

## RESOLUTION

### **Request for Clarity Regarding Participation in Joint Services by District and Synodical Officials**

WHEREAS, the Scriptures declare that “a bishop must be blameless...holding fast the faithful word that he has been taught, that he be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict, those who contradict.” (Titus 1:7-9, Table of Duties); and

WHEREAS, our Lutheran Confessions remind us regarding our “hallowing of God’s Name” that:

Since we see that the world is full of sects and false teachers, all of whom wear the holy name as a cloak and warrant for their devilish doctrine, we ought constantly to cry out against all who preach and believe falsely and against those who attack and persecute our Gospel and pure doctrine and try to suppress it, as the bishops, tyrants, fanatics, and others do. Likewise this petition is for ourselves who have the Word of God but are ungrateful for it and fail to live according to it as we ought. If you pray the petition whole-heartedly, you can be sure that God is pleased. For there is nothing he would rather hear than to have his glory and praise exalted above everything else and his word taught in its purity and cherished and treasured. (LC, III, 47-48); and

WHEREAS, according to the Constitution of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, conditions for acquiring and holding membership in the Synod, include the “renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description...” (Article VI:2); and

WHEREAS, Dr. C.F.W. Walther states in Church and Ministry (*Kirche und Amt*) that:

...it may happen that such a service is required of evangelical [Lutheran] servants to tempt them, namely, whether they will collude with their superiors or whether by their presence they will approve or confirm the wicked worship. In such cases it is not permitted to attend false worship. For if our liberty is tried and our consent is forced from us against our will by fraud, then according to Paul’s example (Gal. 2:5) we must in no way yield to the enemies of the truth. (Mueller trans., p.131); and

WHEREAS, Dr. Walther likewise reminds us in The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel that

When the union of churches was actually put into effect in Prussia, multitudes of Lutherans suddenly awoke from their spiritual sleep, remembered that they belonged to the Lutheran Church, and declared that they would never forsake the faith of their fathers. In fact, they chose to see themselves evicted from their homes, imprisoned, and expatriated rather than consent to a union of truth with error, of the Word of God with man’s word, of the true Church with a false Church. (Thirty-Second Evening Lecture, p.333); and

WHEREAS, Dr. Francis Pieper reminds us in his Christian Dogmatics that

Another symptom of uncertainty is unionism, which pervades the life of the Church today. Unionism has no scruples about practicing church fellowship with spirits that are not of God. But one who is sure of the divine truth thinks and acts according to the order of Christ: “Beware of false prophets” (Matt. 7:15), and the admonition of Paul: “Avoid them” (Rom. 16:17), and the instruction given by “the Apostle of love” with regard to Christian fellowship: “If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed; for he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 10-11). (Pieper, I:118); and

WHEREAS, Dr. David Benke, Atlantic District President, participated in “A Prayer for America” at Yankee Stadium in New York City, which was a memorial service in response to the terrorists attacks in New York City, along with several Jewish rabbis, several Muslim clerics, and at least one Sikh and one Hindu cleric on September 23, 2001; and

WHEREAS, President Benke has previously publicly apologized for his participation in a joint prayer service involving Roman Catholics, Muslims and Jews in a signed statement on October 22, 1998, which states as follows:

My participation in this service was a direct violation of the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, and consequently, a violation of the Constitution, Bylaws and doctrinal resolutions of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. I also recognize that my participation in this interfaith prayer service was a violation of my duties and responsibilities as an elected officer of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. While well-intended, what I did was wrong. I therefore sincerely and publicly apologize to the Synod for my actions in this connection. I assure the Synod that I will not repeat this error in the future by participating as an officiant in ecumenical services; and

WHEREAS, LCMS Synodical President, Dr. Gerald Kieschnick, issued a statement supporting President Benke’s actions, both before and after the fact; and

WHEREAS, as reported in the ELCA News service on September 21, 2001, both President Benke and President Kieschnick had already participated in a joint worship service held days earlier at an ELCA congregation in Manhattan with presiding ELCA Bishop H. George Anderson and several ELCA bishops, and at which President Benke stated that the differences between the ELCA and the LCMS “seem so trivial”; and

WHEREAS, the 61<sup>st</sup> Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod a few short months ago declared that “we can not consider them [the ELCA] to be an orthodox Lutheran church body.” (Resolution 3-21A); and

WHEREAS, the above actions of President Benke and President Kieschnick have generated great discussion and concern within the church at large; therefore be it

*Resolved*, That we, the pastors of the Wyoming District, memorialize the President and the Praesidium of the LCMS to answer the following questions on behalf of the Church:

- 1) Why are there discrepancies between the statement/prayer of President Benke as reported in President Kieschnick's statement and what President Benke actually said at "A Prayer for America"?
- 2) What evidence is there, as stated in President Kieschnick's statement, that the prayer service at Yankee Stadium was "led by Christians?" Furthermore, why was it reported in the said statement that "at least one Muslim" was involved, when several Muslim clerics, several Jewish rabbis, a Sikh, and a Hindu were involved?
- 3) How do we "witness" through prayer to those whom we should first lead to repentance before praying with them? Can they pray with us if they do not believe in Jesus Christ as we only have access to the Father through Him? Further, if we ask them to pray with us, when they cannot, are we giving them false comfort and assurance?
- 4) In what ways does the quotation provided by President Kieschnick from the document, "The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship: A Report on Synodical Discussions" in his statement of September 25, 2001, relate to the context and issues actually being addressed in that document?
- 5) In what contexts is it, if ever, permissible for us to ask Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Jews, and confessing members of other false religions to pray **with** us? If so, whose God is being prayed to?
- 6) In what way are we able to refer to heathen as "brothers and sisters"? Does not Holy Scripture refer to them as enemies of the Gospel?
- 7) In what ways did President Benke's participation result in a **clear** witness that salvation is found only in Jesus Christ?
- 8) In what ways do the actions of President Benke, and their subsequent support by President Kieschnick, speak to those Christians (e.g. Nuers in Sudan) who are being tortured and martyred because they will not acknowledge that Allah is God? How do we address this very real concern of theirs that we have seriously compromised the faith?
- 9) Our Synod has stated in Convention that we can no longer consider the ELCA "to be an orthodox Lutheran church body." What are the implications for the participation of President Benke and President Kieschnick with the highest

ranking ELCA officials in a joint worship service, as well as the Synod's stated desire to address our concerns and our ongoing relationship with the ELCA?

10) Given the attention that the events surrounding the terrorist attacks have gained world-wide, in what ways do the actions of President Benke and President Kieschnick send a clear Scriptural and Confessional witness to those church bodies throughout the world with whom we are in fellowship and who look to us for guidance?

11) In what way does the following quotation from Herman Sasse apply to these situations?

Where man can no longer bear the truth, he cannot live without the lie. Where man, even when dying, lies to himself and others, the terrible dissolution of his culture is held up as a glorious ascent, and decline is viewed as an advance, the like of which has never been experienced. (Union and Confession, p.1)

12) Has President Benke been encouraged to break his word and his public acknowledgment that he previously acted in violation of the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, his stated responsibilities as a District President and his promise to never participate in ecumenical services again? If so, in what ways did the Synodical President, Praesidium and Council of Presidents help him in the keeping of his promise, or aid him in breaking it?

13) In the end, have President Benke and President Kieschnick in their elected offices upheld or violated their stated duties, including the "renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description..." (Article VI:2)?; and be it further

*Resolved*, That we request the President and the Praesidium to respond to the Wyoming District with answers to these questions by February 1, 2002 in order that our circuit winkel conferences can consider them before our Spring Pastor's Conference; and be it finally

*Resolved*, That this response be made available to the Synod-at-large given the common concerns that exist among us, the gravity of the situation, and its many and varied implications for the future of our "walking together" and remaining unified in our proclamation of the Gospel.

Unanimously adopted by the  
Wyoming District Pastor's Conference  
3 October 2001