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BRIEF ITEMS FROM THE NATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL

LCA APPROVES UNIFORM COMMUNION PRACTICES

Pittsburgh. — Private confession and absolution before Holy Communion won qualified approval from the Lutheran Church in America at its second biennial convention here.

Adopting a statement on uniform Communion practices, delegates agreed that "opportunity for private confession and absolution should be afforded in every parish," but deleted a further recommendation that "our people should be increasingly encouraged to avail themselves of it."

The Lutheran reformers of the 16th century, it was noted, abolished compulsory private confession and absolution, but "retained it and commended it highly as a voluntary discipline."

The LCA book of worship, "The Occasional Services," has a formal provision for private confession and absolution which states that "persons who are burdened in conscience on account of sin may seek the personal ministrations of the pastor before the Holy Communion, or at any other time."

On other aspects of the Lord's Supper the statement made the following observations:

Use of either leavened or unleavened bread is suitable, although the use of wafers has "certain obvious practical advantages."

Use of wine is preferred, since the use of unfermented grape juice "is not in the historic tradition of the church and should be discouraged."

Although the chalice or common cup is "still the vessel preferred by many," the use of prefilled glasses is "equally permissible,"

but the use of individual paper or plastic cups is "inappropriate."

While "much may be said" for the present custom of receiving Communion by "tables" which are dismissed as groups with the blessing, attention is called to the practice of continuous Communion which provides for a single pronouncement of the blessing after all present have received the sacrament. In continuous administration, the communicant comes to the altar, receives the elements and, as he leaves, is immediately replaced by another communicant.

A trend, not only in LCA parishes, but throughout the Christian church in almost every land, toward more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper is "in keeping with both primitive Christian and early Lutheran practice" and is to be encouraged.

A policy of uniform Communion practices is desirable, the statement said, because of the increase in population mobility.

"The church is no longer related to a relatively stable society," it pointed out. "Because the church is the people of God, it must reexamine the relationship of its traditional forms and practices to the constantly changing social patterns in which the people live and move."

Uniform Communion practices, the statement added, would alleviate the confusion that often results when persons move to another area and are confronted with different ecclesiastical manners in the same church.

"For this reason," it said, "the church will do well to seek a basic uniformity of Communion practice among its several parishes."

The 13-page statement entitled "Sacrament of the Altar and Its Implications" was prepared by a special committee and is intended as a guide for the 3,227,000-member LCA's 6,200 congregations.

LCA STATEMENT ON FAMILY
ENDORSES BIRTH CONTROL

Pittsburgh. — The position of the Lutheran Church in America on marriage, divorce, remarriage, and birth control was defined in a statement endorsed here by the denomination's second biennial convention.

Entitled "A Statement on Marriage and Family," the 13-point document, prepared by the LCA's Board of Social Ministry, approves birth control where it is spiritually and economically necessary.

The statement stressed that "irresponsible conception of children up to the limit of biological capacity and selfish limitation of the number of children are equally detrimental."

But it added that married couples should plan their parenthood "in accordance with their ability to provide for their children and carefully nurture them in fullness of Christian faith and life."

"The health and welfare of the mother-wife should be a major concern in such decisions," the statement said. "Choice as to means of conception control should be made upon professional medical advice."

The document is intended as a guide to the LCA's members, pending further action at the church's 1966 biennial convention in Kansas City, Mo. During the 8-day convention, the delegates also:

Adopted a statement calling for an end to commercialism in the church because it "vitiates the clear relationship between the giving of the Christian and the mission of the church . . . and creates a false image of the church."

Ratified proposed standards of acceptance into and continuance in the LCA's ministry, including a statement that clarified constitutional provisions against membership of the church's ministers in so-called secret societies. It sets forth that "no minister of this church shall be or become a member of a group which because of its oath of secrecy makes it

impossible for the church to determine if its teachings and ceremonies 'are consistent with what the Lord has given solely to His church.'"

Authorized the president to appoint a commission of 15 members to make a comprehensive study of the doctrine of the ministry for report to the 1966 convention.

Approved a statement declaring that little of religious value had been lost in the Supreme Court's ban on prayer and Bible reading in public schools.

Received a report from the Board of Parish Education which urged support of the nation's public schools and discouraged the starting of parochial schools.

Approved a "master plan" that provides for the merger and/or relocation of several of the LCA's 10 theological seminaries.

Were told by the Board of College Education and Church Vocations that \$2,546,568 had been given to help support the LCA's 25 church-related colleges in the U.S. and Canada in 1963.

Heard from the Board of World Missions that a critical need exists for missionary personnel to serve in the LCA's 11 missions in Africa, Asia, and South America.

Assured a 2-year \$45 million church expansion program by authorizing the Board of American Missions to borrow up to \$7 million. The funds will be used to enter 215 fields, organize nearly 200 new congregations, and erect 320 new church buildings.

Elected 38 clergymen and 38 laymen to fill vacancies on the Executive Council, the Court of Adjudication, and eight boards of the church.

Asked the Executive Council to consider the use of voting machines or other mechanical devices in the conduct of elections at the next biennial convention, to replace the present paper ballots.

Instructed the Executive Council to study the circumstances under which the ministry of an LCA congregation may be combined

with, or terminated in favor of, the ministry of another communion.

Referred to the Executive Council a recommendation that the Commission on Approaches to Unity undertake conversations with fellow Lutheran churches "with all prudent speed."

Acted on numerous amendments to the approved constitutions for synods and congregations and to the LCA constitution and bylaws, most of the changes dealing with "housekeeping matters."

Approved a budget of nearly \$59 million for the next biennium.

Heard an address by Roman Catholic Bishop John J. Wright of Pittsburgh, the first prelate of his faith to address a Lutheran convention in North America.

Elected Dr. Malvin H. Lundeen to a 4-year term as secretary of the LCA, a post to which he was named for two years in 1962, when the LCA was constituted by merger of the Augustana, American Evangelical, Finnish Evangelical, and United Lutheran churches.

LCA DELEGATES DEBATE MEANING OF BLASPHEMY

Pittsburgh. — In prolonged debate on the race relations statement adopted here by the second biennial convention of the Lutheran Church in America, delegates became embroiled early in controversy over the meaning of blasphemy.

The introductory section of the statement recommended by the LCA's Board of Social Ministry quoted from the Prayer of the Church, normally a part of the liturgy at Sunday services in local congregations, to point up the evils of racism.

Quoting an optional petition in the prayer, the disputed sentence declared that "to stand before God and pray that He will 'take from us all hatred and prejudice' and then as a praying church to discriminate among men

on any such sinful basis is an act of blasphemy."

Dr. Raymond D. Wood of Atlanta, Ga., president of the LCA's Southeastern Synod, moved to strike the phrase "an act of blasphemy" and insert in its place the words "a contradiction of this prayer."

Discrimination is "sinful," but describing it as "blasphemy" gives the impression it is an unpardonable sin, Dr. Wood said. "Let us be loving and kind and patient with one another and not condemn," he pleaded.

He told the convention that many of the Lutheran churches in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee, the territory of his synod, have opened their doors to all Christians and that "for many of our people God has taken their prejudice away." However, he added, "segregation no doubt will continue in many of our congregations."

Dr. George W. Forell, professor of Protestant theology at the State University of Iowa in Iowa City, defended the use of "blasphemy" in the statement as correct.

"Blasphemy," he said, "is using the name of God in vain. If I pray that I should be freed from prejudice and do not really want to be freed from prejudice, I am using God's name in vain and committing an act of blasphemy."

Further debate on the issue was marked by an attempt to amend Dr. Wood's amendment by adding the phrase "and an affront to God," but this was defeated. As finally adopted, the statement included the change advocated by Dr. Wood.

LCA HEARS ROMAN CATHOLIC BISHOP URGE JOINT CHURCH STUDIES

Pittsburgh. — A leading prelate of the Roman Catholic Church told a Lutheran gathering here that not only the Scriptures but also the writings of early church leaders should be the subject of joint study by Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians.

The plea was voiced by the Most Rev.

John J. Wright, bishop of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, in greetings to the Lutheran Church in America at the opening business session of its second biennial convention.

Bishop Wright's appearance, before 700 delegates and several hundred visitors in the grand ballroom of the Hilton Hotel, marked the first time that a Roman Catholic prelate has addressed a Lutheran church convention in America.

In a 20-minute address Bishop Wright stressed his belief that "shared scholarly studies of the church fathers . . . might prove a providential restoration and enrichment of our common family heritage."

He said it would be "as if relatives too long estranged were happily to meet in the ancestral homes to which they had retained deep but, alas, divided loyalties and were again enjoying together treasures which they each remember with tender love, but, alas, separately."

Bishop Wright began by greeting the delegates as "dear brethren all in Christ," recalling, in a quotation from the late Pope John XXIII, a declaration of Saint Augustine.

Even though divided, St. Augustine said, Christians will cease to be brothers only when they cease to say the Lord's Prayer, that "Our Father," Bishop Wright added, "by which they commonly acknowledge Christ as their Elder Brother and God as their Father in heaven."

In a reference to the Reformation, the split with Roman Catholicism that established the Lutheran Church and Protestantism, he observed that he quoted St. Augustine "a little timidly and a little wistfully at a gathering of Lutherans."

"I have long tended to suspect that it was our separate readings of St. Augustine, much more than of Sacred Scripture," he said, "that intensified those theological divergences which widened into such mutual isolation after certain historical happenings that not

one of us, as a Christian, can think of without tears, remorse, and affliction of spirit."

This was but one reason, he added, why "I venture the hope that the present universally welcomed renewal of mutual Scriptural interests and studies will be accompanied by a common effort at a fraternal revisiting of the ancient Latin and Greek church Fathers."

Bishop Wright asserted that "such a joint and filial revisiting with the church fathers, notably St. Augustine, for some second looks — long, searching and filled with great love — can only be approved of men and blessed by God."

He said the studies should be directed to the end that "we, who have a common Father and a common Elder Brother, in Jesus Christ, may recapture a common family feeling. . . ."

Bishop Wright voiced the hope that "whatever your Lutheran reservations about some Catholic developments in and since the 16th century, there must be some, please God many, Catholic developments and forms of witness which, as Christians, you admire fraternally and welcome gratefully."

"Certainly," he said, "there have been many gifts and graces in post-Reformation Lutheran history for which we Catholics should be deeply grateful, not only as Christians but even as humans."

As one of these, "far from the least and perhaps a happy symbol of all the others," the bishop cited Johann Sebastian Bach, whom he described as "the great Lutheran artist."

Bach, he said, "bore a profound, integrated, and masterful musical witness that was theological in its significance and salutary in its cultural influence."

Bishop Wright urged that Bach "may help keep us commonly aware and mutually appreciative of the faith that his music proclaims."

This faith, he said, is "the truth that

Jesus is the heart of man's desiring, that God's glory must be the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of all our ecumenical hopes and strivings."

"Thus will He help us do what both of us are determined to do, keep the focus of our faith on the incarnate Son of God," he concluded.

LUTHERAN SEES HISTORY OF ROMAN MASS ENTERING A NEW ERA

Berlin. — The Second Vatican Council marks the dividing line between two epochs in the history of Roman Catholic public worship and the Mass, the director of the Lutheran World Federation's Department of Theology declared here.

Dr. Vilmos Vajta, one of the observers of the LWF at the council sessions, said that "just as the Council of Trent (1545—63) occasioned a new liturgical epoch within the Roman rite, so the Second Vatican Council will doubtless have a comparable effect."

In a lecture at the Kirchliche Hochschule here, he stressed that the basic principles of the new liturgical constitution produced by the latter "bring the Tridentine (Trent) period to a conclusion."

The Council of Trent fixed the Roman Catholic position over against the distinctive emphases of the Protestant Reformation.

Dr. Vajta said that "every heir of the Reformation . . . must rejoice" that the aspects of the liturgy now being underscored by the Roman Catholic Church "are precisely the elements which are fundamental for evangelical liturgical life."

Aspects he cited are "the renewal of the use of Scripture in the liturgy, the proclamation of the mighty acts of God, the active participation of the faithful in worship on the basis of their Baptism, and especially the restoration of Communion in the Eucharistic celebration."

He acknowledged that, whereas "Trent focused on dogmatic considerations regard-

ing the Mass," the current council seeks to maintain dogmatic continuity and places its "renovations" on a pastoral plane.

Nevertheless he voiced confidence that "the old principle, 'the rule of prayer determines the rule of faith,' will surely once again prove to be valid."

The Hungarian-born theologian, now a Swedish citizen, expressed conviction that the kind of liturgical practice advocated by the Second Vatican Council "poses problems for [Roman] Catholic dogmatics which have not yet been solved." After citing some examples, he said, "The Gospel requires us to continue to raise these questions; but now they have become questions which are directed at [Roman] Catholic dogmatics by liturgical practice itself as this has been legislated by (the new) constitution.

"This provides a new basis for discussion between the churches."

The 46-year-old theologian's lecture here was one of his last before he leaves his LWF post in Geneva on Sept. 1 to become research professor of the Lutheran Foundation for Interconfessional Research at Strasbourg, France.

An alternate at the first session of the Vatican Council in 1962, he was one of the federation's regular delegate observers at the second session last year and will be again at the third session, opening on Sept. 14.

With respect to the necessity of having a congregation present to give meaning to a churchly act of worship, Dr. Vajta said the Vatican Council seems to have taken a theological position "according to which privately celebrated masses are still possible, but communal ones appear as most appropriate to the nature of the Mass."

"This," he commented, "represents a considerable difference, not only from Trent, but from more recent magisterial pronouncements. An approach is made to the congregational worship for which the Reformation strove. . . . It is possible to ask whether an

epoch in the history of the Mass has come to an end."

ELECT SOUTH DAKOTAN TO HEAD LUTHERAN LAYMEN'S LEAGUE

Lincoln, Nebr. — Robert W. Hirsch, a state senator from Tripp, S. Dak., was elected president of the 140,000-member international Lutheran Laymen's League here yesterday. The 38-year-old attorney succeeds Harry G. Barr, Fort Smith, Ark., who was ineligible for reelection.

Delegates approved a \$250,000 expansion of the league's headquarters building in St. Louis, a restructuring of its educational aid programs, and a revision of its bylaws. Houston, Tex., was chosen as the 1966 convention site and Milwaukee for 1967. Next year the league, sponsors of the international Lutheran Hour, will meet in Boston.

In other election results Ray Schnitzmeyer, 53-year-old banker from Hoffmann, Ill., was reelected as financial secretary. Named to the board of governors for the first time were Alvin W. Graef, Louisville, Ky., Thomas D. McDougall, Grand Forks, N. Dak., and Arthur R. Kohl, Van Nuys, Calif.

LWF COMMISSION APPROVES JUSTIFICATION STATEMENT

Pullach, Germany. — Publication and distribution of a "contemporary statement" on the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith was approved here by the Lutheran World Federation's Commission on Theology.

The action was taken during the commission's first meeting since it was reorganized at the federation's fourth assembly in Helsinki, Finland, late last summer. The sessions here were held July 29—Aug. 3.

The Helsinki assembly was unable to reach unanimous agreement on the wording of the statement on justification, known as Document No. 75, and referred it to the theology commission for refinement.

Before approving the statement, the commission discussed the document in detail, made a number of modifications described as minor in nature, and added a preface on its origin, its history at Helsinki, and the theological setting against which it is to be understood.

A report on the commission's work from 1958 to 1963 was prepared by the Rev. Jörg Rothermundt, a former assistant in the Department of Theology, and will be issued with the statement on justification.

The report, a commission member said, will serve as "further exposition" of the background of the document in the total study program of the old commission.

Commission members also adopted for its study program over the next six years the theme recommended by the Helsinki assembly — "The Quest for True Humanity and the Lordship of Christ."

The theme will be approached through four subthemes during the future, although its relation to the work of the next assembly depends upon decisions to be made by the LWF Executive Committee and the new subcommittee on the assembly.

The next meeting of the 7-member commission has been scheduled for June 5—11, 1965, at a place to be determined in East Germany.

BRIEF ITEMS FROM THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD SYNODICAL CONFERENCE, ITS MISSIONS, WILL CONTINUE

Ann Arbor, Mich. — Representatives of two Lutheran bodies voted to continue the Lutheran Synodical Conference and to give responsibility for the conference's missionary enterprise in Nigeria and Ghana, West Africa, to the two church bodies. They are The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, with 2,683,876 members, and the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, with 20,464 members.

Last year two members of the conference, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, withdrew over differences in theology and practice with the Missouri Synod. An invitation was extended by the 110 delegates at the conference convention here to have the former members "rejoin the common task of sound confessional Lutheranism through the agency of the Lutheran Synodical Conference."

The conference urged close contact with sister church bodies overseas. Dr. John Daniel, Bethlehem, Pa., president of the conference, listed five areas of possible cooperation: united theological study and consultation, common worship and liturgical studies, exchange of theological professors, discussion of mission efforts, and a unified approach to ecumenical conversations.

Both members of the conference are cur-

rently engaged in the Inter-Lutheran Consultation, which was initiated with member bodies of the National Lutheran Council, to draw up outlines for a cooperative agency in which Lutherans might participate in theological studies and mutual projects.

During sessions of the convention the delegates honored Dr. Karl Kurth, St. Louis, who has retired after supervising the mission activities of the conference for 18 years. Negro congregations in this country have now joined geographic Districts of the Missouri Synod. There are 32,000 baptized members in 200 congregations in Nigeria.

Serving as officers of the conference's board of trustees are: August E. Beckemeier, St. Louis, chairman; Rev. John Bajus, Chicago, vice-chairman; Dr. Otto A. Dorn, St. Louis, secretary; and Russell Rolling, St. Louis, treasurer.