

The Doctrine of Church and Ministry: The Scriptural Basis for the WELS Practice and its Uniqueness from the Practices of Other Lutheran Church Bodies

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Every Christian pastor in the course of his ministry wrestles with the question - Is what I preach and teach correct, and is my personal view of what God's church is what it should be? Every congregation member whom we serve likewise has this same concern - Is what my pastor preaches and teaches correct, and is the church to which I belong right by nature and right in the purpose it now is serving? To someone who has grown up in either the WELS or our sister Synod the ELS this is a very great concern, because we are but a small minority in this world. Among all the Lutherans in North America we comprise less than 5% of the total Lutheran population which numbers around 9 million. Most Lutherans belong to either the 3 million member (ALC) American Lutheran Church, or the 2.4 million member (LCA) Lutheran Church of America, or the 2.8 million member (LCMS) Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. When you are in the minority as we are, the concern seems that much greater to justify your personal position on church polity and its practice. In our efforts to attract new people to our churches we find that we do need to be able to show those newcomers how we differ from other Lutherans and why it is better for them to join our church. We do have a different church and a different ministry as the title of this paper assumes.

Keeping these concerns in mind, we will now study **“The Doctrine of Church and Ministry: The Scriptural Basis for the WELS Practice and its Uniqueness from the Practices of Other Lutheran Church Bodies”** using this outlined approach. We will look at:

- I. What God's Word says the Church and Ministry is
- II. What our Synod's position is in this matter
- III. How our Synod's position differs from that of other Lutheran Bodies
- IV. What we can learn from all of this

The Doctrine of the Church and Its Ministry has been established by God in His Word. The *Una Sancta* or the Holy Christian Church is a gathering of believers in the name of Jesus Christ. Eph. 5:23 says of the Church, "For Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He is the Savior." In his first letter to the congregation in Corinth the Apostle Paul wrote, "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Cor. 1:2) As Jesus Himself put it, "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." (Mt. 18:20) God's Word employs many different names to speak of the church. The believers in Christ are called The City of God (Ps. 46:4) The People of God (I Pet. 2:9-10) The Temple of God (I Cor. 3:16-17) Mount Zion (Ps. 48:2) The Bride of Christ (Rev. 2:12) The Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23) and other names. The main fact which God's Word teaches us regarding the profile of the church is - It is invisible. Only God Himself can really see the Holy Christian Church, because it is established through faith. Faith is something that can only be found in our heart or our soul. As God's Word puts it, "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (I Sam. 16:7) When Jesus spoke about the church which He referred to as the

Kingdom of God He said, "The Kingdom of God does not come visibly, nor will people say, "Here it is," or "There it is," because the Kingdom of God is within you." (Lk. 17:21)

Still, even as God's Word clearly shows us how spiritually invisible the church is, that same Word makes us understand - The Holy Christian Church has a visible presence here on this earth, because it is made up of people. And people can be seen, because they are flesh and blood. The Bible again and again in the New Testament refers to the visible gatherings of people to hear God's Word and make use of the Sacraments as churches. (Acts 13:1, 14:23, 15:47., 16:5) From what God's Word tells us we are to understand that wherever the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments are administered in keeping with God's Word there the church is to be found. The reason we can say this is - The Holy Spirit through these means of grace will be leading people in these places to believe in Jesus. As God Himself has put it, "(My Word) will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and, achieve the purpose for which I sent it." (Is. 55:11)

The specific form the church is to take and the specific way in which the church is to be administered has neither been commanded nor forbidden by God's Word. The form and the administration of the church are adiaphora. This is not to say that it does not matter how the church is formed or how the church is to be administered. Sanctified Christian judgment and decency and good order will determine what form the visible Christian Church should take so that it can best fulfill its God given purpose in this world. As I Corinthians 14:40 puts it, "But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way." It is important that the form of the church and its administration not get in the way of the ministry which it is to carry out.

The ministry of the church is to preach and teach the Gospel, and baptize and commune God's people. Jesus' command to His disciples was, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them everything I have commanded you." (Mt. 18:19,20) At the same time the Church is to forgive the sins of penitent sinners and retain the sins of impenitent sinners. In speaking of the ministry of the church Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Mt. 18:18) The guidelines by which both the public and the private ministry of God's people is to be carried out are clearly set forth for us in God's Word. But the exact way in which the church is to carry out its God-given ministry is not set forth. Congregations, and synods, and the like must determine for themselves according to their given circumstances and their particular needs how they will best carry out the work of the holy ministry. Now that we have briefly looked at what God's Word says regarding the Doctrine of Church and Ministry we will look at:

What Our Synod's Position Is on this Matter

The WELS position with respect to the church and its ministry can best be understood by reading Article VII of the confessional statement "This We Believe". This statement has been widely circulated throughout our Synod since 1967. Our Synod's official position regarding the Church and Its Ministry is clearly explained within this article in 13 short paragraphs. The following statements are excerpts from these paragraphs:

Statements Regarding the Church

- We believe that there is one holy Christian Church, which is the Temple of God (I Cor. 3:16), the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:23, 4:12)
- Whoever believes that Jesus died for his sin and rose again for his justification (Rom. 4:24) belongs to Christ's Church.

- Every true believer, regardless of the nation or race or church body to which he belongs, is a member of the holy Christian Church.
- The members of the holy Christian Church are known only to God, we cannot distinguish between true believers and hypocrites. The holy Christian Church is therefore invisible and cannot be identified with any one church body or the sum total of all church bodies.
- Wherever the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments are administered, the holy Christian Church is present, for through the means of grace true faith is produced and preserved. (Is. 55:10-11)
- The means of grace are therefore called the marks of the Church.
- Since these visible gatherings (for example, congregations, synods) confess themselves to the marks of the Church and make use of them, they are called churches.

Statements Regarding the Ministry

- We believe that the holy Christian Church is one, united by a common faith, for all true believers have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (Eph. 4:5-6). Since this is a unity in the heart, it is seen only by God.
- We believe that God bids us on our part to acknowledge oneness in faith among God's saints on earth only as they by word and deed reveal (confess) the faith of their hearts.
- We believe, furthermore, that the individual through his membership in a church body confesses himself to the doctrine and practice of that body.
- We believe that we cannot practice religious fellowship with those whose confession reveals that error is taught or tolerated, supported or defended. The Lord bids us avoid persistent errorists. (Rom. 16:17-18)
- We believe that every believer is a priest and king before God. (I Pet. 2:9) To all believers God has given the means of grace to use.
- We believe that it is the will of God that the Church in accordance with good order (I Cor. 14:40) call qualified men (I Tim. 3) into the public ministry.
- Through its call the church in Christian liberty designates the place, form and scope of service.
- We reject any attempt to identify the holy Christian Church with an outward organization, and likewise any claim that the church must function in the world through specific organizational forms.
- We reject as false ecumenicity any views that look for the true unity of the Church in some form of external or organizational union, and we oppose all movements toward such union made at the expense of confessional integrity.
- ***We reject the contention that religious fellowship may be practiced without confessional agreement.

The confessional statements our beloved Wisconsin Synod makes regarding the Church and Its Ministry are closely linked to the doctrine of fellowship. In fact, about one third of Article VII on the Church and Its Ministry in "This We Believe" is devoted to our Synod's practice of its fellowship principles. The emphasis on Scriptural fellowship principles on the basis of Romans 16:17 is so strongly stated here that Article VII could be titled The Church and

Its Ministry, and Its Fellowship. What becomes very apparent is - One cannot be a WELS pastor with weak fellowship principles and remain in good standing with the rest of our Synod's constituency. It has even facetiously been said, "Romans 16:17 is the Gospel according to the Wisconsin Synod." But that is not true.

Our fellowship principles are really a reflection of our high regard for God's Word. Outside of the realm of God's Word the fellowship principles which we practice are not defensible. In the society in which we live this is rather the principle which rules supreme: there is to be complete democracy for everyone in all things without regard to sex, race, ethnic origin, or creed. Within the realm of Christendom in our country the general reigning theological principle is - the Fatherhood of God, and the Brotherhood of all Mankind. It is not surprising that we of the Wisconsin Synod often find ourselves on the defensive when it comes to doctrinal issues even when we claim to have taken our stand on the basis of our great love for Christ and love for God's Word. As we are going to see - Differing views in the area of fellowship principles is actually only symptomatic of the much greater differences which exist between us and other major Lutheran Bodies. We will now look at:

III. How Our Synod's Position Differs from That of Other Lutheran Bodies

In this section of our study we are going to look particularly at the ALC (The American Lutheran Church), the LCA (The Lutheran Church of America), and the LCMS (The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod). These church bodies of course do not include all of the Lutherans in the United States. But outside of our own church body about 9596 of all the Lutherans living in our country belong to one of these three large Synods. Some of the small Lutheran church bodies with which we differ could be mentioned. This includes The Apostolic Lutheran Church of America, The Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America, The AELC (The Authentic Evangelical Lutheran Church), The Protestant Conference, and the CLC (The Church of the Lutheran Confession). The main concern of this discussion will be with the way in which we differ with the three aforementioned bodies.

The differences which exist between us and the ALC, the LCA, and the LCMS in the area of Church and Ministry are deeply rooted. In the case of the ALC and the LCA our differences in the area of Church and Ministry extend to the very founding principles of these respective synodical bodies. The ALC which was founded in 1930 came about as a result of a merger between the Ohio Synod founded in 1818, the Iowa Synod founded in 1854, the Buffalo Synod founded in 1845, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) founded in 1917. Formerly the ELC had been known as the Norwegian Lutheran Church of North America. It was a merger of Hauge's Norwegian Ev. Lutheran Synod, the Norwegian Ev. Lutheran Synod, the United Church, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (Danish) and the Lutheran Free Church. The Lutheran Free Church, however, did not join the ALC until 1962. As one might expect the merging of so many synodical bodies into one big super synod might have had a detrimental effect on the resulting Synod's confessional standard. In the case of the formation of the ALC this was definitely the case.

In the epilogue of his book on the history of the ALC Fred W. Meuser shows us that the basic confessional spirit of the ALC has been that of compromise. Regarding confessionalism he admits of those who formed the ALC, "Even though they were not able or willing to endorse every individual utterance of the Confessions as absolute truth they were unwilling to grant to the individual the right to choose which confessional utterances he would accept. As a whole, the Confessions were regarded as reliable interpretations of the Scripture. The admission was made

that on a few minor points the Confessions went a bit beyond Scripture, but those instances were said to be easy to spot."¹ Regarding the prerequisites for Church Fellowship he says, "Ohio's view was that confessional synods must have solid assurance that real, not merely nominal unity of faith exists. The Richmond, Michigan City, and Toledo colloquies and the consultations with the Norwegians are evidence that Ohio's view prevailed. Neither the merging synods nor the American Lutheran Church, however, insisted that all synods must accept identical wording of every dogma. Agreement in the faith, not uniformity of phraseology, was essential."² Regarding the ALC view of Inspiration Fred W. Meuser writes, "The fact that the definition of inspiration was placed into the constitution indicates the American Lutheran Church makes acceptance of this approach to Scripture a condition of church membership and fellowship with other synods. There is undoubtedly some variety of opinion beyond the bounds of the constitution within the American Lutheran Church, but it has never been publicly vocal."³ It is to be noted that Meuser's history of the ALC was copyrighted in 1958. Even at this time already Meuser does elude to the fact that the "source theory" of Bible study was already being afforded some recognition in ALC circles. The ALC did not change its constitution in 1959. It still read:

"The American Lutheran Church accepts all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as a whole and in all their parts as the divinely inspired, revealed and inerrant Word of God, and submits to this as the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life."

However, Harold E. Wicke, the former editor of our "Northwestern Lutheran," notes that in 1959 already the word "inspiration" was being used in a limited sense by some within the ALC.⁴ Since this time the historical critical method of Bible interpretation has received wide spread acceptance and approval in the ALC. Existentialism, neo-orthodoxy and the social Gospel which are really by-products of the use of the historical critical method have made their inroads into the ALC, and they are being heralded as the Neo-Lutheranism of the Twentieth Century. We need to watch out that we do not write off the whole ALC as being entirely liberal. There are still a number of so called Old Lutherans in the ALC, and they view God's Word as we do. They stay in the ALC, because they feel that is the mission the Lord has called them to fulfill.

Regarding the doctrine of the Church the ALC does not in practice view the church as a body of believers who are in complete agreement on all the doctrines of the Scriptures as we do. The ALC even allows for differing views towards the church's confessional standards. The practice of close communion by and large is a thing of the past in the ALC. It should be noted: "In 1964, representatives of each of the three major churches (ALC, LCA, and LCMS) formed the Joint Commission on the Theology and Practice of Confirmation, which after four years issued a "Report for Study" (December 28, 1967) and published a report book on confirmation and communion. The report made two significant recommendations (1) that baptized children be admitted to Communion during the latter part of the fifth grade and (2) that confirmation, defined as a "pastoral and educational ministry"... designed to help baptized children identify with the life and mission of the adult Christian community... should take place in the latter part of the

¹ Fred W. Meuser, The Formation of The American Lutheran Church, Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1958, p. 274.

² *Ibid.*, p. 274.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁴ Harold E. Wicke, Catechism of Differences, Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1964, p. 23.

tenth grade.”⁵ This recommendation was implemented by both the ALC and the LCA in 1970. The LCMS was divided on this issue at that time, and it recommended that the individual congregations within the LCMS “study their practice of confirmation and communion.”⁶ This was a very significant change of policy for the ALC and LCA, and our WELS congregation in Zillah gained a wonderful family through it.

As far as the ALC's view of the Ministry is concerned - It differs greatly from our Wisconsin Synod view. Our chief concern is to preach and teach the Gospel together with all of God's Word in its truth and purity, and to administer the Sacraments as God has given them to us, Our public ministry is the work of trained men who have been given a divine call. The ALC allows women to occupy the ministerial office, as well as men no matter what their sexual orientation happens to be.⁷ Preaching and teaching the Gospel seems to be the main concern of the ALC, but social concerns occupy a much higher place on the agendas of ALC churches than they should.

A few words should now be said regarding the LCA. The LCA like the ALC came into being in 1962 as a result of a merger. It was a merger of the United Lutheran Church in America which was founded in 1918, the Augustana Lutheran Church founded in 1860, the American Evangelical Lutheran Church founded in 1894, and the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church founded in 1890 (formerly known as the Suomi Synod). One of these four Synods, the United Lutheran Church in America was itself a merger of three Synods, the General Synod founded in 1820, the General Council founded in 1866, and the United Synod of the South founded in 1862.⁸ As in the case of the ALC it must be said of the LCA that its birth from the merging of many Lutheran bodies did not give it a very strong confessional position. In fact, the LCA holds the weakest confessional position of all of the Lutheran churches in North America, and that is not a compliment. The constitution of the LCA opens the door wide to unionism and all of its attendant evils. Johannes Knudsen who wrote a history of the LCA says of the LCA constitutional article of faith, “The stand is positive but qualified and the choice of words carefully chosen.”⁹ He was absolutely right. Those who framed the LCA Constitution did not want to offend anyone who nominally calls himself Lutheran. Included here is the LCA's constitutional article on faith. Notice how the LCA qualified its confessional stand particularly in the last four sections of this article.

Constitution of The Lutheran Church in America
Article II
Confession of Faith

Section 1. This church confesses Jesus Christ as Lord of the Church. The Holy Spirit creates and sustains the Church through the Gospel and thereby unites believers with their Lord and with one another in the fellowship of faith.

Section 2. This church holds that the Gospel is the revelation of God's sovereign will and saving grace in Jesus Christ. In Him, the Word Incarnate, God imparts Himself to men.

⁵ Clifford Nelson, (ed.), The Lutherans in North American, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975, p. 518.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 519.

⁷ “Back to Christ and the Bible,” The Christian News, Vol. 21, No. 26 (June 27, 1983), p. 13.

⁸ Wicke, Op. cit. p.p. 8-9.

⁹ Johannes Knudsen, The Formation of The Lutheran Church in America, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978, p. 34

Section 3. This church acknowledges the Holy Scriptures as the norm for the faith and life of the Church. The Holy Scriptures are the divinely inspired record of God's redemptive act in Christ, for which the Old Testament prepared the way and which the New Testament proclaims. In the continuation of this proclamation in the Church, God still speaks through the Holy Scriptures and realizes His redemptive purpose generation after generation.

Section 4. This church accepts the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian creeds as true declarations of the faith of the Church.

Section 5. This church accepts the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism as true witnesses to the Gospel, and acknowledges as one with it in faith and doctrine all churches that likewise accept the teachings of these symbols.

Section 6. This church accepts the other symbolical books of the evangelical Lutheran church, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, Luther's Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord as further and valid interpretations of the confessions of the Church.

Section 7. This church affirms that the Gospel transmitted by the Holy Scriptures, to which the creeds and confessions bear witness, is the true treasure of the Church, the substance of its proclamation, and the basis of its unity and continuity. The Holy Spirit uses the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship. As this occurs, the Church fulfills its divine mission and purpose.

What was said with regard to the ALC in the matter of the Church and its Ministry can likewise be said of the LCA. Here is a list of a few of the many doctrines which separate us from other Lutherans, compliments of Harold F Wicke.

- A. Subscription to the Lutheran Confessions
- B. The Inspiration and Innerancy of the Bible
- C. The Creation and related teachings
- D. Christology
- E. Conversion
- F. Predestination or Election
- G. Justification (with a discussion of the attitude of the various bodies toward membership in the Lodge)
- H. The doctrine of the Church and Ministry
- I. The doctrine of Church Fellowship
- J. The Essence and Object of the Lord's Supper (with a discussion of Communion practices in the various bodies)
- K. The doctrine of Sunday
- L. The Millenium and related teaching (anti-Christ, Universal Conversion of the Jews, a First Resurrection)

This list does not exhaust the doctrinal differences that exist, but comprises the most prominent one.¹⁰ A good way to keep up on this is to read "Christian News."

Last but certainly not least our discussion leads us to look at the Missouri Synod which was founded in 1847. We naturally as a Synod feel very close to the LCMS, and that is understandable. It has not even been twenty five years ago since we severed our ties with Missouri. The fellowship statements and the doctrinal statements which our Wisconsin Synod made with regard to the Church and Its Ministry in its dealings with the Missouri Synod in 1960 still stand. Included here are our Synod's doctrinal position papers on the Church and on the Ministry in their abbreviated forms.

Theses on Doctrine of the Church, 1960

Theses on The Relation Of Synod and Local Congregation To the Holy Christian Church

In the discussion of the doctrine of the Church, specifically the relation of synod and local congregation, it is helpful and essential to distinguish between The NATURE AND ESSENCE of these respective bodies on the one hand and their ORGANIZATIONAL FORM AND FUNCTION on the other.

- 1. The Church, according to its inner nature and essence, is the total number of all those whom God recognizes as His dear children by faith in Christ Jesus... (Supporting Scripture passages, which are quite lengthy, follow throughout the theses.)*
- 2. Any group of professing Christians gathered in Christ's name... can rightly be called "Church" because of the Christians in it. Therefore also a so called local congregation gathered about Word and Sacrament is rightly called "Church" only because of the Christians in it... The outward organizational form of a congregation is of human arrangement and may vary widely as it did even in the Apostolic Church...*
- 3. When it is said that a synod is "Church" this is said with reference to its inner nature and essence, namely insofar as it constitutes a communion of true believers. When it is said that a synod or conference is a "human arrangement" this is properly said with reference to its outward organizational form which is determined and defined by the congregations that have constituted this body...*
- 4. When the formal origin of synods as we know them is kept in mind there will be no room for a situation where a synod invades and over-rules a congregation in its exercise of Christian discipline. When a synod goes beyond the functions that have been assigned to it by the constituting congregations it oversteps its call and becomes a busybody in other men's matters...*
- 5. If we remember that a synod is "Church" with reference to its inner nature and essence, we will not doubt that when a synod faithfully and conscientiously fulfills its assigned functions (whether it be the training of pastors and teachers, in promoting the work of missions, or in the area of doctrinal discipline, the supervision of doctrine*

¹⁰ Wicke, Op. cit., pp. 10-11.

and practice), its actions are completely valid and have divine authority. For they are functions for which, as "Church", it is fully competent and qualified...

Theses on Doctrine of the Ministry, 1960

Theses on the Ministry of the Keys and the Public Ministry

1. *The Ministry of the Keys, which is the ministry of the Word, has been committed to the Holy Christian Church - therefore to each Christian man, woman, and child. Christians are to be personally active in this ministry in every possible way which is not in violation of God's Will and Ordinance...(Supporting quotations from Scripture follow, here and throughout.)*
2. *It is God's Will and Ordinance that Christians provide for the public administration of the Keys. This is achieved through the calling of qualified individuals who are thus placed in charge of the public administration of Word and Sacraments and perform this task in behalf of their fellow Christians (von Gemeinschafts wegen). Such service is referred to as the Public Ministry; and its duties are to be exercised only by those who are properly called to it by the Church. This Public Ministry is God-ordained and not a product of historical development... (Article 14 of the Augsburg Confession. "Of Ecclesiastical Usages," is quoted here in addition to Scripture.)*
3. *The office of the Public Ministry is not limited to any divinely fixed form as such, for example the outward form of the "Pharramt" or pastoral office. In Christian liberty, as circumstances require and the Lord supplies diversity of gifts, operations and ministries... The Church may separate the various functions of the Public Ministry of the Word and apportion them to whatever number of qualified persons it may choose to call. It is essential that each call thus extended shall specify the area of responsibility and the type of duty thereby assigned, and that each laborer abide by the terms of his call.¹¹*

The basic discrepancy which exists between us and the Missouri Synod still today is in how the Missouri Synod views the form of the Church. The Missouri Synod still views the local congregation as the only legitimate form of the Christian Church. Since this is the case, the Missouri Synod will never cease to have trouble maintaining doctrinal integrity on elevated Synodical levels. A comparison of our Synod's Constitution with that of Missouri bears this out. The Missouri Synod Constitution has no separate sections devoted to church discipline in its bylaws, whereas our Wisconsin Synod's Constitution has four lengthy sections dealing with discipline and various repeals.

The other big area of difference which exists between us and Missouri is in the area of the practice of fellowship principles. In answer to the question, "Is the public practice of a church body important?" Harold E. Wicke succinctly answers, "It is. Doctrine and practice of a church body cannot be separated. The public practice of a church body is the public evidence of its real doctrinal position."¹² Jesus Christ our Savior said, "Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father in heaven." (Mt. 7:21)

¹¹ R. C . Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity in America, Philadelphia Fortress Press, 1966, pp. 177-179.

¹² Wicke, Op. cit., p. 7.

There was not a small amount of concern expressed by some within the Missouri Synod when Dr. Ralph Bohlmann their President had a private audience with Pope John Paul II in the Vatican in Rome this past March. As an outside observer I wonder if this same concern is expressed when Dr. Bohlmann meets with the presidents of the ALC and the LOA. The point is - It makes no difference whether we fellowship with another Lutheran who openly disagrees with what our church teaches or fellowship with someone who is nominally of another faith. The violation of the Scriptural fellowship principles de facto is one and the same. Romans 16:17 says, "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." The Missouri Synod has made a wonderful turn around in its approach to Bible study since 1973 when 45 out of 50 of its Seminary faculty members left St. Louis to form Seminex. We were all cheering in our own Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin when this happened. But we were told then not to get our hopes up too high about getting back together with Missouri. And that is still the way it is today. The matter of scouts and lodge members is still an issue, and if anything the LCMS has strengthened its ties with the ALC and the LCA.

IV. So What Can We Learn From This?

We can learn to be humble, thankful, and ever diligent in the exercise of our God-given faith. That the Synodical bodies of the WELS and ELS have taken a strong confessional position and hold a strong confessional faith, especially when as it pertains to the doctrine of the Church and Its Ministry is not due to the efforts of man, but to the love of God. We in the Wisconsin Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod are not any more intelligent than our Lutheran neighbors. We do not approach the study of God's Word with any greater sincerity of heart and faith than our Lutheran neighbors do. We are not any more adept at quoting the Holy Scriptures than other Lutherans. Physically we certainly are not stronger than our Lutheran neighbors. We are a minority. We walk in the same land. We breathe the same air.

But we are different. We are different, because the Lord in His grace has allowed us to be different. And we must never forget that. Ephesians 2:8 and 9 says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast." We must never ever take our faith in Jesus Christ our crucified and risen Savior for granted. But always we must diligently exercise in the Word so that with God's help we are able to share the truths from which our faith is derived with others. The very life of the Church and the success of its Ministry depends on it.

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