



A Statement of Concord Based on the Small Catechism

**The Koinonia Project 2.0
Minnesota South District – LCMS
2017**

Introduction

“A Statement of Concord” summarizes the work of six resource theologians and the conversations of pastors, commissioned workers, and lay people around the MN South District of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. It is the product of the Koinonia Project 2.0, a project designed to create stronger concord in doctrine and practice among our pastors, workers, and congregations.

On February 18, 2017, a colloquium was held at six different locations in the district, each focusing on one of the six chief parts of the Luther’s Small Catechism. At each colloquium a resource theologian presented a brief paper one of the chief parts of the Catechism. Then participants broke into working groups to address these questions: On the basis of this chief part, what do we affirm together, what do we reject, and where do we see a need for further conversation? A large group discussion followed.

On March 25, 2017, the resource theologians met to summarize what they heard from participants and developed the format for “A Statement of Concord.” In addition to summarizing participants’ responses to the above questions, they decided to add a section which makes practical application of the affirmations. That section is titled, “Our Faith in Practice.”

On May 6, 2017, a plenary session of pastors, commissioned workers, and lay people gathered for a public reading of “A Statement of Concord” and further discussion.

Our thanks to the following who served as resource theologians for the project: Rev. James Vehling (Ten Commandments); Rev. Dr. David Lumpp (Apostles Creed); Rev. Dr. Mark Shuler (Lord’s Prayer); Rev. Dr. Thomas Trapp (Baptism); Rev. Dr. Armand Boehme (Office of the Keys & Confession); and Rev. Steven Briel (Lord’s Supper). Their insights brought depth and clarity to our conversations.

Thanks as well to those who served as leaders at each of the sites. They were Rev. Wayne Bernau; Rev. Dr. Bob Gehrke; Rev. David Mumme; Rev. Bob Schulze; Rev. Harold Storm; and Rev. Dr. Lucas Woodford. Congregations hosting a colloquium were Immanuel, Lakefield; South Shore Trinity, White Bear Lake; Messiah, Lakeville; Trinity, Janesville; Trinity, Waconia; and Trinity, Rochester. We’re grateful for their generous hospitality. Several small group facilitators guided participants through the Koinonia conversations. Our thanks to them!

It is hoped that this document fosters confidence in the growing concord and harmony we have within our district. Clearly more conversations are necessary, but we are learning how to speak the truth in love with one another. At this time we see no broader use of “A Statement of Concord” beyond our own district; however, we invite its use by anyone seeking to understand more fully the implications of the Small Catechism for building greater concord in the church.

Especially in this 500th anniversary year of the Reformation, we’re grateful that pastors, commissioned workers, and laypeople in the Minnesota South District had the opportunity to do theology and celebrate what we believe, teach, and confess, and practice together.

Dean Nadasdy, President
Minnesota South District – LCMS

The Ten Commandments

Preface

We are living in a culture in which moral relativism (which means that a transcendent absolute moral foundation does not exist) and moral pluralism (which implies that multiple “absolute” moral foundations coexist and compete) increasingly prevail. The Creator’s plan for human society, both as “written upon the heart of every human creature” as well as revealed in His Word, is either largely disregarded or blatantly rejected. It is reminiscent of what occurred in ancient Israel during the time of the judges: “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” [Judges 17:5].

Even within the church the Ten Commandments, which prescribe how people ought to live in relationship to God and with one another, seem to have lost their relevance. Because of misuse and disuse, the role of the Ten Commandments within the Christian community has been diminished to the point where they no longer are taken seriously by all who call themselves Christians.

Taking into consideration the current situation in both church and society, it is important for us to rededicate ourselves to understanding and teaching how the Law of God relates to His plan of salvation and the message of the Gospel.

This We Believe, Teach, and Confess

Based on the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions, especially Luther’s Small Catechism, we joyfully affirm the following:

1. The Law of God, first written on the heart of every human being and then reiterated and clarified on Mount Sinai on tablets of stone as the “Ten Words”, applies to all people. We reject the idea that the Law of God applies only to those of a certain religion, culture, or time.
2. Because natural law has been corrupted and distorted by sin, it is no longer a complete or reliable depiction of God’s will for humanity. We reject the understanding that an absolute standard of behavior can be discovered by reason alone.
3. The Ten Commandments, as they reflect and clarify natural law (moral law), are absolute and objective. We reject that the impression that the Commandments are only suggestions which can be adapted to societal trends and open to individualistic interpretations.
4. The main purpose of the Law is to expose sin and to reveal the need for a Savior (“The Law always accuses”). We reject the position that a person is saved by keeping the Law, i.e., that one earns heaven by obeying the Ten Commandments
5. The Ten Commandments provide the Christian with a blueprint for a God-pleasing life (Third Use), in that having been redeemed by God through Jesus’ atoning sacrifice, the believer is called to respond in holy living. We reject antinomianism, which posits that, since Jesus “fulfilled” the Law, people may live as they see fit.
6. Faith is the key to obeying the Ten Commandments; it is about trusting God “above all things”. We reject the teaching that one can earn God’s favor through self-centered resolve or effort (good works).

7. Only the proclamation of the Gospel, not the pronouncement of the Law, is able to change hearts into alignment with God's plan for human life. We reject the stance that the church should petition civil authorities to legislate the principles of the Ten Commandments with the aim of changing hearts.
8. The Law does not restrict us as followers but instead liberates us, so that we can experience life as God meant for us to do. We reject the notion that for one liberated by the Gospel (a saint) the Law becomes a burden or a threat to freedom.
9. The Law of God often conflicts with the mores and laws of society and keeping the Law often involves suffering, in that society rejects its tenets. We reject the idea that by keeping the Law the life of a Christian will be easy and without struggles.
10. The church must interpret the Law as revealed in the Old Testament in light of the teachings of Jesus, the ultimate law-giver and interpreter. We reject the assumption that the Old Testament is "Law" (represented by Moses) and the New Testament is "Gospel" (represented by Jesus).

Toward Greater Concord

We believe our churches would benefit from further mutual conversation on the following questions:

1. How can we, as did Luther, better focus on the spirit rather than the letter of the Law?
2. How can we as followers of Jesus view each commandment not so much as a directive to shape up but as an exhortation to reflect in one's daily life the will of God as exemplified by Jesus (Third Use of the Law)?
3. What are ways in which we can relate to the non-Christian society around us by focusing on natural law ("written on the hearts") which is common to all human beings?
4. What can we do to seek unity in practice with regard to the 6th Commandment?

Our Faith in Practice

As we live out our various callings in the church and the world, our affirmations of faith suggest the following actions or practices:

1. We will teach the Ten Commandments to children and all those new to the faith.
2. We will continually endeavor to properly apply (distinguish between) Law and Gospel in our preaching and teaching.
3. We will help one another understand the real meaning of Christian love (agape) and how to relate it to the numerous moral issues facing us at home and church and in our communities.
4. We will emphasize not only the negative aspects of the Law and but also help people see the positive thrust of the Commandments (Third Use of the Law).
5. We will effectively use the Law, especially natural law, as a way to engage people who reject God and His word as valid and normative. Since every culture, every society, every religion has a moral code that reflects the Golden Rule, beginning with a consensus that some things are right and some wrong, a Christian can enter into a dialogue about the reason why this is the case.

The Apostles' Creed

Preface

The Apostles' Creed is the baptismal creed of the church catholic. As Martin Luther has explained it in his Small and Large Catechisms, it is the most popular and central statement of the Trinitarian and evangelical faith, which Lutheran Christians have always believed, taught, and confessed—personally and collectively. As the baptismal creed, it defines the most important dimension of a Christian's identity. By God's grace, there is enormous concord among us concerning the affirmations made by the Creed itself as well as by Luther's shorter and longer explanations.

This We Believe, Teach, and Confess

Based on the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions, especially Luther's Small Catechism, we joyfully affirm the following:

1. The Apostles' Creed states the essentials of the Christian faith, present and past, to which all Lutheran Christians are committed; as such, it is a fundamental norm of our proclamation and teaching.
2. In the context of Luther's catechisms, confession of the Apostles' Creed is an important fulfillment of the First Commandment.
3. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—three distinct persons in one divine essence—is the revealed, Trinitarian divine name. We reject any and all substitutions for the Trinitarian divine name revealed in the Word of God.
4. This triune God has created everything that exists, most especially human beings in God's image, by his Word and without any preexisting materials. We reject any position that compromises the creative activity of God or the special character of human beings as having been directly and specially created by the triune God.
5. God's creation of human beings includes the good gift of reason, through which human beings seek to understand the works and word of God, and to serve the needs of one's neighbor, understood as those who need our care.
6. The God who has created human beings and the world we inhabit remains active, continuing to preserve his creation and protect us from harm and evil.
7. By unfolding the personal and relational dimensions of God as "Father," Luther invites us to understand fatherhood in terms of the goodness of God, not in terms of the possible shortcomings of some human fathers.
8. The Creed, most especially in the Second Article, states the core of the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ. We reject any claim that there is salvation apart from the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who alone is the way, the truth, and the life. We also reject any understanding of the gospel beyond or other than that revealed in the Scriptures and confessed in this Creed, namely, that God forgives sins by grace for the sake of Jesus Christ.
9. Jesus Christ is completely God and completely a human being; that is, from the moment of his conception by the Holy Spirit to all eternity, he exists in two distinct natures in one unified person.

10. In the Creed as Luther explains it, this gospel focuses on Jesus as “Lord,” that is, as the one who redeems us from our bondage to sin, as well as on Jesus as the one who conquers sin, death, and the power of the devil.
11. The risen and ascended Christ’s position at the right hand of God refers to the present exercise of his kingly rule.
12. The Holy Spirit calls through the gospel, enlightens with his gifts, makes holy, and preserves his children in the faith. We reject that Christian faith is a matter of intellectual attainment, human volition, personal decision, or cooperation; much less is it an achievement or a reward for human works of any kind.
13. The Holy Spirit’s work of sanctification takes place in the context of the church, and the presence of the means of grace are the marks or signs of the church.
14. The outcome and consummation of gospel is the resurrection of the body and eternal life with the triune God.
15. As a statement of Gospel, the contents of the Creed strengthen believers in their daily lives, witness, and worship.
16. Confessing the faith is an opportunity God gives to his children, as a consequence of the faith worked by the Holy Spirit through the gospel; and this confessing of the faith also serves as a contemporary witness to this gospel.

Toward Greater Concord

We believe our churches would benefit from further mutual conversation on the following questions:

1. How might the contents of this creed be communicated better to a generation and to constituencies no longer familiar with it?
2. How might this creed be restored to its traditional place as providing a common theological confession—and language—for God’s people?
3. How might we best realize the unifying, catholic dimension of this Creed?

Our Faith in Practice

As we live out our various callings in the church and the world, our affirmations of faith suggest the following actions or practices:

1. Our families, worshiping congregations, and schools should be proactive and intentional about teaching the language and the doctrinal content of this creed, the knowledge of which can no longer be assumed.
2. To this end, our educational ministries should communicate this creed with the help of all suitable contemporary media.
3. The contemporary church should be vigilant in the face of any and all efforts to displace the language or the content of this creed, inasmuch as such substitutions are theologically injurious and effectively destroy both the evangelical and catholic dimensions of the historical Apostles’ Creed.

The Lord's Prayer

Preface

(In part from Charles Arand, "The Battle Cry of Faith: The Catechisms' Exposition of the Lord's Prayer," *Concordia Journal* [1995]: 42-65)

In discussing the Lord's Prayer, Martin Luther identified God's command and promise as the basic starting point for all prayers. Both were contained within the opening address, "Our Father who art in heaven." In his exposition of the Sermon on the Mount (1532), Luther explains that, with the words 'Our Father,' God "warns us to remember both his command and [his] promise" (LW 21:146). The promise is clearly stated in the Catechism, "God tenderly invites us to believe...." Both command and promise are picked up in Luther's explanation of the "Amen" to the Lord's Prayer. There he states that our Father "himself has commanded us to pray in this way and has promised to hear us." For Luther, Christian prayer begins not with us, but with God.

So, for what should we pray? We pray for what we need. What do we need? Again, Luther turns to the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer shows that God is so concerned for our needs that He not only promises to hear our prayer, He takes the initiative and puts the very words into our mouths that we are to pray (LC III.22). This alone makes the Lord's Prayer far superior to any prayer that we might devise for ourselves (LC III.23).

This We Believe, Teach, and Confess

Based on the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions, especially Luther's Small Catechism, we joyfully affirm the following:

1. We affirm that the Lord's Prayer is a cherished prayer and remains significant today. We reject the mindless recitation of the Lord's Prayer.
2. We affirm the use of the Lord's Prayer as an expression of the unity we have in baptism. We reject praying publicly with those outside of Christ; for outside of Christ we cannot call upon God as our Father.
3. We affirm that prayer is our response and duty for what God has first done for us. We reject claims that prayer is an action drawing us closer to God or making us holier.
4. We affirm that prayer heightens our subjective perception of our relationship as children of God by shifting our focus to the things of God. Our prayer is a response to the Word of God. We reject suggestions that prayer is a means of grace or a source of direct revelation (SA-III VIII 3–13; LC II 34–62; FC Ep II 13).
5. We affirm that Jesus has revealed God to us as "our Father." We reject calling God "Mother" or "Parent" when the Lord's Prayer is recited.
6. We affirm that our Father, because He is our Father, wants to hear our prayer.
7. We esteem God's name as holy. We reject considering ourselves more highly than God, and using His name casually.
8. We affirm that God's reign is from eternity. We believe His word and pray for His redeeming work to be done in and through us, in all aspects of our lives. We reject assertions that Jesus will establish an earthly kingdom (millennialism, dispensationalism), or that the Church must do so (social gospel).

9. We affirm in view of the cross of Christ that God's will is a good and gracious will. We reject prayer that seeks to manipulate God to do our will.
10. We affirm that we become aware of the needs of others and how we address those needs as we pray for daily bread.
11. We affirm that, since we have received grace, we can live graciously with one another.
12. We affirm that evil exists and that the devil is real. We pray God will guide us away from evil and temptation.

Toward Greater Concord

We believe our churches would benefit from further mutual conversation on the following questions:

1. How shall we pray with others in an increasingly diverse and multi-religious society? *Some members of our congregations have familial contacts with members of the Wisconsin Synod and are confused by their fellowship principles. Others interact in multicultural and multi-religious circumstances and wonder how to pray faithfully in such contexts.*
2. Does God hear the prayers of those outside of the Christian community? *The tension is between the Christocentric nature of prayer as Jesus taught us on the one hand and the omniscience of God on the other, complicated by disagreement on the definition of the word "hear" in the question.*

Our Faith in Practice

As we live out our various callings in the church and the world, our affirmations of faith suggest the following actions or practices:

1. We will regularly and specifically pray the Lord's Prayer in our Sunday assemblies, in our church gatherings, in our workplaces and schools, and in our homes.
2. We will shape our public prayers using the paradigm of the Lord's Prayer with attention to the phrase "our Father."
3. We will use the Lord's Prayer as a model when teaching people to pray and pledge ourselves to conduct formal training sessions in prayer with all members of the congregation in the next triennium.
4. We will always invite other Christians to pray the Lord's Prayer with us.
5. As we pray the Our Father, we will wrestle seriously with the broken nature of families in contemporary society (not to mention all the "new forms" of family) and how the accompanying changes and losses impinge on our teaching of and use of the Our Father. We will take these challenges seriously and approach them in a winsome way, so that people might hear the Gospel.
6. We will develop guides for and instruction in the practice of prayer in multi-religious contexts. We will seek to balance faithfulness with graciousness and generosity as pastors and people navigate new and unanticipated circumstances.
7. We pledge that, when our last hour comes, we will embrace that upward call with one last "our Father" in our heart and on the lips of those who surround us.

Holy Baptism

Preface

By the power of the living and abiding word of God (1 Pet. 1:23), spoken as water (in any amount) is applied, God uses Holy Baptism to deliver the blessings of Christ's salvation individually (John 3:16). The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, one God, gives eternal peace. Lutheran Christians recognize that justification is given (Rom. 3:26; 5:16); each believer is equipped for sanctified living (Rom. 6:17: "obedient from the heart"). Christians look upward to thank and praise and outward to love with God's forgiving love (John 15:16: "fruit that lasts"), in spite of resistance to the Gospel. Baptism's crowning moment will be life eternal in God's presence (John 14:1-6).

This We Believe, Teach, and Confess

Based on the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions, especially Luther's Small Catechism, we joyfully affirm the following:

1. Holy Baptism is *instituted* by and *administered* in the name of the Triune God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:16-20). Other formulas and phraseology are improper.
2. Holy Baptism is a *divine action*. The Holy Spirit (John 3:5: lit.: "unless one has been born of water and Spirit") undoes the spiritual (and physical) death of Adam and his progeny (Gen. 2:17: "surely die"; Rom. 5:12: "death spread to all"; 1 Cor. 15:22: "as in Adam all die"). Jesus' death takes away enmity with God (Rom. 5:8-11: "Christ died for us"; "justified by his blood"; "delivered from the wrath of God"; "reconciled to God by the death of His Son"; 5:15: "the free gift abounded for many").
3. Holy Baptism *delivers* forgiveness and begins one's eternal life (Acts 2:38). Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved (Mark 16:16). The washing of rebirth and renewal by the Spirit, poured out through Christ, makes believers heirs (Titus 3:5-8). You were buried and raised (Col. 2:12). Those rejecting the Spirit's offer of reconciliation through Christ remain outside the restored relationship in unbelief (Mark 16:16; Matt. 12:31-32). One is not baptized into a Christian denomination but into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 1; 12). One does not baptize on the basis of faith. Faith claims forgiveness and responds to grace (1 Pet. 3:21). Faith is not a prerequisite for baptism. "Believer's baptism" is advocated if one misunderstands Mark 16:16. Holy Baptism is not merely a symbol, and a "dedication" has nothing to do with baptism. Baptism is not just for one's original sin. Baptism is not repeated (Eph. 4:5: "one baptism"), even if one turns from sin or because one denies infant baptism.
4. Holy Baptism *sets* each believer *on a path of new life*. Baptism does not get something "done" but "started." "God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance" (Rom. 2:4). The old Adam dies daily and a new being lives daily before God in righteousness and purity (Rom. 6, the entire chapter: buried, raised, walking in newness of life, no longer enslaved to sin, dead to sin and alive in Christ, sin having no dominion, slaves of righteousness, for sanctification; Rom. 8:11: "the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you"). Christians are "clothed with Christ" (Gal. 3:27). The Christian life is a joyful response to the good news: God's wrath is gone; He deals graciously with His beloved children.

5. *Infant baptism* is God's action upon humans. Whole households were baptized (Acts). *Adults* are baptized to claim the benefits of Christ, not because of their faith. No one is born innocent (Ps. 51:5; Genesis 5; John 3; Rom. 3:23; 5:12). The age of reason plays no role (John 1:13). Baptism is the ordinary means by which the promises are delivered (Luke 23:43: the thief, by exception). Baptism is not a guarantee of eternal life. One can fall away (Hebrews 6; Mark 5: the sower).

Toward Greater Concord

We believe our churches would benefit from further mutual conversation on the following topics:

1. Compare "the baptized" and "the elect/saved."
2. Who administers Holy Baptism?
3. Dealing with the "minimally connected" and their children.
4. Salvation while rejecting baptism (Catechism question 251)?
5. Baptizer's intent and baptism's validity.
6. Immersion the ideal?
7. Baptisms of John and Jesus compared, contrasted.
8. Good works "necessary" for the baptized?
9. Emergencies.
10. Salvation for stillborn (Luther: "Word" penetrates womb.)
11. Baptisms administered by non-Trinitarian groups

Our Faith in Practice

As we live out our various callings in the church and the world, our affirmations of faith suggest the following actions or practices:

Christians are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:14-21). Yet normal conversation among our members emphasizes sinfulness, old nature, "ought to," "try," "should," failure (Romans 7:18-25, without context of Romans 6 and 8). We are already Christians and are living the sanctified life, empowered, equipped, enlivened, enabled people. It is easier to be faithful to Christ the Bridegroom than to sin, as is true in marriage (one hopes!).

Bible study is to lead one to hear God's love story, not to learn what God "wants". Proclamation tells what we are in Christ. The Spirit is at work. Baptism is a real change. Concentrating on one's sinfulness (and need to change it?) seems all too common. We Lutherans, of all Christians, see the power of baptism. But baptism and the new creation take a back seat in worship and study. Let us view it with utmost urgency. We are to equip Christians with Christ's forgiveness, loving as loved. Baptism turns us outward, to God and neighbor. The Spirit spoils the sinning and empowers the living.

Thus the call: reflect deeply on the meaning of Holy Baptism in the life of the Christian. It is to bring peace, joy, hope, promise. It is to instruct the believer in what God is doing in one's life. The task of the church is not to stop one from sinning but to tell of the Savior who already now lives in us by the Spirit. Proclamation yields sanctification as God works on the heart. Remember: You are alive forever. Celebrate!

The Office of the Keys and Confession

Preface

How are Christians to deal with their sins? Are they to cover them up, claim they haven't been committed, made light of, blamed on others, or confessed to God and those sinned against? Luther's Small Catechism helps Christians to answer these questions.

The Small Catechism reflects the teaching of Scripture about confession and absolution. God's call to repentance is taught in both the Old and New Testaments. David was called to repent of adultery and murder. Jesus taught about repentance in Matthew 18. Scripture's call to repentance is part of our liturgical heritage (1 John 1:8-10).

The Small Catechism also reflects the pastoral concerns of Martin Luther for both repenting of personal sins and for godly penitential preparation for receiving the Lord's Supper. Luther began the 95 Theses with Christ's call to repentance in Matthew 4:17, because he understood that the entire life of baptized believers is to be one of repentance.

Some versions of The Small Catechism also contain sections on the "Office of the Keys" and the "Christian Questions with Their Answers" to assist people in godly introspection, contrition, repentance and absolution. All of this is preparation for a penitential reception of the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of faith.

Confession and the Keys are needed in the Church today because of widespread religious illiteracy, the lessening of the seriousness of sin, the loss of absolutes, faulty understandings of confession, the push for infant communion and Communion without Baptism (CWOB). There is also the practical need to apologize to our neighbor for running the lawnmower over his petunias. This is where confessing sin in worship becomes the daily practice of our earthly life.

Confession and the Keys are interconnected with the other parts of the Catechism. To confess sin, Christians need to know the Ten Commandments to identify what is sinful. Christians need to know the Creed which reveals how the Triune God has dealt with sin in Christ. Christians need to learn about prayer and the Lord's Prayer to talk to God about sin and other matters. Christians need to believe they are God's saintly baptized redeemed and forgiven sons and daughters, saints in God's Kingdom who are to live in daily contrition and repentance. The use of Confession and the Keys flows from baptism. Self-examination and the confession of sins are the Christian's daily exercise, and spiritual preparation for receiving the Sacrament of the Altar. Christians need to believe what Christ is giving in His Last Will and Testament, the Lord's Supper. There Christ gives penitent sinners His true body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine, the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation in heaven's glory. The whole purpose of the Keys is to give sinners of God's love and grace in Christ.

This We Believe, Teach and Confess

Based on God's Word, the Lutheran Confessions, and especially Luther's Small Catechism, we joyfully affirm the following about the Office of the Keys, Confession and Absolution.

1. We affirm that sin is real, all human beings are sinful and need God's forgiveness in Christ. We reject the idea that sin is something to be determined by human beings and can be forgiven by means other than those given by God.

2. We believe that forgiveness is from God, that it is unconditional, and that we receive forgiveness through the Means of Grace because Christ has made satisfaction for all sins by His death and resurrection. We reject the idea that God's forgiveness can be earned or result from human works or that human beings can make satisfaction for their sins.
3. We affirm that the Office of the Keys is a gift Christ has given His Church, and that every Christian is empowered to use the Keys (laity & clergy). We reject the idea that the Keys can be used only by some in the Church (clergy).
4. We affirm that Absolution is a declared objective act - a Gospel proclamation of grace in Christ. We reject the idea that Absolution needs subjective human feelings to make it valid.
5. We affirm that the Keys, Confession, and Absolution are intimately connected with and integral to the other chief parts of the Catechism

Toward Greater Concord

We believe that our congregations would benefit from further mutual conversation about:

1. The need for more preaching and teaching about the foundational truths of the Keys, Confession and Absolution
2. The need for greater concord in the practice of the above truths in the relationships of congregations, pastors, and individual Christian
3. Whether or not the Church should speak of Absolution as a sacrament
4. Greater clarity in speaking about confession and absolution between a Christian and a non-Christian

Our Faith in Practice

Our affirmations of biblical and confessional truths suggest the following practices or actions:

1. Three ways to confess sin and be absolved as part of our baptismal Christian life:
 - a. Private confession and absolution with the Pastor
 - b. Apologizing to the neighbor we have sinned against and forgiving those who have hurt us
 - c. The general confession of sins in the Divine Service and in the Lord's Prayer
2. The use of the Keys in preparation for receiving Holy Communion
 - a. The Christian Questions with Their Answers (LSB 329-330)
 - b. Using "How Christians Should Be Taught to Confess" to aid self-examination (LSB 326)
 - c. Using "Individual Confession and Absolution" (LSB 292-293)
3. Daily reading God's Word to have God's Word of law reveal our sins to help us daily confess, and daily to be blessed with the Gospel of Christ's justifying grace and mercy

The Lord's Supper

Preface

The Lord's Supper was Jesus' last will and testament before He was crucified, died, and was buried. However, having been raised from the dead on the third day, He now lives to ensure that we receive all the benefits of His Passion which include the forgiveness of all sins, life in all its fullness, and eternal salvation. As Martin Luther teaches us in the Small Catechism, "In the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words."

In His Supper, Jesus, our heavenly Bridegroom, unites Himself with us, His dear Bride, and gives us His true body and blood to eat and to drink under the outward forms of the bread and wine. This is what Martin Luther teaches us to believe when he writes in the Small Catechism, "[The Lord's Supper] is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself, for us Christians to eat and to drink." He bases this confession on Jesus' own simple and clear words, "Take eat, this is my body . . . Drink of this [cup], all of you, it is my true blood."

The Lord's Supper unites us not only with our risen Lord but also with one another in "koinonia," that is, in fellowship with one another where we share our common faith, our common hopes, our common love for Jesus and one another. Luther suggests this in his statement that the Lord's Supper is "for us Christians to eat and to drink." If one might ask what Luther meant by a Christian, he answers this in the introductory comments to the "Christian Questions with Their Answers . . . for Those Who Intend to Go to the Sacrament" where he writes, "[A Christian is one who has received] instruction in the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper."

This We Believe, Teach, and Confess

Based on the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions, especially Luther's Small Catechism, we joyfully affirm the following about the Lord's Supper:

1. Under the outward forms of bread and wine we firmly believe that every communicant, believing and unbelieving, eats and drinks the true body and blood of Jesus. We reject the idea that the body and blood of Jesus is merely a spiritual or symbolic presence.
2. We believe that the bodily presence of Jesus in the Sacrament is not dependent on the faith of those communing but on His Word and promise alone. We reject "*receptionism*," that is, the idea that the body and blood of Christ are present only for those who believe this or only when the bread and wine are being received and consumed.
3. We believe that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated with reverence and dignity. We question the use of any practice that would treat the Sacrament irreverently or casually.
4. We believe that the Lord's Supper is intended only for those who have been baptized and instructed in the Word of Christ. We, therefore, affirm the ancient practice of closed communion. While we understand that there are exceptions and believe that pastors should be allowed some discretion in whom they commune, we reject any form of open communion including what has been called "functional open communion" where the practice of closed communion may be verbally affirmed but not enforced or followed.

5. We believe that the Lord's Supper should be a regular and frequent part of Lutheran worship and not an occasional extra. We reject the idea that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated only rarely and occasionally.

Toward Greater Concord

We believe our churches would benefit from further mutual conversation on the following questions:

1. Who should be permitted to commune at our altars? What makes a person "*worthy*" to be admitted to the Lord's Supper?
2. Should we call our practice "*closed*" or "*close*" communion? or both (*close[d]*)?
3. What does pastoral discretion mean and how frequently should this occur?
4. Who should distribute the elements in the Lord's Supper, only pastors or laymen; and if laymen, can women assist in the distribution of the Sacrament?
5. What are the proper elements to be used (are grape juice, leavened bread, gluten-free bread proper elements to be used in the Supper?)
6. How often should the Supper be celebrated?
7. Should first communion be tied to confirmation?
8. At what age should children be communed?
9. Should the blood of Jesus be distributed only with a chalice or only with individual glasses or can/should both be used at the same time? If individual glasses are used should they be glass or is it proper to use plastic or paper cups?
10. What should be done with any unconsumed elements following the Supper?

Our Faith in Practice

As we live out our various callings in the church and the world, our affirmations of faith suggest the following actions or practices:

1. We will continue to affirm clearly and boldly that in the Lord's Supper the risen Lord Jesus comes to us to feed us with His true body and blood under the outward forms of bread and wine.
2. We will continue to treasure the Lord's Supper as one our Lord's means of grace; that is, one of the means by which He bestows on us all the benefits of His life, death, and resurrection including full forgiveness of all sin, life, and salvation.
3. We will encourage regular and frequent reception of our Lord's Supper.
4. We will seek to use those elements which most closely resemble those which our Lord used when he instituted this blessed Sacrament.
5. We will conduct the Lord's Supper with the greatest reverence and dignity as befits this precious gift our Lord has given us.
6. We will seek to use the Lord's Supper as He intended it to be used—as a sign of our koinonia or union with Him and with one another.
7. While there may be occasional exceptions, we will follow the practice of closed communion inviting to the Table only those who are baptized, instructed and who are in full fellowship with us in doctrine and practice.
8. We will encourage our pastors to catechize or instruct people carefully and thoroughly in the proper understanding and use of the Lord's Supper.

9. We will encourage our pastors to reference the Lord's Supper regularly in their preaching and teaching.
10. As we celebrate the Lord's Supper we rejoice in our mystical union with the "angels, archangels and all the company of heaven" as we join them in singing "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts," anticipating a place with them someday at the heavenly marriage Feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom!

Conclusion

For generations, Luther's Small Catechism has been a treasure of the church, giving generations of believers content, structure, and language for their faith. Our experience in Koinonia 2.0 affirms the role the Catechism can play in bringing greater concord to the church in doctrine and practice. This is the case because the Catechism richly communicates in simple terms the truths of the Holy Scriptures, God's own powerful Word.

"A Statement of Concord" offers a snapshot of the concord present among groups of church workers and lay people meeting in the MN South District in 2017. As such it represents only those who participated in the discussions. Still, the statement finds its content, structure, and language in the Small Catechism. We sincerely hope that, as "A Statement of Concord" is posted online (www.mnsdistrict.org) and distributed to a broader audience, it will become a resource for others seeking healthy conversations on concord in doctrine and practice. We also hope to post online the excellent brief essays presented by the resource theologians who served in the Koinonia 2.0 Project.

May the Holy Spirit continue to build a bond of unity, concord, and harmony among all who joyfully share our confession.

Praesidium
MN South District
Eastertide, 2017

President Dean Nadasdy; Vice Presidents Bob Gehrke, Lucas Woodford, David Mumme, and Harold Storm; and Pr. Bob Schulze, Executive Assistant to the President