

Report on the 2023 LCMS National Convention

Introduction

[Jesus said,] “So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to Me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your Name, and cast out demons in Your Name, and do many mighty works in Your Name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:17-23, ESV)

You can judge the quality of their faith from the way they behave. Discipline is an index to doctrine. — Tertullian, *The Prescriptions Against the Heretics*

Earthly treasures are esteemed more highly than the pure Word and Sacrament. Men become ashamed before the world because of the pure doctrine. Nothing is done to maintain the orthodox ministry. God’s Word is heard with a sleepy mind. Men learn to despise it...

All Christ’s sheep are judges, both learned and layman, man and wife, bachelor and spinster, young and old, for it concerns each one’s soul, his own life, his own salvation...

It is the holy, inalienable and unassailable right of the whole congregation and of every member to judge doctrine, to prove it, to receive it or reject it. But in the church, no one is to rule and control with force—not even the congregation...

Do not despise diligent searching in the Holy Scriptures, in the books of orthodox teachers, and especially in the public confessional writings of the orthodox Lutheran Church {*Book of Concord*}. Don’t think that you lack time, that you must look out for your earthly calling. The salvation of your soul is concerned. Should you not have time for that? — Dr. C.F.W. Walther, *The Sheep Judge Their Shepherds*

Brothers and Sisters in Christ of Christ Lutheran Church and the Sioux Falls Circuit:

Throughout history, believers have been assaulted by the devil, the world and our sinful flesh to give up or abandon faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin, death, and that same devil.

In our own Synod, our fathers in the faith, including laymen, repelled attacks on the very Word of God by those who believed and taught the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation¹, which has self-destructed². Standing up to these attacks at the 1973 New Orleans Convention led to the 1974 Concordia Seminary Walkout. Many of those who walked out formed, along with the LCA and the ALC, the church body known as the ELCA. The lack of faithful, confessional doctrine in the ELCA has led to heresies, such as goddess-worship (herchurch.org³) and, as we will see below, a belief that Jesus Himself committed personal sin(s).

I am convinced now, more than ever, that we in the laity need to gird ourselves with God’s Word (Eph. 6:10-20) and the Confessions. The release of the *Large Catechism with*

Annotations and Contemporary Applications (LCACA, 2023) is endorsed and promoted by the leadership of our Synod.

“Those ruling Synod are beginning to have contempt for the people of LCMS, both pastors and parishioners. Pres. Harrison has only praised LCACA. The embrace of leftist framing is merely a ‘lack of clarity.’ He and his institutions have ignored the issues of having authors from churches not in fellowship with LCMS. No one at Synod has ever really answered the serious objections that respectable pastors—and somewhere near a majority of Synod in convention—have made against the volume. And Synod’s leaders tarred some of those who raised criticisms with the brush of ‘alt-right’ white nationalism.” (<https://americanreformer.org/2023/11/wokeeness-in-conservative-lutheran-circles/>)

See also *Racism and the Church: A Dissenting Opinion*, 1995 LCMS Convention Workbook, pages 62-64, Appendix R3-01A, authored by Cameron A. MacKenzie, Ken Schurb, James W. Voelz, Norman Nagel; April 9, 1994 (<https://tinyurl.com/RATCADO>)

One of LCACA’s essayists from the ELCA, Steven D. Paulson, stated that Jesus committed personal sins – this is heresy.

Steven D. Paulson’s book titled *Lutheran Theology states:*

“[On the cross] Christ comes to *believe he was guilty.... Confessing made it so, and thus Christ committed his own, personal sin—not only an actual sin, but the original sin... not only did he confess our sins as his own (and believed it), but he proceeded to take on every single sin ever committed in the world: “I have committed the sins of the world” (“Ego commisi peccata mundi”).*” (Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 105).

However:

Hebrews 4:15 ESV—

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One (Jesus) who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet **without sin**.

As this text proves, Jesus, being God in the flesh, committed no sins. He died on the cross as the propitiation, the payment, for our sins and for all sins. He delivers that forgiveness to us through His Word (John 1:1-14), through Holy Baptism (Small Catechism, Baptism, II—Mark 16:16), through Absolution (John 20:21-23), and through His Body and Blood (*Real Presence*—Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-29; Small Catechism, VI Sacrament of the Altar; Large Catechism, Sacrament of the Altar 20-22, 28-32; Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, 52-53, 62, 79-82).

Jesus is truly present in the Divine Service to give these gifts to us. And if Jesus is truly present in the Divine Service, do we believe it? Do our actions reflect our belief?

If one does not believe it, or if Jesus is instead an abstraction, then one’s actions will reflect that belief also.

This report consists of three parts:

1. The Why and How of the National Convention (page 3)
2. The Work of Committee 9 (page 4)
3. The Resolutions of Note that Were Adopted (and One that Was Not) (page 5)

The Why and How of the National Convention

The LCMS, including its member congregations, pastors, commissioned ministers (teachers, DCEs, etc.), accepts without reservation the Holy Bible as the written Word of God and all the documents in the Book of Concord “as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God” (2023 *Handbook*, Constitution, Article II, Confession).

“**The Synod in convention** is empowered to and has formed corporate entities which shall have legal powers...” (*Handbook*, Constitution, Article IV, Powers). “**All organized congregations that have joined Synod hold voting membership**” (*Handbook*, Constitution, Article V, Membership, Part A).

“**The Synod convenes every three years for its regular meeting**” (*Handbook*, Constitution, Article VIII, Synodical Meetings).

“**Overtures to a convention** of the Synod may be submitted only by a member congregation of the Synod, a convention or board of directors of a district, an official district conference of ordained and/or commissioned ministers, the faculty of an educational institution of the Synod, the Board of Directors of the Synod, a board or commission of the Synod listed in Bylaws 3.2.2, 3.2.2.1, 3.2.3, and 3.2.3.1, a committee established by a prior convention, or a forum of a circuit.

“(a) Overtures **are recommendations in the form of proposed resolutions requesting action on the part of the convention.**” (*Handbook*, Bylaw 3.1.6.2, National Convention, Reports and Overtures, Overtures)

“All **reports and overtures** accepted by the President in accordance with the foregoing paragraphs **shall be referred by him to convention floor committees.** Such floor committees shall be appointed by the President in consultation with the Council of Presidents and the Praesidium.

“(a) Appointments will be made from among the voting delegates (Bylaw 3.1.2ff), advisory delegates (Bylaw 3.1.3ff), and advisory representatives (Bylaw 3.1.4ff).

“(b) Ordained ministers, commissioned ministers, and laypersons shall be represented on all committees.” (*Handbook*, Bylaw 3.1.7, National Convention, Convention Committees)

The 2023 National Convention Committees

Committee 1: National Witness

Committee 2: International Witness

Committee 3: Mercy

Committee 4: Life Together

Committee 5: Theology and Church Relations

Committee 6: Pastoral Ministry and Seminaries

Committee 7: University Education

Committee 8: Finance

Committee 9: Structure and Administration

Committee 10: Ecclesiastical Supervision and Dispute Resolution

Committee 11: Church and Culture

Committee 12: Schools, Family, Young Adults, and Youth

Committee 13: Registration, Credentials, and Elections

Committee for Convention Nominations {Standing Committee (Bylaw 3.2.5)}

The Work of Committee 9 – Structure and Administration

I was asked to serve on Floor Committee 9 by LCMS President Matthew Harrison.

In spite of comments from a certain current district president at a pre-convention meeting (“This is where some people will be leaving the convention floor to go to the bathroom or get a drink of water. Just sayin’. It probably will happen.”), the Committee’s work was important in many ways.

One of the resource persons assigned to our Committee was Pastor Dale Sattgast, former S.D. District President, who serves on the Commission on Handbook (Articles of Incorporation, Constitution, and Bylaws).

We were given 51 Overtures from congregations and agencies of the Synod to distill down to Resolutions to present to the Convention. We met during Floor Committee weekend, June 9-12, 2023, at the LCMS International Center in St. Louis. Since we had so many overtures to work on, we were not expected to have our work completed by Monday at noon.

Six Overtures were assigned to Boards, Offices, Individuals or Commissions. One Overture was already Addressed by a Previous Convention. The remaining 44 Overtures were distilled down to 12 Resolutions through four subcommittees assigned by Pastor Timothy Scharr, Southern Illinois District President, Committee Chair.

One subcommittee worked on whether to keep the three-year Convention cycle or move to a four-year cycle, along with overtures on Circuit Size and Alignment.

Another worked on two major issues: 1. whether to keep the current method of electing the Synodical President or move it back to it’s original method, at the Convention itself; and 2. whether to implement term limits on the President, First Vice President and Secretary or not.

Another worked on miscellaneous overtures covering various topics.

Pastor Michael Mohr (Central Illinois District President), Pastor John Drosendahl (Redeemer Lutheran, Mandeville, Louisiana (Southern District)), and myself were assigned Overtures 9-20 through 9-26, regarding Nonvoting Advisory Delegate Convention Participation.

Prior to beginning the work of our subcommittee, we were encouraged to read Report R62 in the 2023 Convention Workbook (<https://tinyurl.com/2023ConvWB>), pages 159-168. This report was the result of the 2019 Convention Resolution 9-17: Study of Voting Privilege in the LCMS (CCM). This report laid out the history of the franchise going back to the founding of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. Since the Synod was founded on the equal voting participation of congregations or parishes (*Pfarrgemeinde*) and, within each *Pfarrgemeinde*, equal voting of pastors and laity (1-to-1), any change to that foundation would result in, my belief, scrapping the Synod’s Constitution and Bylaws. See Res. 9-08A, page 5.

Our Committee wrapped up its work Saturday afternoon. After the *Today’s Business* staff was able to go through all resolutions, checking for accuracy, spelling, etc., we were excused about 5:00 pm, Sunday.

The Convention was held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, at the Baird Center (formerly known as the Wisconsin Center), July 28–August 3, 2023.

Resolutions of Note that Were Adopted (and One that Was Not)

Res 4-06: To Encourage In-Person Corporate Worship:

Several congregations are still having issues with members not attending services in person since Covid.

Res. 5-07: To Recognize That the Synod is Not in Altar and Pulpit Fellowship with the Japan Lutheran Church:

The JLC grew out of LCMS mission work begun in 1948. They were a partner church of the LCMS since 1971. However, they have been training, ordaining and calling women as “pastors” or “deacons” since 2006. Since they refuse to repent of this sin, the LCMS severed fellowship.

Res. 5-08A: To Affirm In-Person Communion:

This is affecting about 12 congregations in the Pacific Southwest District (not sure of others).

Res. 5-09: To Review Guidance on Admission to the Lord’s Supper:

Several congregations throughout Synod are practicing (functionally) open communion and instructs district presidents to address it.

Res. 5-10: To Articulate Theology and Philosophy of Lutheran Education:

Synod’s parochial schools must maintain their Lutheran doctrinal heritage and not succumb to secularism.

Res. 5-11: To Reaffirm Synod’s Biblical Position on Marriage and Sexuality:

Lots of pressure on parishes, pastors, teachers, schools to give up on the Sixth Commandment.

Res. 5-15: To Uphold Proper Elements and Reverential Administration of the Lord’s Supper:

It’s evident on YouTube, etc., that several parishes use elements and practices that are less than proper and reverential.

Res. 5-14: To Address Release and Use of *Luther’s Large Catechism with Annotations and Contemporary Applications (LCACA)*:

This Resolution encouraged the use and study of LCACA. As noted above, this book should not have had the Contemporary Applications added, due to the number of non-LCMS “Lutherans” essays included. During open hearings, the Committee was questioned about the essayists as well as the content of the essays. Since they received so much pushback and were told there was going to be more pushback on the floor of the Convention, the Committee **withdrew** the Resolution.

Res. 7-03: To Call Concordia University Texas Leadership to Repentance:

The Board of Regents of CTX has gone rogue and stolen Synod’s property. This has now become a legal issue.

Res. 7-04B: To Revise Bylaws to Revisit and Renew Relationship of Colleges and Universities with the Synod:

Around 20 pages of changes to the Bylaws.

Res. 7-05A: To Bring Accountability to Concordia Boards of Regents and to Improve Doctrinal Fidelity and Amenability to Ecclesiastical Supervision:

Return schools to their purpose: train church workers and faithful laity.

Res. 9-08A: To Strengthen Nonvoting Advisory Delegate Participation at Conventions:

As noted above, Commissioned Ministers (teachers, etc.) and other advisory delegates are encouraged to participate in floor committees. The *Pfarrgemeinde* voting participation, however, will not be changed.

Res. 9-09A: To Appoint a Task Force to Prepare the 2026 Convention to Consider Implementing a Four-Year Convention Cycle:

Since implementing a four-year cycle would require modifying the Constitution and Bylaws, length of terms of office, etc., the Resolution would establish a Committee to propose all the changes and bring them to the 2026 Convention. If the Convention adopted them, the earliest that the changes would be implemented would be the 2029/2030 Convention.

The body declined the Resolution.

(This was the only Resolution that was declined by vote.)

Res. 11-04: To Address Abortion and Use of Fetal Tissue in Vaccines:

Yes, aborted baby tissue is used in the manufacture of vaccines. Needs to stop.

Res. 11-05: To Address the Relationship between Church and State in an Increasingly Hostile Environment:

No, the government is not here to help us.

Res. 11-06: To Oppose Mandatory Registration of Women into the Draft:

We do not want women drafted.

Res. 12-01A: To Produce Uniform Set of Lutheran Academic Standards for Our Schools:

Makes sense if we want students to remain faithful Lutherans.

Res. 12-05A: To Encourage Family Devotions, Lutheran Fathers, and Young Men:

Synod encourages a robust devotional life!

Endnotes

¹ Yet with the historical-critical method, the Bible was wrested from the hands of the church and tendered to the grasp of academic elites. Thankfully, today, the Bible has been returned to God's people. (Timothy H. Maschke, "The Historical-Critical Method" in *Rediscovering the Issues Surrounding the 1974 Concordia Seminary Walkout*, 2023, Concordia Publishing House, p. 81)

² Near the end of 1974, Eugene Klug (1917-2003), a professor at Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois, and a member of the Seminary Issues floor committee at the New Orleans convention, reviewed in detail a book by German theologian Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method*. The review highlighted how the book pointed out the failure of the historical-critical method among recent German scholars. The method self-destructed through its rejection of biblical authority, its acceptance of subjective conclusions, its failure to be accepted by the laity, and its failure to take Scripture's own authority on authorship. (*ibid*, p. 76)

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<https://www.herchurch.org/about/our-purpose>

We strive to be an **open** and **affirming** community. All persons are welcome and loved in the love of Christ-Sophia and the Great Mother of us All. This an exciting time. Even though we have been in God/dess' service in the City since 1882, we are birthing a new congregation. We are always becoming a community of hospitality, which expresses inclusivity through word/wisdom and worship, deed and ministry programming.