

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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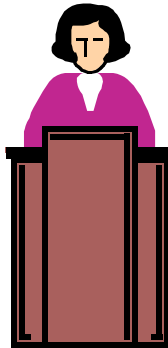
Vol. 19 No. 4

Where Are God's Blessings

By Rob Pue

Are you a Christian who has been struggling with the burdens of life and can't understand what ever happened to the promised blessings of God? Do you suffer with trials and strife and one problem after another and you can't understand why your prayers go unanswered day after day, night after night? Do you lay awake at night, unable to even pray anymore because your mind wanders from one disturbing thought to another, never settling long enough to listen to the voice of the Almighty? Has stress and anxiety become a way of life for you, so much so that you can't imagine life any other way, or see any sign of light at the end of the tunnel?

(Blessings, continued on next page)



The Ordination of Women

We have a considerable number of persons, clergy and lay, who contact the LMS each year. They have seen our web page [lmsusa.org] or they have heard of us in some other way. In most every case one of the first questions asked is, "Do you ordain women?" or "What is your position on women in the ministry?" When we answer that we do not ordain women, that is generally the end of the discussion. If they do question why, it makes no difference if mention is made that one of the reasons is Holy Scripture.

It is interesting, because if people had some understand-

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The Lutheran Ministerium and Synod unanimously welcomed into Membership in the ILC

by Rev. Dr. Ralph Spears

"The International Lutheran Council is a worldwide association of established confessional Lutheran church bodies which proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ on the basis of an unconditional commitment to the

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(Blessings, continued)

What's up with that?

What has happened to the joy and peace you, as a Christian, were promised by the preacher? Or is being a Christian really be meaningful, relevant, life-changing?

Many well meaning believers deal with all these questions and struggles. Part of it can be blamed on the way they've been taught. A lot of sincere preachers put more emphasis on the promises and grace of God, the blessings of Jesus, and His ability to save us and redeem us for eternal life, than they do on the rest of the story. They teach Part Two of the story alright. But they often neglect teaching Part One, and therein lies the problem.

Because people hear the message and say, "I want that." They want the grace of God. They also have an in-born need to be close to Him, to have a relationship with Him, just as He has a desire to draw close to each of us. The Lord made us this way, with that need for a relationship with Him. So why is our relationship so often hindered, and why do our prayers go unanswered, and why do we feel so bad?

First, we must understand, the problem lies with us, every time. God doesn't fail us or go back on His promises, or lead us into the wilderness just to laugh at us and see us fail. Yes, He often allows trials and suffering in our lives, and many times He leads us into uncharted waters to teach us something important, and many times we stumble and fail, and fall. Other times He doesn't lead us into the wilderness; we go there on our own, as we turn aside from His wisdom and guidance. In those times, we inevitably fail and fall harder and farther, often to where we come to the very end of ourselves and have literally nowhere else to turn - except back to Him, like the prodigal son. (Luke 15:11-32).

You see, if we don't learn Part One of the story on our own, in His love for

us, He will teach us this Himself - and He'll do it the only way we'll understand. He does this for us because He loves us so much, and because this is SO vital and necessary to our ultimate salvation, and to our relationship with Him. And because we can never receive the blessings His Word promises if we don't learn this lesson.

What is this lesson, this Part One of the story, that is so often neglected by preachers and teachers and well meaning leaders? Repentance. Plain, simple, good old-fashioned Repentance. The teaching of it is neglected because it's a tough pill to swallow, especially for us spoiled Americans. But the truth is, there is no conversion and no salvation without true repentance.

Here in America today, we want our cake and we want to eat it too. We want God and Jesus, and all the benefits they promise, but we don't want to be inconvenienced in any way. "Sure," you say, "I'm a Christian. But I'm not a fanatic about it." And just what IS a fanatic? "A fanatic is anyone who talks about Jesus more than I do."

Oh. Hmmm.

So in other words, you want to be a Christian and receive God's blessings in this life, and you want to "be in that number" when the saints go marching in to heaven at Christ's return. And you readily accept God's free gift of grace. But "don't mess with my comfortable lifestyle" right now. Well, that's not how it works, folks. There's no forgiveness - and no salvation - without repentance. Much has been made, recently, of the Barna studies showing that there is very little noticeable difference between professing Christians and non-believers, between church-goers and the unchurched. Divorce rates are nearly the same; financial and health problems are nearly the same, free time is spent in activities that are nearly the same. In short, there is no intelligible difference between those

who claim the name of Christ and those who do not. Is it any wonder unbelievers call us hypocrites? No longer are we salt and light. Because of our unrepentant hearts, our lives portray little attraction for the unbeliever.

So what does it mean to repent? Simply, turning from sin, and turning to God. Setting your goals on the things of Christ. It is a willful change of heart, mind and behavior.

Sometimes when one of our children does something unkind to another, we insist that they, "Say you're sorry!" The errant child obediently repeats the word, "Sorry." But they're not really sorry. Maybe sorry they got caught, but really, they just want the problem to go away, and they're probably already planning how to get back at the other kid at another time, when they won't get caught. That's not true repentance.

True repentance means being truly sorry for what you've done. You can't fake it because God sees the heart. Mere words are meaningless. Only with true sorrow and repentance can forgiveness and reconciliation take place. Only then can a life ever be changed. "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret..." (2 Cor. 7:10).

Ask any recovering alcoholic when it was that his life changed for the better. You'll find out it was when he was brought to the place that he was truly sorry for his behavior. Not when he told his wife he was sorry for the abuse. Not when he told his kids he was sorry for the neglect. Not when he told his employer he was sorry for missing work. But when he was truly sorry, deep in his soul. It takes Godly sorrow to bring repentance.

Maybe your life isn't that bad. Maybe you're not an alcoholic or an abusive husband, or a criminal. Sure, you know that "all have sinned," but you tell yourself you really haven't sinned "all that much." Maybe you're even actively involved in your church. Maybe you think you have it

"all together" for the most part. Do you really? Are you really experiencing the blessings God promises in His word? Or do you feel something is missing? Are you joyful and at peace most of the time? Or do you struggle daily with stress and anxiety and strife and just a general lack of happiness?

Are you one who says, "Yes, I'm a Christian, but I still want to go out and party on the weekends." "Yes, I'm a Christian, but I can still watch 'Desperate Housewives' because I'm under grace." "Yes, I'm a Christian but I don't have to change my bad eating habits; I can eat junk food and I don't have to exercise, it's much more comfortable here on the couch." "Yes, I'm a Christian, but a little porn on the internet won't really hurt." "Yes, I'm a Christian, but I can charge things on my credit card I can't really afford today, and pay for them later." "Yes, I'm a Christian but if I pay attention in church this weekend, I don't really have to read my Bible during the week." "Yes, I'm a Christian, but..."

What is your "but?" What is it that you're holding back from God? What do you value more than your relationship with God? Because that's what it comes down to, you know...if there is something in your life that you instinctively know is a sin, but you refuse to give it up, refuse to repent of it, the truth is, you value that more than you value God. Let's be honest.

"Yes, I'm a Christian, but I'm not a fanatic about it." Really? How's that working for you?

Unlike earthly parents, our heavenly Father doesn't demand we "Say you're sorry!" He doesn't want false confessions, and He doesn't want our empty words. Earthly parents can tell when we're not really sorry. How much more our heavenly Father sees our hearts and knows the truth.

If you are a professing Christian living a fake Christian life, it won't be a very good life. If you've not

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truly come to the place of repentance, of real Godly sorrow, your soul is going to be in turmoil. Because God is going to pursue you. And your loving Father is going to bring you to that point of true repentance, one way or another, because as you know, He's not willing that any should perish. Better yet, He really does want to bless you. He has many blessings stored up for your life. They're being held in a "trust fund." But you can't access them until you truly trust Him...enough to let go of this world and all its trappings (and traps).

Sometimes as Christians we tend to think the devil is hindering us. We jump to the conclusion that we must be doing such a good job for God that the devil doesn't like it, and he wants to derail our ministry. Yes, sometimes that happens. But before we give satan that much credit, we should re-evaluate our walk with Christ. Are we really in His will? Or are we holding on to the cares of this world? Is our faith vibrant and strong? Or are we walking with one foot in the world and one foot in the Kingdom? Is there, somewhere in our secret lives, something that we relish too much to give up? If there is, be sure that the Lord is going to root it out. And it probably won't be a pleasant process.

We get distracted from our Christian walk, and we tend to hold on to certain things because they appeal to our fleshly passions. Sure, we know that certain things, like drunkenness are sins and we avoid all that. But we need to filter everything through the light of Scripture. (Which, by the way, can't be done if we don't read it).

Today in America, gluttony has become the accepted passion of the flesh in many churches. Rarely is there a gathering at church without food being present. We host "pot lucks," or the more acceptable version, "pot blessings," but most often they tend to result in "pot bellies."

We're also so overwhelmed with our activities and responsibilities that we neglect our physical health, by neglecting exercise. That's not ok.

That's what I'm learning now, with the help of our friend, Dr. James Bowman at Alternative Health Concepts. He has been teaching me some things on health, nutrition, exercise, and stress. I'm studying materials he's shared with me, and I have a plan to give up my old life of poor diet and no exercise. It's more than a diet or weight loss program, it is a lifestyle change, a repentance of the old ways, trading the old ways for a better way. It's not going to be easy for me. It never is, giving up old, life-long habits. But it is a better way. That's another point, important to mention. God doesn't want us to repent simply because He's a big kill-joy in the sky and wants to squash all our fun. He wants to lead us and He wants us to follow Him to a better way. Repentance is trading the world's ways for God's ways. Trading apathy for passion.

"Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." (Acts 3:19).

Ahh...refreshing. Like a dip in a pool or a cold glass of ice water on a hot, sweaty day. Refreshing, renewal, regeneration...all blessings we receive when we repent.

The Bible says we must take up our cross daily and follow Him. The highway to hell is wide, with room enough for all who choose it's easy path. The road to life is narrow, and only a few ever find it. We can't really say we're taking up our cross daily if refuse to repent and give up our old ways of life. Whatever you're holding onto that hinders your soul, let it go. It will not be easy, but that's why they call it the narrow road. Just remember, they also call it the road to life! Repent and be blessed!

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ing of what it means that we hold to a high view of Scripture [i.e. we believe the "Bible to be God's Word... and as such, it is without error in all it touches, whenever and however it speaks whether in matters of faith, doctrine, history, geography, or science," (The LMS statement on the Word)], then they would understand that there is no room for discussion when it comes to a number of matters that people are making issue of in the church today. There would be no need to discuss or question issues such as abortion, homosexuality, same-sex marriage, living outside the covenant of marriage, the ordination of women, as well as a great many other issues. If one holds to a high view of Scripture and consider it to be the final authority in all matters of faith and life, then there is no need for statements or position papers on any number of issues.

As to the ordination of women, when the now president of our synod questioned this issue way back in 1970 when it first took place in the LCA, he soon found that it was never a consideration as to what Scripture might have to say on the issue. It was rather that the church might 'get on board' with the practices of the Methodists, and of course, there was concern for political correctness.

It is most interesting to note, that in the Lutheran family, there were only two synods that ordained women prior to the formation of the ELCA (the LCA and the ALC). Then with the formation of the ELCA, it was the one and only Lutheran church to ordain women. Now however, among the various reasons given as to why churches and clergy are leaving the ELCA, the ordination of women is never a reason given. The result is that we now have two new Lutheran entities also ordaining women, the LCMC and the NALC. But interestingly, the ordination of women continues only in those church bodies that can be traced back to the LCA and the ALC; to two

church bodies that, 40 years ago, were willing to compromise their stand on the Word of God. For them, the Bible is not "The Word of God," rather, the Bible, "Contains the Word of God": A very big difference with serious ramifications.

What follows is an article that gives all of us something to think about in connection with the ordination of women. Hopefully the suggested applications of this study can be of help to all.

Men, Women, and the Church

1 Timothy 2:8-15

Author: Justin Lonas

Perhaps no passage stirs frustration and controversy inside and outside the Church today as does 1 Timothy 2. In the wake of the feminist revolution of the 20th century, anything in Scripture that seems to differentiate between men and women (particularly if it places women under the leadership of men) is under constant assault from our culture. As we come to the second half of chapter 2, it is incumbent upon us to remember a few key principles in interpreting difficult or controversial passages.

In an article from an earlier series in this column on 1 Peter 3:18-22, I wrote: "When wading into the most difficult part of [a] passage, we need to bear in mind the context we've just discussed. In order to rightly interpret [these verses] we have to assume that their message follows from what [the author] has been saying throughout the book...the 'difficult passages' are often revealed to be more straightforward than we think once we have dug deeper into them and endeavored to keep them in context.

"We have to remember that every word of Scripture is where it is for a
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reason, and that none should be overlooked just because we don't understand it at first. [Also], we tend to make more of such passages than the Spirit and the human writer intended. We have to apply Occam's Razor (the principle that the simplest solution to a problem is usually the correct one) in reading these verses." Also, we would do well to "let Scripture interpret Scripture," and avoid trying to make specific passages say things that contradict the rest of the biblical record."

With that in mind, let us remember what Paul's theme has been throughout his letter to Timothy. He is urging and equipping Timothy to refute the message and overturn the influence of certain false teachers who have been wreaking havoc on the church at Ephesus since Paul left. He has just finished making the point that salvation, contrary to what the false teachers have been promulgating, is a free gift of God through Christ Jesus to all who believe.

If we read a shift in tone and focus (from the false teachers to the ordering of the church) at the beginning of chapter two without seeing how Paul's overarching message carries through, we will be prone to see his statements here as apostolic pronouncements about church polity and behavior, completely dissociated from the specific context. That is the fast-track to proof-texting and lazy exposition that leads to misunderstanding and division. Because we see Paul's "big picture", we know that his command to pray for all men isn't just a command (though it is one) but a statement of the true path of the faith against the false teachers' message.

Men and Women at Worship

After his declaration on salvation in 2:1-7, Paul addresses the attitudes and behaviors specific to men and women in regards to their public witness and worship. "There-

fore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness" (2:8-10).

It is easy, when we read the Bible, to see references to "man" or "men" as general words for humanity, particularly when it comes to commands, but this is not the case here, as Paul uses the word *andras* ("males") rather than *anthropos* ("mankind"). Paul has specific commands for the men and different ones for the women in the congregation. N.T. Wright offers a helpful insight here in suggesting that Paul wanted Christian men and women to be markedly different from their cultural gender stereotypes—the men needed to trade machismo, anger, and lust for peace and righteousness, and the women were to put away pettiness, immodesty, and vanity in favor of the beauty of the heart manifested in good works.

He urges the men to pray with "holy hands", indicating pure hearts. Their worship is marred if they have been living sinfully, using their strength and energy for their own selfish desires or other evil purposes rather than for God's work. He also commands them to come without "wrath and dissension", putting aside the divisions wrought by the false teachers in favor of the unity that submission to God's true authority brings. This is a prescription that touches men's hearts today as it did then—for men to avoid posturing and "trash talk" in order to live in peace and unity with one another requires the patient work of the Spirit in our hearts.

For the women, Paul desires them to stand apart from the culture in how they look and act. The Roman world of the first century was

marked by sexual immorality, and women of means tended to dress seductively and adorn themselves with all manner of jewelry to increase their attractiveness to men. Paul urged Christian women to reflect their submission to God by dressing modestly to avoid “advertising” for men’s sinful desires. His appeal that they adorn themselves with good works echoes Peter’s statement in 1 Peter 3:3-4: “*Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.*” He is not urging dowdiness as a virtue, but rather reminding women that true beauty flows from the heart. This, likewise, still applies poignantly today.

For both men and women, Paul’s focus is on their inner being and how the Spirit within them is reflected by their actions and appearance. Both are changed by their submission to God, and it shows in contrast with cultural expectations.

Women as Learners, not Teachers

Few would quibble with Paul’s instructions to men and women in verse 8-10, but he continues on with more commands for women that seem untethered from any corresponding directions given to men. Paul writes: “*A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet*” (2:11-12). In today’s hypersensitive culture, Christians are accused of misogyny on the basis of these two verses more than any other. As such, we are under constant pressure to define them down or avoid any attempt to exposit and apply them.

Again textual and cultural context go a long way toward helping us interpret this passage rightly. First, women of the first century were often restricted to home and social

life, and were seldom educated in any formal way. Paul’s statement here assumes that Christian women were receiving instruction in the Word through the church—that in itself was a radical departure from the culture, elevating women as God’s image-bearers and teaching them the truths of the Word. His instruction here is not to squelch women, but to guide them in holiness as they learn.

The word for “*quietly*” here refers to a quiet spirit or uncluttered heart rather than the absence of sound, and “all submission” (*pasi hypotasi*) in this verse lacks an object, which is why many translators render it as a general demeanor of “*submissiveness*”. In this light, Paul is not saying that women can never speak in church (though he does appear to prescribe that in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35) or must not do anything without the say-so of the nearest male leader, but rather urging them to worship and learn with a quiet spirit and an attitude of submission to God. Paul did not want Christian women to use their newfound learning to become busybodies or to lord their knowledge over others.

Second, we have to remember that much of the culture and economy of the city of Ephesus was based around the worship of Artemis, the goddess of virginity and fertility. The Temple of Artemis there was among the seven wonders of the ancient world. The significance of this cult to the city life there is evidenced by the riot recorded in Acts 19 (in which the mob chanted “*Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!*” for two hours) caused by the disruption to idol trade as people forsook Artemis for the Gospel of Christ. The worship of Artemis, as best we can tell from historical records, was directed by women priests and heavily involved temple prostitutes.

Paul’s firm prohibition of women from teaching and leading in the church could very well have been to

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make a clear distinction between the worship of the One True God and the prevailing religion of the city. The female leadership of the cult of Artemis stood in contrast to the larger culture in which men held power in all institutions, and Paul likely wanted to avoid being of a similarly counter-cultural leadership structure.

Third, Paul was keenly aware that some of the women in the church had been among those who were led astray by the false teachers and had been spreading their gossip and untruth throughout the body. He writes in 5:13 and 15: *“At the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention...for some have already turned aside to follow Satan.”* In 2 Timothy 3:6-7, he writes: *“For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*

In effort to protect the church from the influence of easily swayed women, Paul issued a blanket ban on women in leadership and teaching roles at Ephesus. Going around from “house to house” might also have meant from house church to house church, thus spreading the false teaching of straying leaders through the whole Christian community in Ephesus.

Adam, Eve, and Childbirth

This is the reason that Paul brings up Adam and Eve: *“For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived fell into transgression”* (2:13-14). He is appealing to Scripture to bolster his case—namely that God, through the created order, established male

leadership and that women, because of their God-given relational and emotional nature, can be more susceptible to deceit in some ways than men.

Paul is not attaching some special blame to all women for bringing sin into the world. If we look at the Genesis 3 account of the Fall, Adam is clearly culpable as well, giving Eve instructions that did not come from God (*“or touch it”* in verse 3) and blindly following her into sin. However, much as he uses Adam elsewhere in his epistles as a representative of all mankind, Paul here seems to be using Eve as a representative for all women, showing the need for Christian women to be aware of their vulnerability.

Paul closes the chapter with a puzzling statement that sets some modern women’s blood boiling: *“But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint”* (2:15). The difficulty of this verse (which actually reads closer to “a woman will be saved...”) however, is easily diffused by recognizing that Paul clearly did not intend to contradict his dozens of statements of the nature of salvation (justification by faith alone through the grace of Christ alone) in other places (even in this chapter) by adding some sort of works requirement for women. Therefore it must mean something else.

Many theologians have attempted to make this verse more palatable by saying either, 1) that this is a reference to the incarnation of Christ (i.e., women are saved through the childbirth of the Son of God), or 2) that it is a promise that faithful Christian women will be protected physically when they have children. Both of these are expositional nightmares: the first doesn’t follow from the context at all and would be the only reference to salvation coming through Christ’s incarnation (rather than His death and resurrection) anywhere

in Scripture; the second ignores the thousands upon thousands of Christian women through the centuries who have died in childbirth.

A sensible reading of this verse fits it into the context of protecting the church at Ephesus from the false teachings being spread by women with time on their hands. This verse parallels what he says in 5:14.

"Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach." In that culture, the only respectable career for a woman was as a wife and mother; and Paul is, in essence, telling the church to encourage women to ground themselves with good work to avoid the temptation to be busybodies spreading falsehood.

Application

In our day, when the Church is under pressure from within and without to forgo "old-fashioned" notions of gender roles and allow women to serve as pastors, how are we to bring Paul's words here to bear on our context? Often we rely on 2:12 as our chief proof-text for affirming a biblical model of male leadership, but the multiple cultural and contex-

God created men and women to be different and has given different roles and responsibilities to each of us.

tual factors surrounding this passage leave us open to dangerously convincing hermeneutical attacks if this is the only verse we can point to in order to make our case.

When we look at Paul's own words here, though, we see that even he was not relying merely on his apostolic authority, but he makes an appeal to Scripture to show grounds for his decision. Following his example, we have to answer our cultural critics with a comprehensive biblical approach. Paul stakes his case on the fact that God created men and women to be different and has given different roles and responsibilities to each of us. This pattern is repeated in all the passages related to church leadership in the New Testament. Women are not demeaned by being prevented from leadership any more than men are demeaned by being prevented from motherhood—God created us and equipped us, and called His work "good".

To the extent this truth makes us uncomfortable, we should examine the motivations of our hearts. Just as Paul was concerned that the Church be markedly different from the surrounding culture in his day, so should we strive to march to the drum of Scripture instead of the world. A faithful church led by godly men cuts a sharp distinction with a world system in which maleness, femaleness, and all concrete gender identities and sexual behaviors are being flattened into a morass of "whatever works". When Scripture and culture come into conflict, we side with the culture at our own peril.

Justin Lonas is editor of *Disciple Magazine*.
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What: *The 2013 LMS-USA
Conference / Convention*

When: *June 21-23, 2013*

Where: *Christ Lutheran Church,
Chetek, Wisconsin*

Holy Scriptures as the inspired and infallible Word of God and to the Lutheran Confessions contained in the Book of Concord as the true and faithful exposition of the Word of God.”

So begins the ILC Constitution and the reason that we in the Lutheran Ministerium and Synod – USA became vitally interested in its work and applied for membership, because our own intent and purpose from our humble beginnings, was and is, in the very same manner stated.

Objectives: The ILC exists for the purpose of encouraging, strengthening and promoting confessional Lutheran theology and practice centering in Jesus Christ both among member churches and throughout the world.

Confessional centrist Lutherans, we reasoned, must naturally reach out to like minded Lutherans wherever they might be. The objectives stated above, are an exact “fit” with our own. *So we rejoice in being formally welcomed into membership and fellowship at the September gathering of the International Lutheran Council in Niagara Falls, Canada, in an old Carmelite Monastery retreat center overlooking the Falls.*



Shortly before the LMS-USA was formally incorporated in 1993, the ILC was officially founded by means of these Constitutional statements. However, their history has antecedents all the way back to 1952, a few years after the formation of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). This later organization soon drifted from Scriptural principles and so this day follows the all too familiar ‘broad highway’ to destructive practices much like the largest Lutheran organization among us (the ELCA).

The ILC is not a church body nor does it carry out churchly functions. It does not intend to prescribe any course of action for its members, but rather seeks to assist and strengthen them in their confessional witness and mission. (Although it is comprised of member churches who comply carefully with the Confessions and Scriptures as stated above.)

Neither is the ILC a reactionary body by nature, however it is fully capable of making proper distinctions as it did in Convention in Korea in 2009 when the member bishops and presidents of this thirty-five member body there assembled in Soule, found it vitally important to craft a defining statement on the same sex issues and the Ministry of Word and Sacrament due to resolution put forth by the ELCA in Convention by a 66% majority in Minneapolis just a month and a half earlier to much popular worldwide publicity. This was swiftly and masterfully done on a firm Scriptural basis by the ILC delegates albeit from five different linguistic backgrounds.

All proceedings including lively worship services are translated by an able staff of interpreters into Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, German occasionally, and of course English, as needed.

We were first invited guests to the Convention in Berlin, Germany, a memorable occasion with remarkable papers on Luther by the staff of

the German seminary. This included a trip to Wittenberg and a Service in Luther's own peasant Church with a stirring address by the Bishop of Soweto, South Africa, David Tswade. The work of the S.E.L.K. – independent German Church was quite apparent and inspiring but the solid fellowship with the brothers from many lands all committed to the unaltered principles of Brother Martin Luther, I found most welcome and gratifying! And so it has been in each gathering with men who are now trusted brothers in the Faith now more palpable and real. This was indeed the “home” that we of the LMS had originally desired.



Delegates outside the retreat center

(The ILC member churches meet every three years, and the seminaries of the ILC also gather every three years also.)

As ILC members we learn first hand the plight of sister churches and their often difficult situations in Haiti, New Guinea, the North African nations, and the Philippines; the later two, under pressure from increasing Islamic influences. Just last week we heard that two warring Lutheran church groups in the Philippines were united by a decisive vote under our now good friend, Bishop James Cendernola.

Again we are delighted and pleased to be officially included on the rolls of the ILC and a greater part of the ongoing work. As the former Executive Secretary, Sam Nafzger, who served the ILC so well for eighteen years stated in his final report, "At no time since the



LMS president, The Rev. Dr. Ralph Spears (on right) with, the reelected Chairman of the ILC, Dr. Voight of the SELK Church.

Reformation has there been a greater need for the work and witness of this truly confessional body the International Lutheran Council." With Luther's own hymn we pray;

*Lord keep us steadfast in Thy Word
Curb those who fain by craft or sword
Would wrest the Kingdom from Thy Son
And set at naught all He hath done.*

*O Comforter of priceless worth
Send peace and unity on earth
Support us in our final strife
And bring us out of death to life.*

If there is interest in further information on the International Lutheran Council, you are encouraged to browse the organization's website:

<http://www.ilc-online.org>

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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For information or to make
comment write:

President/Pastor, LMS-USA
2837 East New York St.
Indianapolis, IN 46201

Internet Contact:
revralphs@sbcglobal.net

Table Talk
P. O. Box 31
Chetek, WI 54728

To: