

Convention Highlights

“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!” (Psalm 133:1, ESV)

This summer (July 29th - August 3rd) our church body, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), gathered for national convention at the Baird Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This was our church body’s 68th regular convention. The convention theme was *“We Preach Christ Crucified,”* which was based on 1 Corinthians 1:18–25. Every three years the LCMS meets in a synod-wide convention. It was aired live on the LCMS website, as well as on *YouTube*. If you didn’t have an opportunity to watch it, I wish to give you some minor highlights. If you have access to the Internet, you can view many more convention highlights at <https://reporter.lcms.org/category/convention/national-convention/> or watch the convention proceedings on *YouTube* (type “LCMS convention 2023” in the *YouTube* search box and it should take you to a link).

To start, I was surprised by the amount of unity at the convention. Obviously, there will always be disagreements at any church-wide convention. Although highly cherished, few resolution votes ever achieve unanimous approval. Nevertheless, I was impressed by the amount of consensus that was reached – especially on some of the more contested issues. Also, this past convention put to rest rumors and accusations that were floating around earlier this year that the LCMS was conceding to an anti-Biblical “woke” agenda. I would contend that the studies and resolutions at the convention indicate the exact opposite. And those who doubt this are invited to watch the convention proceedings for themselves.

Many things are discussed at a synodical convention. I won’t touch upon everything said and done at this last convention, but I’ll mention some of what I think were noteworthy outcomes. One of the more controversial issues going into the convention dealt with the Concordia University System (CUS). Three of the original ten colleges have closed in the past decade. And there have been concerns raised about some of the teaching going on at the universities. One of them, Concordia-Texas, has even declared that it is seceding from the CUS. Well, the synod in convention voted that Concordia-Texas be encouraged to repent – and that the LCMS is going to oppose any efforts to secede. It seemed clear to me that the synod is not planning on relinquishing control of this university. Also, it was resolved that LCMS leadership will have greater oversight at each university (especially over the theological teaching), and that a Lutheran identity will be maintained at each university.

Also at this convention, the LCMS officially entered into altar and pulpit fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of South Sudan/Sudan (ELCSS/S), the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland (ELMDF), the Lutheran Church of Uganda (LCU), and with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine (ELCU). Also, the Ceylon Evangelical Lutheran Church (CELC) in Sri Lanka was recognized as a self-governing, full partner church of the LCMS. The church in Ukraine is where Kipp and Tami Beaudoin had served as missionaries. The presiding bishop of this church, the Rev. Serge Maschewski, came to Milwaukee to personally address the convention. He told of the struggles they have encountered, especially in a war-torn country, and how the faithful keep trusting in Christ. He also presented LCMS President Harrison with a helmet that the LCMS had purchased for the Ukrainian church (along with other protective gear) that had saved the life of Rev. Maschewski when a convoy he was traveling in was hit. This same helmet,

which had sustained damage, also saved the earthly life of another Ukrainian Lutheran pastor afterward as well.

Numerous Lutherans overseas have been turning to the LCMS for assistance and theological guidance throughout the 21st century. Dare I say they are hungering for solid Biblical teaching (ironically as many in America are walking away from the church). The spread of false teaching has been happening overseas as it has in the US, and many Lutherans overseas are not satisfied with nor tolerant of the false theological teachings and stances taken by the Lutheran World Federation (of which the LCMS does not maintain membership). Seeking to be confessional Lutherans, many have been seeking help from the LCMS. And Rev. Maschewski was not the only Lutheran bishop from overseas to travel to Milwaukee to express gratitude for LCMS support and to confess doctrinal unity with our church body. The Rev. Dr. Juhana Pohjola, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland, and Dr. Paivi Rasanen, member of the Finnish Parliament, each addressed the convention to tell about the threats and legal actions that have been leveled against them in Finland because they refused to stop proclaiming what the Bible teaches about gender and sexuality. Like other Lutherans from overseas, they likewise wished to thank the LCMS for all its encouragement and support during their trials. The Rev. Peter Anibati Abia, bishop of the ELCSS/S, also addressed the convention and spoke of his church body's commitment to confessional Lutheran teaching and the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a dying world.

There has been (and remains) a lot of mission opportunities overseas for the LCMS. On a more sad note, after lengthy discussion that has taken place over the course of years, the LCMS voted to recognize that altar and pulpit fellowship with the Japan Lutheran Church has become broken. The reason why this fellowship became broken was because the Japan Lutheran Church has ordained two female deacons (they also are no longer restricting the pastoral office only to males), and the Japan Lutheran Church has consistently taught and practiced open communion. This is only the second time in the history of the LCMS that the synod has recognized that fellowship with another church body has been broken because of false doctrine and practice (the other instance was decades ago when altar and pulpit fellowship was broken between the LCMS and the American Lutheran Church). There was a prayer following the vote asking that the Japan Lutheran Church repent of its error with the hope that the LCMS could reestablish unity and fellowship with this church body in the future.

The LCMS has six vice-presidents. All six were reelected – Rev. Peter Lange, Rev. Benjamin Ball, Rev. Christopher Esget, Rev. Dr. John Wohlrabe, Rev. Nabil Nour, and Rev. Dr. Scott Murray. Rev. Peter Lange was reelected as First Vice-President, which is a full time position (as is the position of Synodical President). The other vice-presidents aren't employed as full time professionals – most also work as full-time parish pastors. President Matthew Harrison was reelected by a synod-wide ballot before the convention began.

Among other things resolved by convention was the reaffirmation of the LCMS position on closed communion, as well as our Biblical stand on marriage and sexuality. Also, as at past conventions, the synod's commitment to the sanctity of life from the womb to the tomb was again expressed, as was our church body's opposition to racism. Being the first national convention since the COVID pandemic, the church body encouraged in-person corporate worship (also requesting that

the Commission on Theology and Church Relations prepare a study on the Third Commandment and its application to worship today), and the synod in convention also declared that congregations & pastors are to refrain from practicing on-line communion (which had been practiced by a few within the LCMS during the pandemic).

My summary only hits the tip of the iceberg. Plenty more happened. There were reports, presentations, devotions, singing, and even Bible studies (one of which the Thursday night Bible class at St. Paul's went through this summer). People heard from committees and agencies throughout the church body and elected numerous people to boards and other positions. I encourage you to use the links above to watch and read more if you wish to find out what else happened. Being live streamed, the convention proceedings were very transparent (as they ought to be). Ask me if you need assistance accessing this information. As I said before, the margins of agreement in the voting were quite remarkable. Not all measures obviously passed, but many did. Meanwhile proper decorum and peaceful interaction were upheld. And most importantly, Christ crucified and risen was faithfully confessed. ***"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!"***

In Christ,
Pastor

Psalm Readings for September

WEEK ONE: Sunday, September 03; PSALM 67; Monday, September 04; PSALM 68:1-18; Tuesday, September 05 ; PSALM 68:19-35; Wednesday, September 06 ; PSALM 69:1-15; Thursday, September 07 ; PSALM 69:16-36; Friday, September 08 ; PSALM 70; Saturday, September 09; PSALM 71

WEEK TWO: Sunday, September 10; PSALM 72; Monday, September 11; PSALM 73; Tuesday, September 12; PSALM 74; Wednesday, September 13; PSALM 75; Thursday, September 14; PSALM 76; Friday, September 15; PSALM 77; Saturday, September 16; PSALM 78:1-37

WEEK THREE: Sunday, September 17; PSALM 78:38-72; Monday, September 18; PSALM 79; Tuesday, September 19; PSALM 80; Wednesday, September 20; PSALM 81; Thursday, September 21; PSALM 82; Friday, September 22; PSALM 83; Saturday, September 23; PSALM 84

WEEK FOUR: Sunday, September 24; PSALM 85; Monday, September 25; PSALM 86; Tuesday, September 26; PSALM 87; Wednesday, September 27; PSALM 88; Thursday, September 28; PSALM 89:1-19; Friday, September 29; PSALM 89:20-37; Saturday, September 30; PSALM 89:38-52

