Public Profession, Persecution, and Faithfulness: Holding Up the Prophet's Hands

by The Rev. Michael D Henson Delivered on May 6, 2006 for The Alliance of Evangelical Lutheran Laypeople

Introduction.--Jesus declares in Matthew 10:32-33, "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven."

As soon as you begin to make the good confession of Christ, you had better be prepared to receive persecution. Jesus goes on to warn in verses 34-36, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household."

When this confession of Christ brings with it persecution, the believer will need to be devoted to the Apostles' teaching(Acts 2:42). Jesus says in verses 37-39, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 10:34-39, NKJV).

It is in these verses that you have the outline of my talk this afternoon. I will be speaking about, "Public Profession, Persecution, and Faithfulness: Holding Up the Prophet's Hands."

I. Private Profession.--The theologians divide our confession of Christ into what is either called **a private profession of faith** or **a public profession of faith**. **A person's private profession of faith is what that person personally says or the words which he composes himself.** St. Peter says, It is a good thing for individual believers to "always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear"(1 Peter 3:15). However, this private (or personal) profession is not a self-made or a personally creative statement. The content of our faith comes from the heavenly Father whose Son sent out Prophets, Apostles, and Pastors to teach the truth in the power of the Holy Spirit and therefore build up the Body of Christ.

In an article, entitled *Admission to the Lutheran Altar: Reflections on Open versus Close Communion*, The Rev. John Stephenson writes, "None of us are foot-loose and fancy-free individuals bidden to church-shop our way as tourists through earthly Christendom; rather we are pilgrims attached by baptism and confirmation to particular altars and particular pulpits" (CTQ, Jan-April, 1989, Volume 53, Numbers 1-2, p.44). When we were baptized, our names were recorded in the congregation's registry and one of Christ's under-shepherds was now directed to watch over us as men who must give an account(Heb 13:17). When we were taught the faith in confirmation training(catechesis), we were taught a particular teaching from the pastor of a particular pulpit, who served at a particular altar where the public faith of that congregation was proclaimed until the Lord comes(1 Cor 11:26). Furthermore, that congregation probably had some affiliation with other Christians gathered in other places, which we commonly refer to as synodical membership.

In the human rite of confirmation, we make a public profession of our common Christian faith. Within the rite, there is the speaking of the Apostles' Creed and the reference to "...the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, drawn from them, as you have learned to know it from the Small Catechism." Contrary to some congregation's practices, catechumens don't give individual speeches concerning, "What Jesus means to me." Professor Kurt Marquart says *in Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics*, Volume IX, on The Church,

"The lines of church fellowship, it will be remembered, run not directly between individuals, but by way of the uniting center, that is, the church's pure marks.

Individuals are in fellowship with one another by way of their pulpits and altars. They do not first come to know each other as brothers in the faith, and then form a common relationship to the church. Rather, the mutual acknowledgement hinges on the prior mutual participation in the common faith of the church. One's spiritual identity is shaped not so much by personal verbal profession of the moment, as by the public doctrine of the altar and pulpit at which one regularly confesses(Acts 2:42; 1 Cor 10:17; 11:26)" (p. 66-67).

II. Public Profession.--A person's public profession of faith is determined by the particular congregation with which one belongs and the synod with which one's congregation belongs. Whenever you join a congregation, you are stating that the teaching of that congregation, which sounds forth from its pulpit, is your teaching and belief. Whenever you receive communion at the altar of a congregation, it is understood that you are in full agreement with the doctrine and practices of that congregation. Your public profession is determined by the altar and pulpit of your home congregation. If your congregation professes that the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures are the inspired and inerrant Word of God, then that is your public profession, simply by virtue of your membership.

The desire of Christians to unite together in associations or synods beyond their own congregation is in keeping with our Lord's teaching in John 17,

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me" (20-23).

Similarly when your congregation joins a synod or affiliation with other congregations, that synod's public teaching is both your congregation's public profession and your public profession of faith. Your membership in synod says that you are in agreement with the doctrine and practice of that synod and the members of that synod.

C.F.W. Walther, whose saint day we celebrate tomorrow, states in his Pastoral Theology,

"Hence in whatever church one partakes of the Holy Supper, one professes that church and its doctrine. There cannot be a more intense and fraternal fellowship than that into which one enters with those in whose company one enjoys the Holy Supper(1 Cor. 11:26 and 10:17). There is therefore a great difference between sometimes listening to a sermon in an alien ecclesial communion and partaking there in the celebration of the Holy Supper.... Holy Communion, by way of contrast, is an act of confession; if one communes in an alien church, one actually joins it, appears as a witness for its doctrine, and pronounces its members one's brothers and sisters in the faith" (*Amerikanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie*, p. 145).

III. A Heterodox Public Confession.—On January 9, 2005, Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin Illinois, the congregation which I serve as pastor, entered a State of Confession against six points of false teaching and practice within the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. This decision was preceded by years of teaching, not only concerning the content of the Scriptural faith as found in the Book of Concord(including the Small Catechism), but also years of truthful and frank facts concerning the present direction and action of our Missouri Synod.

Following the 2001 Synodical Convention, the public actions of many officials were directly in conflict with our previously agreed upon public profession. Having worked extremely hard between 2001 and 2004 to elect confessional leaders and write overtures to address these false teachings and practices, I was very disheartened to inform my congregation of the outcome of the 2004 Synodical Convention. Things had changed! The Missouri Synod was no longer

your grandfather's synod. Instead of our Missouri Synod chastening those who were disturbing our fellowship and attempting to change our doctrine and practice, the 2004 Synodical Convention voted to approve the various false teachings and practices as its own public profession of faith.

As members of the Missouri Synod, my congregation and I, now had a heterodox public profession of faith. Anyone could say to us, "You're Missouri Synod aren't you? I hear that you now participate in joint worship with Muslims." And they would be right. I could no longer respond, "That's not true," or "That's not the Synod's position." Up until 2004, we could say that those actions were only the actions of renegades not following the rules, but after 2004 the Synod had spoken. 2004 Synodical Resolution 3-06A commends the Commission on Theology and Church Relations(CTCR) Document *Guidelines for Participation in Civic Events* in which **Unionism and Syncretism** is now approved under the teaching of serial prayer. Christians and non-Christians can "take turns" offering prayers without it being joint prayer.

I guess my congregation could have just withdrawn our membership from the Missouri Synod, and then we wouldn't have had a heterodox public profession of faith. There are some congregations and pastors who have done just that. We chose to enter a **State of Confession** for a limited time while we pursue **the Synodical dissent process** and take advantage of every opportunity to speak the truth in love in order to call back our beloved Synod to her former doctrine and practice. This course has not been easy, but I believe it is the right course for our congregation to take.

IV. Synodical Dissent Process.--First of all, what is the Synodical dissent process?

The Synodical dissent process is designed to allow a member of Synod to oppose and work to correct certain official Synodical teachings, which they consider to be false doctrine. Members of Synod have agreed to follow this dissent process(bylaw 1.8), not because it is found in Holy Scripture or required by Holy Scripture, but for the sake of good order in the Synod. On the one hand, our beloved Synod wants her members "to honor and uphold the resolutions of the Synod," on the other hand she desires some orderly way to allow for any Synodical errors to be corrected. The truth of God's Word is just that important!

This dissent process has three steps:

- 1. Express dissent "within the fellowship of peers,"
- 2. Bring the dissent "to the attention of Commission on Theology and Church Relations"
- 3. Express dissent as "an overture to the convention calling for revision or recision."

1. By means of the publication of brochures and presentations by myself and my congregational chairman and lay elders at congregational, circuit and district gatherings, we have expressed our dissent to the six points of false teaching and practice and fulfilled **the first step of the Synodical Dissent process**.

I have brought along a bunch of layman's packets for you to take home. Those are in the 9 x 5" manila envelopes. Inside that packet, you will find a one-page yellow state of confession and a white brochure which is the more expanded version of our state of confession. This brochure includes some Bible study materials, which we used to explain the six points to our congregation. There is a pink brochure which gives some updates. There is another white brochure entitled, "State of Confession Newsletter Articles," which explained the reason for our state of confession. For those who desire even more information, I also have some pastor's

packets in a 9 x 12" manila envelope which give 100 pages of documentation and originals to photocopy.

If you are willing to listen to an audio CD, I also have some of those available. In February of 2005 and then again in June of 2005, our elders were invited to give presentations on our State of Confession to Circuit Forums. I have around 10 copies of that second presentation on a two-audio CD packet entitled, "Trinity Presentation, Circuit 3 & 4, June 5, 2005." I have an audio copy of a presentation I gave in March of 2005 in Chicago.

In November of 2005, I put together an update for my congregation, which reviews past progress and explains the effect which our State of Confession is having. That is available in a 9 x 13" packet and includes either a DVD or an audio CD.

2. On September 18, 2005 Trinity Lutheran Church and I approved a letter of dissent and sent it on to the CTCR to fulfill **the second step of dissent**. Included in the 100 page pastor's packet, I mentioned earlier, is our dissent letter printed on purple paper.

3. The final remaining step in the dissent process will occur in September of this year(2006) when we submit an overture to the 2007 LCMS Convention calling for revision or recision of the false teachings and practices. As a side note, I can tell you that our congregation and Circuit submitted overtures to our 2006 Southern Illinois District Convention in the hopes of having the District memorialize Synod to return to the truth. I will tell more about that later.

V. State of Confession.--Second, let's look at a "State of Confession." A "state of confession," is not concerned with Synodical relationships, but with keeping God's Word not to participate(share) with those who do not continue to hold to the Apostolic teaching(Rom 16:17, 1 Tim 6:3-16). A state of confession is declared for <u>the sake of the conscience</u> of the member of Synod. A "state of confession" allows a congregation or pastor to remain a member of an erring Synod for a time, but not participate/share in the errors of that same Synod. A State of Confession is only a temporary measure.

As shown above, a person's confession is determined by their public membership. Thus, if the Synod approves false teaching as the official teaching of the Synod, then each and every member of Synod is equally guilty of that false teaching on account of their public membership. A "state of confession" is one particular way of keeping a good conscience and not participating in falsehood. Those congregations and pastors in a "state of confession,"

- 1. Commune only with those who have rejected the false teaching of Synod,
- 2. Share pulpits and altars with those who have rejected the false teaching of Synod, and
- 3. Support with our offerings, only those missions and organizations who teach in accordance with the Word of God.

If you were to lump together all of the various actions which my congregation and I have undertaken since 2001, it is the State of Confession—and in particular, **the refusal of communion to other members of the synod—which has drawn the most heat.**

VI. The Present Chaos.—Our State of Confession and the refusal to practice altar and pulpit fellowship with those who are not in a State of Confession, usually causes some **initial consternation among other confessional pastors and laymen**. It usually raises some questions from good people like yourselves saying, "But we completely agree with your six points, and you wouldn't commune us?" Personally, I don't like the answer I must give, but I find it the

only theological answer which is consistent across the board. No, I cannot commune you because your public profession of faith is that of the heterodox Missouri Synod. Yes, personally I know that you disagree with lay ministers, open communion, and the other false teachings. However, church fellowship is built on public profession of faith, not your private profession of faith. Whenever someone's public and private profession do not agree, something needs to be changed, so that your, "yes," can be "yes," and your "no," "no."

Whenever I was a boy, my father wanted to play golf at the better golf course in town. That course was owned by the lodge, and in order to play there, you had to join the lodge. My father didn't care anything about the lodge, just the golf. Furthermore, he was told that you didn't have to attend meetings. Our pastor told my Father that lodge membership was incompatible with the church's teachings. Despite the assurance of his private profession that he didn't believe the lodge's tenets, nor would he attend meetings, his public membership was the issue. To my Father's credit due to faithful teaching from our pastor, we played golf at the public course in town.

I don't know your congregation, your pastor, or your situation. I am not saying that you must do what I have done, or be in exactly my place right now. I am not saying that you or your pastor is doing something wrong. I commend you for hosting these forums and not being afraid to address things that are going on within our Synod. Although we need to speak up and encourage each other to action, we also need to be patient with each other. Our Synod's doctrine and practice is in chaos. Some congregations have responded and some are already well prepared to respond, though most do not know of their options. Other congregations have been told nothing and it is going to take some time to bring them up to speed.

VII. State of Confession Opponents.—Although my congregation and I are convinced of the legitimate and confessional use of both pursuing the synodical dissent process and going into a state of confession, I must tell you that there are some confessional pastors who do not agree with me. I urge you to examine their words and mine and decide for yourselves.

I can tell you that the LC-MS <u>Committee on Theology and Church Relations(CTCR)</u> sent **a warning shot over the bow** to actively discourage anyone who would go into a State of Confession. On April 15, 2005 the CTCR rushed through a statement in response to questions from the Praesidium, which completely reversed an April 1970 decision of the CTCR and contradicted a 1971 Synodical Resolution 5-01 which stated that, "Member congregations, pastors, and teachers who have entered upon a 'state of protest' nevertheless retain their membership in the Synod; and Whereas, The Constitution of the Synod does not recognize a limited membership such as is proposed by our petitioning brethren; therefore be it Resolved, That congregations and individuals who are in a 'state of protest' remain entitled to all benefits and privileges of synodical membership."

Now the CTCR states in 2005 that "...the approach taken in dealing with those who declare themselves *in statu confessionis* with the Synod and refuse to commune district or synodical officials should be the same approach taken in dealing with those who ignore or oppose the Synod's position on close(d) Communion and thus choose to practice open Communion in violation of their commitment to Synod." Although the CTCR's words are intended to threaten to discipline those in a State of Confession, I had to laugh when I first read those words.

VIII. The Six Points.—You see, one of our six points is that despite Synod's official stance in resolutions and statements that closed communion is the only Scripturally and Confessionally faithful practice, open communion is now widely practiced throughout the Synod and is not disciplined. Rather than admit that our doctrine and practice has changed, we have redefined theological terms. In the case of syncretism and unionism, we now speak of civic events and serial prayer in order to get around the truth. When it comes to closed communion, the discussion is now about pastoral discretion, extra-ordinary circumstances and practice as opposed to doctrine.

At our 2006 Southern Illinois District(SID) convention in February, our Synodical President responded to a question about closed communion by first telling everyone that closed communion was not a doctrine, but a practice. You have to understand that our Synodical President reported to the 2004 Synodical Convention, "This disagreement in {closed communion} practice has resulted in dissension and disharmony between pastors and congregations of the LCMS, even though they are otherwise agreed on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper."

He sees closed communion as a practice that may differ from congregation to congregation, while doctrine is something that remains the same. To prove his point, he gave an example of a confirmed member's son who moved away to an area in which there weren't any Lutheran churches, so he joined a Methodist church. Whenever he was home for Christmas, our synodical president thought that this extraordinary case was one that pastors could legitimately differ. If only our Synodical President had heard of a public profession of faith, he would know that this man was formerly a Lutheran, but now he is a Methodist by public profession of faith and should not be communed.

Thus, just as open communion is allowed within the Missouri Synod, neither I, nor my congregation, have been disciplined for entering a State of Confession. There is a reason that I have not been disciplined. My District President does not think I have done anything wrong. According to synodically approved CCM rulings concerning ecclesiastical supervisors and 2004 Resolution 8-01A of the new "**Ecclesiastical Supervision and Dispute Resolution**," I cannot be charged for doing anything wrong unless my District President thinks I have done something wrong. I quote, "The action to commence expulsion of a congregation or individual from membership in the Synod is the SOLE responsibility of the District President...." Should you think that I have done something wrong, first you must meet with me in a face-to-face meeting. Even though I am speaking publicly, you still are required to meet with me face-to-face. Following that, the only think that you can do is beg my District President to begin formal proceedings. If he refuses, you have no further recourse. Prior to 2004, any member of Synod could call to account the actions of another, but now only the District Presidents determines.

So far I have mentioned three of our six points: Unionism and Syncretism, Open/Closed Communion, and the new Ecclesiastical Supervision and Dispute Resolution Process. Allow me to briefly address the remaining three points.

Similar to our Synodical President's distinction between the doctrine of Lord's Supper and the practice of closed communion, **contemporary worship** is supposedly just different styles of worship with the same Lutheran doctrine. That is a lie. Contemporary worship is none other than the heterodox worship of "Evangelical" Protestant Revivalism, and is consistently employed by those who hold to the tenets of the Church Growth movement. Our Synodical President has been heavily promoting contemporary worship from within his Ablaze! program. Unlike Lutheran worship, contemporary worship is not centered in the doctrine of justification. Contemporary worship appeals to the felt needs of the people by relying on the entertainment and revivalistic practices of the Reformed. Contemporary worship waters down the content of the Christian faith for the sake of getting in the people.

The fifth point of false teaching is the use of **lay ministers**. Prior to 1989, men were trained and then called and ordained into the Pastoral office of the Holy Ministry in accordance with Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession, "It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call." In 2001, Synodical President, Dr. A.L. Barry made plans to reverse the 1989 Convention decision. But instead of putting an end to the practice as was recommended by 2001 Resolution 3-08 (and supported by our seminaries), a substitute resolution endorse and continued the practice of lay ministers. In 2004, Resolution 5-09 encouraged Districts to continue this unscriptural practice.

The last of the six points is the **service of women in the church**. On the basis of 1 Timothy 2:11-14, and in particular, St. Paul's words, "I do not permit a women to teach or have authority over a man," as well as 1 Corinthians 14, our church has taught an **order of creation**. According to the order of redemption, both man and woman are equally redeemed and one in Christ. However, we do not cease to be male and female. According to the order of creation, we have taught two things. First, <u>we do not allow a woman to hold the pastoral office</u>. At least officially that is still the teaching of the Missouri Synod, though surveys seem to indicate that many personally do not agree. Second, according to the order of creation, <u>we also have</u> <u>maintained that a woman is not to have authority over a man</u>. Up until 2004, the offices of congregational president and elder were not open to women. The 1985 CTCR began to undermine this teaching and the unapproved 1994 CTCR report, "The Service of Women in Congregational Offices" completely did away with it. The 1994 report concluded that women may serve, "in all offices of the congregation, including that of chairman, vice-chairman and elder, and district and Synodical boards and commissions provided that they don't involve public accountability for the function[ing] of the pastoral office."

A minority report of five LCMS professors disagreed with the 1994 report. The 1995 LCMS Convention did not approve the report. But then in 2004, Resolution 3-08A, affirmed the conclusions of the unapproved and flawed 1994 report so that women may now serve in every humanly established office. The issue of authority according to the order of creation was said to not apply.

IX. Faithfulness.--Whenever Moses was sent by God to lead God's people out of Egypt, there was not unanimity among the Israelites. Although their first reaction to Moses' message was belief and worship, their support quickly changed, when trials came their way.

After Moses spoke to Pharaoh about letting his people go. Pharaoh gave the command to no longer provide straw for the people in the making of bricks. The Israelites complained to Moses and Aaron. Moses then complains to God. Exodus 5:22-23, "O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? Even since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all."

At the beginning of chapter 6 it says that God told Moses to lift up his hands(9:22, 9:29) and bring these plagues upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians and God would rescue them. In verse 9

it records that the Israelites would not listen to Moses. Once again Moses complains, "If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips" (6:12).

Later when God's people were hemmed in at the edge of the Red Sea and Pharaoh's armies were approaching some of them complained that Moses brought them out in the wilderness to kill them and that they should go back to Egypt. "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" (Ex 14:12). Moses complained to God. "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water..." (Ex 14:15).

And finally, the last example I give comes after the giving of manna and quail and water from the rock. In Exodus 17 the Amalekites come to attack the Israelites. In verse 11 it says, "As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up--one on one side, and one on the other--so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword."

I tell this story for you to realize that the interaction between Moses and the Israelites, is not much different from that between the Pastoral Office and the laity. Moses was called and ordained to do the job, which God had given him. It didn't matter whether Pharaoh or even the Israelites listened to him, Moses was called to be faithful. **However, the lack of Israelite support did not help the cause. It often made Moses' work very difficult.** As you know from the table of Duties in the Small Catechism, under the heading "What the hearers own their Pastors," Romans 13:15 says, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy and not a burden for that would be of no advantage to you."

I could give you story after story of individual pastors who have backed off and refused to speak up because of the complaints of the laity. Embarrassed pastors who don't like contemporary worship, but who give in to the pleadings of their people. Pastors who are afraid to oppose Synodical programs and directives, because they fear for their jobs and know that they will have no support from their District or Synod. There are even a few District Presidents who don't like what is going on, but they won't speak up.

For example, again and again, people sheepishly ask me whether they can reproduce any of the materials which I have produced. They are surprised when I say yes. The reason they ask, is because they are afraid of getting me in trouble. It seems that very few will speak on the record. They don't want their name to get out. They publish articles anonymously. I will not deny the fact that Pastors are required to preach the truth in season and out of season, but I also know that those pastors who have the support of their laity are more vocal. We need to encourage our laity to hold up the Pastor's hands. Your pastor needs your encouragement and support.

X. Doctrinal Ignorance.--First of all, we must come to grips with the fact that our present Synodical crisis is not about a Synod taken against its will by insurgent leadership. **The**

present crisis is that the majority in Synod actually approves of the present direction. The majority of our Synod's members do not know the Small Catechism, nor do they know the basics of the faith or they would cry out in protest against women holding positions of authority, or pastors replacing the Divine Service with the revivalistic fluff that you would see down the street at the non-denominational church.

Most of our laypeople and pastors have not been well taught and do not understand simple distinctions like private profession and public profession. This is not the fault of the laity, but it is a condemnation of the pastors. Luther spoke about this in his preface to the Small Catechism, "Therefore, dear brothers, for God's sake, I beg all of you who are pastors and preachers to devote yourselves sincerely to the duties of your office, that you feel compassion for the people entrusted to your care, and that you help us accordingly to inculcate the catechism in the people, especially the young."

The present chairman of my congregation tells the story how he didn't grow up Lutheran, but became one soon after he was married. He was a member of two Missouri Synod Lutheran congregations, before coming to our congregation, but had never been taught Confessional Lutheranism. One of his pastors even had my member preach the sermon, when he was gone on vacation. My member regularly attends our Wednesday night catechesis with his family and has read the Book of Concord with delight. If you take one of our audio CD he is one of the presenters of our six points at Circuit Forum in June of 2005.

XI. Synodical Ignorance.—Second, many of our good laymen do not know what is going on in our Synod. If all they receive is Synodical publications, then they will not know the whole truth. The LCMS executive director of the CTCR had an article in The Lutheran Witness which said that everyone in the Missouri Synod is confessional. The Lutheran Witness has had articles promoting lay ministry, intentional interim ministry, etc. Even the reporting of events is not always accurate.

A congregation's pastor just 45 miles away wanted them to pass an overture that would forbid the pastor and members in a state of confession from serving in elected or appointed position in the District. At the time I was serving as second Vice-President of the district. When they asked what this overture was about, he told them that my congregation had left the Synod, Pastor Henson was causing all kinds of trouble with false teaching, and this was costing the Synod millions of dollars in lawsuit money. This pastor must have forgotten that I had served his congregation as Circuit Counselor for 6 years. The next day I got calls from a few families asking what was going on. I explained and sent them some materials. In about a week, one family called back and informed me that not only was his evaluation of me not true, but they knew nothing about this LCMS crisis and their present pastor was doing most of the false things mentioned in my materials. This family sent me \$100 and requested a couple dozen packets and audio CDs of everything I had. After failing to garner any support in their own congregation, this family joined our congregation in March.

XII. Reject Lutheranism.--Third, one of my members has a saying which goes, "There are many Lutheran congregations, but not many Lutherans." It may surprise you but there are many Lutheran laymen, who do not want to be Lutheran--if Lutheran is to be defined by the Lutheran Confessions. They may want to be Missouri Synod, or belong to the local congregation, which has the name Lutheran on the door, but they are not about to give up contemporary worship or their own lay ministries.

Once again, I praise you for your organization's goal, "to inform, educate and encourage fellow Evangelical Lutherans regarding issues of concern." However, I think you will find, or maybe you have already found out, that there are those who do not want to be informed or educated in Lutheran theology and practice. As I mentioned earlier, I have been speaking about these six points ever since the Synodical Convention in July of 2004. Although there have been those who have listened and have even encouraged me by their efforts. Nevertheless, the vast majority of those we have reached have yawned and seem unconcerned. One of the people, who left our congregation after our state of confession, had told me soon after the Yankee Stadium sycretism, "I know that you are right, Pastor, and that Benke's action was wrong, but I have to admit that I cheered when I saw one of our own get up and speak." Another of my members said that despite the Scripture's prohibition, they actually welcome the changes in women's roles.

XIII. The Future: Congregational Standpoint.--Concerning the present LCMS crisis and the near future, I see things unfolding from three points of view. From **a congregational standpoint**, we can no longer bury our heads in the sand and hope that it will all go away. We can't write it off as partisan politics and certainly it is not just a grudge against the present administration. Both pastor and people must speak up and bear witness to the truth.

What will the outcome be? I don't know and neither do you. I can tell you that you will be labeled a radical and called unloving. In my own congregation, we lost a few members at first to those who wanted other things. But now over a year later, we now have received over 20 members from five families and three different congregations. These laypeople learned about the truth and wanted real Lutheran teaching and practice. They have joined our congregation because we are in a State of Confession and taking a stand.

On the other hand, I now have another pastor as a member of my congregation. Having been at his congregation for over 15 years, he tried to engage his people in the discussion about the Synod and move them to action. Some of his people shouted him down at a meeting so that he couldn't even finish a paper he was presenting. They slandered him and opposed him to such a degree that he took early retirement. This reaction must also be anticipated.

I have already explained how the presence of false teaching and the toleration of falsehood in the LCMS does impact your congregation's public profession of faith. Now let me explain some other effects.

There are many good pastors who are telling their people nothing. When pushed about their inactivity they tell me, "I'm just going to preach law and gospel." In my own district and circuit, I have watched how it takes less than three years for good congregations to be dismantled by the next slick-talking church-growth pastor. Don't comfort yourself by saying that you have a good pastor and those things aren't happening in your congregation. Maybe they aren't now, but what kind of pastor will follow him.

Good pastors not only provide green pastures for their people to feed upon—that is pure preaching and proper administration of the sacraments—but they also protect their sheep from the wolves. **Good pastors point out the false teaching and warn against false heterodox practices.** There is a reason why our Lutheran Confessions not only tell us what we believe, teach and confess, but they also tell us what we reject and condemn. Even though your congregation may be following the liturgy, if they aren't warned about the poison of Contemporary worship or lay ministers, they will fall to it later.

Your congregation may be weak and, in your opinion, will not be ready for any kind of action for some 10 years. Alright, but you cannot fail to tell them the truth. Public false teaching

must be met with open and public rebuke. Pastor, you have a divine call to preach the truth in that congregation and to warn them of error so that they may flee from it(1 Tim 6:3f, Roman 16:17). If the practice of your members does not yet rise to the level of your teaching and preaching(doctrine), then keep it at, for as many years as they will hear you. However, you cannot use their ignorance or lack of orthodoxy as an excuse to keep silent. You must warn them again and again that the Scriptures tell us to avoid those who teach or tolerate falsehood.

Layman, you can hold up your pastor's hands. You must be faithful in receiving the Word in the Divine Service, as well as in Adult Bible Class. If your pastor offers a weekly catechesis for children and adults to learn and put into practice the teaching of the Small Catechism, be there. If he doesn't teach it to you, then read how applicable the preface to the Large Catechism is to our present situation. Luther says, "A shameful and insidious plague of security and boredom has overtaken us. Many regard the Catechism as a simple, silly teaching which they can absorb and master at one reading." Later Luther says, "They need not fear a fall, for they have already fallen too horribly. What they need is to become like children and begin learning their ABC's, which they think they have outgrown long ago."

Don't underestimate what you can do as laypeople. Luther also says, "As it is, the common people take the Gospel altogether too lightly, and even our utmost exertions accomplish but little." You need to be strengthened even more in the teaching of God's Word and the basics of the faith, so that you can be useful in the fight. Many, many of my battles have been won without me saying a word directly. Instead, my laypeople take the Word with them from Bible studies and sermons and they talk to their family and other members. They encourage other members to come to Bible class. They speak to members in other congregations and teach them what is going on.

XIV. A Synodical Evaluation.--Now let me say a few words about this fight from a Synodical standpoint. Once again, I do not know the future. It would not be prudent to call the game before the final buzzer has sounded. However, it would not be honest to give no score or report no progress as to how things are progressing.

The things that I am about to say are not going to be easy to bear. We recently found a few termites at our parsonage and after an inspection we had the house treated. Nobody likes to have bad news, but you take care of the problem. Now what if the man called to inspect our house said, "We found some termites," and then said, "We recommend knocking down the house." What?! It's too much, too soon. Why didn't I see the damage before?

Let me explain. I don't deny that God can work through the teaching of His Word to change hearts, but if the Word is not allowed to have free course, then we have cut off the means God has provided to affect change. I have been speaking about these false teachings wherever and whenever I can. I come from a district that is considered one of about 5 conservative districts in the Synod. When I was still 2nd Vice President of the District, I was allowed to speak freely about these things at Circuit and District meetings, and there was much discussion about our six points.

We recently had our SID Convention in which I wrote 10 overtures to address our six points and the recent CTCR report on a State of Confession. Now almost all of the overtures were changed and watered-down quite a bit. Nevertheless, they all passed. Is that good news? Well, yes, but let's be realistic. They all passed by a margin of about 60% for and 40 % against. That's not a real solid victory for what most would consider a good district and that after much discussion.

How are things progressing in other districts of the Synod? After I gave a paper in March of 2005, I was asked to come and speak to a Circuit Forum in another supposedly conservative district in October of 2005. Because I know that some of the things I say can be upsetting, I try to be as open as possible. Therefore, about two weeks prior to the engagement, I sent out some of my packets to the District President and Circuit counselor with a note offering to answer any questions they might have, before I came to speak. Four days later I got a call from the Circuit Counselor telling me that the District President had cancelled my presentation and would not allow me to speak in his district. I was told that he called another supposedly conservative District President who advised him not to let me speak. He said, "If he's in a state of confession, then he's saying that the Synod is teaching falsehood." Yes. If our Synod is infallible, then we might as well install a pope and cardinals.

I have received news that a congregation on the East coast submitted some overtures taken from the newsletter of Consensus to address some Synodical problems. The District President, after consultation with his District advisors, refused to consider or even print the overtures in the District Workbook.

If after more than a year of discussion, we can only get a 60% vote in a good district. If two of the five good districts won't allow the discussion to be engaged, because Synod can't be accused of false teaching? If other districts won't even allow an overture which criticizes Synod to stand, you draw your own conclusions about whether Synod can be turned back to her former teaching and practice.

My congregation is in a temporary State of Confession and is committed to following our Synod's bylaws for correcting the errors of Synod. When the 2007 LCMS Convention meets in Texas we will see the outcome of our efforts. If Synod returns to the truth, we will drop our state of confession and rejoice. If Synod does not return, we will leave her.

XV. Conclusion: An Ecclesial Standpoint.-Finally, from **an ecclesial standpoint**, I have excellent news. The Apology to the Augsburg Confession concludes Article IV with these words, "Augustine says: 'The question is where is the church? What then shall we do? Shall we seek it in our own words or in the words of its head, our Lord Jesus Christ? I think we should seek it in the words of him who is the truth and who knows his body best.'"

Our Lord has promised that His word is truth and the truth will set you free. St. Paul in his address to the Corinthians explains his source of doctrine and practice saying, "For I have received from the Lord that which I delivered unto you..." (1 Cor 11:23). St. Paul charged Pastor Timothy(1 Tim 1:18-19) to wage a good war, holding faith and a good conscience. It is that church which is built upon the ministry of the confession which Peter made when he declared Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God (Treatise, 25). Against that church even the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (Mt 16:18).

Four hundred, and four score and six years ago our fathers gave forth the pure confession before the Emperor in the city of Augsburg. Now we are engaged in a great civil war testing whether our synodical bonds can long endure. We are called to make not only a private confession of our faith, but also give a pure public confession in agreement with our Lutheran forefathers so that other may live by that Gospel. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But in a larger sense, we cannot hallow our public confession, nor can we keep it pure by our own reason or strength. It is the blood of our Lord Jesus who suffered, died, and rose again. He provided this saving message and by means of His Holy Spirit He will preserve it. It is for us his disciples, pastors and laymen, to be committed to the faith of Him who made the good confession. Pastors are to lift up hands and confess the prophetic and apostolic faith. Laymen are to hold up the hands of the prophets. Together we are to confess Christ's truth before men.

"He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for Jesus' sake will find it." Our Lord has given us the promise, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of Life."