

Texas Shows the Way Forward to Build Trust, Collegiality and a Bright Future for the LCMS

REV. JOHN DAVIS, SENIOR PASTOR
MEMORIAL LUTHERAN CHURCH, KATY, TX

I am a huge baseball fan, and as the season is winding down, the eagerness of the playoffs replaces the tedium of the 162-game regular season. But not for every team. For many teams, the end of the regular season also means making tough decisions-- who to say good-bye to and who to welcome come next year. It is a time to shift the focus from past glories and current struggles to a bright and hopeful future.

Baseball teams are not the only ones who are challenged to take such steps. The same can also be said for the Church and in particular, the LCMS. That is why I am so encouraged by the actions of the Texas District in convention last year. The pastors and congregational leaders of Texas gathered in San Marcos, Texas, and with the pandemic in sharp decline at that time, were able to enjoy a robust attendance of delegates and guests. More importantly, they made some bold steps to shift the focus from past glories and current struggles to a bright and hopeful future for the LCMS.

Pathways to True Dialogue

Highlighting these steps were the adoption of resolutions that set forth pathways for true dialogue and discussion between individuals from disparate points of view. After much discussion Resolution 02-04-21a, ["To create true synod-wide dialogue and study with respect to controverted matters,"](#) was adopted. This resolution calls for the Council of Presidents (COP) to identify controverted matters of any type in our Synod, as those that don't have a 2/3 majority consensus, and then place such matters in a process (agreed upon by 2/3 of the COP) of not less than a year that allows for fraternal discussion and edification. Further the process calls for face to face discussion, preferably in person, or through electronic means.

The hoped-for result of the process would be a joint document that would state points of agreement as well as any unresolved matters along with the Scriptural and Confessional rationale for each position, presented in a manner that allows for appropriate theological reflection and study by the congregations, pastors, church workers, and the people of the Synod, and then *after* such a process any appropriate actions be brought forward to the Synod in Convention.

Conversation and Consensus Is Our History

This resolution is a hearkening back to our early Lutheran fathers who had much discussion leading up to the Book of Concord and who presented their positions, clearly stating agreement and disagreement. More importantly it is a pathway to heal long-held divisions in our Synod and build trust among brothers and sisters in Christ who are all genuinely seeking to be faithful to the Scriptures, the Confessions, and the *Missio Dei*. It is a small step toward a bright and hopeful future for the LCMS.

An Example of the Fruit of Respect and Dialogue

The delegates of Texas also approved **by over 73%** a similar resolution, putting such a process in place for the controverted matter of celebrating communion in homes during on-line worship.

Resolution 02-05-21a not only encouraged the same spirit and process of the preceding resolution, but actually put it into practice. The convention adopted the following amendment that will help build trust between congregations and pastors by resolving *“that congregations be encouraged to refrain from the practice of the Lord’s Supper in the home during online worship until fraternal dialogue is complete and unity is reached.”*

The amendment passed by a similar percentage and modeled the fraternal spirit that the resolution was seeking, as delegates, working with President Michael Newman (*and his fine leadership!*) sought common ground for an appropriate amendment. You can see the video for yourselves at the following link <https://youtu.be/npb2QUufuwA?t=979> from minute 16:40. It is encouraging that this spirit was mirrored in discussions among the COP on this subject as well as others.

In the debate, Pastor Christopher Hull’s convention speech from the floor shows what a spirit of collegiality can do. “I believe changing this amendment is in the spirit of what we’ve been talking about yesterday and today – the fraternal dialogue. I could have easily said, ‘No, I don’t want to change it. I’m going to stomp my feet and have my way and the leave if we don’t play nice together.’ But I believe this is proper. We need to discuss it. We need to walk in humility with each other and understand that all of us are under the same Scriptures and Confessions together. So, I’m looking forward to the discussion. I’m looking forward to the dialogue and I’m glad it’s already started. It’s fun times.”

We Need to Talk More About 7-03

Lastly the delegates encouraged similar Synod-wide conversation on a very significant item that has received very little attention throughout the church. It is an item that very few people are aware of that significantly changes the relationship between the Synod and our Concordia Universities. The matter is the Concordia University System (CUS) Governance Model Proposal put forth by the LCMS 2019 Resolution 7-03 Committee. In Tampa, in 2019, the LCMS convention adopted [Resolution 7-03](#) *[“To direct a collaborative process to propose a new governance plan with respect to university education.”](#)*

The Task Force proposal is essentially [27 pages of bylaw changes](#) that dissolves the CUS and replaces it with a Commission on Higher Education. No longer will universities be agencies of Synod, but instead will be affiliates who must undergo new theological accreditation based on new Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcome Standards (LIMOS).

The goal of this is to try to separate the right-hand kingdom activities from the left-hand activities. However, a survey of the LIMOS and the bylaw changes themselves reveal that such a separation is really not so clear or clean and puts a significant burden on both universities and the commission alike.

The proposal also increases the Synod’s control in the nomination, selection, and continued service of regents, which could potentially increase Synod liabilities rather than decrease them.

Fundamentally, the proposal changes the idea of the universities being “our universities” and the long-held partnership we have enjoyed to what appears to be a less collegial, and even a potentially adversarial relationship.

Affirmations, Concerns and Questions about 7-03

With respect to Synod’s 7-03 proposal, by a 70% majority, the Texas District delegates did two things when they passed [Resolution-02-07a: “To Provide Comment to the LCSM 2019 Res. 7-03 Committee Concerning the CUS Governance Model Proposal.”](#)

First, they provided feedback that the committee sought. *(Unfortunately, most of our congregations, pastors, and people were not aware of this request as it was quietly asked for in a Reporter article. The request came in February 2021, with the end of September 2021 being the deadline for feedback—long before the majority of district conventions).* The delegates’ feedback was even-handed and fair, providing both affirmations and concerns, as well as some important questions.

Second, consistent with the spirit of the convention, they asked for true Synod-wide conversation on a matter of such importance, utilizing a model similar to the Synod-wide workshops and discussions in connection with the *Blue Ribbon Task Force and Synod Structure and Governance* in 2010. The hope is to have such dialogue well *before* the 2023 Synod convention. We should all be grateful for their work making us aware of such dramatic changes to our Concordias and their encouragement of having a truly “collaborative process” delegates to the 2019 Synod convention asked for in the very title of [Resolution 7-03](#).

While conventions might not have the same level of excitement as a baseball game (although I know some who would say they’re about the same 😊), the Texas District Convention provided something more. In both their actions and their decisions, they have shown our Synod the way forward to build trust, collegiality, and a bright and hopeful future for the LCMS.