

Discover the priorities and specific areas of concern that call for particular emphasis for the mission efforts of the LCMS.*

A THEOLOGICAL STATEMENT FOR MISSION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

by Matthew C. Harrison

Background

REFLECTING OUR COMMITMENT TO THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) in convention has adopted resolutions in support of missions for decades. In 1986, for example, Resolution 3-02 was adopted, resulting in the 1991 publication of “A Theological Statement of Mission” by the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR). As the context both domestically and internationally has changed since the end of the twentieth century, it is helpful to express the timeless truths of God’s desire to save all people in contextual and contemporary language for the situations the church encounters in the present age.

Most recently, Resolution 1-03A was adopted in 2013, calling for the development of a “Theological Statement of Mission for the 21st Century” by the end of 2014 that would form the basis for Synod-wide study of the subject.

In fulfillment of this resolution, “A Theological Statement for Mission in the 21st Century” was developed and adopted by the Board for International Mission (BIM) and the Board for National Mission (BNM). This version was published in the *Journal of Lutheran Mission*, March 2014, pages 60-69. The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) reviewed, provided feedback, and helped revise the final version, which was commended to the Synod in Convention 2016 Resolution 5-18, “To Commend ‘A Theological Statement for Mission for the 21st Century’ for Synod-wide Study and Use.”

*In November 1991, the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) released a

document, “A Theological Statement of Mission.” Just as the current document is the result of a Synod convention resolution (2013 Res. 1-031A), the 1991 CTCR document was produced as a result of a Synod convention resolution (1986 Res. 3-02). For decades, the Missouri Synod has passed resolutions in conventions in support of mission. This reflects how the Missouri Synod takes

seriously Christ’s mandate for the gospel to be proclaimed to the entire world. The 1991 CTCR statement on mission and the current document demonstrate how each generation and age of the church must confess and put into practice the faith given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ. The two documents, while written in different styles, are in harmony with one another, expressing the same truths about Christ’s mission and the church’s response to our Lord’s mandate. In fact, the CTCR statement on mission states about itself, “This statement was

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not envisioned as an end in itself but as a tool that would be available for possible use by the various units of the Synod as they seek to develop their own individual mission statements.” In this regard, the 1991 CTCR statement has served as a helpful tool. In like manner, the following statement seeks to be a helpful tool for the present time. It is a consideration of various aspects of the church’s mission in a way that is consistent with Synod’s three-fold emphasis on *Witness (martyria)*, *Mercy (diakonia)*, *Life Together (koinonia)*.¹ Although the following document

¹ *Witness, Mercy, Life Together* is an attempt to describe what the church always has done — proclaim the gospel, care for people’s bodily needs, and have fellowship and community together as the church. Relating these themes to the Greek nouns *martyria*, *diakonia*, and

seeks to address mission from a distinctively Lutheran theological perspective, it is not a “missiology” *per se*. As such, it will not engage the wide variety of perspectives found in that discipline, reflect the many fine contributions of various scholars in that field, or address all of the practicalities of mission practice. Rather, it seeks to set forth priorities and specific areas of concern that call for particular emphasis for the mission efforts of the LCMS at this time.²

1. God. Where the Holy Trinity is present via the gospel and received in faith, there cannot but be *Witness (martyria)*³, *Mercy (diakonia)*⁴, *Life Together (koinonia)*⁵. These

koinonia is not a suggestion that they are either translation equivalents or full conceptual parallels. Whatever titles are given to such churchly work or whatever terms are used, these activities have been a part of the church's life since the beginning. See Albert B. Collver's *Witness, Mercy, Life Together: Bible Study* (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House), 2011. In *Mission from the Cross: The Lutheran Theology of Mission* (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), Klaus Detlev Schulz describes both the Trinitarian nature of mission (see chapter 6, 87–97) as well as the activities of the church and Christians that could be summarized by terms such as *Witness, Mercy, Life Together*. Schulz adds the idea of *leitourgia* as he diagrams the church's work (237). He also refers (1) to the work of “proclamation, confession and witness” (see 14–17, 161–167), (2) to the church's *diakonia* (101–104), and (3) to the church as “a new community” (see chapter 13).

² For a helpful and trustworthy guide to the particular discipline of missiology, Schulz's work, mentioned in the previous footnote, *Mission from the Cross*, is noteworthy. It thoroughly engages the field of missiology and the work of various other missiologists and constructs a distinctively Lutheran missiology that is relevant for our particular time.

³ While the term *martyria* can be translated “witness,” its frequent if not primary application in the New Testament is to the testimony of the apostolic eyewitnesses of our Lord. This is true of the noun and its verbal cognates in the book of Acts, in the Gospel of John, and elsewhere in the New Testament. Here it is used in the more general sense of the church's proclamation.

⁴ The *diakon-* word group is the subject of significant discussion in contemporary exegetical circles and is never translated as “mercy” (*eleos* is the Greek word for mercy). While the lexical understanding of the language of *diakonia* and related terms has undergone significant change, the idea that the word group may include such things as rendering specific aid, service, help, or other expressions of mercy cannot be doubted. The word *diakonia* is recognized by many English speaking people because the words “deacon” and “deaconess” are derived from it. Translations of the New Testament often render it as “ministry” or “service.” It is used here to denote “acts of mercy” or “mercy in action.” This fits with the use of the verbal cognate of *diakonia* to describe the work of Jesus and his merciful sacrifice in Matthew 20:28 (MARK 10:45). The noun is used to describe the charitable work of Christians in Romans 15:25 and 2 Corinthians 8:19–20. The noun *diakonia* is used in a similar way in Acts 11:29; 2 Corinthians 9:1, 12.

⁵ “Life together” is not a translation for *koinonia*, which is normally rendered by terms such as “communion,” “fellowship,” “participation,” or “sharing.” Life together is a helpful expression, however, that captures an essential aspect of the church's fellowship/participation/sharing, since such *koinonia* is what the life of Christians together with one

three reflect God's very being as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier,⁶ and they encompass his holy and gracious will for all in Christ Jesus — namely that all come to believe in and bear witness to Christ, reflect divine compassion, and live together in forgiveness, love, and joy in the church (AC I [Kolb-Wengert, 37]).⁷

2. Humanity. It is the deepest offense to natural man that, apart from the life-giving witness of God in Christ, he is blind, dead and an enemy of God (EPH 2:8–9); incapable of “true fear of God and true faith in God” (AC II, 1 [Kolb-Wengert, 36–39]; 1 COR 1:22–25); and is, therefore, helpless under the damning and merciless hammer of divine law (JER 23:29). The condemnation of the law knows no respect for persons, much less class, ethnicity or sex. The witness of the gospel (word and sacrament) is the sole source of life for the dead, the only remedy for sin, death and the devil. Thus, the entire life of the Christian individual and the church is lived in and for the fact that “the Son of man came to seek and save the lost” (LUKE 19:10).

3. Christ, the content of the Gospel. Christ himself is the content of the gospel, and thus of the church's mission of *Witness (martyria)*, *Mercy (diakonia)*, *Life Together (koinonia)*. The gospel is defined by Christ's person, words and works, and it transcends time and space. Just as “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow,” so the gospel is the unique once-for-all offering of Christ, the God-man, for the sins of the world (HEB 10:10). “The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin” (1 JOHN 1:7). “The work is finished and completed. Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by His sufferings, death, and resurrection” (LC II, 38 [Kolb-Wengert, 436]). The communication of the gospel may vary culture

another is all about.

⁶ The use of these “economic” titles for the Triune God [Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier] echoes Luther's *Small Catechism* and should not in any way be taken to imply avoidance of the biblical name of the Blessed Trinity — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

⁷ Please note that this document wishes only to echo “the catholic faith” of one God in three Persons (Athanasian Creed 1–3, KW 24). Therefore, to “reflect God's very being” is not to define the blessed Trinity, nor is it to suggest that the triad of *Witness, Mercy, Life Together* fully encompasses the entirety of God's attributes. Rather, it simply expresses that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are perfectly united in the work of witness, mercy, and life together as they create, redeem, and sanctify. The work of witness reflects the Word who is God; the work of mercy reflects God who is love; and the work of life together reflects the Trinity in unity as well as the mystical union between Christ and his church. This also echoes the CTCR's *Theological Statement of Mission* which stated: “Mission begins in the heart of God and expresses his great love for the world. It is the Lord's gracious initiative and ongoing activity to save a world incapable of saving itself” (5).

to culture, but the fundamental definition of the gospel as justification is timeless because it is biblical (ROM 3:21–26; 4:5). “[W]e receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace, for Christ’s sake through faith when we believe that Christ has suffered for us and that for His sake our sin is forgiven” (AC IV, 1 [Kolb-Wengert, 38, 40]).

4. Christ, the Source and Model for the life of faith.

Faith lays hold of Christ, and from him it is enlivened and given its impulse and model for *Witness (martyria)*, *Mercy (diakonia)*, *Life Together (koinonia)*. Jesus spends himself completely (MARK 1:38) to bear witness as the Son of God sent for the salvation of the world (JOHN 3:16). Jesus has compassion on the needy within and outside the community of faith (MARK 7:28). Jesus establishes a community of believers who are “brothers and sisters” (ACTS 2; MARK 3:31 ff.), who are “not to lord it over each other” (MATT 20:25) but to live together in forgiveness (MATT 18), love (JOHN 15) and mutual service (JOHN 15:12; MARK 10:45; PHLM 2). “Oh, faith is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, so that it is impossible for it not to be constantly doing what is good” (FC SD IV, 10 [Tappert, 10–11]). While the church’s work of extending of Christ’s *Witness (martyria)*, *Mercy (diakonia)*, *Life Together (koinonia)* in community will always be but a weak reflection of his own, where there is no *Witness, Mercy, Life Together* in forgiveness and love, there is no church, no faith in Christ.⁸ To paraphrase Luther, Christ is both *sacramentum* and *exemplum*, both sacrament (gift) and model for the Christian.

5. The saving word of God. God’s means of bringing salvation in Christ is the word of God proclaimed: “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (ROM 10:8–9). “So that we may obtain this faith,” our confession says, “the ministry of teaching the gospel

⁸ This is not to suggest that, in some wooden fashion, *Witness, Mercy, Life Together* are the “marks of the church” in the sense of AC VII. It seeks only to emphasize that where the gospel is rightly preached and sacramentally administered, there the Holy Spirit will be creating faith through the witness of Christ’s gospel. Such faith will result in active love of the neighbor (*mercy*) and will sustain the fellowship of believers (*life together*). See § 5 below.

Bearing witness to the saving good news of God for us in Jesus is the fundamental task of the church (MATT 28:19).

and administering the sacraments was instituted” (AC V, 1 [Kolb-Wengert, 41]). Thus the church, the assembly of all believers in Christ, is found *where* the word of God is found, where “the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel” (AC VII, 1 [Kolb-Wengert, 42]). The word of God — read, spoken, proclaimed — will not return to God empty but will accomplish his purpose (ISA 55:10–11) and will bring people to faith in Christ “where and when it pleases God in those who hear the gospel” (AC V, 2 [Kolb-Wengert, 41]). That is why the church is not recognized by individual faith or works, which may be invented or contrived, but by these external marks, “the pure teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments in harmony with the gospel of Christ” (AP VII and VIII [Kolb-Wengert, 174]).⁹ Therefore, where the word of God is found; where Holy Absolution is proclaimed (the specific announcement of the forgiveness of sins for the sake of Christ); where Holy Baptism is done in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; where Christ’s true body and blood are given by his word of promise, there you will find the church, the assembly of believers in Christ, and there you will find Christ himself. Moreover, where Christ’s church is located in the word and sacraments, there you will find

Witness (martyria), *Mercy (diakonia)*, *Life Together (koinonia)* (GAL 2:8–9).

6. Witness is the sacred and fundamental task of the church. Bearing witness to the saving good news of God for us in Jesus is the fundamental task of the church (MATT 28:19). This leads to the making of disciples. The apostolic witness is connected to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The preaching of the gospel consistently proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah promised by the Old Testament Scriptures, preached the damning law in full force (“You killed the author of life” [ACTS 3:15]) and preached forgiveness through repentance, faith and Holy Baptism. This apostolic message is to predominate proclamation by called preachers within the community of believers, the proclamation of evangelists to those outside the church, and the witness of every Christian in the context of his or her vocations in life. It is the sacred task

⁹ Compare with Ignatius, “The Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans”: “Where Christ Jesus is, there is the catholic church,” 8.

of preachers to know the Scriptures ever more profoundly and constantly to seek to improve the craft of preaching that the gospel may be preached in its biblical fullness and with clarity to its hearers. It is the sacred task of preachers to equip the saints to bear witness to Jesus to their friends, family, and others who are placed before them in their daily vocations. The word of God is equally effective for salvation, whether proclaimed by Christ, the angels, called preachers, or shared by common Christians among one another, or with those who do not yet know Christ's forgiveness (ISA 55:11).¹⁰ In order to carry on Christ's witness into the world, the church is entrusted with training, teaching, and making pastors through theological education. This witness will accompany the church's corporate work of mercy (the mercy is Christ's) and will dominate the church's life together. "Where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Spirit who creates, calls, and gathers the Christian Church, without which no one comes to Christ the Lord" (LC II, 45).

Dr. C. F. W. Walther asked to whom the responsibility to preach the gospel among all people of the earth has been committed. He answered:

The word of God is equally effective for salvation, whether proclaimed by Christ, the angels, called preachers, or shared by common Christians among one another, or with those who do not yet know Christ's forgiveness.

Here we see that it is the people of the New Testament, or the Holy Christian Church, that God has prepared or established, to show forth His praise in all the world. That means that the church is to make known the great works of God for the salvation of men, or that which is the same thing, to preach the Gospel to every creature. Even Isaiah gives this testimony, having been enlightened by the Holy Spirit: The true mission society that has been instituted by God is nothing else than *the Christian church itself*, that is the totality of all those who from the heart believe in Jesus Christ.¹¹

7. Witness and confession. Witness and confession are two inseparable aspects of the church's life in this world. Witness to Christ is as simple as John 3:16 but as fulsome

as the gospel of the incarnation; humiliation and exultation of Christ; his Baptism and ours; Absolution; the Holy Supper; the doctrines of grace, conversion, election, bound will and more. The gospel is, in fact, replete throughout the Scriptures and to be applied pervasively and winsomely in manifold ways according to the need of the hearers. As confession, the witness of the gospel rejoices in standing for the creedal truth as it is in Jesus. It is as simple as the earliest confessions of the faith ("Jesus Christ is Lord," PHIL 2:11; LC II, 27) or the Small Catechism or as replete as the Nicene Creed or the Formula of Concord. The church's goal is always witness unto sal-

vation in the simple message of salvation by the blood of Jesus and growth into the full confession of the orthodox Lutheran faith. The Lutheran church rejoices that salvation is found wherever simple faith in Jesus and his merits is found, but it always seeks a witness and confession consisting of the "whole council of God" (ACTS 20:27). Lutheran mission is creedal and catholic.

8. Mercy as sacred vocation. The church is Christ's body, and as such, she continues his life of mercy as a

witness to the love of God for body and soul. The church has a corporate life of mercy toward those within the orthodox fellowship of believers, toward the broader community of Christians and to those outside the church (GAL 6:10). The church can no more ignore the physical needs of people than Christ could have refused to perform healings or persons can be separated into body and soul in this life. Thus, the early church heartily and vigorously continued Jesus' ministry of healing and care for the needy (ACTS 6; 2 COR 8-9). This witness, through mercy accompanying the gospel, has been a missiological force of the church in its great periods of advancement, especially in times of desperate need and persecution. The care for the widows (ACTS 6) and Paul's collection for Jerusalem (2 COR 8-9) are the great prototypical models for mercy for the church for all time. We care for people in need, not with any ulterior motive, nor even in order to proclaim the gospel. We proclaim the gospel and care for the needy because that's who Christ is, and that is who we are as the church in this world (JOHN 14; ACTS 4:12).

¹⁰ See also § 16 below.

¹¹ C. F. W. Walther, "The Mission Society Established By God," in *The Word of His Grace* (Lake Mills: Graphic Publishing Co., 1978), 20.

9. Life Together as bestowed and lived. Our Life Together in Christ's church is not acquired by human decision or merit; it is a gift. Just as one does not elect one's own family, so we are brought into Christ's holy people by the action of the Triune God. "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 COR 1:9). The Lord has called, gathered, enlightened and sanctified us through the gospel to live together as his church. Life in this community is a gift that entails responsibility. We see this in Paul's exhortation to Ephesians to bear with one another in love, "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (EPH 4:3), even as he is quick to add that we were called into the one body of Christ and faith in a singular Lord. We cannot create the unity of the body of Christ; that is given. But we are to be on guard against teachings and practices that would tempt us away from the one Lord, the one faith and the one Baptism that keep us in union with the one God and Father of us all.

10. Witness, Mercy, Life Together in the apostolic church. The apostles testified to *Witness (martyria)*, *Mercy (diakonia)*, *Life Together (koinonia)* in the apostolic church. An example of this can be found in Galatians 2:7, 9–10. The apostles divided up the task of proclamation (witness) to the circumcised and the uncircumcised. The apostles remembered the poor (mercy). The apostles extended the right hand of fellowship (life together).

"Bearing witness," says Luther, "is nothing but God's Word spoken by angels or men, and it calls for faith."¹² In Acts 1:8, the risen Lord says of his apostles that they will be his witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and beyond those borders to the end of the earth. It is the apostles who with their own eyes have seen the Lord, touched him with their own hands and heard his voice with their ears (see 1 JOHN 1:1–4), who are designated witnesses. We are witnesses only in the derived sense that our words echo the reliable testimony of the apostles. To

¹² Martin Luther, "Lectures on Zechariah" (1527) in *Luther's Works*, vol. 20, ed., Walther Miller, trans. Hilton Oswald (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), 213.

bear witness is to speak not of ourselves but of another — Christ Jesus. The apostolic church is sent to repeat the witness of the apostles that Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is the only Lord who saves.

"You notice," said Luther, "that concern for the poor is the other work of the apostles."¹³ Saint Paul exhorts the church to care for the poor. In the third century, Tertullian wrote how the pagans would say of the Christians, "See how they love one another."¹⁴ The way that the church cares for the needs of those within the church is a witness to the world. Yet the mercy of God does not stay within the church but goes out from the household of faith into the entire world.

"[W]e preach the Gospel," said Luther while commenting on Galatians 2:9,

in unanimous consensus with you. There we are companions in doctrine and have fellowship in it; that is, we have the same doctrine. For we preach one Gospel, one Baptism, one Christ, and one faith. Therefore we cannot teach or command anything so far as you are concerned, for we are completely agreed in everything. For we do not teach anything different from what you teach; nor is it better or sublimer.¹⁵

Going about our daily vocation as baptized members of Christ's royal priesthood, we testify to Christ, speaking his saving word, the same word we regularly hear in preaching and the same word we read for ourselves in Holy Scripture (e.g., through personal and family devotions).

The life together of the apostles was based upon having the same foundation in Jesus Christ, that is, holding to the same doctrine. This life together is not created by us but by the Lord. When the same doctrine is recognized in another Christian or in a church body, we have a life together.

11. On being Lutheran today for the sake of Witness, Mercy, Life Together. "The Gospel and Baptism must

¹³ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Volume 27: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 5–6; Lectures on Galatians, 1519, Chapters 1–6*, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan, Walter A. Hansen (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 210.

¹⁴ Tertullian, *Volume 3: Apology 39.6* Ante-Nicene Fathers, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishing, 1996), 46.

¹⁵ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1–4*, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan, Walter A. Hansen (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 104.

traverse the world,”¹⁶ said Luther. This is what Lutheran missions care about — faithfully preaching repentance and faith in Jesus’ name, baptizing and teaching so that those who belong to Christ in every nation are built up in his word and fed with his body and blood. Mission is, to use the words of Wilhelm Löhe, “the one church of God in motion,” calling, gathering and enlightening unbelievers through the pure teaching of the gospel. This definition lies at the heart of what it means to be Lutheran in mission. Lutheran mission is defined by an unqualified (*quia*) subscription to *The Book of Concord* as the correct exposition of the Holy Scriptures. We are in harmony in the one biblical gospel and the Sacraments instituted by Christ. Rejecting theological pluralism and its offspring universalism, Lutheran mission is grounded in the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ, knowing outside of his word, which is spirit and life, there is only darkness and death.

12. The church today as a community of *Witness, Mercy, Life Together*. When the German mission leader and theologian of the last generation, Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf (1910–1982), asserted, “The Lutheran Church can only do Lutheran missions,” he was observing that the Lutheran confession is inseparable from mission.¹⁷ There is no church without mission, and no mission without the church. Evangelism becomes the church’s mission when its goal is gaining souls for the local community of believers and planting the church as a witnessing, merciful community of believers. When confession and mission are pulled apart, both suffer. Mission without confession is reduced to zealous fanaticism. There can be no confession without mission for confession takes place before God and in the presence of a listening world. The mouth of confession is the voice of mission always proclaiming that Jesus Christ is the God who justifies the ungodly, giving life to the dead in the forgiveness of sins. And this forgiveness of sins is found only in the Christian church where the Holy Spirit “daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers,” to use the words of the Small Catechism. That is why, in the Book of Acts, those who received the preaching of the apostles were baptized, being added to the church, says Luke (ACTS 2:41). In the church created by mission, which has at its heart the

preaching of the gospel, those brought to faith “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers” (ACTS 2:42). Church and mission go together; you do not have the one without the other.

The claim, no doubt disputed in our day, that Lutheran missions lead to Lutheran churches is far from a parochial appeal to brand-name loyalty or mere denomination-alism.¹⁸ Instead, it is the recognition that the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies a holy Christian people through the pure preaching of the gospel and sacraments administered according to the divine word. Lutherans are glued to the scriptural truth that the Spirit works faith in the hearts of those who hear the good news of Jesus crucified and risen when and where it pleases him. Faith is not created by human enthusiasm, crusades for social justice or strategic planning. Faith comes through the word of the cross. That’s what Lutheran mission is given to proclaim. It is precisely in this Lutheran understanding of mission that mercy and life together converge.

Lutheran mission celebrates First Article gifts of language and culture. Lutheran mission has no interest in changing the culture of a people as long as those conventions and culture are not sinful. In fact, Lutheran mission, as found in the Reformation, seeks to bring the gospel to people in their native language. Lutheran mission teaches that Christian churches are to be subject to the governing authorities and do not engage in revolution. Lutheran mission seeks to build capacity in the newly planted churches so that, in the unity of faith and confession, these younger churches may mature and live as true partners together with us in *Witness, Mercy, Life Together*.

13. Word of God. The Triune God is a speaking God. By his spoken word, the Father brought creation into existence (GEN 1:1–2; PS 33:6; JOHN 1:1–3). Christ, who is the eternal Logos, speaks his words, which are “spirit and life” (JOHN 6:63). The word of Christ’s death and resurrection — the message of God’s reconciliation of sinners to himself — is preached. It is this preaching that creates faith since

¹⁶ Werner Elert, *Structure of Lutheranism* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 386.

¹⁷ Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf, “The Lutheran Church Plants Lutheran Missions,” trans. Matthew C. Harrison and Rachel Mumme, *Journal of Lutheran Mission* (April 2015).

¹⁸ Neither is this claim intended to be sectarian in nature. The Holy Spirit is at work wherever the gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered and, therefore, there exists throughout the world under various names the *catholic church* (that assembly which holds the *catholic faith*; see Athanasian Creed). Lutherans thank God for that reality, but it is not a reason to minimize the importance of Lutheran churches exercising their missionary responsibilities in a way that is fully faithful to their Confessions, thus producing new *Lutheran churches*.

“faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ” (ROM 10:17). The Holy Spirit was breathed out by Jesus to his apostles on Easter evening (see JOHN 20:22) and inspired them to put his word into writing “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (JOHN 20:31). It is through the prophetic and apostolic witness to Christ delivered to us in the Holy Scriptures — the Spirit-inspired and inerrant word of God — that we have access to Jesus and life with him (see 2 TIM 3:15 and 2 PET 1:16–21). The Holy Scriptures are to be interpreted in light of their being given by the Triune God. “The exegesis of the Holy Scriptures cannot contradict their inspiration.”¹⁹ Both interpreter and context stand under the Holy Scriptures and are, in fact, interpreted by the divine word. The internal clarity of Scripture is mediated through the external clarity of its own words. Far from being an imposition on the Bible, the right distinction of the law from the gospel is nothing other than the distinction between “letter” and “Spirit” (see 2 COR 3:1–18). Without this distinction, the Holy Scriptures remain a dark book (see AP IV, 5–6 [Kolb-Wengert, 121]; FC SD V, 1–27 [Kolb-Wengert, 581–586]).

The Scriptures stand in the service of preaching. Preaching that conforms to the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures is the oral word of God and, therefore, a means of grace. Preaching is never merely descriptive but always a kerygmatic, efficacious proclamation that delivers condemnation to secure sinners and consolation to those broken by their sin. Preaching is always a speaking of either the law or the gospel in the present tense, creating repentance and faith in those who hear, where and when it pleases God (see ISA 55:10–11; AC V, 2–3 [Kolb-Wengert, 40–41]).

Preaching is not limited to the sermon but is also individualized in the absolution where God’s servant is entrusted to speak words that forgive sins now (see JOHN 20: 21–23; SC V, 15–29 [Tappert, 349–351]).²⁰ The absolution is eschatological, that is, it brings the verdict of the last day into time as Christ says, “I forgive you your sins.” The absolution leaves no room for doubt for it is God’s own word of promise to be trusted in life and death.

14. Baptism. Baptism is far more than a rite of initiation.

¹⁹ Oswald Bayer, “Theology as Askesis,” in *Gudstankens aktualitet*, trans. E. M. Wiberg Pedersen, et. al. (Copenhagen: Forlaget ANIS, 2010), 49.

²⁰ This is included under Baptism originally; see Kolb-Wengert, 360–362.

While it is a line of demarcation between unbelief and faith and hence not optional for mission, it is more than an entry point into the Christian life. Dr. C. F. W. Walther wrote, “Let us never forget that through Holy Baptism we have all joined the mission society which God Himself has established.”²¹ Baptism is best thought of as present tense, hence, “I am baptized” and not “I was baptized.”²² Luther notes, “I am baptized, and through my baptism God, who cannot lie, has bound himself in a covenant with me.”²³ Baptism is the Triune God’s gift whereby he demonstrates his mercy by bestowing on us a new birth (see JOHN 3: 3–6; 1 PET 1:3–5; TITUS 3:4–7). Baptized into his own name (MATT 28:18–20), we have God’s own pledge and witness that we belong to him through the forgiveness of sins (see ACTS 2:38–39) and are heirs according to the promise (ROM 6:1–11; GAL 3:26–29; COL 2:12–14). Therefore, Baptism will not be withheld from infants or from new converts to the faith. Since it is by Baptism that we are joined to the body of Christ (see 1 COR 12:12–13), this sacrament is foundational for our life together.

15. Lord’s Supper. Hermann Sasse described the sacrament of the altar as “the church’s heartbeat.”²⁴ In this sacrament, Christ gives his body and blood under bread and wine for us Christians to eat and to drink. It is his testament in which he bestows the fruits of his saving sacrifice on the cross: His body given into death and his blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins. Luther underscores the forgiveness of sins in the Small Catechism as he engages in a threefold repetition of the words “given for you” and “shed for the forgiveness of sins.” These words show us that the sacrament of the altar is the testament of God’s sure mercy for sinners. When we come to eat and drink Christ’s body and blood, we come as beggars to the feast of heaven. In this sacrament, we are not accessing Christ by liturgical mimesis;²⁵ rather we are proclaiming

²¹ Walther, “The Mission Society,” 24.

²² Thus Christians live in our baptism through confession and absolution. By God’s grace we daily return to our baptism as we crucify the old man in confession of sin and rise in accord with the new man in holy absolution (the forgiveness of sins). This gift therefore keeps the objective nature of God’s grace ever before us so that we do not fall into relying on our experience or emotion. For these reasons we also strive to retain individual confession and absolution in the church.

²³ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 35: *Word and Sacrament I*, eds. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton Oswald, Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 36.

²⁴ Hermann Sasse, *We Confess the Sacraments*, trans. Norman Nagel (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), 151.

²⁵ Mimesis means “imitation, mimicry.”

the Lord's death until he comes (see **1 COR 11:26**). Eating and drinking in the Lord's Supper do not create life together (*koinonia*) but confess and express this unity we have in the proclamation of Christ's death. Life together (*koinonia*) in confessing him is always Christ's work and Christ's gift by his word. Hence the practice of closed Communion is a necessary corollary of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper.²⁶ Bringing contradiction in teaching or life in the Holy Communion fails to give witness to Christ and what he gives us in and with his body and blood.

16. Priesthood of the baptized. The apostle Peter writes to those who have been “born again to a living hope” (**1 PET 1:3**), that is, to those who are baptized into Jesus' death. He describes us as “living stones” that are built up as a “spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (**1 PET 2:5**). This priesthood is holy, that is, it is cut off from the uncleanness of sin and set apart to live by faith in Jesus Christ. Notice that the New Testament does not speak of us as individual priests, each going his or her own way and doing the work of a priest for ourselves. Rather the New Testament speaks of our lives lived within a company of priests, a priesthood.

The priesthood offers spiritual sacrifices. These are not sacrifices that atone for sin.²⁷ Jesus did that once and for

all on the cross (see **HEB 7:27**). The sacrifices that we offer are spiritual sacrifices, the sacrifice of a broken heart and contrite spirit (see **PS 51:17**). This is the life of repentance: Daily dying to sin and living in the newness of Christ's forgiveness. In other words, the whole life of the believer is one of sacrifice. This is the point that Paul makes in Romans 12:1 where he writes,

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Everybody in the ancient world knew that sacrifices were dead, not living. Jerusalem's temple resembled a slaughterhouse more than a church. The priest, smattered with blood, looked more like a butcher than a clergyman. Paul's words must have jarred his original readers for he writes of a living sacrifice. We present our bodies as living sacrifices for we have died to sin in Baptism and now live in Christ's resurrection (see **ROM 6:1–11**).

This priestly life is our vocation, our calling. We live it out in our daily callings in the congregation, in civic community (citizenship), the family and the place of work. Here we who have received mercy from the Father show forth that mercy in our dealings with others, and it is here that we bear witness to Christ by “proclaiming the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light” (**1 PET 2:9**).

Going about our daily vocation as baptized members of Christ's royal priesthood, we testify to Christ, speaking his saving word, the same word we regularly hear in preaching and the same word we read for ourselves in Holy Scripture (e.g., through personal and family devotions).²⁸ The content of our witness is always Christ,

²⁶ The Missouri Synod has used different nomenclature to express the idea of closed Communion at various times in her history. Different terms have been used to describe the same doctrine and practice. The terms “closed Communion,” “close Communion” and “close(d) Communion” are equivalent terms. Article VI of the Missouri Synod's Constitution states as a condition of membership in the Synod, “Renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description.” Article VI:b provides additional clarification by defining unionism and syncretism as “Taking part in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations or of congregations of mixed confession.” The practice of closed Communion then precludes receiving Communion at churches that hold heterodox positions. The Missouri Synod has adopted Dr. C. F. W. Walther's *Church and the Office of the Ministry* as its official position in 2001 (Res. 7-17A). In Thesis VIII of Walther's *Church and the Office of the Ministry*, Walther writes, “Here the saying of Augustine holds: ‘Believe and you have eaten.’ As I said before: To receive the Sacrament is a mark of confession and doctrine. Therefore, whoever does not regard as true the doctrine of the church in which he intends to attend the Sacrament cannot partake of the Sacrament in that church with a clear conscience.” (Download Walther's Thesis VIII at <http://goo.gl/gKqIOq>.) Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, trans. Norman Nagel (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 76. “By ‘closed Communion’ reference is to the restricting of participation to full members of the congregation.” Participation in Holy Communion is directly connected to church fellowship. See also CTCR, Admission to the Lord's Supper (1999), <http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=411>.

²⁷ Prayer is an important sacrifice and must not be confused with the means of grace. Prayer is a confession of faith which recognizes that God's “good and gracious will is done even without our prayer,” as

Luther makes clear in the Small Catechism. Prayer does not seek to control or manipulate God. Prayer does not engage in superstition that goes beyond what the Lord has promised in his word. Prayer is the expression of the justified sinner who humbles himself before God's almighty hand — and by the Spirit's work through word and sacrament — is led to rely upon Christ alone while praying as the Lord prayed in Gethsemane, “Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” See CTCR, *Theology and Practice of Prayer* (2011), 18–20.

²⁸ Schulz, *Mission from the Cross*, 242–243, reminds us that “Luther emphasizes that every Christian has the right and obligation to pass on and witness God's Word in his personal sphere of life. In fact, Luther may at times even use the term ‘preach’ (*predigen*) for this act, implying that the incumbents of the priesthood of all believers are actually given a certain task to proclaim the Gospel wherever they may be. The

crucified and raised from the dead for all. In so doing, we are inviting others into the same life we have received from Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the only real life there is: that given in word and sacrament. Baptized believers will often be found urging others, believers and unbelievers alike, to “come and see” (JOHN 1:39) what Christ has done for them and for all.²⁹

17. Office and offices. There is one office that Christ has instituted for the proclamation of his word and the giving out of his sacraments. This is the Office of the Holy Ministry (see JOHN 20:21–23; AC V, XIV, XXVII). Through the call of the church, the Lord places qualified men into this office (see 1 COR 14:33–38; 1 TIM 2:8–14). The men who serve in this office are to be properly trained and capable (see 1 TIM 3:1–7; 2 TIM 2:1–7; 4:1–5; TITUS 1:5–9) of the task of being stewards of the mysteries of God (see 1 COR 4:1–2). The church may not be without this office for it is to this office that Christ has entrusted the preaching of his word and the administration of his sacraments.³⁰ No one puts himself into this office, nor does the church have the right to refashion the office into something other than what the Lord has instituted, or to put men into the office without being called and ordained (see AC XIV). The church does live in freedom to create offices that assist those who are placed in the one divinely-mandated office of the ministry of word and sacrament. These helping offices (auxiliary offices) would include deacons, deaconesses, evangelists, schoolteachers, catechists, cantors, parish nurses, workers of mercy, and the like.³¹ These are valuable offices of

context of this private preaching does not stand in conflict with the pastoral ministry of preaching and administration of the Sacraments publicly affirmed through the proper rite of vocation (*rite vocatus*).”

²⁹ Oftentimes, it is precisely this testimony from the priesthood of the baptized that plants the seeds for the church in contexts where the church has not yet been established, where ordained pastors or missionaries are not present, or where the church is persecuted. The word does not return empty (ISA 55:11) and faith can and does take root and grow through the word when and where it pleases the Holy Spirit, whether the gospel is spoken by laity or clergy. Thus the faith did not disappear when missionaries were forced from China and pastors were jailed. Even as Lutherans rejoice in that truth, we also recognize that the witness of the laity does not mean the office of the pastor (or ordained missionary) is thereby rendered unnecessary or expendable. See Schulz, *Mission from the Cross*, 239–247, and § 17 herein.

³⁰ Thus the AC calls this “the office of preaching” (*das Predigamt* AC V 1).

³¹ The Office of the Holy Ministry, or the office of preaching and teaching, is founded on the apostles and prophets of Scripture and is seen within such scriptural offices identified by the names bishop/overseer (*episkopos*), elder (*presbyteros*), and shepherd (*poimenos*). This preaching office includes within it not only the work of “pastor” as Lutherans now identify it most commonly, but also evangelist and teacher (EPH 4:11). In LCMS tradition an office of teacher, in distinction

service to the body of Christ and the world, but they are not to be confused with the Office of the Holy Ministry itself. The Office of the Holy Ministry might be said to be the office of faith as Christ instituted it so that faith might be created in the hearts of those who hear the preaching of Christ crucified. Helping or auxiliary offices are the offices of love for through these callings the love of Christ is extolled in word and deed as his mercy is extended to those in need.

Those whom Christ through his church has placed in the Office of the Holy Ministry do not lord it over the priesthood of the baptized, but they stand among the baptized, as one of them, holding an office of service, seeking only to give out the Lord’s gifts as he intended (1 COR 4:1–2).

18. Worship: *koinonia*, freedom, catholicity and the limits of love. Questions of liturgical diversity and uniformity need to be set within the context of the distinction between faith and love. Faith is freed by the gospel from all works of self-justification, but faith is not freed from the gospel or the means that Christ has instituted to bestow the gospel (the pure preaching of this good news and the right administration of the sacraments according to the divine word; see AC VII). Preaching and sacraments require form, and this form is catholic rather than sectarian or self-invented. Lutherans gratefully inherited the Western liturgical tradition filtered through the sieve of justification by faith alone and honor it as our heritage (AC XXIV [Kolb–Wengert, 68–72]). Lutherans make a distinction between what Christ has mandated and what his word prohibits. In between the two are “adiaphora,” or “middle things,” which are neither commanded nor forbidden by God. The middle category of adiaphora does not mean that these matters are unimportant or indifferent; they are to be evaluated by how they confess the truth of the gospel and sacraments. In

from the pastoral office, has been auxiliary in nature, working under and assisting the one who has overall responsibility for preaching and teaching. In other parts of the world, a particular office of evangelist aids the church’s ministry in a similar fashion in the particular work of outreach, church planting, and mission development, especially where few ordained pastors are available. So also, the office of catechist has developed in churches for the particular work of instructing new believers. Thus, there is one overarching preaching office (see AC V), but it is inclusive of certain responsibilities that may be shared with others in offices that appear in various times and places in the church. And, in addition, there may be other helping offices established which fall only marginally within the scope of the work of the preaching office or are even completely distinct from it (e.g., a church musician or a parish nurse or an administrator of a food program). See also CTCR, *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, Nomenclature* (1981).

times when a clear confession is called for, the Formula of Concord reminds us, matters of adiaphora may cease to be adiaphora (see FC SD X, 10 [Kolb-Wengert, 637]). Ludwig Adolph Petri notes that mission “must abstain from establishing confessions, accepting new customs in the divine service, uniting separated confessions and the like. As soon as mission begins to do something like that, it is manifestly in the wrong, for none of those tasks is charged or relegated to mission.”³² This is to say that matters of liturgical practice are not best left to the individual but should reflect our confessional consensus so that both the freedom of faith and the love for brothers and sisters is maintained.³³ Love is always given to patience and deference to the weakness of the fellow believer (see ROM 14), but it may never be used as an excuse to compromise the truth of our confession. Liturgical diversity within the larger catholic context will be guided by the need to maintain unity in both faith and love (see FC SD X, 9 [Kolb-Wengert, 637]).

19. Visitation. Sometime after his first missionary journey, “Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are’” (ACTS 15:36). So the church today — following also the example of the apostles, Luther, Melancthon and others — engages in evangelical visitation, appointing people to the task so that we encourage and assist one another in the confession of Christ before the world. In our Synod, we come alongside one another to advise one another from the word of God. The focus of our visitation of one another is faithfulness both to the mission of Christ through the church to the world and to our clear confession of Christ’s saving work. Visitors are enjoined to come to the pastors and congregations and mission stations as a brotherly advisor, reminding them of the joy of serving in the mission and ministry of the

church. Visitation is a continuing task in the church, carried out through all segments of the church’s life together. When we visit our partners around the world, it must also be in the same Christ-centered spirit as the Lord’s apostle who, before his visitation with them, writes to the Romans, “I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you — that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine” (ROM 1:11–12).

20. Two kingdoms/discipleship. Luther observed that the kingdom of Christ is one of hearing while the kingdom of the world is one of seeing. Discussions of the place of the church in the public square inevitably lead us to reflect on how the Triune God is active in his creation. Luther’s teaching on the two kingdoms does not segregate God’s activity into the holy sphere of church leaving the world to its autonomous devices. God is at work in the world in two different ways, with different means and with different ends. Hence Luther can use the imagery of the ear to indicate God’s right hand governance whereby he causes his gospel to be preached to bring sinners to faith in Christ and through faith inherit eternal life. On the other hand, the left-handed work of God is identified with the eye, with seeing. In this kingdom, God uses law to measure and curb human behavior so that his creation is not plunged into total chaos and so that this world, subjected to futility (ROM 8:20), is preserved until the last day. Authorities in the kingdom of God’s left hand evaluate on the basis of evidence that is observable. Here distributive justice is the order of the day. But in the kingdom of his right hand, God’s verdict is the absolution, the proclamation of a forgiveness of sins not achieved by merit or worth. When the two kingdoms are mixed or muddled, law and gospel are confused.

Lutherans are concerned to keep the teaching of the two kingdoms straight and clear for the sake of the gospel, which alone gives forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. Luther fumed that the devil is incessantly seeking to “brew and cook” the two kingdoms together.³⁴ Satan would like nothing better than to dupe folks into believing

³² Ludwig Adolph Petri, *Mission and the Church: A letter to a friend (Die Mission und die Kirche: Schreiben an einen Freund)*, trans. David Buchs (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2012).

³³ This is not to deny the necessity of liturgical change as the church enters new settings. An obvious example of necessary change is the use of vernacular language for worship. That may also entail some change of terminology itself where words or concepts are completely alien. However, the concern of this section is that liturgical change not take place in a way that is contrary to the Lutheran confession of faith — a confession that rightly stands in the western creedal tradition. Thus, liturgical change, where it occurs, is always to take place in a collaborative manner or a way that is *catholic* in nature. In such a way not only are the concerns and needs of a local church considered, but so also the needs of the wider contemporary church, and, even the church of the past has a hearing.

³⁴ “The devil never stops cooking and brewing these two kingdoms into each other. In the devil’s name the secular leaders always want to be Christ’s masters and teach Him how He should run His church and spiritual government. Similarly, the false clerics and schismatic spirits always want to be the masters, though not in God’s name, and to teach people how to organize the secular government. Thus the devil is indeed very busy on both sides, and he has much to do. May God hinder him, amen, if we deserve it!” (Martin Luther, “Psalm 101,” 1534, *American Edition*, Vol. 13, 194–195.)

that salvation comes through secular government or conversely that the church is the institution to establish civil righteousness in the world. Either confusion displaces Christ and leaves sinners in despair.

The teaching of the two kingdoms is necessary for the sake of the gospel. This teaching guards us from turning the gospel into a political ideology. The gospel works eschatologically, not politically, as it bestows pardon to sinners and establishes peace with God. It is a faith-creating word of promise heard with the ear, trusted in the heart, and confessed with the tongue. Christians, who live by faith in this promise, also live in this world where we use our eyes to see, to discern, to evaluate. The realm of the political is not to be dismissed as ungodly or unworthy of the Christian's involvement. God is at work here too. But he is at work here to protect and preserve his creation, making it a dominion where life can flourish. God's left-handed work is not to be confused with salvation, but it is a good gift of daily bread to be received with thanksgiving by those who know the truth.

So Lutherans neither put their trust in political processes nor do they eschew political involvement. The teaching of the two kingdoms is an indispensable gift in an age beset by temptations both to secularism and sectarianism.

21. Stewardship. The question of stewardship begins not with what I have but with what the Lord has given me. Therefore, stewardship begins with the gifts of the Triune God. This is reflective of the way that the apostle Paul deals with stewardship in 2 Corinthians 8. Paul does not start with an assessment of the resources of the congregation or with legalistic instructions about how much they should be doing to meet their quota. Rather, he begins with God's grace, with God's undeserved gift in Christ. Christians give not to win God's favor but on account of his prior gift, salvation in Christ Jesus. In 2 Corinthians, stewardship is connected with assisting those in need, in showing mercy.

This is the pattern of Christian stewardship. Just as in Romans 12, where Paul makes his appeal to Christians that they present their bodies as living sacrifices by the mercies of God, so here Paul wants his hearers to know first of all about God's grace. Anchored in the unmerited riches of God's mercy for sinners in Christ, the Macedonians are eager — yes, begging — for the opportunity to take part in the offering. They exceed the apostle's imagination or expectation. What do they do? They give

themselves first to the Lord and then, Paul says by the will of God, they give themselves to us.

Lutheran missions seek to be good and faithful stewards of the resources the Lord has given to his church. Faithful stewardship seeks to build capacity in partners while not creating harmful dependencies. In this way, the entire body of Christ may be strengthened in its stewardship. We recognize that we are accountable to each other in our mutual confession of the faith and in our handling of valuable resources — human, financial, and property. The financing of missions and use of funding requires transparency at every level lest the witness of Christ be diminished, mercy be overshadowed by greedy self-interest, and our life together fractured.

22. Lutheran identity. Mission, as with the entire life of the Synod, will be guided by confessional identity and integrity. Bound to the Holy Scriptures as the infallible word of the Triune God and convinced that the Book of Concord confesses what the Bible teaches, we will joyfully and without reservation make this good confession before God and the world in light of the last day (see **MATT 10:32**; **2 TIM 4:1-8**). We will not be ashamed to be Lutheran in all that we do. Like our forefathers at Augsburg, we will speak God's testimonies before kings and not be put to shame (**PS 119:46**). We will teach this theology without duplicity at home and globally to any and all who are open to hear our confession. Given the seismic shifts in world Lutheranism away from the historical confession of the Lutheran church, we will seek to strengthen lonely and disenfranchised Lutherans who seek to be faithful in doctrine and practice.

23. Theology of the cross. The "theology of the cross" (see **1 COR 1:18-2:5**) stands in sharp contrast to the prevailing theology — the "theology of glory." The theology of the cross shows God at work under opposites, giving life through death, showing mercy in wrath, making himself known in his hiddenness, and manifesting strength in weakness. The theologian of glory attempts to access God by way of various ladders: moralism, rationalism or mysticism. The theologian of the cross confesses God condescending to humanity in the weakness of the baby of Bethlehem and the man of Calvary. The theologian of glory would judge a church successful on the basis of how well it accomplishes certain goals defined by the tenants of this world. The theologian of the cross recognizes that the church is hidden under suffering and defeat.

Christ's church faces many enemies from within and without. She bears the mark of the holy cross, not as an identifier for its own sake, but as a consequence of bearing witness to and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church in every place bears the Holy Cross to some degree. The church in some places bears what appears to be a smaller cross than the church in other places, yet no matter how small or big the cross, it serves the same purpose: A witness (*martyria*) to the world and, as Formula of Concordia XI confesses, "to conform us into the image of the image of the crucified Son of God." It should not surprise us, the Lord's people, that his holy church takes on the appearance of the crucified Son of God. In fact, it is a great honor and joy that the Lord conforms us into his image. This is why St. Paul says in Romans 8, "I know all things work for good." The life of the church is cruciform in shape. The apt words of Hermann Sasse ring true: "All that we think and do in the church has to be cleansed by the theology of the cross if we are to escape the perils of a theology of glory."³⁵ The theology of the cross will forever be a litmus test of the genuineness of *Witness, Mercy, Life Together* in our midst.

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³⁵ Hermann Sasse, *We Confess Jesus Christ*, trans. Norman Nagel (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 52.