

# TABLE TALK

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...these words... shall be upon your heart; you shall  
teach them... and talk of them... Deut. 6:6,7



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## A Mystical Point in Time: The Lutheran Ministerium and Synod- USA National Convention

by Rev. Mark Dankof

The National Convention of the Lutheran Ministerium and Synod-USA held at Christ Lutheran Church of Chetek, Wisconsin June 22nd-24th was a Mystical Point in Time.



Christ Lutheran, Chetek, WI

It was a glance back at recent American Lutheran history: first, a snapshot look at the inauguration of the American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC) 25 years ago in Minneapolis, MN, historically the predecessor body to the LMS-USA; second, a nostalgic nod to the launching of the LMS-USA itself in Indianapolis, IN, 17 years ago in 1995.

This year's National Gathering in

northern Wisconsin reunited 4 men tied to the earliest history of both Lutheran bodies and all now members in good standing of the Clergy Roster of the LMS-USA in 2012.

**Rev. Donald Thorson** of Chippewa Falls, a member of the Executive Committee of the American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC) a quarter of a century ago, was presented membership in the LMS-USA formally in the moving closing service of the convention; **Rev. Dr. Ralph Spears** the Presiding Pastor



Rev. Donald Thorson, Rev. Dr. Ralph Spears,  
Rev. Mark Dankoff, Rev. Dr. John Erickson

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of the LMS-USA and Pastor of St. Matthew Lutheran of Indianapolis; Rev. Mark Dankof of Immanuel Lutheran of San Antonio and a member of the LMS-USA since its inception in 1995, was acknowledged as the first Lutheran clergyman to join the AALC officially on July 10, 1987; **Rev. Dr. Emeritus John Erickson** of Christ Lutheran of Chetek, Synodical chairman of the LMS-USA..

The theme of Pastor Spears' message for the Opening Service of Holy Communion on June 23rd was "*What Do These Stones Mean?*" The text for his address was I Peter 2: 1-10, the Epistle Reading of the Day. Pastor Spears underscored **Jesus Christ as the Living Stone**, "*disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious,*" and **disciples of Christ as "lively stones. . ."** who comprise "*the spiritual house, a holy priesthood, . . . a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people. . .*" who have been "*called out of darkness into His marvelous light. . . [who] have now obtained mercy [I Peter 2, esp. verses 9-10].*"



Rev. Dr. Ralph Spears preaching at the opening service of Holy Communion.

Pastor Spears emphasized the *Living Stone* as the center of the story of Christian redemption, reconciliation, and eternal life. The *Lively Stones* are entrusted with continuing to "***Tell the Story***," of the *Living Stone*, the theme of the LMS-USA National Convention, with absolute fidelity to the inspired, inerrant Word of God of Scripture which conveys *Christ Crucified* and *Christ Risen* as **the Christ of Scripture, the Christ of History, and the Christ of Faith.**

Dr. Spears' homily set the tone and the stage for the major speakers and presenters assigned to provide instruction and ministry to those gathered at Christ Lutheran for the weekend. There were seven (7) special presentations which followed, and which covered a wealth and breadth of material for those who traveled to northern Wisconsin from around the country to hear them.

These seven presentations were Dr. Ralph Spears' thoughts on the significance and function of Liturgy; Pastor John Erickson's repristation of his observations of October 1993 in Janesville, Wisconsin on issues affecting the American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC) in the early 1990s, issues having a direct bearing on the eventual formulation of the LMS-USA in 1995; Pastor Mark Dankof of San Antonio followed with a sobering application of lessons past and present in his message entitled, "*The Famine, The Watchman, and the Remnant.*" Dr. Donald Thorson's offering was entitled, "***Inerrancy of the Scriptures: A Question of Focus? Focusing on the History of the American Association of Lutheran Churches: Seeking Relevance for the Lutheran Ministerium and Synod-USA***"; Maureen Spears-Tullis made a compelling presentation entitled, "***What Makes a Church a Church?: Mus-ing on Models, Ministries, and True***

**Meaning with Discussion.”** Pastor Jeffrey Iverson rounded out the weekend with his own personal journey and life history, tabbed as his **“Finding the LMS-USA.”**

Each presentation was compelling. In his tome on Liturgy, Dr. Spears insisted that, *“Liturgy ties together the theology and practice of a Church and acts as a barometer of its very function.”* In that regard, the longtime Pastor of St. Matthew’s Lutheran in Indianapolis shared his historical and functional perspective on worship, postulating that, *“Most liturgy can be traced to the all-important need to remember, especially in the context of a verbal tradition before the days of written history.”* Liturgy in this regard involves the remembrance of key events in the life of a people in linear history, where the prose of scribes enables the people to *“... memorize the events, rehearsing and singing the prose from memory from time immemorial.”* Eventually, Dr. Spears reminded the Convention attendees, these pieces of prose were written down by later generations, as evidenced by the Song of Deborah and the Great Passover Liturgy. The Collect for the Second Sunday of Lent, titled *“Reminisce,”* is suggestive. God commanded His people to remember - and they did.

Dr. Spears proceeded to remind his hearers that if Liturgy includes committing a proven history to memory, it must also *“... be careful with the words and phrases concerning God—and use them with great respect.”* Liturgy must avoid the **“God and I are buddies”** approach in which *“we prevail upon Him with a certain insider attitude,”* **where intimacy on God’s terms is replaced by one solely on ours.** A misplaced sense of intimacy, a false sense of *“ordering the Almighty around”* and embracing the trivial to make it more approachable, are to be avoided.

Calling upon the Name of the Lord is to be accompanied by absolute respect and care. The attitude of the Pastor in leading the Liturgy must be saturated in the latter, with balance rooted in Biblical and historical perspective assisting in the avoidance of both manipulation and trivialization of the Divine and the Holy.

Pastor John Erickson’s review of his October 1993 message in Janesville, Wisconsin, entitled **“A Problem of Identity,”** brought 25 years of AALC and LMS-USA history into play in reviewing his own observations on an identity crisis in American Lutheran theology and worship previously evidenced in the Spears lecture on Liturgy. With references to changes in the AALC between its constituting National Convention in November of 1987 in Minneapolis, and an *“infamous”* National Convention only 3 years later at Northwestern College in St. Paul, Minnesota, Pastor Erickson chronicled the erosion of Lutheran theology and practice in that situation, courtesy of the trends of much of contemporary American Evangelicalism, including the Charismatic Movement, the Health-Wealth Prosperity Gospel, the reduction in doctrinally sound preaching, the embrace of Dispensationalism and Premillennial Eschatology, the replacement of the Lutheran Chancel (altar, font, and pulpit area) as the focus of worship with the “Stage” of Evangelical Performers and Entertainers, who often substitute “success” and “numbers” for doctrinal and devotional integrity informed by the history of Liturgy and the orthodox Lutheran understanding of this history.

Pastor Mark Dankof of San Antonio followed with **“The Famine, The Watchman, and the Remnant.”** It was noted that Pastor Dankof was

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Rev. Mark Dankof presenting

literally the first Lutheran clergyman in history to be accepted onto the clergy roster of the American Association of Lutheran Churches on July 10, 1987. His congregation, St. Matthias Lutheran of Seattle, was one of the Charter Churches entered into membership on the AALC's Congregational Roster at the constituting National Convention in Minneapolis in 1987. Pastor Dankof was subsequently elected to the AALC's Board of Trustees and its Board of Higher Education in those pivotal days.

Yet within 3 years, he and his congregation were gone. Why? His presentation dealt with the reasons for the departure, based on the trends in the AALC cited by Pastor Erickson in 1993 and again in 2012. With reference to Amos 8, Habakkuk, Revelation 2:9, and Daniel's 70 Week Prophecy in Daniel 9, Pastor Dankof suggested that both the United States generally and most of American Lutheranism specifically, are being impacted by a Famine of God's Word as Ancient Israel was at the time of Jeroboam II and the prophecies of Amos. To be

a *Watchman* at such a time in history references the hardships of Habakkuk and others playing this role now for God's people in difficult and dark days. *The Confessing Church of Christ is a Remnant Gathering of the Faithful* in the midst of such darkness, with reference to the Church of Smyrna in John's Apocalypse as the model (Revelation 2:9).

Rev. Donald Thorson of Chippewa Falls gave a critical overview of the history of the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy in the strand of American Lutheranism officially committed to this position as articulated in **Thesis Number One** of the *Minneapolis Theses (1925)*, with special attention paid to the history of the American Lutheran Conference (1930) and its Member Synods; the American Lutheran Church of 1960; and finally the American Association of Lutheran Churches (1987). The wealth of data, dates, and quotations from relevant documents cited by Rev. Thorson proved invaluable for those who heard the presentation and received a written summation of his lecture. Perhaps the most cogent observation provided by the AALC's ex-Executive



Rev. Donald Thorson



Committee member was the dry martini that, **“In my view, the irony and lament of the ALC’s history is that the loftiest statement of faith [Thesis Number One of the Minneapolis Theses of 1925] did not protect an errant organization. The dominant [political] party in a group finds a way to re-interpret or circumvent what is written on paper.”**



Presenter Maureen Tullis

There were three (3) additional sessions of instruction for the faithful gathered at Christ Lutheran of Chetek. **Maureen Spears-Tullis’** session on *“What Makes a Church a Church”* explored different Church Models, including *the Church as Institution*, the *Church as Mystical Communion*, the *Church as Sacrament*, the *Church as Herald*, and the *Church as Servant*. These Models correspond to various recognizable denominational forms in the United States; each has a description of its reason for being; each has advantages and disadvantages. Two recognizable dynamics to be identified are the ***Fighting Curmudgeon Syndrome*** and the ***“I’ll Help You Change” Syndrome***. Maureen Spears-Tullis concludes that these Syndromes, and the various Church

Models, all indicate that the same goal is being pursued in different ways by all the approaches: *“... trying to convert followers or establish salvation or keep church membership alive and the church doors open—by manipulating members into becoming closer to Christ. . . .”*

An accompanying observation in the lecture was the emphasis on the **true Church** as one that is **Christ proclaiming and centered in the Word**. The dangers of a **modern church** rooted in **secularism**, and as an institution *“making Christ serve them instead of [them] serving Christ,”* was emphasized as a **warning** to the Remnant and Confessing Church in a *“Brave New World.”*

**Pastor Jeffrey Iverson** rounded out the Convention seminars with his *“Finding the LMS-USA.”* Pastor



Rev. Jeffery Iverson

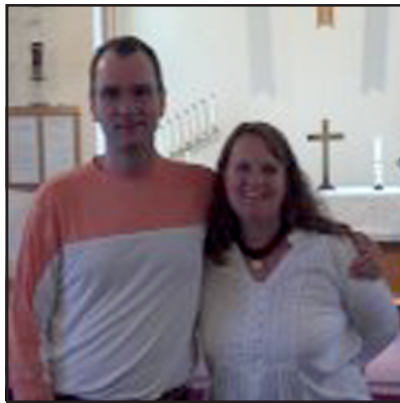
Iverson referenced all of the circumstances that led to his encounter with the Synod’s leadership in the 1990s, his personal journey in his calling prior to that time; his ordination service of June 8th, 1997 at St. Matthew’s Lutheran Church in Indian-

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(*Preachers*, continued from page 5)

apolis, presided over by Dr. Spears and where Pastor Mark Dankof offered the special day's homily; and finally with references to many trials and tribulations since, trials seemingly typical for the Christian in an increasingly post-Christian American society and secularized church.

Pastor Iverson noted that, "*Whatever the future holds for me, I know that the LMS-USA still has the treasure I was looking for back in 1997. That treasure is God's inerrant Word, His Sacraments, our Lutheran Confessions, and our traditional Liturgy. But as the Apostle Paul reminds us, '... we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but*



Arik and Tina Johnson

*not destroyed.'"* [2 Corinthians 4: 7-9] Amen.

Finally, on Sunday morning **Arik and Tina Johnson** of Madison shared the LMS-USA National Convention of their farming acreage south of Wisconsin's Capitol, designed to be used to facilitate food production to feed the needy of the inner city in the name of Jesus Christ, according to the focus of the

*Parable of the Sower*. The name of the food and Gospel proclamation ministry, based on the New Testament parable, is ***Altum Radix*** ("***Deep Roots***"). Arik has been the longtime Internet web site director of the LMS-USA *gratis in perpetuity*, and recently began the **Facebook** page [<https://www.facebook.com/LMSUSA.org>] for this Remnant gathering of the Lutheran faithful.

### Closing Service

The time and place of this convention was very special because it coincided with the 25th anniversary of the congregation of Christ Lutheran Church.

#### *A brief history of Christ Lutheran.*

In the midst of the theological upheaval of the discussions that lead to the formation of a New Lutheran Church (The ELCA) in 1988, it became clear to a number of folks in the ALC congregation in Chetek, that the most basic foundation of their church was being compromised, i.e., Holy Scripture as the divinely inspired, inerrant and infallible Word of God.

On June 3, 1987, six couples met to discuss the possibility of forming a new Lutheran Church in Chetek. One week later they met with Pastor Don Thorson of Chippewa Falls (the pastor mentioned above) to discuss their concerns with what was being proposed with regard to the "new church" as well as the new AALC Church body that was being formed. 28 people attended this meeting. Four days later several persons met and the name "Christ Lutheran Church of Chetek" was chosen. Incorporation papers were drawn up at that time. On June 20 the first church service was held with 23 adults and 5 children in attendance.

The congregation affiliated with the newly formed AALC. Things progressed rapidly. Within months they grew to where they could no longer meet in homes. The local

Christian Missionary Alliance church graciously gave them use of their facility. The building of a worship facility began in November of 1990 and the first service was held on Ash Wednesday evening, February 13, 1991.

All too soon it became evident that the affiliation with the AALC had been a mistake. To make a long story short, that affiliation was severed in 1994 and Christ Lutheran's Pastor and congregation were instrumental in the formation of the Lutheran Ministerium and Synod in 1995.

Now on the occasion of their 25th anniversary, the challenge was set before the members of Christ Lutheran and the attendees of the annual LMS Convention, "What Do These Stones Mean?"

Even as the memorial stones placed on the shore of the Jordan river were placed there to encourage the retelling of the story of Israel's passing into the promised land (including, you can be sure, all of her history, good and bad, all the way back to Abraham), so too, this anniversary celebration occasioned the telling of the story (blessings and



Rev. Dr. John Erickson, pastor of Christ Lutheran Church from July 1988, until his retirement in July of last year, was the preacher for the anniversary celebration.

struggles) of the Christ Lutheran family as well as of the LMS Synod of which she is now a part.

Rev. Dr. John Erickson was the preacher for the occasion with Mark 13:1-9 along with Joshua 4:1-9 as his text. When the children of those who passed through the Jordan asked "What do these stones mean," they were to be told "how the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord so the people could cross over." All of this... God, His people... His faithfulness, their unfaithfulness, is something God did not what his people to forget.

Very shortly, as we know, His people did forget and that forgetting had tragic results. In Judges 2:10 we are told of how after that whole generation of Joshua had died, "another generation grew up, who neither knew the Lord nor what he had done for Israel." And the result? The answer is given us in the very next verse, "Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt... [and in so doing] they provoked the Lord to anger."

Much of the Old Testament is a record of the people's experiencing God's goodness and grace and then forgetting, and as a result, experiencing suffering and loss. But then remembering once again, and in repentance and faith, being restored, only to forget once again.

What we have at Christ Lutheran, is among other things, a building... a building that can raise questions on the part of those who see it: When did this congregation form? ... and for what reason? Who and what was involved? ... who helped? And in the telling of the story once again, we can bring glory to God and rejoice in His faithfulness.

This brings us to another mention

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of stones, the stones of the temple in Jerusalem (Mark 13:1-9). A lesson we can learn from the words of our Lord on that occasion is an important lesson for the church and for us in the 21st century. Our Lord wants us to understand that the glory of a Church does not consist in its building for public worship, but in the faith and in the godliness of its members.

Secondly, there is a principle we need to keep in mind: However hard we may work to make our church beautiful, we must work hardest at keeping pure doctrine and holy practice as its principle ornament.

One further point that is important to remember as we move forward, is that we live in a day of *election*. The true church, until the return of our Lord, will be a remnant church. And if we take Scripture seriously, we will discover that it will be a *small* remnant at that. "Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matt. 7:14).

Never forget, that as individuals, as a congregation, and as a Synod, it will cost us who dare to hold to opinions such as these. It will bring upon us unkind remarks and unfavorable judgments. But the end will prove who is right and who is wrong. For that end, let us patiently wait. And as we wait, let us continue to faithfully gather around Word and Sacrament... studying, teaching, working, and praying.

Pastor Iverson said it well in the closing words of his presentation: *as the Apostle Paul reminds us, ". . . we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed."* [2 Corinthians 4: 7-9] Amen. Ω



Rev. Tylan Dalrymple, present pastor of Christ Lutheran Church, and host pastor of the 2012 LMS Conference and Convention.



The sanctuary of Christ Lutheran Church, Chetek, WI



Very special to the gathering this year was the opportunity to celebrate with LMS president Rev. Dr. Ralph Spears and his wife Sallie, their 50th wedding anniversary.



Members of the Convention Choir rehearsing for the Sunday anniversary worship service.



## Do You Know Your Church?

By Pastor Steve Grunwald

The church, the one that you have gone to for years, is it the same as when you joined and started going there or has it shifted from what it was? Or are there things going on in the greater church body that you are not even aware of that do impact you and what you believe? These are questions that we have to ask ourselves.



Now I do not mean the social part of the church, but rather the part that deals with the Word of God. Have things changed and you are not aware of it -- or are you indifferent as to what is going on, for you feel it is not your concern? That is what I am talking about and it is very important that we address the issue.

The reason that it is so important is that you and you alone are responsible for your own salvation as it is you and no one else that the Lord will ask when you appear before Him at your death. Will you say you believe in the saving grace of the Lord but you were taught wrong and did not get it right? That your pastor or priest taught you wrong which led you astray and you did nothing to correct the problem; that you let it slide or did not want to be bothered by the details of it. It is up to us to make sure we are being taught right -- we are responsible, no one else is -- so we cannot shift the blame.

As this is the case, it is up to us to check that the church is doing its job and being faithful to God. We have the same resource available to us as even the foremost theologians. That resource is the Bible, which is

the divine inspired Word of God. We are to let the Bible interpret the Bible, not social norms, changing society, or opinion, for we must always remember that the Bible is the absolute truth and not relative truth. We can only judge it by itself and not according to the world's standards or reason. It is through this absolute truth that we are set free.

The trend today is toward the social gospel, which will tell you that Jesus is love and He will find a way for all to be saved whether or not they believe in Him, that you get "points" for just being a "good person." It makes no difference about your belief about God. What we are talking about here is universal salvation and this is a man-made institution. Nowhere in the Bible does it say it is this way, but rather only through Christ can you be saved. Jesus said it numerous times; the apostles also wrote and preached that it was only through faith in Christ are we saved, yet time after time our churches tell us differently. I personally had this happen in the church I was going to for years. We had a switch in pastors and the message changed. It was more about the all-encompassing love of Jesus and

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salvation of all. It was not until later that I discovered that the synod had switched to a universal salvation from what it had been teaching, the saving grace of our Lord. This did not happen in just my church but in many churches across the world.

Here are some points that you need to look at to see if this is happening in your church. Are they undermining and weakening the belief in the Bible? Do they teach that the Gospel has been misunderstood all these years and they now have the right understanding? Do they say that all religions are equal, that Christianity is no better than the rest? Do they teach that Jesus is not the only way, that there are other ways to be saved? Do they say that a transformation of yourself by Jesus is not important, what you want to do is more important, and that all feelings and behaviors are correct? And, finally, do they say



### ***The Bible is the divine inspired Word of God***

that the Bible is just a good book to live by, that you can pick and choose what to follow from the Bible?

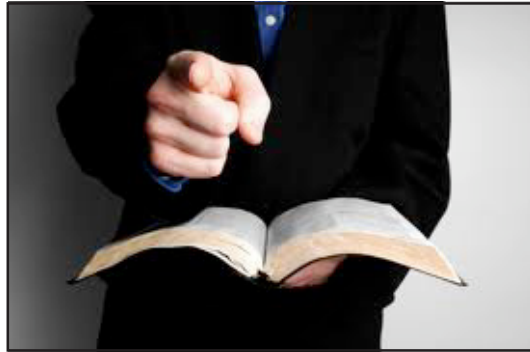
Are you hearing that the stories or, as I call them, the histories are made up and are just myths? They gloss over Genesis as a made up history taken from other cultures with their creation stories. Or do they claim that the stories are good reading but have no relation to today's world? Do they state that

the story of Christ's birth is wrong because certain things cannot be explained; that His death and resurrection are also not correct -- for how can it be, as it defies explanation and reason so therefore it also must not have happened as it was told to us? This works entirely to undermine the infallible truth of the Scriptures and make them less than what they are which is the absolute truth of our Lord.

Is the church now teaching that they have a new understanding of the Bible and everything we have been taught before is not what God meant or intended? That what we have believed for centuries since the time of Christ is wrong and only now do we truly understand what Jesus was talking about? Or that the world has changed and that what was taught is no longer important as we as a people have changed and that it no longer applies to us as we have evolved...?

Are they now teaching that all religions have value and are therefore equal? Are you being taught that their faith belief system has just as much merit as the belief in Christ as our Savior and Redeemer? That Allah and Buddha are just "other names" for God and therefore all are one in God? They just call him a different name than we do and that we must open ourselves to diversity of other cultures and belief systems and accept them as being at one with us.

Does your church teach that our God is a loving God and that He will find a way for all people to be saved and go to heaven -- whether or not they believe in Christ? That just by being a good person they can gain points and God will look the other way and not see their sin or unbelief. For our God is a kind and loving God and He could not be that cruel and hard. Are you taught



***Is your church teaching the Bible, or is it teaching what *it* wants you to believe about the Bible and what it says.***

there are many ways to be saved and Christ is just one way? Are you told it is okay to be “at one with Mother Earth” or to be with the animal world to look inward and seek the “inner peace?”

The other is transformation that you do not have to change, that you can continue to live as you always have. God wants you to be happy and if this means continuing to live the life that you have, that is okay for He is a kind and loving God and will continue to forgive your sin. So if it makes you happy, continue to do it, for God wants you to continue on in that sin and be happy.

This leads into the last statement, which is that the Bible is a good book and that is all it is -- a good book, nothing more. So if this is the case, I can just pick whatever I want to believe and follow. Time and time again I have heard that the Bible is no longer relevant -- it does have some good thoughts -- but most of them are outdated. Since it is outdated, so are some of its principles and practices and we can ignore them.

What these churches are doing is disregarding some key passages regarding who Christians are. In Romans 12:2 we are told we are no

longer of this world and no longer conform to it but rather we are transformed into Christ and are set to different standards than the world. This transformation is also talked about in other letters to the churches.

So why are we always trying to please this world and not Christ? For He is the Transformer and the Changer -- without Him everything we do is meaningless -- yet the churches leave Him out or demean His work.

So it is up to us to remain with Christ and make sure we are being led and instructed properly. The only way we can do this is to study God's Word and become intimate with Him. This will allow us to see the falsehoods and follow in Christ. Let the full transformation work in us so that we are no longer tempted to conform. Also that we bring the Word back to our churches so that absolute truth is spoken again and that all may be saved through Christ Jesus, the one and only way. Ω

Pastor Steve Grunwald pastors Cornerstone Lutheran Church, Wausau, Wis. This article was originally published in *Wisconsin Christian News*, Volume 12, Number 12, and is here used with permission of the author.

The LMS-USA is Lutheran Church body describing itself as *Biblical, Confessional, Evangelical, Liturgical and Congregational*. It is a 'Forum' in which there is an on going discussion of theological issues and concerns among clergy and lay alike. The LMS-USA meets annually for a Theological Conference and this publication, besides carrying news of the Ministerium and Synod, functions also as a vehicle for this continuing dialogue.

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