

From Wisconsin to California: A Former ELS Pastor Walks the Talk

By Rev. William C. Mack
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After moving to southern California, my first thought was, “I have *got* to find a snow blower...Quick!” We had to sell ours before we moved from Wisconsin. “A snow blower?” you might say. “What on earth for? There’s no snow in Carlsbad, California!” Yes, I know. But over the years I had been “*trained*” by the life-threatening, *never-ending*, winter snow and ice! I wanted to prepare for the worst! I was taking no chances! Quickly, I realized that they don’t *sell* snow-blowers in southern California! Cautiously, I accepted having a snow-blower *free* garage. I *like* it!

Synods are like snow-blowers. They operate on the principal of expanding gas and they blow out hot air and useless materials. Oh yes, snow-blowers come in handy if you are “stuck” with ice and snow. But if you do not *have* any ice or snow in the first place they are useless! Historically, synods (like snow-blowers) eventually break down. Why? Because the power that comes with synodical authority always has a *corrupting* affect. Historically, synods are ineffective in dealing with the “snow and ice” of *power abuse, greed and false doctrine*. Why? Because they create their *own* problems which they are left to correct, which creates other problems....etc..

Now, imagine being in a spiritual fellowship where there is no “snow” or “ice” (bureaucratic/spiritual abuse); just the sunny “climate” of a peaceful ministry, supportive brother pastors and an organization that (truly) holds to the “old Lutheran teachings”. Every time you see a “snow blower” (a synod), or even a “snow *shovel*” (i.e., district president), you laugh; remembering how painful the public ministry *had* been in the past. Sure, you still have a few “*rainstorms*” from the flesh of the “flock”, the world and the Devil but they eventually pass...and you feel much better as you preach, teach and administer the Sacraments with no hindrance to your “shepherding”...or your *personal* life! Such can be your experience with the United Lutheran Mission Association.

I, too, was a L.C.M.S. pastor for four years; leaving that synod in January of 1984. The “snow and ice” of spiritual apathy and false practices were killing me....literally. I was having severe chest pains due to stress (according to my doctor). When I “had it out” with my liberal district president, he threatened to “throw me off” the clergy roster; all because I was upholding the traditional teachings and practices of the L.C. M.S.! Because of my youth/stupidity, I did not realize he could not nonchalantly do so. But I resigned, and shortly after, was called by an *independent* congregation in Australia. I joined the E.L.S. in 1985 and reassured them that “my doctrine and practice were ‘old Missouri’ and that my spiritual point of view could be best summed up in the “Brief Statement of 1932”. They accepted me with open arms....but that was *before* the controversy over the doctrine of Church and Ministry.

I was called to another independent Lutheran congregation in Oregon (in 1987). I would serve *three* independent, Lutheran congregations...and not only “survive” but actually *enjoy* it! One of those independent parishes was in Wisconsin where I found great joy in the outdoors; hunting and fishing. Deer, northern pike and turkeys abounded! I loved it! Eventually I pastored a congregation with synodical ties and I needed *distraction* from the pain I encountered. Yes, the “ice and snow” were *more* than physical in Wisconsin as I tried to keep my family, my synod, and my flock, from slipping into the “ice-cold” errors of *other* Lutheran bodies. The truly important work of the Spirit, through the means of grace, was being attacked more and more and I felt increasingly helpless. The joyous *distractions* were not enough.

You may not be into hunting and fishing, but perhaps friendships, the prestige of being in a large synod, synodical security (re: retirement and calls) may be the *distractions* that are keeping you from facing what is truly *keeping you* from a peaceful ministry. But the public ministry is *FAR* more important than earthly blessings; no matter *how* much we enjoy the “turkeys”!

Last year, when I saw an article by Pastor Bill Abbott in Christian News, I thought it would be good to try to get him into the E.L.S. to help us out. He was not interested. (I guess he could start to feel the “snow and ice” all over again.) And, in talking to him, I was elated to find a Lutheran group that actually esteemed the teachings of C.F.W. Walther! We instantly became friends.

U.L.M.A. was attractive, also, because I had (so to speak) “blown my shoulder out” trying to “snow blow” (i.e., correct the doctrinal abuses foisted upon us by the sacerdotalists in my own synod and by the errors of the W.E.L.S.). One group, the sacerdotalists, were insisting that ordination was a “sacrament” and that Holy Communion was not valid, or efficacious, without an ordained pastor administering it. The other group (a neighboring W.E.L.S. congregation) was practicing open communion; telling folks that “all who believe in the *real presence* of Christ in the Sacrament may commune.” Now, this last group may have irritated any Baptists, Methodists or Presbyterians that were visiting...but I’m sure that if any Roman Catholic, Episcopal or E.L.C.A. folks were there, they were “tickled pink”! Sacerdotalism and open communion also plague the L.C.M.S., I know.

To liken the grace of God in Christ to the finest food may be an over-simplification but personally having “tasted” the “fare” of the L.C.M.S, the E.L.C.A. and the W.E.L.S. (the E.L.S. is not far behind) I can assure you that the “steak and wine” of the United Lutheran Mission Association are *beyond compare*! No false doctrines or *any* false practices are tolerated, while at the same time, the emphasis is constantly made that the Gospel is the center of all that we do. *Nor is any apology* made for our belief that the Book of Concord should be accepted because it is a correct interpretation of Holy Scripture.

When a physical body is deprived of a healthy environment, healthy water and healthy food it suffers; sometimes developing cancer. My own father contracted it and,

mercifully, died in less than two months. Some people go for *years* with that disease as it slowly rots the organs and tissue inside the body. The same is true of the visible church. Spiritual “cancer” infects it! The E.L.C.A., (for example) although a relatively *new* church body, is (spiritually) “dead in the water”. The L.C.M.S. has *officially* condoned the errors of women’s suffrage, theistic evolution (in the Concordia system) and sacerdotalism (through the seminaries). Her *refusal* to discipline error and her tenacity in *punishing* faithful “shepherds” is horrendous! She is *dying* of spiritual “cancer”. No amount of tears or righteous anger can bring her back. If you know your church history, you know that no conservative, Lutheran body which has officially embraced error has *ever* gone “back” to Confessionalism. The time to *leave* your synod is now....for the sake of your family, your ministry, your flock and the honor of your God.

Last October, the “snow” (of spiritual *attack*) came early (to me). The E.L.S. and W.E.L.S. had a combined Reformation service in Madison. Over 500 people attended. It was packed! What an opportunity to show the world our wonderful Lutheran teachings and hymns! But the sermon had no objective justification in it, no reference to the Sacraments (or even to Luther!) and almost half of it was a “bridge” illustration! It was something you would hear from a Church Growth T.V. preacher! I was *greatly* disappointed. And to top it off, three of the four hymns turned out to be contemporary rubbish! (The only redeeming hymn was “A Mighty Fortress”). I was angry! So I contacted the W.E.L.S. pastor in charge of the worship service. His wife answered the phone. When she asked my reason for calling, I told her I had some problem with the selection of the hymns used for the combined Reformation service. Her response was, “Oh, (my husband) didn’t pick the hymns. I did!” As I was obviously stunned into silence, she quickly added, “Well, you need songs that really *move* people!” The Third Article had been abandoned. When I *did* speak to the pastor he “backed up” his wife. Euphoria was chosen over doctrine. How sad...

Several weeks later, I was blessed to go to the Holy Land (no, not Saint Louis,.....Israel!). I went with forty W.E.L.S. pastors and four of their wives. All went well...until we got to the Sea of Galilee. There we went on a cruise. As we headed out from the port, the captain (who professed to be a “Messianic Jew”) put on a C.D. of contemporary Christian music. He called out, “Let’s worship!” I chuckled to myself, saying, “This guy has no idea how conservative we are.” I looked around and was stunned to see two of the W.E.L.S. ladies and one W.E.L.S. *pastor* lifting up their hands in “praise and worship” with the captain. I turned to the W.E.L.S. pastor next to me and jokingly said, “So, when did the W.E.L.S. change its doctrine of fellowship?” He was not amused. Spiritual “ice” was forming on my soul and I knew I had to do *something*...because the E.L.S. was close behind them.

The “warmth” of the United Lutheran Mission Association cannot be overemphasized in a world that is growing more and more “dark” and “cold”. The spiritual shallowness of the contemporary movement and the apathy of those who are supposed to be “guarding the vineyard” is becoming more apparent.

Saint James said, “You see then that a man is justified by *works*, and not by faith *only*”. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession and the Formula of Concord correctly state that in this text James is referring to “how a Christian can identify...a true, living faith and *distinguish it* from a...dead faith”. Is *your* faith “dead” or “alive” brothers? Prove it to us.....Prove it to *yourself*.

We cannot all be called to southern California but we can all, by the power of the Holy Spirit, “dump the snow-blower” (of synod) and leave behind the fear of *not* being a part of some “mega-church” organization. Embrace the “warming” Truth of God’s Word, brothers. Save yourself, your family and your flock from the bureaucratic *wolves* that *call* themselves “pastors” but yet attack faithful shepherds. Resist the temptation to just “feed” on the “basics” of truth found in a synod. Rather, “*feast*” on the means of grace, *unhindered* by those who call themselves your “brothers” and yet attack you. “Feast” in the “sunshine” of true, peaceful, theological *freedom* in Christ.

I have been incredibly blessed these past six months working with U.L.M.A. and, especially, her pastors. I’ve been missionary-pastor to Christ the Rock Lutheran Church (in Carlsbad, CA) for a little over three months; working with faithfully committed souls who want the truth and purity of God’s Word for themselves and others. The Lord has *poured* out His blessings on us “*even though*” (as *some* would see it) we use the “good ole **T.L.H.**” and hold to the practices of the *early* Lutheran Church.

Do not get me wrong. We, in U.L.M.A., are not *perfect*...but we do have a Savior that has *declared* us to be so, in *His* eyes, through His shed blood. We have a Redeemer Who has promised to be with us always; guarding our hearts with His grace and watching over our families and our “flocks”. “*Fear not!*”, brothers. He *is* “with you always”. He *will* take care of you....Come to the “snow-blower *free*” zone; the **United Lutheran Mission Association**. May God grant it for Jesus’ sake. Amen.