

The Common Confession

Parts I and II

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THE COMMON CONFESSION
PART I

Foreword to Part I

The common confession of faith is the composite work of two committees: the Committee on Doctrinal Unity of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, authorized and empowered to prepare such a statement by its 1947 convention, and the Committee on Fellowship of the American Lutheran Church, authorized and empowered to negotiate with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod for the same purpose by its 1948 convention. These two committees voted in joint session on January 7, 1949, to request a joint subcommittee consisting of Dr. Edward C. Fendt, Dr. John H. C. Fritz, Dr. Bernard J. Holm, and Rev. Werner H. Jurgens to prepare the preliminary draft of such a confession. This draft was written by these men in Chicago, Ill., on August 29 and 30, 1949. Revisions were offered in sessions of the two official committees meeting separately (the American Lutheran Church committee in Chicago on September 15, 1949, and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod committee in St. Louis on September 16, 1949). On October 21, 1949, the joint subcommittee embodied these revisions in the document and submitted the revised draft to all the members of the two committees. On December 5 and 6, 1949, the two committees met jointly and approved the copy herewith submitted.

This confession of faith, unanimously approved by the two official committees as their report to their Synods, is hereby respectfully submitted to the Synods for adoption.

*The Committee on Doctrinal
Unity of The Lutheran Church—
Missouri Synod*

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Dr. Wm. Sodt
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Chicago, Illinois, December 6, 1949

**Report of the Committee on Doctrinal Unity
of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod
and of the Committee on Fellowship
of the American Lutheran Church**

In order to give expression to our common Christian Faith, we hereby declare the following to be our mutual conviction and testimony:

I. GOD

We believe and teach:

(1) The one and only God is the God who has revealed Himself to us as the Creator of the world and its Preserver, to whom the entire creation and all creatures are subject, who is the Lord and Ruler over all things. Through the Holy Scriptures He has revealed Himself to us as the Righteous and Holy One and also as the God of our salvation from sin and death. He has designated and manifested Himself as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the work of creation, redemption, and sanctification. We therefore confess our faith in this Triune God, three distinct Persons in the one Godhead.

(2) All men can know of the existence and activity of God, deriving such knowledge from the creation of the world, their own conscience, and history. But who God is, how He is minded toward man, and what He has done for man's salvation from sin, can be known only from God's revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ through the Holy Scriptures. In Jesus Christ, God became incarnate. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," John 1:14.

Cf. Acts 14:15-17; 17:24-31; Romans 1:19-20; 2:14-15; 1 Corinthians 2:10-14; Ephesians 2; Colossians 1; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Hebrews 1-2.

II. MAN

We believe and teach:

(1) God in the beginning created man in His own image to live according to His Law which God had written into man's heart; but man disobeyed God and thereby became a sinner, alienating himself from God, and bringing sin and death upon himself and all his posterity. "As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned," Romans 5:12. Therefore all men are born into this world with original sin; and being unable to observe God's divine commands, they willfully continue to transgress God's holy Law in thoughts, words, and deeds. Man as sinner has delivered himself

into the bondage of sin and of the devil, from which man cannot free himself by his own powers. From this desperate condition and tyranny only God can set man free.

Cf. Genesis 1-3; Psalms 51 and 130; Romans 1-7; Ephesians 4:24; Hebrews 2:14-18.

III. REDEMPTION

We believe and teach:

(1) God from eternity decreed to send, and in the fullness of time did send, His Son to fallen man as Savior, to fulfill the Law in the sinner's stead and to suffer the sinner's punishment in his stead. Christ "was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification," Rom. 4:25. God "laid on Him the iniquity of us all," Is. 53:6. Christ entered into death in order to bring man, held in the grip of death, unto life with Himself. In His victory over death He brings to man a life of freedom from death. God by raising Christ from the dead proclaimed to the world that He has accepted the atonement for man's sin as completed and that Christ, the risen and exalted God-Man, shall reign as Lord forever.

Cf. Isaiah 53; Matthew 20:28; Luke 24; John 11 and 14; Acts 2:22-36; 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21; 1 Timothy 2:4-6; 1 Peter 1:18-25.

IV. ELECTION

We believe and teach:

(1) God from eternity, solely because of His grace in Christ and without any cause whatever in man, elected as His own all those whom He makes and keeps members of His kingdom and heirs of eternal life. The Holy Spirit by the Gospel has called us and assured us of our status before God, testifying to us that He has chosen us for Himself in Christ from the foundation of the world, and by the imputation of Christ's righteousness has given us the assurance that He will present us faultless before the throne of His glory.

Cf. Acts 13:48; Romans 8; Ephesians 1; 1 Peter 1:1-9.

V. MEANS OF GRACE

We believe and teach:

(1) God has willed that the knowledge and benefit of Christ's redemption from sin be brought to man through His means of grace, namely, through the Gospel in the Word and in the Sacraments. Through these means he not only offers but actually bestows His grace in Christ unto forgiveness of sins and a life of fellowship with Him.

(2) *The Word.* Through the Holy Scriptures, which God caused to be written by men chosen and inspired by Him, God instructs and assures us regarding His will for us. The Holy Scriptures

constitute His Word to men, centering in the revelation of Himself in the person and work of Jesus Christ for our salvation. Through the Holy Scriptures God continues to speak to men in all ages until the end of time. He speaks as the infallible and unchanging God, whose message to mankind never changes. Since the Holy Spirit by divine inspiration supplied to the holy writers content and fitting word, therefore we acknowledge the Holy Scriptures in their entirety as the inspired Word of God. His Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that His Word is true, that He will keep all His promises to us, and that our faith in Him is not in vain.

(3) We therefore recognize the Holy Scriptures as God's inerrant Word, and this Word of God alone shall establish articles of faith (cf. Smalcald Articles, Part II, Art. II). We pledge ourselves to teach all things taught in the Holy Scriptures, and nothing but that which is taught us by God in the Holy Scriptures.

(4) The Holy Scriptures teach both Law and Gospel, but the chief content of the Holy Scriptures is the Gospel. The Law enters into the service of the Gospel by bringing man to a knowledge of his sins and by convincing him that he is under God's judgment because of his sins, and by telling the believer what fruits of faith he should produce.

(5) *Baptism.* In the Sacrament of Baptism, God adopts men as His children. In Baptism, God confers the benefits of Christ's redemption and graciously bestows the washing of regeneration and newness of life. We recognize it as the Lord's will that men should be baptized even in their infancy, knowing that the promise of God also applies to little children.

(6) *The Lord's Supper.* In the Sacrament of the Altar, Christ gives us His body, offered up for us, and His blood, shed for us, to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of sins, the strengthening of our faith, and the increase in holiness of life. In this Sacrament we receive Christ's body and blood orally as well as spiritually. All communicants receive Christ's precious body and blood together with the bread and wine, but only the believers obtain the blessings of the Sacrament. Christ is not only present at the celebration of the Sacrament, but in this Sacrament He enters into the most intimate communion with the members of His Church, bringing to them His body and His blood by which He made atonement for their sins.

Cf. The Word: 1 Corinthians 1—2; 2 Timothy 3:14—4:5; 1 Peter 1; 2 Peter 1:12-21.

Baptism: Matthew 28:18-20; John 3:1-13; Acts 2:37-39; Romans 6; Titus 3:4-7.

Lord's Supper: Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:23-29.

VI. JUSTIFICATION

We believe and teach:

- (1) By His redemptive work Christ is the Propitiation for the sins of the whole world; hence forgiveness of sin has been secured and provided for all men. (This is often spoken of as objective justification.) "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the Word of Reconciliation," 2 Corinthians 5:19. Hence no sinner need be eternally lost on account of his sins. God offers this propitiation and reconciliation freely to all men through His means of grace. There is nothing in sinful man or in what he may do to merit God's declaring him righteous. God justifies the sinner solely on the basis of Christ's righteousness, which He imputes to the sinner through the Gospel and which the sinner accepts by faith. Such faith is wrought in man by the Holy Spirit. Through this faith we not only receive from God but also retain the blessed assurance of our righteousness in His sight for Christ's sake.

Cf. Romans 3—5; Galatians 2:16—3:29; Colossians 1; 1 John 2:2.

VII. CONVERSION

We believe and teach:

- (1) The sinner's conversion takes place when God brings the contrite sinner to faith in Christ as his Savior. This change of heart with respect to sin, and this reliance upon Christ for salvation from sin, is the work of God the Holy Spirit, without any co-operation whatsoever from sinful man. "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost," 1 Corinthians 12:3b.

Cf. Acts 5:31; 26:18; Ephesians 2:1-9; Jeremiah 31:18-19; Ezekiel 11:19-20.

VIII. SANCTIFICATION

We believe and teach:

- (1) The believer in Christ can no longer enjoy living in sin, but he is prompted and enabled by the love of God in Christ and by the indwelling Holy Spirit to live according to God's commandments and to be minded toward all things as God is minded. "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me," Galatians 2:20.
- (2) We therefore, out of gratitude to God, seek to glorify Him by abounding in good works, without which faith is dead. In glorifying God we seek to serve Him and our neighbor in love, as He directs us in both tables of His Law.

- (3) In this present world the Christian can never attain perfect sinlessness, because sin inheres in him until death. But we strive for the goal that is set before us and by daily contrition and faith make progress in our Christian life. We look forward to the life to come, when we shall be cleansed of every defilement of sin and shall share with Christ His perfect life.

Cf. Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 and 7:1; Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:13 and 3:12; Colossians 1:10 and 2:6; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Titus 2:11-14; 1 Peter 1:15; 1 John 3:6-9.

IX. THE CHURCH

We believe and teach:

- (1) All believers in Christ constitute the one, holy, Apostolic (in agreement with the Apostles' doctrine), and catholic (universal) Church. Jesus Christ is its Head. Through the means of grace He calls all its members into fellowship with Himself and also unites the members in fellowship with one another.
- (2) To all members of His Church the Lord has given all the rights and prerogatives set forth in His Word. Every Christian has the right of direct access to God without a human mediator.
- (3) To the Church has been given the commission to preach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments. It is therefore the duty of Christians to unite in local congregations for this purpose. In such local congregations the presence or activity of any unbelievers or hypocrites does not nullify the power of the Word of God. The efficacy of the means of grace does not depend on the faith of the administrant, but inheres in the Word of God itself.
- (4) In this present world, Christ does not promise His Church any earthly reign over the affairs of men. His Church will remain a kingdom of the cross until His return for Judgment; but He will sustain it according to His promise: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it," Matt. 16:18b.
- (5) It is the duty of the Church to be faithful to its Lord and His Word in all its testimony, to be steadfast in its confession of His truth at all times, and to avoid and combat error. It is the duty of the Church to mold and keep its practice in conformity with the Lord's directives in the Holy Scriptures. Therefore we dare not condone error or have altar and pulpit fellowship and unscriptural co-operation with erring individuals, church bodies, or church groups that refuse to be corrected by God's Word. We must also be alert and susceptible to the Lord's leading to establish and maintain fellowship with those whom He has made one with us in the faith and to seek to win the erring and wayward for unity in the true faith. We are mindful of our Lord's intercessory prayer

that we, who are His brethren, may be one, even as He and the Father are one.

Cf. Matthew 28; John 8:31-32; 15; 17; 20:22-23; Romans 12:3-8; 16; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 3:12; Ephesians 2; 4:1-16; 5:6-11; Colossians 1; 1 Timothy 6; 1 Peter 2:9-10; 1 John 4:1; 2 John 9-10.

X. THE MINISTRY

We believe and teach:

- (1) The ministry of the Word and Sacraments exists by divine ordinance. God continues to call men into this holy office and entrusts the spiritual welfare of His congregations to these pastors as His gifts to the Church. It is the will of God that congregations choose as their pastors only such men as have the qualifications outlined in the Holy Scriptures. Pastors are required by God to be faithful and as faithful pastors are entitled to the love and respect of their congregations.

Cf. Acts 20:28; Romans 10:12-18; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; 2 Corinthians 4; Ephesians 4:11-15; 1 Timothy 3; 5:17; Hebrews 13:7-17.

XI. THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

✕ We believe and teach:

- (1) The Lutheran Confessions (Book of Concord, 1580) are true exhibitions of the truths of the Holy Scriptures. Therefore it is rightly required that every pastor and congregation in the Lutheran Church subscribe to and uphold the doctrines taught in these Confessions without any omission, deviation, or reservation.

XII. THE LAST THINGS

We believe and teach:

- (1) The Church of Jesus Christ will exist and endure on earth, according to the promises of Christ, until His return for Judgment. When Christ returns for Judgment, He will raise up all the dead — all believers in Him to eternal life, and all others to everlasting damnation.
- (2) Among the signs of His approaching return for Judgment the [distinguishing features of the Antichrist, as portrayed in the Holy Scriptures, are still clearly discernible in the Roman Papacy, the climax of all human usurpations of Christ's authority in the Church.] We hold it to be an error to teach anything as a sign of Christ's second advent not promised or foretold in the Holy Scriptures, such as the expectation of a mass conversion of the Jews, a preliminary resurrection of martyrs, and a visible millennial reign of Christ on the earth before the Day of Judgment.

(3) "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time, wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations; that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ; whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory; receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls," 1 Peter 1:3-9.

(4) "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is," 1 John 3:2.

Cf. Matthew 16:18; John 5:28-29; 6:40; 18:36; Romans 11; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-10; 1 John 2:18; Revelation 20.

THE COMMON CONFESSION PART II

Foreword to Part II

Part II of the *Common Confession* was prepared in a period of two years by the members of the Committee on Doctrinal Unity of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Committee on Union and Fellowship of the American Lutheran Church after Part I was adopted by these two Synods. Part II is intended as a supplement to Part I, and the two parts in reality form one doctrinal statement. Neither part is to be regarded as complete in itself or unrelated to the other. Part II was written to bring clarification where misunderstanding of Part I was encountered, as well as adding some doctrines which were omitted in Part I. The aim of the joint committee was to let the Holy Scriptures speak authoritatively and with finality in all matters discussed and summarized, so that past controversies might be allayed and future controversies avoided.

The entire *Common Confession* does not claim to be a complete review of the Christian faith and life, but it manifests common insights and emphases in our understanding and formulation of many Christian doctrines as held and taught in our churches. It constitutes a common and united devotion to the Word of God as the teaching of our churches in our times.

Part II as unanimously adopted by our two official committees in our last joint meeting in Chicago, Ill., on February 9, 1953, is therefore being submitted to our Synods for thorough discussion and, if found in harmony with the Holy Scriptures, for adoption.

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**Report of the Committee on Doctrinal Unity
of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod
and of the Committee on Union and Fellowship
of the American Lutheran Church**

In the belief that our common conviction and testimony regarding the Christian faith as expressed in the *Common Confession* must express itself in the life and corporate activity of the Church, we submit the following statements as indicative of, and normative for, Christian life in our congregations and Synods:

THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

i. THE CHURCH'S MISSION

- (1) **Company of the Reborn** The Church, as the company of those who are born again, is the salt of the earth and the light of the world. It confronts a mankind which without the gracious working of the Holy Spirit is totally corrupt in trespasses and sins, is completely blinded to the will of God, and willfully resists every endeavor of God to save it from destruction. It is the privilege of the Church to proclaim in word and deed the glorious redemption of all men in Christ. God "will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth," 1 Timothy 2:4. It is the duty of the Church to testify that salvation is wholly and solely in and through Christ. "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved," Acts 4:12.
- (2) **Communion of Saints** The Church, as the communion of saints, enjoys fellowship with God and is nourished and sustained by His presence and by His activity in the means of grace. God speaks to the assembled congregation in the Word and Sacraments, and the assembly of believers responds in hymns and prayers of adoration, intercession, petition, and thanksgiving to God. Through the Word and the Sacraments God constantly assures the Church of its status before Him and enables it to fulfill its function in the world. The Church thus enabled is commissioned by God to "show forth His salvation from day to day," to "declare His glory among the heathen, His wonders among all people," Psalm 96:2-3.
- (3) **Beloved of God** The Church, as the beloved of God, reflects its love for God by ministering to all men, especially to those of the household of faith. Following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Church seeks and works for the complete well-being of all men. "This commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also," 1 John 4:21.

Matthew 5:13-16; Ephesians 2:1; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Romans 8; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; 1 Peter 2:9-10; 1 Timothy 2:3-6; Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 2:8-10.

John 14:23; Exodus 20:24; John 8:31-32; 1 Timothy 2:1; Philipians 2:15-16; 2 Timothy 1:7-14; 4:1-5.

Matthew 25:31-40; Galatians 6:10; 1 John 4:7-21; Luke 10:25-37.

ii. THE CHURCH'S RESOURCES

- (1) **Presence of God** The Lord, who commissions the Church to preach the Gospel to every creature, promises to be with it unto the end of the world. He sends His Spirit to dwell in the Church forever and to bring to its remembrance all things which Christ as its Head has said and still says in the Scriptures. As the Church faithfully proclaims His Word, Christ's promise, "He that heareth you, heareth Me," is fulfilled, Luke 10:16. He to whom all power is given in heaven and in earth has promised to grant whatsoever the Church needs and asks in His name.
- (2) **Means of Grace** As the Good Shepherd Christ guides and guards the Church through perils and assaults in a hostile world, and the Holy Spirit as the Chief Builder cleanses and sanctifies the Church as the habitation of God. Through the means of grace, the Gospel in the Word and Sacraments, the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith, and thus directs and enables it to do the will of God. Where these means of grace are in use, there God builds His Church.
- (3) **God's Gifts** The Lord always bestows His gifts on the Church in a generous and abundant measure. He gives to the Church pastors after His own heart who preach God's Word and administer the Sacraments in the name of the Christian congregation. He also calls and equips other workers for their respective and diverse ministrations of love in every generation.
- (4) **Assurance of Victory** God's Word never returns unto Him void, but always accomplishes that which He pleases and prospers in the thing whereto He sends it. Through the Gospel in the Word and Sacraments He is at work in and through the Church to call men from sin and death and to make them heirs of everlasting life. Those who believe in Him enjoy fellowship with Him forever, are made laborers together with God in the work of His kingdom, and by their faith triumph over the world. "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith," 1 John 5:4.

Matthew 28:18-20; John 14:26; 16:23-24.

John 17; Ephesians 5:25-27; 2:14-22; 2 Timothy 1:9; Romans 1:16.

Acts 1:8; Ephesians 4:7-16; Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Acts 6:1-7; John 13:12-15.

Isaiah 55:10-11; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; John 5:24; 8:31-32; Acts 2:38-40; Galatians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 3:9; 2 Corinthians 6:1.

iii. THE CHURCH AND ITS MINISTRATIONS

- (1) **Universal Priesthood** All members of the Church are royal priests. In calling a pastor to preach the Word of God and to administer the Sacraments on their behalf, the members of a local congregation exercise their royal priesthood and by no means relinquish it. The privilege and the responsibility of ministering to the saints of God remain the privilege and responsibility of all the members of the Church.
- (2) **Individual and United Activity** From the exercise of this ministry no one is exempt. Every Christian, man or woman, old or young, rich or poor, skilled or unskilled, learned or unlearned, as God gives power and opportunity, is to edify the Church of God; to feed the lambs and the sheep; to instruct and encourage others; to visit the sick and help the needy and distressed; to seek, admonish, rebuke, forgive, and restore the erring; to judge and remove false teaching; to endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace; to speak in defense of all the saints, being ready to give an answer to anyone concerning the hope that is in them; and to support with prayers and gifts the exercise of this ministry in areas and spheres which he himself cannot reach. Christian congregations and synods take counsel and co-operate with each other in seeking God-pleasing and effective ways to perform the work the Lord has assigned to all members of His Church.
- (3) **Universal Application** The blessings of this ministry are meant for all races and conditions of men. From these blessings no one may be excluded, since no one is excluded from the forgiveness spoken by God to the world in the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. Christian love, having its source in that forgiving love of God, is spontaneous and unrestricted and knows no barrier of race, class, or color, even as Christ is the Propitiation not only for our sins, but also for the sins of the whole world.

1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 5:9-10; 2 Corinthians 2:10.

Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; 14:29; Jeremiah 23:9-40; Ephesians 3:14-21; 4:1-6; 1 Peter 3:15; 1 John 4:1-6.

2 Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 1:19-22; 1 John 4:7-21; Hebrews 9:26; Acts 17:24-28; 1 John 2:2.

iv. THE CHURCH AND THE HOME

- (1) **Marriage** God has ordained and blessed the estate of marriage and has established the relation of mutual helpfulness and love between husband and wife. Marriage is intended by God to be a lifelong union. "What God hath joined together let not man put asunder," Matthew 19:6.
- (2) **Parents and Children** In love and wisdom God has blessed the marriage state with the privilege and responsibility of parenthood. "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth," Genesis 1:28. "Children are an heritage of the Lord," Psalm 127:3. Parents are responsible for their children and should rear them in the fear and admonition of the Lord. God has established the home as the foundation of society and the training school for Christian character. Over against the sins of impurity, infidelity, neglect, and all other causes that may lead to divorce, the Church emphasizes the sacredness of the home and the blessedness of the parent-child relationship.
- (3) **Christian Home** The Church under the impulse of Christ's Gospel counsels the youth, encourages Christian companionship, upholds purity of life, and teaches God's will regarding courtship and marriage. The Church upholds the all-inclusive character of the home, where the old and the new generations meet together in love and esteem. To rear children in the fear of God and to care for aged and infirm members of the family remain the responsibility of the family.
- (4) **Family Worship** Christians enjoy the blessings of the family altar, where God's Word is read and the entire household unites in prayer. Christian parents present their little ones to be baptized as early as possible and regularly bring their entire household to the house of God for worship and spiritual growth and understanding. When parents fail to recognize and discharge their duties as God's representatives in the home, God will hold them responsible for any resulting delinquency of their children. Christian parents remember Joshua's example, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," Joshua 24:15.

Genesis 2:18-24; Ephesians 5:22-33; Matthew 19:3-9; 1 Corinthians 7:10-16.

Psalm 127; Ephesians 6:1-4.

Ecclesiastes 11:19-12:1; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 2 Timothy 2:22; Malachi 4:6; 1 Timothy 5:4.

Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Colossians 3:16; Mark 10:14; Hebrews 10:23-25; Ephesians 6:3.

v. THE CHURCH AND VOCATION

- (1) **Christian Vocation** Every earthly relationship is sanctified through fellowship with God, and for the Christian, whatever his vocation may be, the whole of life is a sacred stewardship from God. The Church, therefore, recognizes and proclaims the dignity of all labor that glorifies God and serves the welfare of man. All believers are responsible servants of God; and their time, talents, and treasure are a sacred trust from God, to be employed for Christ in their respective vocations. As a steward of God the individual Christian constantly faces the question, "Is my vocation God-pleasing?" The choice or change of his vocation must be prompted not by selfish gain, but by a desire for better service to God and man according to the abilities which God has granted to him. The Church reminds its members to heed the divine injunction, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," Ecclesiastes 9:10, in the assurance that a good and perfect kind of life is one which has for it the commandment of God.
- (2) **Management and Labor** In the relation of management and labor the Church is obligated to proclaim to its people with strength the twin admonitions, "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven," Colossians 4:1. "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye service as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God; and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men, knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for ye serve the Lord Christ," Colossians 3:22-24. The emphasis in all management-labor relation should not be on selfish or unfair gain, nor on depriving others of the benefit of their labors, but on unselfish Christian service to the neighbor and the community.
- (3) **Christian Stewardship** God blesses such labor and through it provides the necessities of life for the individual and his dependents, the things that are good and beautiful, and maintenance of good government. Above all, He supplies the means for the support and extension of His kingdom and the resources for that Christian charity which has compassion upon the neighbor and promptly and personally supplies his need. The Christian views the fruits of his labor as blessings bestowed upon him by God and as a trust to be administered to the glory of God.
1 Timothy 4:4-5; Colossians 3:17; 1 Corinthians 10:31; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-13.
Proverbs 3:5-10; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; James 5:1-6; Philippians 2:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12; Matthew 7:12.
Psalm 145:15-16; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Corinthians 9:14; Galatians 6:9-10; Matthew 25:31-40; 1 Corinthians 4:7; 1 Chronicles 29:10-19.

vi. THE CHURCH AND EDUCATION

- (1) **The Great Commission** The Church continues to heed Christ's charge to go into all the world and to make disciples of all men, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded.
- (2) **Bible in Education** The Church has the duty to provide for all its members throughout their lives the best possible instruction in the Holy Scriptures. The Holy Scriptures are God's verbally inspired Word, that is, God moved men to write what He wanted recorded in the words which He wanted employed. They alone constitute God's inerrant Word to men. They alone are "able to make" men "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus," 2 Timothy 3:15. They alone train men in holy living. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works," 2 Timothy 3:16-17.
- (3) **Christ-Centered Education** The Church places all the arts and sciences in the service of God and therefore brings the Word of God to bear on education at all levels for all professions and occupations. It insists that education for a God-pleasing life must be Christ-centered. Therefore it considers incomplete any program of education which omits as its paramount consideration the existence and activity of the Triune God in the world. The Church corrects such programs with its own program of teaching the truths revealed by God in His Word. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you," Matthew 6:33.
Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Isaiah 40:9; John 14:6-23; 8:12.
2 Peter 3:17-18; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Psalm 78:1-8; John 10:35; 6:63; Isaiah 40:8; 1 Peter 1:23-25; 2 Peter 1:19.
Psalm 19:7-14; 111:10; Acts 17:24-28; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; 1 Timothy 4:8.

vii. THE CHURCH AND GOVERNMENT

- (1) **God and Government** The Church recognizes governmental authority as ordained of God, as subject to the will of God, and as designed to seek the good of its citizens. It is the function of such government as God's representative to punish those who do wrong, to approve those who do right, and to protect all from injustice. The Church supports such government by admonishing its members to obey the laws, to pay taxes, and to render personal service in time of peace and war as the government may require, provided only that "we ought to obey God rather than men," Acts 5:29.

(2) **Christian and Government** The Church calls upon its members to pray and work for good government. They are enjoined not only to keep themselves unspotted from the evils of the world, but are also called upon to work as citizens for the eradication of evil practices in government. To assist in the nomination and election of honest men to public office, to promote the enactment and enforcement of proper and salutary legislation, to encourage Christian men and women to hold public office, and to support all officers in the faithful exercise of their duties, remain responsibilities of all Christian citizens. The liberty of Christian witness should not be abused to heap disrespect upon the incumbents of government offices, however frail these officers may be. The Church constantly prays "for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty," 1 Timothy 2:2. God's Word requires that government officers administer their high trust with integrity, sobriety, and humility, for they shall be judged by God.

(3) **Christian and War** The Church recognizes war as an evil and emphasizes that sins, both personal and national, are the cause of war, and earnestly stresses the need of repentance. If repentance does not take place, the judgment of God may become evident in war. In times of war as well as in times of peace the Church proclaims the will of God for all men, combats the passions of hatred and revenge, and always seeks to alleviate the suffering caused by war. Christians, while careful not to provoke war or resort to war, nevertheless in times of war have the responsibility to defend their country when in danger or under attack from its enemies.

Romans 13; 1 Peter 2:13-17; Titus 3:1-2; Matthew 22:15-22.

Jeremiah 29:7; 1 Timothy 2:1-4; Romans 13:6-7.

Matthew 5:43-48; James 4:1-2; 1 Timothy 2:1-6; Romans 12:9-21; Luke 3:14; Matthew 5:9.

viii. THE CHURCH AND CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

A. The Basis, Nature, and Extent of the Church

- (1) **Church Universal** All believers in Christ, and only believers in Christ, are members of the one, holy, Apostolic, Universal Church. They are made and kept members of this Church solely through the gracious work of God. God is at work wherever His Word is preached and His Sacraments are administered. It is in the one Christ, who comes in the Word and the Sacraments, that the Church Universal possesses its unity.
- (2) **Church Unity** The oneness of the Church is not a goal to be achieved or a task to be completed. It is a unity that belongs to the essence of the Church because the one Christ, the

Lord of heaven and earth, is its Head. Either a man belongs to this one Church, or he does not. Either the Church is the one Church, or it is not the Church. This union with Christ as the Head also brings about the union of believers with one another. The uniting power of the Gospel becomes manifest both in local congregations and groups of congregations throughout Christendom.

- (3) **Marks of the Church** The means of grace (the Gospel in the Word and the Sacraments) are the only genuine marks of the Church, and by them Christ through the Holy Spirit creates and preserves faith in the hearts of men. Through them the Church manifests itself on earth. The Gospel in the Word is not to be thought of as an inarticulate possession of the truth, but as a real proclamation of the Christ for us, the declaration of God's forgiveness for the sake of Christ, our Substitute, "who was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification." Likewise, it is not mere knowledge about the Sacraments which constitutes a mark of the Church, but the actual administration of them according to the institution of Christ. Without the Gospel in preaching and Sacraments it would be impossible to speak of the Church, for then the Church would be non-existent.

Acts 16:30; Mark 16:16; Galatians 3:26-28; Romans 10:9-17.

Ephesians 4:1-16; Acts 2:41-47; Romans 12:4-5.

1 Peter 1:23-25; Romans 10:17; 1:16; Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-20; Matthew 26:26-28; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

B. The Basis, Nature, and Extent of Church Fellowship

1. Church Fellowship as a Fellowship of Faith

- (4) **Authority of the Scriptures** Fidelity to the source and norm of Christian doctrine, that is, submission and obedience to the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, is required on the part of all members of the Church. If a person (or group of persons) by God's grace and the guidance of the Spirit acknowledges the Holy Scriptures as his only authority in all matters of faith and life and conforms thereto, and does not deny, contradict, or ignore any word of God in the Holy Scriptures, he is to be regarded and acknowledged as a brother in the Lord and a fellow worker in the Kingdom of God. Not to recognize him as such constitutes a denial of Christ's work in the brother and leads to schism in the Church.
- (5) **Disruptions of the Fellowship of Faith** On the other hand, teaching otherwise than the Word of God teaches, setting up dogma contrary to, or without warrant from, the Word of God, as well as neglecting or omitting any part of the Word of God, creates divisions in the Church and disrupts its unity. To overlook divergences from the Word of God in the

teaching and life of other Christians, to tolerate false teaching and practice contrary to Scripture, and to be silent in the face of denials of the Word of God likewise contribute to the disruption of the unity of the Church.

Matthew 28:20; John 8:31; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; Acts 4:32; 9:27-28; 1 Corinthians 3:11.

Acts 18:24-28; Galatians 2:11-14; Matthew 18:15-18; Romans 16:17-20; Matthew 16:6; Ephesians 5:11.

2. Church Fellowship as a Fellowship of Confession

- (6) **Function of the Confessions** The Church's response and witness to the Word of God, particularly in the face of denial and attack, finds expression in the confessions of the Church. Loyalty to the Ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran Confessions is therefore essentially fidelity to the Holy Scriptures. We hold to them not merely because they have been formulated and accepted by the Church as the expression of its faith, but because they constitute the right understanding and exposition of the Scriptures. The Scriptures remain the norm by which every confession must be interpreted and judged.
- (7) **Primacy of the Gospel** This confessional loyalty is of particular importance with reference to the witness of the Confessions to the central theme of the Scriptures, the Gospel. Agreement in the Gospel is fundamental to church fellowship, for the Gospel constitutes the center from which all teachings of the Scriptures are to be viewed. Ultimately all the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures have an organic connection with the central theme of the Scriptures, which is the Gospel. A denial of any teaching of the Scriptures involves a mutilation of, and departure from, the complete Gospel, and it is for this reason that a full and common obedience to the Holy Scriptures is an indispensable requisite for church fellowship. It is impossible to recognize as equally valid such confessions as are mutually contradictory. The validity of a confession is established not by the mere claim that it is in harmony with the Scriptures, but by the fact that it is in actual agreement with them and is a faithful restatement of the Gospel as the central theme of the Scriptures.
- (8) **Contending for the Truth** The Lord directs His Church in every age to determine how the testimony to the truth of His Word can be given most effectively, so that all men may hear and know the authority of that Word in such matters. In order to protect the flock of Christ against errorists, it may be necessary to give this testimony in their presence, or it may be necessary to testify by withdrawing from them. There is no war-

rant in the Scriptures to disregard error and errorists. The Lord makes it the duty of the Church to expose the error to the errorists on the basis of the Holy Scriptures and thus seek to win the erring brethren by love. If the Church's admonition of love remains unheeded, separation as a final endeavor of love becomes inevitable, for even in withdrawal or excommunication for reasons of heresy and apostasy the real purpose is not to exclude the erring brother forever from the fellowship of faith, but to win him back into such fellowship.

Hebrews 10:23; 1 Peter 3:15; Galatians 1:8; 1 Corinthians 1:10.

1 Corinthians 3:11; Galatians 1:8; 2 John 9-11; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Romans 1:16-17; Isaiah 8:20; Matthew 28:20.

Matthew 7:15; Acts 17:11; 1 Timothy 6:3-5; Titus 3:10; Romans 16:17-20; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14, 15; 1 Corinthians 5:4-5; James 5:19-20; 2 Cor. 2:6-10.

3. Church Fellowship as a Fellowship of Love

- (9) **The Bond of Love** Church fellowship is characterized by love for the brethren. Following the example of the Lord, who gave Himself for the Church, the members of the Church are to "consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works"; "forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." As Christ loved the Church, so His followers are enjoined to love one another. This love for one another has compelling implications for church fellowship. Christian love yearns for fellowship with the brethren, shuns the loneliness of separation, and is nourished and sustained by the personal relationship of Christ with the Church and the members of the Church with Christ and with one another. It is the nature of Christian faith and love to be expressed in fellowship with brethren.
- (10) **Speaking the Whole Truth in Love** Christian love for the erring brother is clothed in humility and candor. Humility demands that Christian remember that he, too, is frail and that his judgment of a brother may be partial and erroneous. Lovelessness, arrogance, and arbitrariness have no place in the treatment of an erring brother. Great and grievous sins of maltreatment of the erring brother may lie concealed behind a screen of avowed faithfulness to the truth. Candor demands that fellowship or the avoidance of fellowship be motivated and fortified by all the relevant teachings of the Word of God. Neither separatism nor unionism may be validated by using selected Scriptural admonitions out of proper context to prove it correct and by disregarding other relevant Scriptural admonitions. It is required of brethren to listen to each other's testimony, to respect each other's

conscience, and to judge all relationships in the light of the entire Scriptures.

John 15: 9-17; Romans 12: 3-21; Ephesians 4: 16; Hebrews 10: 25.

Galatians 6: 1; Acts 18: 24-28; Matthew 18: 15-18; Acts 9: 26-30; Luke 9: 49-50; Romans 14: 1; Galatians 6: 1-5; 2: 11; Acts 20: 27; 2 Corinthians 13: 8.

4. Church Fellowship as a Fellowship of Work

- (11) **The Lord's Behest** A fellowship of faith, confession, and love will find expression in a fellowship of work. Such behests of the Lord to the Church as "Go ye," "Pray ye," "Labor ye," are commands not only for individual, but also for joint or corporate activity. The work of proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed is the task both of the individual Christian and of Christians joined together. However, such co-operation among Christians, based on the fellowship of faith, confession, and love, should not be confused or identified with co-operation in external matters. If such co-operation in external matters is not contrary to the Holy Scriptures or the Lutheran Confessions, it becomes a matter of Christian freedom and may be undertaken for reasons of good stewardship and efficiency.
- (12) **One Lord — One Task** The Lord has given many gifts to the Church, not for the edification of a few, but for the edification of all. The Lord has assigned tasks to the Church for which He enlists the co-operation of all its members with Himself and with one another. It would be a misreading or a misunderstanding of the Gospel to insist that each Christian or each group of Christians must work entirely alone or that each Christian serve the Lord in his own self-chosen way. Such an attitude results in confusion, suspicion, and poor stewardship. One of the purposes of the Gospel is to bring Christians to serve the Lord together in the Lord's way.
- (13) **One Word — One Mind** This fellowship of work can become a reality only when a fellowship of faith, confession, and love exists. It is only when Christians confess the same faith and are agreed to let the Word of God be authoritative and normative in all matters of faith and life that a real fellowship of work can result. God's Word requires that Christians "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel."

John 13: 13-17; 17: 18; Galatians 6: 2; Matthew 28: 19; Luke 10: 2; Romans 15: 26-27.

1 Corinthians, chs. 12-14; 16: 1.

John 15: 1-5; Ephesians 4: 13-16; 2 Corinthians 6: 1; Philippians 1: 27.

ix. THE CHURCH AND ANTI-CHRISTIAN ORGANIZATIONS

- (1) **Church Under Cross** The Lord has warned His disciples that as long as this world stands, the Church will be under the cross. Christ's name will be mocked by unbelievers and His authority usurped by impostors within and without Christendom. As for the faithful members of the Church, the warning of their Lord always applies: "If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you," John 15: 20. The Church as the company of God's faithful witnesses will continue under bitter attack and at times must endure grievous tribulation.
- (2) **Church in Combat** In the face of these onslaughts of the enemies of Christ, the Church must stand firm in the faith. It does more than bear and suffer. It unmasks, condemns, and combats with the sword of the Spirit all religions and sects which alter or displace the redemption wrought by Jesus Christ by their own devices or efforts; all organizations and movements which seek to deprive God of His sovereignty; and all humanistic and secularistic philosophies which exalt the powers of man and refuse to give to God the glory that is due Him.
- (3) **Church in Witness** The Church must be alert to detect such anti-Christian propaganda everywhere, even where it appears in moralistic and pseudo-Christian form, as in those lodges and fraternal orders which explicitly or by omission remove Christ from His position of mediatorship between God and man and thus deny the central teaching of Scriptures, that salvation is solely and wholly through Christ. Over against the teaching of such organizations the testimony of the Church must be clear and unequivocal. By proclamation and by salutary discipline all men must be shown and must be made to face the fact that they cannot serve two masters. To compromise with work-righteousness is to endanger the whole Church; and each and all must share the labor of safeguarding the faithful, of extricating those who have become involved in organizations which proclaim salvation by works, and of denying fellowship to those who stubbornly refuse to yield to the Word of God by continuing in their anti-Christian affiliations. Synods as well as Christian congregations cannot remain indifferent or inactive in the exercise of salutary discipline necessitated by such divided loyalty. This task, like all the tasks of the Church, must be done in holy fear and in holy love.

Mark 12: 1-12; Matthew 16: 24-28; 2 Thessalonians 2: 1-12.

Ephesians 6: 10-19; Romans 1: 18-2: 16; 1 Corinthians 1: 18-31.

Galatians 1: 8-9; 2 Corinthians 6: 14-18; Matthew 18: 15-18; 6: 24; 7: 21-27.

x. THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD TO COME

- (1) **Church in Eternity** The Church in all its activities in the world remembers that its life in Christ is eternal. The fact that the Church exists, that men believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, is due ultimately to the eternal election of God, who "hath chosen us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him," Ephesians 1:4. "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, whereunto He called you by our Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ," 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14. God by His Word and Sacrament calls men to faith and keeps them in that faith unto the end. Remaining humbly and gratefully conscious of its origin in God's elective will, the Church is preserved from the fatal delusion that it is a self-caused and self-sustaining institution; and the individual member lives and works in the blessed assurance that nothing shall separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.
- (2) **Church in Time** The Church remembers also that it is the beginning of the new world in the midst of the old, that the goal of all its working and striving is not in this present world, that it is the body of the Christ whose Kingdom is not of this world, the Christ who is to come. Since we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, the Church's life is marked by an alert and responsible expectancy and striving, and measures all its actions by the inescapable and just judgment of Christ upon those actions. Such a life cannot fail to be a life of daily repentance.
- (3) **Church in Triumph** The Church's expectancy of its Lord's return is also a joyous hope: the Bridegroom who will return has even now made the Church's life the evening before the feast. This solemnly joyous expectancy frees the Church from a sole and desperate concern with things earthly and temporal; it makes the Church free to act spontaneously according to the promptings of the love that is the pulse beat of its faith. Despite all the seeming triumphs of Satan, the Church possesses for its work in the world a serene courage and an undisturbed vision and assurance of victory. "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us."
- Ephesians 1:3-14; Romans 8:28-39; John 10:27-28; Luke 12:32.
Ephesians 2:19-22; Colossians 3:1-2; Luke 12:42-48.
Luke 21:28; Matthew 25:1-13; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Romans 8:31-39; Revelation 22.

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