

## **From Missouri To Virginia: – A Former Missouri Synod Pastor Walks the Talk.**

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I would like to take a brief survey:

How many are 1)Laypeople? 2)Pastors? 3)Teachers? 4)Administrative types? 5)Other?

How many are LCMS? ULMA? Other?

Don't Answer! Do not answer this next question. How many would be willing to take that leap of faith and leave the LCMS to join an independent confessional evangelical Lutheran church or to join a new synod or association that is truly Lutheran to its core?

That is the big, scary, leap of faith, truly gut-wrenching question isn't it?

God needs someone.

Someone has to be the pioneer. Someone has to be the guinea pig. Someone has to be the one with the entrepreneurial bent. Someone has to be willing to make that none of the above choice on the test question.

Isn't that what happened with our Lord? Doing what no man had done before. Isn't that what happened with Luther? Doing what few dared to do in the face of the papacy and not get burned at the stake! Isn't that what happened with Walther? Doing what no other group had done in the northern part of the U.S. in the 1840's. (I'll get into what happened in the south later on).

And on and on it goes. Perhaps some of you here today are going to be used by God in great and subtle ways to rebuild confessional Lutheranism in America in the coming years. All fires begin with a spark. Perhaps today is the day when God begins something good through you in reigniting confessional Lutheran belief and practice here in the United States.

I'm Rev. James R Shaw. I have been a Lutheran and a Christian since God the Holy Sprit though water and the Living Word of God made me a member of His Kingdom through the rite of Holy Baptism in December of 1957 in southern California.

I was confirmed in the one true faith at Community Lutheran Church in South Burlington Vermont—one of 2 LCMS Churches in the whole state of Vermont at the time. Today by the grace of God, there are now 3 LCMS churches there. As is the case all over America, some of these churches are more Lutheran than others.

I have undergraduate credits from 4 different Concordia institutions with an MDIV from Concordia Theological Fort Wayne in 1999.

A number of times as I grew up and moved about the country, I was brought into membership using the old TLH Agenda a number of times. In that agenda, one joined the "Evangelical Lutheran Church". That is the church I continue to be a member of as do most all of you.

It is a commitment that many of us made at our confirmation with these words:

“Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?”<sup>1</sup>

Such is the bold confession that Evangelical Lutherans make. That “death” word seems to get to the young people sometimes. But then they should feel a touch queasy as these are spiritual life and death issues—issues that in turn spill over into the physical—into our ecclesiastical and secular worlds—the right hand and left-hand kingdoms.

The Christian faith that we believe, teach, and confess then, is not for the faint of heart. We are after all the church militant. We are at war. We do not however, “wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*”<sup>2</sup>. And some of those may just be inside the church. This work is not easy. And even Jesus in John chapter 6 experienced the harsh reality of fair weather Christians<sup>3</sup>. That is why this faith we hold is as Jesus describes in Matthew chapter 7 as a “narrow gate” or “way”<sup>4</sup>. It can be aptly described as did Hermann Sasse as a “lonely way”<sup>5</sup>. We as confessional Lutherans journey down a road less traveled—the road of Luther and many a confessional saint of times past.

Consider also this little quote from Saint Basil of Caesarea, a Christian church father of the 4th century<sup>6</sup>.

"I learned from the example of the three children in Babylon that when there is no one to support the cause of true religion, we must accomplish our duties alone. They sang a hymn to God from the midst of the flames, not thinking of the multitudes who rejected the truth, but content to have each other, though there were only three of them"<sup>7</sup>.

Do not let the numbers fool you. You do not need faith in numbers. You just need faith in the one true God—the faith of a mustard seed that Jesus said can move mountains<sup>8</sup>. When Elijah was atop Mount Carmel, the odds were perceived by many to be 850 to 1. There were 450 prophets of Baal and there were 400 prophets of Asherah<sup>9</sup>. If you really want to get the numbers right it was really the one true God against a nothing of another god—1 to zero. No contest. The one true God always prevails whether we perceive that in the flesh or not. Sometimes being alone is a good sign. As Luther stated at Worms, “I was the church”<sup>10</sup>.

There was a time when being a Missouri Lutheran meant something. Missouri had a solid confessional reputation that was known throughout the world. There was a time when Theodore Engelder could express that “light shining on a hill” leadership in the 1922 book *Ebenezer* with an essay titled, “Why Missouri Stood Alone”. We could read that essay and feel no shame, embarrassment, or think we had to apologize for some fictitious arrogance. We need not apologize for being right—for standing firm on God’s Word alone. That reputation earned by

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<sup>1</sup> Lutheran Service book Agenda p. 30; LSB hymnbook p. 273

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 6:12

<sup>3</sup> John 6:60-61, 66

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 7:14

<sup>5</sup> The Lonely Way Selected Writings & Letters of Hermann Sasse CPH (back cover of jacket vol. 1)

<sup>6</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basil\\_of\\_Caesarea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basil_of_Caesarea)

<sup>7</sup> Saint Basil, "On the Holy Spirit"

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 17:20

<sup>9</sup> 1 Kings 18:19

<sup>10</sup> Jaraslov Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels: Catholic Substance and Protestant Principle in Luther’s Reformation* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1964), 18.

standing upon God's Holy Word alone however, in these latter days continues to fade, as the sun appears to be setting on the LCMS as a corporation.

So as the shine fades from the apple of American Lutheranism, what is a quia-confessional Lutheran to do? Where do you go? Where do you turn? Whom do you trust?

While as a pastor now, I am no longer a member of the LCMS on paper. Still in my own mind, I continue to be a member of the LCMS that I grew up in—the church of Martin Luther, Martin Chemnitz, CFW Walther, Francis Pieper, Bente, and many others. I suppose if one really thought about it, once God the Holy Spirit called me out of the LCMS, my theology improved since I was no longer in official fellowship with those who were bound to anti-biblical practices and errant convention resolutions. No longer would I be embarrassed to say that a pastor in my church put a double bed in the chancel and preached on sex. No longer would I be humiliated by my association with an LCMS church that would put up red and white billboards mocking God and signed by Satan. No longer would I have to explain why the LCMS would repeatedly pass resolutions at convention in support of closed communion but never discipline those pastors and churches that openly practice otherwise. No longer would I be a member of a church with a schizophrenic confession and practice. I was called from near insanity to sanity.

The best part of being on the outside. No, wait a minute. The best part of being on the inside and no longer on the outside is that I no longer have an “ecclesiastical supervisor”. That is because I now have replaced that with something even better. As I was reading in Luther's Works<sup>11</sup> recently, I came across Luther's treatment of papal authority. One can find a similar treatment in the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* found in the *Book of Concord*. Luther's response was to quote Jesus who said from Luke 22, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves”<sup>12</sup>. You also have the 1<sup>st</sup> century incident where the Apostle Paul deals with the hypocrisy of Peter<sup>13</sup> in Galatians chapter 2 as an equal.

So what I experience now is not an innovation. This is as God would have us as pastors and Christian laypeople live. I went back also and looked in the old Lutheran history books, and specifically I read a few letters of some confessional pastors in the early 1800's. These were staunchly confessional men. They had their problems with the North Carolina Synod in the 1820's which politically and theologically would be the equivalent of the ELCA today. They fought for a while as Lutherans do. When the confessional men saw reform was not going to happen, they went off on their own to form the first confessional synod in America—the Tennessee Synod. You don't hear much about the Tennessee synod at the Fort Wayne Seminary. Maybe I did not take class that dealt with them or due to the fact that the Tennessee Synod has since fizzled out—leaving it as a mere footnote of Lutheran history for many.

The Synod was led by the Henkel family which produced a number of confessional Lutheran pastors in the early 1800's. They also had their own printing press. Writes Bente in American Lutheranism, “The Henkels were a busy and skillful people. When in need of manuscript for their press, they wrote it; when in need of verses, they composed them; when in need of woodcuts, they cut in wood; after the books were printed, they bound them; and when the bindings

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<sup>11</sup> Luther's Works 31:387

<sup>12</sup> Luke 22:25-26

<sup>13</sup> Galatians 2:11ff

had dried, they, in part themselves, canvassed the finished product throughout the country”.<sup>14</sup> They were responsible for the first printing in English of the Book of Concord—commonly known as the Jacobs edition.

The Tennessee Synod was the equivalent of the LCMS but it was in the south. They spoke German. They also—now get this lay people—were the first American Lutheran church body to give laymen the right to vote at their conventions (or convention equivalent.) These confessional men were very clear about what they believed, taught, and confessed. Those saints remain a good and faithful witness to us today.

Now I will get back to whom my real ecclesiastical supervisor is. I model my understanding and practice after what I find in the Holy Scriptures, Lutheran Confessions, the history of the Tennessee Synod and the early history of the LCMS.

This understanding can be illustrated with a quote from Bente’s *American Lutheranism* volume 1, “When, in a letter, several members of the North Carolina Synod designated Paul Henkel as ‘the head’ of the Tennessee Synod, the latter declared, and could do so truthfully, that their Synod ‘confesses no man as its head save the one and only God-man, Jesus Christ’”<sup>15</sup>.

With all this in mind, quite frankly and simply, Jesus Christ is my one and only ecclesiastical supervisor. And as a result, I no longer look over my shoulder or think twice about what I write, print, or post on the Internet. I simply ask the question, would Christ approve?” Does this bear a true witness as opposed to a false or misleading one?

This approach also has its roots in the LCMS constitution which states, “All matters of doctrine and of conscience shall be decided only by the Word of God. All other matters shall be decided by a majority vote”.<sup>16</sup> You just need to look at the ELCA’s August, 2009 Churchwide Assembly<sup>17</sup> to see what happens when a majority vote trumps the Word of God. And since “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”<sup>18</sup>, I’m just going to let Jesus decide these things.

Thus as a confessional evangelical Lutheran, I like Luther, am held captive by the Living Word of God<sup>19</sup>. I no longer live captive under the yoke of the synodical constitution, convention resolutions, CCM pronouncements, or CTCR statements. I can much more now identify with Luther who on December 10, 1520 cast volumes of canon law into the fire. In his explanation entitled *Why the Books of the Pope and His Disciples Were Burned*, he gave 5 major reasons. His summary is most telling:

“Therefore let no one be impressed by the lofty titles, names, and prestige of the papal estate, of canon law, and by the use of these burned books, which is of long standing. Rather listen and look first at what the pope teaches in his books, what poisonous and frightful doctrines are contained in the holy canon law, and what until the present time we have worshipped instead of the truth, and then judge freely whether I have burned these books justly or unjustly”<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Bente *American Lutheranism* Vol. 1 p. 234.

<sup>15</sup> Bente *American Lutheranism* Vol. 1 p. 202.

<sup>16</sup> *Handbook of the LCMS* 2001 p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> The ELCA assembly voted to allow the use of pastors in same-sex relationships (homosexuals and lesbians).

<sup>18</sup> John 1:14

<sup>19</sup> From Luther’s confession at the Diet at Worms, April 18, 1521.

<sup>20</sup> Luther’s Works 31:384

Quite frankly by my observation, the LCMS has come to the point of allowing The constitution and Bylaws to trump the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. So to that I say, “adios, au revoirs, auf wiedersein”<sup>21</sup>.

I follow here in the footsteps of CFW Walther. I follow the guidance of the LCMS Brief Statement of 1932:

“29. The orthodox character of a church is established not by its mere name nor by its outward acceptance of, and subscription to, an orthodox creed, but by the doctrine which is actually taught in its pulpits, in its theological seminaries, and in its publications. On the other hand, a church does not forfeit its orthodox character through the casual intrusion of errors, provided these are combated and eventually removed by means of doctrinal discipline, Acts 20:30; 1 Tim. 1:3”<sup>22</sup>.

I do not know how many dozens of times I have read that paragraph over the years. As I prepared this paper, it finally dawned on me what this says. Here in the *Brief Statement* which has been accepted by the LCMS as representative of their belief and practice for decades, is a statement that says in effect, “What you state on paper does **not** count—it is secondary to what is taught from the pulpits, taught in the seminaries, and printed on paper and the internet”. When doctrinal discipline breaks down as most confessional Lutherans in the LCMS will agree, the LCMS loses it’s orthodox character. The LCMS thus today is clearly heterodox by this admission. You cannot get around it. This is the elephant that sits in the Purple Palace. He is not going away anytime soon as the “dispute resolution process” has institutionalized heterodoxy.

My recommendation for those whose consciences are vexed by this is to follow the advice of LCMS president emeritus CFW Walther who states:

“Pastors must direct people to Christ and say, ‘You see, we proclaim the pure word of God, which contains the eternal Gospel. That is why you should cling to us, and that is why we maintain that the moment we no longer do that, you should leave us! For salvation is not in any way dependant on us, nor on the Missouri Synod. So, if it does not proclaim the pure Word of God, it is worthless, and you should leave it....It [the Missouri Synod] should prefer to go out of business (*untergehen*) rather than to let the church suffer harm by its continued existence. Those who want to see the Synod continue under all circumstances, regardless of whether that would harm the kingdom of Christ, are not being led by the Spirit of Christ but by the spirit of selfishness, and instead of being a building stone in the kingdom of Christ, they are a hindrance to God’”<sup>23</sup>.

I walked the walk. I followed the advice of the first president of the LCMS who probably knows a whole lot more about the principles upon which the LCMS was founded than anyone else. Now I am not talking about what it may have developed and morphed into, but what the original LCMS was designed to be. So from that newfangled LCMS, I am free. How did we get here?

Much of the growth of the LCMS was in the baby boom years in the suburbs. Many of those churches in time ended up being passed over. Some inner city churches were abandoned to Pentecostal missions, and the exodus of Lutherans in search of the latest wave marches on. Some of those churches kept their identity based upon God’s Word. Others kept the name but let the

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<sup>21</sup> The common sign-off to the Lawrence Welk TV Show.

<sup>22</sup> Brief Statement 1932, Sec. 29 p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> - Rev. C. F. W. Walther, 1st Synodical President, *Essays for the Church*, vol. II, p. 61-62.

incoming waves of the local culture dilute their belief and practice to the point where one could no longer differentiate between and LCMS church and a generic inter/non-denominational church.

I visited one of those churches while on vacation once years ago. We happened to meet one of their members in a local business. This person was proud of the fact that they were not like most LCMS churches and the service was more like the Baptists. That church is now one of those Ablaze magnet churches or some other fancy term. Keeping up on the terms and acronyms is not my specialty on purpose. This too shall pass.

I now freely lead a group of confessional Lutheran souls who are members of an independent Lutheran church in one of these suburban areas. They are members of the invisible church. They are not a sect. They sing the same liturgy you do. They sing the same confessional hymns out of TLH or LSB. They say 2 creeds every Sunday (the Nicene for church and the Apostles as part of the Sunday School opening). They hear the same kind of Law and Gospel sermon that most of you confessional Lutherans hear or preach. We have kids as young as 3 years old learning the 6 chief parts of Luther's Small Catechism. All these things can and do happen in an Independent Lutheran Church.

Big bureaucracies loathe independent churches. You cannot suspend or restrict their pastors when they proclaim something true but politically inexpedient. The ecclesiastical legalists cannot stand a free church—a church which to paraphrase David Henkel of the Tennessee Synod he describes as having no ecclesiastical supervisor but Christ. Like the anti-Christ pope who wants to get in between the parishioner and his Savior, the Lutheran ecclesiastical supervisor similarly feels it necessary to squeeze in between God and the pastor or the congregation and its pastor.

Independent Lutheran churches are smart about this. They simply recognize that they do not need that extra sedan-chair overhead. “You are the weakest link. Good-bye”<sup>24</sup>.

There is a reason that the fastest growing segment of Lutheranism in America is independent Lutheran churches. This is the growth area with low overhead. Everyone works and everyone helps one another. It is the body of Christ in action.

Now there are those who are and will get quite envious of those of us who live in the “liberty of faith”<sup>25</sup> as Luther phrases it. That phrase “liberty of faith” was used by Luther in his book “The Freedom of The Christian”. So in the spirit of Luther, I now joyfully live and work under the freedom of the Gospel. I live quite simply by faith in Jesus Christ with Bible and Book of Concord in hand. The heavy yoke of those burdensome laws of men have been lifted. As Saint Paul Says in Galatians 5, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage”<sup>26</sup>. I am now free to be undershepherd of Jesus Christ rather than servant to a district president or circuit counselor. As Luther said, popes and councils have erred and often contradicted one another<sup>27</sup>. So I find myself refreshingly under the authority of the best of shepherds freely living under the Gospel of Jesus Christ and bringing that Gospel unimpeded to a fallen world.

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<sup>24</sup> A reference to the “The Weakest Link” TV show (U.S. NBC 2001-2002) where the losing contestants were directed out the door with the tag line: “You are the weakest link. Goodbye.

<sup>25</sup> Luther's Works 31:369

<sup>26</sup> Galatians 5:1

<sup>27</sup> From Luther's confession at the Diet at Worms, April 18, 1521.

This liberty—this freedom can be quite threatening to those sedan-chair leaders who have their formulas and demographic studies. Right now for example, I as a missionary am working on opening another mission at an undisclosed place. I did not have to get permission to do this. You hear the gospel call of your Lord and you go! Real Book of Acts mission work is that simple.

I will not publicly say where this mission field is or who is involved because in my experience the LCMS as a bureaucracy has a way of pouring all kinds of money into an area when they feel threatened. If you want to know more about this practice, just talk to the men in the Lutheran Mission Alliance (LMA) down in Texas of which I am a member. They experienced that kind of anti-competitive behavior down in Texas first hand. We learn from other people's mistakes and experience.

There are also some mission fields in far off lands outside the United States that I am personally aware of. Likewise, I mention no people, places, or governments, lest the persecution of the state or church come upon the faithful missionaries that are serving under the radar. In at least one of these instances, the official LCMS in their ignorance and naiveté works actively against the work being done by confessional Lutheran missionaries in that country!

In spite of all this goofiness I see in the various Lutheran church bodies both great and small, I know that God is more powerful than all these seemingly grand efforts of men. He uses "the foolish things of the world to confound the wise"<sup>28</sup>. The meek will inherit the earth<sup>29</sup>. As Gamaliel said in Acts 5, "...if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it -- lest you even be found to fight against God"<sup>30</sup>.

I as a missionary pray. I pray for guidance. I pray for insight. I pray for opportunities to tell others the Good News of what Christ has done for me and all creatures. When will those doors open? I have no idea. That is the fun. That is the joy of living under the cross and under a wise shepherd and Lord. In this one opportunity I am working on, I in my flesh never thought it would amount to much. God the Holy Spirit appears to have a different idea for now. At one point when in humility I washed my hands of this thing seeing the door appear to close, God saw fit to move people's hearts and open a window<sup>31</sup>. It is like Saint Paul working in Troas. After first being redirected by the Holy Spirit away from Bithynia, he receives this vision to go to Macedonia and help the people in Phillipi<sup>32</sup>.

So Paul gets the call and he goes. So I get the call to Virginia, and I go. I do not want to go to the east coast (in my flesh). But that is however, where God's people are. That is where the altar of ministry is located. So like Abraham, we follow God's leading<sup>33</sup> and we go to a land that God has shown us.

Just after I received the call to be missionary at large, I received a phone call from the Missouri district president Ray Mirly. Little did he realize how prophetic were his words of greeting. He began his conversation with these words which I will remember for a long time. "I hear the Holy Spirit has been working in your life". Oh how true—in more ways than any of us can comprehend or even imagine!

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<sup>28</sup> 1Corinthians 1:27

<sup>29</sup> Psalm 37:11, Matthew 5:5

<sup>30</sup> Acts 5:38b-39

<sup>31</sup> Julie Andrews used this proverbial saying in *The Sound of Music*.

<sup>32</sup> Acts 16:8-12

<sup>33</sup> Genesis 12:1

Living by faith as a Lutheran Missionary pastor is fun. In the flesh, this life is scary at times. In the spirit however, one feels joy, peace, and contentment. While one in the flesh may worry about who is sneakily working behind the scenes to do in a parishioner, church, or pastor, people of faith on the other hand put all their trust in their all powerful God. He is a God who overcame sin, death, and the power of the devil. He likewise can overcome the power of earthly bureaucracies and the misguided intentions of men.

Luther put it this way in regards to truly living by faith,

He who holds fast to the Word alone, trusts and abides in it, does not doubt that what the Word says will come to pass; he who does not dictate aim or time or means and ways, but resigns all freely to God's will and pleasure as to when, how, where, and by whom he will fulfill his Word; he, I say, has a true living faith which does not nor can not tempt God<sup>34</sup>.

The just shall live by faith<sup>35</sup>. That is what evangelical Lutherans do. It is a living faith that has consequences in this life and the world to come.

This brings us now to the harder stuff. Most of you sometime in your life have read the life of Martin Luther either through Bainton, Schwiebert, Nohl, or Brecht. Through the eyes of these historians, one can get a sense that Martin's life was not easy—it was dangerous at times. For example, right after the Diet at Worms, there was a price on his head. He was an outlaw of the state. So as a means of protection, he was secreted away to Wartburg Castle. There God used men to protect His servant and the proclamation of His Word. He did it then. God can still do that today. Remember that the next time you say the Lord's Prayer and say, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven".

Just prior to this in the spring of 1520, Luther wrote the book "Treatise on Good Works"<sup>36</sup>. With increasing pressure coming from Rome, it is understandable how he could write these words which still ring true to us today in the ecclesiastical challenges that evangelical Lutherans now face.

"...Yet the world not only did not receive him [*Jesus*], but persecuted him more cruelly than all the others who had ever come forth from God.

Therefore, as in his 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.

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,

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<sup>34</sup> Excerpt from Sermon for the Epiphany; Matthew 2:1-12 - A Sermon by Martin Luther; taken from his Church Postil of 1522.

<sup>35</sup> Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38

<sup>36</sup> LW 44:15-114

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”<sup>37</sup>.

From Luther’s perspective here, the act of the shrinking violet Lutheran is a clear demonstration of a lack of faith. It would appear from an outside observer that LCMS pastors have more faith in the Concordia health and retirement plan than they do in their Lord! I know that sounds harsh. It should.

I have heard the line, “Just wait until the next convention”. I have heard that for two convention cycles. Four churches I know got it. Two of which are Pilgrim Lutheran church Decatur, IL and Redeemer Lutheran Church of Saint Claire Chores, MI. There still remain many confessional Lutheran Churches that remain on the fence unwilling or unable to make a decision. They are at a crossroads of sorts and cannot execute on the admonition of Joshua who asked God’s people this question:

"And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD”<sup>38</sup>.

The LCMS bureaucracy will be more than happy to watch those outlying struggling churches die so that they can lay claim to their property by default as written in many constitutions—language written in a bygone era when what the LCMS believed on paper was what was actually practiced in St. Louis and around the country in a walking together collegiality. Those days are gone so it is time to wake up to a new reality.

Keep in mind that God has a plan here. The rules however are being written as we go. There is little precedent for what we are seeing.

Well actually there is. Consider Lot and Abraham.

There was a lot of quarrelling and fighting between their two camps. Sound familiar? The solution was to purposefully and peacefully divide to separate—to move apart. They were still related. They still shared family ties. They were however now in different spheres and peace now reigned.

Back in 2006 for the 2007 LCMS convention, I and my church submitted two overtures that never saw the light of day. Oh, they were printed in the workbook<sup>39</sup> all right. They dealt with equitably dividing the Synod and were buried near the tail end [of the workbook]. You see, I can be a radical at times. Not that I want to be. Sometimes when everyone else is sitting around pointing to everyone else waiting for someone else to take action, sometimes I think to myself that someone else is me! I was skipping through an old LCMS handbook from the 80’s and this concept of dividing churches was in there—plain as day! This used to happen to churches [quite naturally]: How to divide congregations. How to split congregations. How to separate 2 groups of people so that each would on their own have the opportunity to continue to grow separately but more vigorously.

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<sup>37</sup> LW 44:112

<sup>38</sup> Joshua 24:15

<sup>39</sup> 8-69, 8-70

For those who know something about plants and particularly about hostas, you know what I am talking about here. With perennial plants, you periodically after 3-5 years have to dig them up break them up and replant them so they can continue to slowly grow, spread, and reproduce. And what do you do with the leftovers? You give them away to friends and neighbors so that they can plant them and they continue to be fruitful and multiply.

I have first hand experience with this. Seven churches have given birth to a new mission church in Fredericksburg Virginia. Seven separate bodies of Christ have taken a small part of themselves and planted them together in the Fredericksburg, Virginia area. Together they will begin to grow together, support one another, and grow stronger together. That is how God's church grows. Division is not a bad word. Schism perhaps is. Healthy division is not.

Those in the LCMS used to do it all the time. I'll give you a real world example. My wife grew up as a member of a congregation that was split off and divided from an existing and older congregation. The purpose of that division was so that they could reach out with the Gospel in a newer area of town that needed a local presence of a Lutheran church. That church has since flourished and has opened a preaching station in an adjacent town.

So where does all this leave us? You who are still members of the LCMS have some decisions to make in the next days and months. As you make fateful decisions remember this. Luther by the grace of God saw a new faithful church rise from the wayward Roman catholic church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. CFW Walther pulled together a dozen or so pastors and congregations to form the then faithfully confessional LCMS in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. And now in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century God is doing it again. Come join us that we might faithfully preach and teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ together.

Rev. James R Shaw  
October 14, 2009

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