

This paper is an adaptation by the author of a presentation given to the United Lutheran Mission Association Commission and other interested parties on August 23, 2008 in Decatur, Illinois.

An Island for Misfit Lutherans

Brothers (and sisters) in the One true faith,

“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them” -Acts 16:9-10.

God the Holy Spirit called. I His servant left Missouri, and went to Virginia.

I am an anomaly. People do not know what to do with me. I am not controversial. I do not try to make a big name for myself. I am a simple Lutheran pastor who desires to see God work the old-fashioned way through Word and Sacrament in sustaining His people and bringing them to faith.

I did not kick the door on the way out of the LCMS. I would be happy to rejoin those folks provided they get their theological act together. If God can be patient, I can be patient. I am waiting for those erring and misguided brothers to catch up to Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Agnus Dei Lutheran Church in Fredericksburg, Virginia, the ULMA, and like-minded independent Lutheran churches and Lutheran micro-synods. However, while we wait for an unlikely miracle, there is work to do. Therefore, we work as we preach Jesus the Christ and Him crucified as Saint Paul did. We teach the Bible and the catechism Like Luther and his confessional contemporaries did. We study Luther, the Bible, and the confessions as our Lutheran forefathers did. We visit the churched and the unchurched. We work apart from a bureaucracy. We work apart from heterodoxy. We work apart from much of the strife and angst still present in the church body (the LCMS) that God the Holy Spirit called me out of this past winter and spring [2008].

The work that the ULMA does as a group and the work that I do as a missionary is truly a faith effort. People think I am crazy having left my golden synodical handcuffs behind. I am like Abraham who goes to a place he knows not where.¹ Contrary to popular mainline Lutheran practice, I know what the Bible says about numbers—numbers of people. God does great things when His people are **outnumbered**. Consider Noah, Joseph, Moses, David, Elijah, and Gideon’s 300 men. Eleven apostles in Acts chapter 2. These are just a few Biblical examples. Therefore, the Lutheran confessional militia does not let the small numbers we see around us today scare us. For we know our history—recognizing that our day is much like the mission field CFW Walther saw as he pulled together Lutherans of like mind, belief and practice in the 1840s. As Lutherans we have been here before and we know how this turns out. The work is hard. God however, makes it possible. So He gets all the credit as His people grow in the faith and as new members of His Kingdom are added to their numbers the old fashioned way—one soul at a time.

Not all pastors are cut out to do this work of establishing a new church in the midst of a panoply of doctrine and practice. Here is what Luther has to say about doing the harder thing. This from Luther’s Treatise on Good Works as he discusses the 8th commandment.

“Therefore, as in His [Jesus’] day, so at all times, there are few who stand by the divine truth and risk life and limb, goods and honor, and everything they have for it. As Christ has foretold, “You shall be hated by all men for my name’s sake” [Matt. 24:9]. Or again, “Many of them shall take offense at me” [Matt. 24:10]. But if this truth were attacked by peasants, shepherds, stableboys, and people of no repute, who would not be willing and able to confess it and bear witness to it? But when the pope and the bishops, as well as princes and kings, attack the truth, then everybody runs away, keeps quiet, or pretends not to notice so as not to lose his possessions, his honor, his favor, and his life. [and his Concordia Health and Retirement Plan] ©

3. Why do they do this? For the simple reason that they have no faith in God and expect nothing good from Him. For where there is such faith and confidence there is also a bold, defiant, fearless heart that risks all and stands by the truth, no matter what the cost, whether it is against pope or king, as we see that the dear martyrs did. For such a heart is satisfied and serenely sure that it has a gracious, kindly-disposed God. Therefore, he despises all the favors, grace, goods, and honor of men, and does not attach any value to these transitory things. As it is written in Psalm 15 [:4], "He despises them who despise God, and honors those who fear him." That means he does not fear the tyrants, the mighty, those who persecute the truth and despise God; he does not regard them, he despises them. On the other hand, he clings to those persecuted for the truth's sake, those who fear God more than Men; he stands by them, protects and honors them, let it vex whom it may. It is written of Moses in Hebrews 11 [:24-27] that he stood by his brethren, regardless of the mighty king of Egypt.²

The nice thing about being outside the LCMS is that I no longer worry about the synodical pharaoh, district president, or circuit counselor. I have been freed to fear God rather than men.

I trust in God to work now through different means to provide for my family and my short future here on earth. I now walk much more by faith and not by sight.³ While some have worked in times past to bring evil upon me, God has used those efforts to build character and prepare for a greater good. This makes it possible for me to continue faithfully proclaiming the truth of Jesus the Living Word to those dead in their sin and in strengthening and preserving the faith of the saints. For this, I give the members of the commission and the saints at Pilgrim Lutheran Church many thanks for stepping out in faith to make that possible.

I spent some time on the phone the other night with a CRM pastor from the LCMS. He was wondering about the ULMA. Is there a place for him here on this (to use a Rudolf the red-nosed reindeer metaphor), Island of misfit Lutherans—those cast off from the larger (in an earthly sense) Lutheran synods? He had been beat up by the synodical bureaucracy and some erring people in a previous parish. He effectively is blacklisted in the LCMS. In a time of a purported pastor shortage, this behavior and treatment of pastors is nuts. He was grateful to hear, knows now, and can tell others that there still are people who are faithful to the Lutheran Church of Walther, Luther, the Apostles, and the crucified—yet now living Jesus Christ.

The people of the ULMA are truly a light shining on a hill. God has chosen to bless the ULMA and those other unnamed groups of confessional Lutherans, with a great responsibility in these days. God has called us to remain steadfast, strong, and to give those struggling saints in Lutheran churches around the country hope. When the Diaspora comes—when the faithful Lutheran churches and pastors realize the death of the LCMS that we knew, will the ULMA and other like-minded confessional Lutheran groups be ready to be that place of refuge and healing,—that faithful island for misfit Lutherans?

We know not what tomorrow will bring. Therefore, we continue to faithfully prepare for God's will to be done in us and through us, as we do Word and Sacrament ministry in our grandfather's Lutheran church (but with air-conditioning). To God be the Glory. Amen.

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¹ Hebrews 11:8

² Luther's Works Vol. 44 p. 112-113

³ 2 Corinthians 5:7