaction:

Have we made so little progress? Do we still love faith traditions more than we love God? I know that in each tradition there are those who object to praying along with others. After all, to pray with someone is to suggest – horror of horrors – that their tradition too might have validity, that God might be multilingual. Well do I remember when Bailey Smith, then president of the Southern Baptists said, “God doesn't hear the prayers of Jews.” Of course if you have forgotten the name Bailey Smith, maybe God does hear our prayers after all. There is no reason to make God so small. Traditions do not all agree with one another. Surely there are false doctrines. But is there really only one path to the ultimate reality? (Washington Post - Rabbi David Wolpe)

Do you see why people are offended at our teaching? How dare we say that we have the truth, while those who deny Jesus and say He is only man or a myth, are under God's wrath for their sin and must repent. The issue is whether doctrine and the truth matter. Clergy participating in a joint service give the impression they agree and are addressing the same God. But do we have the same God as the Muslims and the Jews, who

deny that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? No. While we can and should love them in our daily lives as neighbors, that is not what our church stands for and what we confess. When clergy lead worship and pray together publicly, it says the differences don't matter. That's exactly why the world is offended: How dare we say that Jesus is the only way to heaven and that we have the full truth of God that alone brings comfort. The world loves joint services which show unity and human love. By abstaining from services with false teachers, ministers confess the true God and the full saving truth as revealed in Scripture.

In a church service people naturally assume that they are praying to the same God and confessing the same doctrine about Him. Who would dare to think that we are confused about which God we worship? But this Newtown prayer service had clergy of the Muslim, Jewish and Baha'i religions.

Were they praying to the same God as Pastor Morris, who confesses Jesus Christ as Lord? No, but the average American does, and would have had that impression from the vigil. While it is good to pray and call upon God for help in our trouble and grief, ministers praying officially with leaders of false religions and churches who deny some of Christ's teaching, is misleading at best and denies Christ at the worst. We pray in Jesus' name and in faith. The Spirit intercedes for us. God has not promised to hear the prayers of those who do not believe and have not been accounted righteous in faith. It is not the beauty or sincerity of our prayers that cause God to listen to us. It is that we are first forgiven of sin and God tells us He wants us to present our requests to Him because He loves us. Only those who are the Father's forgiven children by faith does He listen to in prayer.

Our reason for existence is at stake: Do we have the truth of Jesus, the only Gospel that comforts and forgives sins? Praying with people whom God does not hear and who deny Christ's sacrifice on the cross is not loving. Unfortunately, there is a lot of pressure from the world to follow along, "play nice" and be generically "religious," even if that religion is man-made and does not lead to heaven. Read Luke 13:1-5, where Jesus responds to a similar tragedy by saying: "Do you suppose that these Galileans [who were murdered] were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." Jesus would not be allowed near a civil prayer service to speak the saving truth which makes unbelievers uncomfortable.

These joint services are not about comfort from God--that we are loved and forgiven in Christ and should repent of our sins--but about making everyone feel good. The world is more concerned with not offending anyone or telling them they are wrong, than the only name under heaven which saves: Jesus. The message (or sermon) that was spoken to comfort the grieving was by the same man who boldly supports the murder of children in the womb. Where was the true comfort that in is Jesus' murder? God knows our pain, because His holy Son died on the cross for us. Only the truth of the resurrection, that shows Jesus is true God, can help those stricken with grief and give certain hope of the life to come.

What is interesting is that in Rev. Morris' "apology" he did state that joint worship was wrong and not possible, which is correct. But he made the claim that "In the end, I believed my participation to be, not an act of joint worship, but an act of community chaplaincy.

Chaplains are expected to give faithful witness under circumstances which are less than ecclesiastically perfect, even as their fellow chaplains may proclaim a different witness." It was not an informal setting in which a chaplain operates independently (like in the military or a hospital), but a formal and pre-arranged service. The news media accurately stated that it was a service to worship and pray to God. We are called to confess, but to give the formal impression by our actions that different religions and denominations believe the same, when they clearly don't, is wrong.

Pastor Morris further said:

Thus, to those who believe that I have endorsed false teaching, I assure you that was not my intent, and I give you my unreserved apologies. If any of you know church members or friends or family who are now confused because of my participation, believing that the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod fully endorses the doctrine of anyone else who was on that stage, please correct this confusion lovingly, and I will personally be happy to help in any way that I can. Feel free to pass on my apologies for having given that impression.

Unfortunately, his intentions are not the issue, but his actions. It did give the wrong impression: that Jesus is not necessary for salvation and His righteousness is not required for God to hear prayer. LCMS members should know that other religions and false teachers should not be believed. But what about the majority of the TV audience? Who will correct them and tell them that Jesus is the only way to heaven and it matters what teachings we believe?

If a pastor of a local church is televised marching in a gay pride march, you should be offended.

Maybe he was just going to the dry cleaners and he did not intend to show support for homosexuality, but one's public actions speak louder than what is hidden in our hearts. That is why we must be careful to not give the impression that we approve of sin or false teaching, which destroy faith in Christ.

This issue is likely to dominate the discussion of our church for at least another decade. I wish we could agree and have unity in God's Word. However, Jesus did not recognize error or tolerate unbelief. He is the one who said: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. ... You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town" (Matthew 23).

Jesus accurately predicted that the world (including its religious leaders), which hates God, would not accept His truth. That God's love is only found in Jesus is offensive to those who are not saved. We cannot fix that or help them by denying what we believe. Only the truth of Christ can bring sinners to love God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This concern and care for Christ's Word, matters more than what the world says. That is why Scriptures say clearly: "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive

people" (Romans 16:17-18).

If We Would be Lutheran

Our nation is in the midst of political campaigning. We are being told that the choice facing us is between two Americas, two visions for our future. Whatever this country's electorate decides in November, the Church and her constituency face an even greater decision every day.

As Lutherans, we celebrate the Reformation on October 31. Perhaps that would be a good day – if we are not too distracted with Trick or Treating – to renew our commitment to being truly Lutheran.

I thought of this recently when reading Luther's comments on Matthew 7:13-14. That dear doctor of the Faith wrote: "Think about this, and guide yourself accordingly. If you want to be a Christian, then be one. . . You will never make the way any wider, and you have to watch how few travel on it, while the great mob travels over there. But let this be your comfort: first, that God is standing next to you; and second, that after you have gone through, you will enter a beautiful and wide room. If you just cling to the Word, guiding yourself by it, and not by what your eyes see, He will certainly be next to you. He will be so strong that your spirit will overcome the flesh, the world, and the devil, who will be unable to do anything with your flesh or with the world or with himself. The Word to which you cling by faith is too strong for him, though it seems tiny and we do not see it."

Perhaps we could paraphrase the above by saying, "If you want to be a Lutheran, then be one." Namely, take daily comfort in your Baptism, but also, take to heart the

daily dying to sin and self which that entails, and the daily rising again in the newness of Christ. Take seriously that He accompanies you with His Word and so learn it diligently. Remember that our Lutheran confession is that "in our churches Mass is celebrated every Sunday and on other festivals, when the Sacrament is offered to those who wish for it after they have been examined and absolved" (Apology XXIV, the Mass).

Did any of that sound strange? Every Sunday? Other festivals as well? After examination and absolution? The Mass? Does the language of our founding documents sound as strange to our Lutheran ears as our nation's founding principles can seem to modern and ill-informed citizens today? We can fix that. We must fix that. If we would be Lutheran, then let us be Lutheran!

For that, this Reformation is a good time to devote ourselves anew to the study of God's Word and our Lutheran Confessions. We ought consider current issues and trends facing our church body according to what God says and what we confess according to it. Our ACELC website has documents and studies to help with that. It is even more important that we exercise informed decision making as Lutherans than that we do the same as American citizens in November.

The choice we make in November will have lasting effects. Ever so much more lasting are the effects of our decision not merely to be Lutheran in name or culture or synodical affiliation, but to actually be Lutheran in confession and life. To depart the historic liturgy in favor of conforming to the patterns of this world will have lasting effects for generations to come. So will failure to catechize our people properly on what Lutherans actually believe, teach and practice!

When we are truly Lutheran, we will repent of our own efforts to broaden the path we are on, hoping more will join us. We will repent of worrying that so many prefer the wide and easy road. It has always been this way. We will stop trying to look more like the world and remember that we look like Christ by virtue of our Baptism. While the world still despises Him, He would have all come under His gracious embrace.

So, we catechize diligently, sure that to do so is to evangelize the next generation. We hold fast to what we have received, eagerly offering it as the prize it is, neither surprised when it is rejected nor forlorn to see how many want to change it. We cling to the Word, judging by what He says, not by what we see. We remain sure that the devil is defeated, regardless of how things look, and that "the Word to which you cling by faith is too strong for him, though it seems tiny and we do not see it."

November lays before us an important decision, but even more is the one which is set before us by our annual celebration of Reformation Day; namely, if we would be Lutheran, then let us truly be Lutheran!

Pastor Rick Sawyer
Vice-chairman, ACELC Board of Directors

Of Broadway Plays and Joint Prayer Services

Posted on February 25, 2013 by Rev. Paul R. Harris

In 1969 there was a Broadway play "in which two male homosexuals make open love on-stage..." The performance beat the charge of obscenity because

while the two were thus engaged they talked about Vietnam. The play met the then litmus test of “some redeeming social value” (*The World Book Year Book 1970*, pp. 55-56).

In 2001 a Lutheran Church Missouri Synod pastor participated in the Yankee Stadium Prayer service after 9/11 and in December 2012 another pastor participated in a prayer service in connection with the shootings in Newtown, Connecticut. Both times the other clergy participating in the service were from un-Christian religions and erring Christian denominations. Both times the LCMS pastors were defended because they proclaimed the Gospel and what they said was needed, comforting, and the popular thing to do. You would say their actions had some redeeming *theological* value.

Yes, I’m sure what the men said on the stage in 1969 about Vietnam was needed, comforting, popular, and had some redeeming *social* value, but what they said did not alter the fact that they were engaged in a lewd, lascivious act publicly. Yes, what they said about Vietnam might have needed to be said, but what they did was still fornication.

Comparing what two LCMS pastors did in joint prayer services with homosexual intercourse on stage is comparing apples to apples. The Old Testament frequently uses the language and image of adultery and fornication to de-

scribe unfaithfulness to God. These two LCMS pastors may have said some amazingly poignant, elegant, and passionate Gospel of real theological value, but they were still publicly fornicating even as the two men were on stage in 1969.

The truth is that many LCMS pastors have been adulterating and fornicating for years doing joint weddings, funerals, baccalaureates, and civic services. Now because of two documents produced by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations they may fornicate as boldly and openly as Absalom did with David’s concubines.

The 2001 CTCR document, *The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship: Report on Synodical Discussions*, which came out prior to the 9/11, said there were some emergency cases too out of the ordinary for anyone to make a decision on in advance. As open Communion has always been justified under the rubric of emergency or extraordinary circumstances, so now unionism and syncretism are.

The 2004 CTCR report, *Guidelines for Participation in Civic Events*, declared that participating in joint prayer was not unionism or syncretism as long as clergymen took turns praying. Here the rubric being followed is the one President Clinton made up to defend his tawdry relationship with Monica Lewinsky. He hadn’t lied when he said that he had no

sexual relationship with her because what they did wasn’t intimate enough.

The open, unapologetic, uncensored theological fornication now going on in the name of our Synod, together with the Synodical president apologizing for getting involved in an attempt to bring the pastor to repentance, shows precisely where we are as a fellowship. We are to the point where we must admit what a person in a long standing adulterous affair does after he is discovered. “My marriage was over a long time ago.”

No matter what the men in the 1969 play said about Vietnam it didn’t disguise, let alone justify, the fact that they were fornicating publicly. In fact, their public fornication took away from whatever good they did say. And so it is with those proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ while they are fornicating with error. Ah but such pastors don’t think it is fornicating! My point precisely. Those defending the participation in joint prayer services defend it by invoking the Gospel, lost souls, grieving people, but they really don’t believe truth getting into bed with error is fornicating under any circumstances.

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April 2013

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	5 PM Confirmation					PASTOR ON	
7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
VACATION			No Bible Stories or Revelation II				
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
		ACELC	Conference	Here			
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	
	5 PM Confirmation	Church Council 6:30 PM	10 AM Bible Stories 7:15 PM Revelation II				
28	29	30					
	5 PM Confirmation						

May 2013

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
			1	2	3	4
			10 AM Bible Stories 7:15 PM Revelation II			
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Ascension Service & Dinner 7:30 PM			10 AM Bible Stories 7:15 PM Revelation II			
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
		6:30 PM Elders Meeting	10 AM Bible Stories 7:15 PM Revelation II			
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Couples	Trip	To	The	Coast		
26	27	28	29	30	31	
			10 AM Bible Stories 7:15 PM Revelation II			

