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2 **RESOLUTION 02-04-21a**

3 **RE: Overture 02-04-21**

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5 **SUBJECT: TO CREATE TRUE SYNOD-WIDE DIALOGUE AND STUDY WITH**
6 **RESPECT TO CONTROVERTED MATTERS**

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8 **Preamble**

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10 In the Preamble to the Constitution of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), two
11 reasons are given “for the Forming of a Synodical Union”: “1. The example of the apostolic
12 church. Acts 15:1-31” and “2. Our Lord’s will that the diversities of the gifts should be for the
13 common profit. 1 Cor. 12:4-31.” Clearly, the framers of the Synod’s Constitution were
14 convinced that unhindered, open discussion of controverted matters, leading to God-pleasing
15 consensus is an important basis for the existence of our church body. Further, they recognized
16 that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to his people in diverse ways. Those diverse gifts are good for the
17 church! Yet, such differences in giftedness may themselves lead to differences in perspectives in
18 issues facing the church, necessitating the process recounted in Acts 15:1-31.

19
20 *A reading of Acts 15:1-31.*

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22 An analysis of the relative recent history of the LCMS shows at least three examples of the
23 Synod engaging processes of discussion and consensus-building around controverted matters that
24 proved wholesome to our life together in the LCMS. In 1991, the LCMS Commission on
25 Theology and Church Relations produced a document entitled “Inter-Christian Relationships: An
26 Instrument for Study,” which sought widespread discussion of the concepts contained therein
27 and provided forms for feedback to the Commission as it continued to consider the topic. In
28 2009, prior to the 2010 convention of the Synod where significant structural changes would be
29 considered, the task force responsible to report to the convention held regional conferences
30 where the concepts could be introduced, questions asked, the merit of the proposals be discussed,
31 and feedback given to the task force prior to proposals being set before a Synod convention. In
32 the early years of the past decade, the *koinonia* project strove to gather pastors around
33 theological issues for the purpose of discussion and agreement. In each case, members of the
34 Synod were given ability to discuss matters of importance and potential controversy in an
35 unfettered, non-threatening environment where no final decisions were being made. In many
36 cases, this environment fostered greater understanding among participants and often greater
37 consensus among them.

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39 The reason for processes like these does not escape congregational leaders, ordained or lay.
40 When, for instance, a church desires to embark on a building program, surveys are completed,
41 forums are held, plans are floated and discussed, all in an attempt to build widespread consensus
42 around the program before a vote is cast to begin the project. This sort of collaborative, collegial
43 process is necessary to elicit broad-based support for the project from the congregation. No
44 leader wants a project like this, or a vote of any significance for that matter, to be adopted by a
45 slim majority. Strong super-majorities are required to prevent unnecessary division that could
46 seriously impede the congregation’s mission.

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48 So it is with the LCMS. Resolutions dealing with controverted issues that are not agreed to by
49 large super majorities of members of synod are divisive. They prevent us from “walking
50 together”—the very definition of a “synod.” Whichever side loses the vote may well be
51 convinced that they have not been heard and that the resolution is being foisted upon them,
52 potentially filling the constituents of that perspective with resentment and resistance. This
53 resolution puts forward a process whereby members of the Synod can be involved in “much
54 discussion” (Acts 15:7) of controverted matters. This discussion is designed to occur prior to
55 those issues coming to a national convention, where historically relatively few individuals have
56 the opportunity to debate the issue for relatively short (and sometimes non-existent) periods of
57 time. Its objective is to help the Synod walk together in greater consensus and unity.
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60 WHEREAS, the witness of Scripture and the early Christian Church was that “after there
61 was much debate” (Acts 15:7) on the controverted matter regarding the circumcision of Gentile
62 converts a decision was made; and
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64 WHEREAS, divergent views on a matter can both seek to faithfully draw upon Scripture
65 and the Lutheran Confessions; and
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67 WHEREAS, The LCMS has historically recognized the need for collegial debate,
68 collaborative decision-making, and consensus building, enshrining “The example of the apostolic
69 church. Acts 15:1-31” in the Preamble of its Constitution and by adopting a process whereby
70 those principles may be observed with respect to the adoption of doctrinal statements in Bylaw
71 1.6.2.b, and
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73 WHEREAS, the LCMS in Bylaw 1.6.2 speaks about “*seeking to clarify its witness or to*
74 *settle doctrinal controversy, so that all who seek to participate in the relationships that exist*
75 *within and through the Synod may benefit and may act to benefit others,”* and thereby offers the
76 possibilities of doctrinal resolutions and doctrinal statements; and
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78 WHEREAS, Bylaw 1.6.2.b.2, with respect to doctrinal statements, calls for a process that
79 allows for “study and suggestions” for as much as a year on such “controverted matters”; and
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81 WHEREAS, resolutions voted on at conventions of synod , including doctrinal
82 resolutions, do not inherently allow for debate or discussion that is described in Acts 15:7 as
83 Πολλῆς – much, multitudinous, plenteous, numerous, a great amount – but instead are
84 sometimes voted on with little or no debate, even on both significant and controverted matters;
85 and
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87 WHEREAS, the LCMS in Bylaw 3.10.1.4 indicates that “The Council of Presidents shall
88 carry out such assignments as the Synod in convention may give to the council from time to
89 time.” therefore be it
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91 *Resolved*, that the Council of Presidents (COP) identify controverted matters as those
92 matters that do not have a 2/3 majority consensus of the COP as determined through a vote on

93 particular subjects brought up for discussion by any member of the Council in their meetings;
94 and be it further

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96 *Resolved*, that such matters that do not produce this 2/3 majority of votes within the
97 Council of Presidents for any particular taken position would be placed into a synod-wide
98 process agreed upon by a 2/3 vote of the COP of not less than a year that allows for fraternal
99 discussion and edification with respect to the controverted matter; and be it further

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101 *Resolved*, that this process would involve discussion face to face, preferably in person or,
102 if necessary through electronic means, between leaders that reflect the divergent and diverse
103 positions recognized by the Council of Presidents' vote on the matter; and be it further

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105 *Resolved*, that these leaders produce a joint document which clearly states points of
106 agreement as well as any unresolved matters along with the Scriptural and Confessional rationale
107 for each position, presented in a manner that allows for appropriate theological reflection and
108 study; and be it further

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110 *Resolved* that this joint document be disseminated throughout the Synod to the
111 congregations, pastors, church workers, and people of the Synod for reflection and study; and be
112 it further

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114 *Resolved*, That the congregations, pastors, church workers, and people of the Synod have
115 fraternal discussion using this document through a process agreed upon by a 2/3 vote of the
116 COP; and be it further

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118 *Resolved*, that after such processes any doctrinal resolution, doctrinal statement,
119 Constitutional or By-law revision, or any action that relates directly or indirectly to the
120 controverted matter should be considered by the Synod in Convention, provided that such
121 proposed action is in accordance with the process established by the COP; and be it finally

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123 *Resolved*, That the Texas District in convention memorialize the Synod in convention
124 with this resolution.

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