



COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY AND CHURCH RELATIONS

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

WHAT IS THE CTCR?

The Holy Christian Church is the sum total of all who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin. It is called into being, nurtured, and extended by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel in Word and Sacraments. Because the church's life is so intimately involved with these means of grace, it must take special care that they are not falsified or weakened in any way as the church communicates to people living in the modern world. A church body that is loyal to the Gospel will therefore be concerned about theology.

Moreover, the church seeks to deepen and strengthen the relationships that exist among Christians both within the church body and in other churches. A Christian church body is therefore vitally concerned with proper church relations.

In order to provide leadership in dealing with the Synod's needs and opportunities in the areas of theology and church relations, the Synod established the Commission on Theology and Church Relations in 1962. Since that time, the Commission has provided reports on a number of significant theological issues and has been the Synod's primary agency for monitoring the Synod's ecumenical relationships with other Christians.

The officially adopted mission statement of the CTCR is: "Empowered by God's Spirit through the means of grace, the CTCR serves Christ's church by providing theological guidance to pastors and congregations for retaining, confessing, and proclaiming the Scriptural **GOSPEL** of Jesus Christ."

MEMBERSHIP OF THE CTCR

The membership of the Commission is carefully chosen so that it is as representative of the Synod as possible. In addition to the president and first vice president of the Synod and the presidents of the Ft. Wayne and St. Louis seminaries (who are advisory members), the membership of the Commission is made up of four lay persons, four pastors (two of whom must be parish pastors and one of whom must be a district president), one parish teacher, four seminary professors, one synodical college professor, and two others. Five of these members are elected by the synodical convention, four are appointed by the seminary faculties, four by the Council of Presidents, and three by the president of the Synod. Because of its membership and the way it is chosen, the Commission represents a microcosm of the Synod itself.

DUTIES OF THE CTCR

The major functions and duties of the Commission are stated explicitly in the *Handbook* of the Synod (3.9.6.2, 3.9.6.2.1, 3.9.6.2.2, and 3.9.6.3) as follows:

- 3.9.6.2 The Commission on Theology and Church Relations shall assist the President of the Synod at his request in discharging his constitutional responsibilities for maintaining doctrinal unity within the Synod.

- 3.9.6.2.1 The Commission on Theology and Church Relations shall provide guidance to the Synod in matters of theology and church relations.
- (a) It shall bring matters of theology and church relations through special studies and documents to the membership of the Synod and to conferences.
 - (b) It shall refer theological issues and questions to the proper individuals or groups of individuals for additional study.
 - (c) It shall suggest and provide studies of contemporary issues, including also current social issues, as they affect the church and as the church may affect such social issues.
 - (d) It shall foster and provide for ongoing theological education through institutes, seminars, and other means.
 - (e) It shall obtain and study theological treatises, conference papers, and similar documents and studies.
- 3.9.6.2.2 The Commission on Theology and Church Relations shall assist the President of the Synod at his request in discharging his constitutional responsibilities for maintaining doctrinal integrity as he relates to other church bodies.
- (a) It shall address itself to and evaluate existing fellowship relations for the purpose of mutual admonition and encouragement.
 - (b) When a church body applies for formal recognition of altar and pulpit fellowship with the Synod, such recognition shall be proposed at a convention of the Synod only after the approval of the commission.
 - (c) When a mission of the Synod applies for formal recognition as a self-governing partner church, such recognition shall be proposed at convention of the Synod by the Board for Mission Services with the approval of the commission.
- 3.9.6.3 The Commission on Theology and Church Relations shall assist congregations and ordained and commissioned ministers of religion in fulfilling their commitment to witness publicly and privately to the one and only Gospel set forth in the Holy Scriptures specifically as they carry out their responsibilities relating to membership in societies, lodges, cults, or any organizations of an unchristian or anti-Christian character to which the Synod has declared itself firmly opposed.

ORGANIZATION OF THE CTCR

The Commission seeks to carry out these functions and duties by meeting together four times during each year. The sixteen voting members of the Commission are assigned to one of three standing committees:

- Committee I — Church Relations
- Committee II — Theology
- Committee III — Church and Society

In the performance of its tasks, the Commission has the services of three full time executives, an administrative assistant, an administrative secretary, and a part-time secretary. The Commission does not understand itself to be a kind of “ecclesiastical Supreme Court” issuing final answers to all kinds of questions, but rather as a service agency of the church to give the church guidance and direction on matters that have been referred to it by the Synod itself or its official entities.

ASSIGNMENTS TO THE CTCR

At the present time, the Commission has the following assignments on its agenda:

Committee I

1. “Inter-Christian Guidelines”
2. Questions from Armed Forces Ministry
3. Develop Plan for Confessional Leadership (2007 Res. 3-03)
4. Opinion on “Unilateral Excommunication”
5. Response to LCMS-NRK Discussions
6. Proposal Re: “Church Relations in 21st Century”
7. Request for Discussions with the Anglican Church in North America
8. Request for Opinion on “Heterodox Congregations”
9. Study on “Priesthood of All Believers” (2007 Res. 1-03)
10. Clarify Unionism and Syncretism
11. Mueller Request for Theological Opinion on Unionism
12. Work with the ILC in Preparation of “Study Resources” for 2017 Celebration of Reformation (2007 Res. 3-02)
13. Guidance for Responsible Communion Practice (2007 Res. 3-09)

Committee II

1. 1995 Res. 3-10 on Relationship of Man and Woman
2. Women as University presidents (BHE/CUS request)
3. Model Conference on Worship
4. Provide Guidance Re: Immigration (cf. 2007 Res. 6-05)
5. Implications of Natural Knowledge of God for Public Witness (2007 Res. 3-04A)

Committee III

1. Christian Stewardship of the Environment (2007 Res. 3-06)
2. Theological Study of CCM Opinions (2007 Res. 8-10, See also Res. 8-05A)
3. DRP Request Re: “Call” Issues
4. Examine Domestic and Child Abuse Education Materials (2007 Res. 6-06)
5. Review of “Healing Memories” (Lutheran-Mennonite report)
6. Prayer
7. “Hostility Toward Christianity”
8. Relationship Between Science and Theology

9. To Provide Assistance Regarding Bioethics
10. Monitor Advisory Panel on Societies, Lodges, Cults, and Religious Organizations
11. Prepare Additional ROM Evaluations (2007 Res. 3-08)
12. Work with LCMS World Relief and Human Care Re: Placement of Children in Morally Ambiguous Contexts (2007 Res. 6-03A)
13. Review Overture 3-30 “Creation Terminology”

ONGOING ASSIGNMENTS

A. Internal Church Relations

In any church body, but particularly in a large one such as ours, there will be disagreements about various matters. Sometimes these disagreements are on relatively minor matters, but at other times they touch deep issues. One of the tasks of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations is to attempt to provide guidance in addressing the problems that cause such polarization. This is done through providing forums and conferences for the discussion of the most critical issues that are troubling our people.

B. Partner Church Relations

Through the Commission the Synod devotes considerable time and effort to improving and deepening relationships with our partner churches, that is, with those churches with whom the Synod is in altar and pulpit fellowship. These include the American Association of Lutheran Churches with whom the LCMS declared church fellowship at its 2007 Convention, several free churches in the major European countries, and a number of churches that were begun as mission churches overseas but have since become independent church bodies

Because the Synod’s partner churches overseas are small and often in need of encouragement and support, the Commission continues to seek ways of providing theological guidance and resources to them. A meeting of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) is held every two years so that the leaders of each of these churches may discuss common problems and seek common solutions that are faithful to the Word of God. Until July 2008, the Executive Director of the CTCR served as the Executive Secretary of the ILC. At that time, a new office was created (Director of Church Relations—Assistant to the President), so that full-time attention could be given to the ever-increasing challenges and opportunities in this area. The Executive Director of the CTCR and the Director of Church Relations work closely together with each other and with the President of the Synod in addressing these needs and opportunities.

One of the most important programs sponsored by the Commission in past years was its Exchange Study Program which provided for the exchange of students, pastors and professors between the Synod and its sister churches in various parts of the world. The committee responsible for this program has now been replaced by the Committee

Responsible for International Study Programs (CRISP), on which the CTCR's Executive Director serves as the CTCR's liaison. An important purpose of this program is to foster better understanding between the Synod and its partner churches and their schools of theology, as well as contributing to common theological growth. Pastors from the Synod's partner churches may come to this country for work on advanced degrees at LCMS seminaries. In this way the Synod is able to make it possible financially for the instruction of pastors and church workers in foreign countries to be well grounded in the Word of God. The many people who have been involved in this program over the years have expressed their deep appreciation to the Synod for enabling them to continue their studies in one of its seminaries, thereby enabling them to do a better job of carrying out the mission of the church in their own country.

C. Other Lutheran Bodies

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations also monitors discussions with Lutheran church bodies with which the Synod is not in altar and pulpit fellowship: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The Commission also seeks to keep itself informed regarding developments in these church bodies to the end that doctrinal agreement sufficient to establish altar and pulpit fellowship may one day be achieved. Following the dissolution of the Lutheran Council of the U.S.A. on January 1, 1988, the Commission has been receiving regular reports on the Synod's involvement with the Committee on Lutheran Cooperation, which monitors various ELCA/LCMS activities in the United States.

The Commission has also spent considerable effort reviewing the structure and functions of the Lutheran World Federation, and has continued to keep itself informed regarding developments in this organization. Over the years, the Executive Director of the CTCR has represented the Synod as its official observer at the general assemblies of the LWF.

D. Other Christian Groups

Although the LCMS is not a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) or the National Council of Churches (NCC), the Commission makes an effort to keep abreast of the latest developments within these groups. The Executive Director of the Commission attended the 1998 WCC Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe as an official observer from the Missouri Synod. At the request of the President and the CTCR, the Executive Director of the CTCR participates in the NCC Faith and Order Commission. Whenever possible, he also attends the annual meetings of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and Christian Churches Together (CCT).

Through the CTCR and the President's office, the Synod also takes part in various ecumenical discussions and dialogs. In past years the Synod has been engaged in discussions with Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, Methodists, the Orthodox, Baptists, the Reformed, and Evangelicals. The LCMS is at the present time a participant in Round XI of the USA Lutheran/Roman Catholic Dialogue. The

Director of Church Relations is currently one of the LCMS representatives to these discussions on “The Hope of Eternal Life” and regularly reports to the CTCR regarding these discussions.

In short, the CTCR is one of the Synod’s key agencies for guiding and directing its contacts with other Christians. This contact is important not only to show continued interest in and concern for fellow Christians, but to bear witness to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as we know it in the Holy Scriptures.

E. Societies, Lodges, Cults, and Unchristian Organizations

The 2001 Synodical Convention adopted Res. 7-27A “To Combine Commission on Organizations and Commission on Theology and Church Relations.” This resolution assigns to the CTCR the responsibility, formerly given to the Commission on Organizations, to “assist congregations and ordained and commissioned ministers of religion in fulfilling their commitment to witness publicly and privately to the one and only Gospel set forth in the Holy Scriptures specifically as they carry out their responsibilities relating to membership in societies, lodges, cults, or any organizations of an unchristian or anti-Christian character to which the Synod has declared itself firmly opposed” (Bylaw 3.9.6.3). In carrying out this responsibility, the Commission has constructed a special website providing evaluations from a Lutheran theological perspective of a broad range of religious organizations and movements – both Christian and non-Christian. More than thirty evaluations are now available, including such recently prepared evaluations as Islam, Latter Day Saints and the Human Potential Movement.

F. Other Responsibilities

1. CTCR Sponsored Conferences, Consultations, and Convocations
2. Theological Opinions
3. Recognition of Altar and Pulpit Fellowship and Partner Church Relationships
(Bylaw 3.9.6.2.2)
4. Expressions of Dissent (Bylaw 1.8)
5. Task Force and Special Assignments

Joel D. Lehenbauer
February 2010

ROSTER

COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY AND CHURCH RELATIONS *2007 - 2010 Triennium*

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Bergman, Shirley
Farney, Kirk
Garton, Jean
Hessler, Peter

PASTORS

Boehme, Armand
Diefenthaler, Jon
Kramer, Loren
Lehenbauer, Walter
Rosin, Robert
Walz, Orville

PROFESSORS

Arand, Charles
Gieschen, Charles
Middendorf, Michael
Raabe, Paul
Rast, Lawrence

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Palmreuter, Kenneth

ADVISORY

Diekelman, William
Kieschnick, Gerald
Meyer, Dale
Wenthe, Dean

STAFF

Lehenbauer, Joel
Vogel, Larry

ELECTED BY CONVENTION

Bergman, Shirley
Boehme, Armand
Garton, Jean
Lehenbauer, Walter
Palmreuter, Kenneth

TERM EXPIRES

2010
2010
2013
2013
2010

ELECTED BY SEMINARY FACULTIES

St. Louis:

Arand, Charles
Raabe, Paul

2010
2010

Ft. Wayne:

Gieschen, Charles
Rast, Lawrence

2010
2010

APPOINTED BY PRESIDENT

Kramer, Loren
Middendorf, Michael
Walz, Orville

2010
2010
2010

ELECTED BY COUNCIL OF PRESIDENTS

Diefenthaler, Jon
Farney, Kirk
Hessler, Peter
Rosin, Robert

2010
2010
2010
2010
