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Things Learned from Interview with Robert Fleischmann, National Director of Christian Life Resources

Entering this interview, I knew very little about the scope of the ministry of Christian Life Resources. I knew that their name was once Lutherans for Life and that they dealt with abortion issues. Other than that, I knew very little. After attending their national convention on November 13 and interviewing Pastor Fleischmann on November 17, I learned a great deal.

I learned that the scope of their ministry extends far beyond simply abortion issues. It extends to anything dealing with life issues. Examples of this include adoption, euthanasia, stem cell research, eugenics, homosexuality, and so much more. They appear to have resources for almost any "hot-button" issue regarding life evident in the world today. Their resources are readily available to anyone who wants to use them, whether pastor or lay person, by contacting them on their website or visiting them at their offices in Richfield, Wisconsin.

I also learned a great deal about their history. Pastor Fleischmann was one of the founders of CLR. He took a special interest in life issues and the politics surrounding them when he attended Bethany Lutheran College in the late 1970s. He especially took an interest when he was taking a human growth and development class. While taking this class, his wife suffered a miscarriage. This loss spurred his interest even more. Bethany Professor Allen Quist mentioned in class that abortion was legal in the United States right up until birth. Fleischmann realized this was wrong, and wanted to do something about it. So his professor and he decided to research and draft a resolution on abortion. Quist presented it to the ELS in 1978 and Fleischmann presented it to a WELS committee in 1979 who edited the resolution. The resolution was

adopted by WELS and encouraged people to “make their voice known” on these issues. His interest continued to grow throughout his years at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary as he continued to be involved with Wisconsin Citizens Concerned for Life (WCCL). During his final year at the seminary, Lutherans for Life was organized in Good Shepherd’s Lutheran Church in West Allis. WLS Professor Fredrich and Glen Schaumberg were some of the first board members, and Larry Marquardt chaired the constituting convention but didn’t serve on the board later.

After serving as a parish pastor in Plymouth, Wisconsin, for about 4 years while still being involved in Lutherans for Life, Pastor Fleischmann was chairman of the board and was called to serve Lutherans for Life as a full-time director in 1988. He accepted the call.

The first official building for WELS Lutherans for Life was in Milwaukee near the WELS synod office at 2401 West Mayfair Road. The first staff was Pastor Fleischmann, a secretary, and a WLC student named Sharon Fleming, who organized much of his schedule and office business. The office eventually moved upstairs, and then next to the synod building at 2949 Mayfair. The headquarters are now in Richfield. Pastor Fleischmann’s hobby of land developing and architecture was valuable in the move to Richfield. Through his hobby, he met a man named Dean Gunderson who introduced him to office space previously owned by Miracle Homes in Richfield. By moving to this new site in Richfield, Pastor Fleischmann estimates that between \$15,000 and \$20,000 were saved on lease costs. Although the new site seems to be more convenient for almost everybody involved, Fleischmann says that many work from home. He believes that working from home actually results in greater productivity.

In the early 1990s, assisted suicide was becoming a bigger issue with the added publicity of Jack Kevorkian. Euthanasia was coming to the forefront. This added to more questions about life issues. CLR at this time also added many other ministries, including the encouragement of

chastity. More issues in the world caused CLR to need more “tentacles of contact”, in which their ministry expanded. The more questions arose and the more complicated they were, the more Fleischmann and CLR had to counsel and take scriptural stands on issues. In fact, Pastor Fleischmann says that there are so many life issues surrounding CLR at present day that he has reported on 54 different areas.

Fleischmann mentioned the reason for the change from Lutherans for Life to Christian Life Resources. As the abortion issue became more and more sensitive in the late 1990s the exclusively pro-life label became more and more difficult to maintain with the growth in activism. Bombing of abortion clinics, chaining doors of pro-life institutions, and protests outside of pro-life buildings were all very common. These in turn caused people to tune out representatives from Lutherans for Life simply because of their name. Also, as the scope of the ministry increased, the organization needed a broader name. Fleischmann would even prefer to have the name simply be “Life Resources” rather than “Christian Life Resources,” so that more outreach could be done.

One interesting instance that Fleischmann mentioned is a current WELS member who is a member of the House of Representatives who consistently votes pro-abortion. He believes that a voter isn't necessarily sinning when doing his job as a voter, that he is rather elected to use his judgment. He holds that this man continually needs to be retained as a member. He says that the time isn't right to let go of him yet. It just seems to gray of an area at this time; that he's not sure if this man is sinning.

Again, I learned a good amount from my interview with Robert, and look forward to using CLR as a valuable resource in my ministry.