

It's Time 2020

A proposal for reform of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod
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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Congregational Focus.....	5
Councils and Authority.....	8
Seminaries.....	11
Higher Education.....	14
Doctrinal Unity.....	18
Synod Structure.....	22
Other Challenges.....	25
Frequently Asked Questions.....	30

Introduction

In October 2008, Pastor Harrison (Later President Harrison) laid out a vision of life in the LCMS. Instead of bylaws, procedures, and worldly ideas of corporate governance, he argued for a churchly approach. It was centered on the Word of God preached and taught in congregations, and a synod that encouraged and supported that work. He painted with a broad brush; it was not a policy document, it was a vision of what the church could be.

At the same time, others were arguing for restructuring the corporate life of the church (LCMS Inc!) according to the latest trends in the non-profit world. A blue-ribbon task force recommended changes that were major in their scope, but minor in their philosophy. Three generations of incremental change had given the LCMS a shiny office building, and a typical office-work mentality. Pastors were called out of the parish, installed in cubicles, and worked 9 to 5, clocking in and out at the appointed hour. The work of the church is the Gospel preached and taught. It may be during regularly scheduled worship times. But it also happens in homes, farm fields, street corners, hospitals, and especially at the death bed. It happens at any hour when someone needs pastoral care.

Pastor Harrison wanted to return the synod to a more pastoral-care approach. At the 2010 convention, the synod made two choices: One was to elect Matthew Harrison as president to implement a new structure. The second was the more corporate structure recommended by the committee, instead of President Harrison's churchly model.

In Christian humility, President Harrison attempted to make it as good as he was able. He followed the scriptural principles of Witness, Mercy, and Life Together for reordering the office-culture of the International Center. It was a tremendous effort. It bought us nearly a decade. But the truth is, it was always bound to fail. Corporate structure is no way to run a church. Our Lord gives the plan for the church: Pastors and people together studying the Word of God and proclaiming it, each according to their office, and responding in prayer. Structures must arise out of the congregational life of the church and the vocations of her members. They must support and channel their energies back into that.

Corporate governance sees congregations as franchises of the brand LCMS-Inc. We have a logo, a reputation, and a mission statement. The congregation is the local extension of the brand. This structure works for fast food. It does not work for the church. But President Harrison yielded his own desires to the decisions of the synod in convention.

10 years later, we can see what happened. He rebuilt the IC from the ground up, but it was still a franchise-based model. What is needed is a congregational model, centered in the life of our people, and in the congregations and communities where they live. It needs to be a model that helps pastors care for

the flock entrusted to them, not a model that seeks to optimize synergies as we align our core competencies for maximum missionization.

In the past decade, President Harrison, working under the Word of God, has accomplished a great deal: Increased use of the synod's approved hymnal, increasing concern for the doctrines taught in scripture and our Lutheran Confessions, a steady stream of translated theological works from Luther and the other great teachers of the church. The task he was given was herculean: A divided synod facing an uncertain future of decline needed solid theological leadership. He provided it. He even set an example of congregational love by accepting a call as an assistant pastor at a congregation in our synod.

But the synod still follows a worldly corporate model for its governance. Bylaws, policies and procedures are the go-to documents, not the Word of God in Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. The way we think about the work of the church must change – and it now appears that it must change quickly.

The COVID crisis and sudden drop in funding at the synod level is only an acceleration of a long-standing trend. Cutting positions at the International Center buys us time. It will not save us. We need to change how synod functions. Rather than a hierarchical and worldly business model we need a scriptural, service model. Only if we make that change can we hope to preserve our synod and pass on the legacy of faithful Christian service to our children and grandchildren.

We can no longer kick the can down the road. Declining revenues were already a problem before 2020. Now, congregations have seen attendance fall dramatically. By the grace of God, most congregations are stable financially, but without extra resources to pass 'up the chain' to corporate. There are hard truths we must face, and we must face them now. If we do, we can continue faithful service to Christ into the future. If we ignore the reality and try to continue on as before, we will be lurching from crisis to crisis, forced to close one historic institution in the LCMS after another.

If we are to save the synod, we must change to a scriptural structure, as President Harrison advised in 2008. It has taken us generations to arrive where we are. We have only a short time to fix problems that seem overwhelming – because they are. We don't need to restructure. We need to cut the Gordian knot of modern business practice and return to a scriptural model of governance and life. This will be a huge challenge – in many cases, we don't even know how to think outside the box of modern business practice. How do we return to faithfulness, and what would that look like?

Congregational Focus

But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Matthew 20

If the bishops would be true bishops and would devote themselves to the Church and the Gospel, we might grant them to ordain and confirm us and our preachers. This would be for the sake of love and unity, but not because it was necessary. However, they would have to give up all comedies and spectacular display of unchristian parade and pomp. But they do not even want to be true bishops, but worldly lords and princes, who will neither preach, nor teach, nor baptize, nor administer the Lord’s Supper, nor perform any work or office of the Church.

Smalcald Articles 3:10

For nearly a century – through the greatest period of growth and unity our synod experienced – all pastors served congregations. The pressure was immense. But God blessed their efforts. At some point, the synod decided to follow a more worldly model: workers would work, managers would manage. And so District Presidents were taken out of congregations; synod officials are often forbidden from serving in congregations. This new system allowed for the rise of “experts”. We had experts in education that no longer educated, experts in youth work that didn’t work with youth, experts in church planting that didn’t plant churches, etc.

The church is congregations, not office buildings. The church is sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd. She gathers to hear the Word of God and receive the Blessed Sacraments of salvation. The only way to regain a congregational focus is to require all synod workers to serve in a congregation. Pastors must pastor.

It’s a very simple principle. Getting there won’t be simple or easy. For almost a century we’ve added duties to various officials. District Presidents spend over a month each year outside their own district working on synod matters. But what are those matters? What do they do? I’ve seen reports of these meetings, and their job is mostly trying to avoid legal liability. This has made the focus of their office the law of the land, rather than the Gospel of our Lord. It changes their perspective. Pastors aren’t shepherds to be encouraged; they are potential problems to be managed. This must end. I am not speaking of incremental change, i.e. having fewer meetings or adding bible studies.

There will be a two year deadline. At the end of it all active pastors who wish to remain on the roster must return to parish ministry: This can not be a “status call” i.e. a District President preaches every other month. It must be active ministry, preaching at least 50% of the time, teaching classes to catechumens,

visiting the sick and dying, not as opportunity allows, but as the congregation has need of them.

How will this work, with all the other duties that District Presidents currently have? It may mean drastic reduction in the size of some districts. It will mean increasing reliance on district Vice Presidents and Circuit Visitors. (I've met those men. They are good men. They can be given greater responsibility than they now have. The Circuit Visitor manual is basically 200 pages of "ask your district president." CV's must be given authority to act.) At the synod level, meetings will be reduced, redirected, and rethought. COP meetings will return to just once or twice a year. Chairmen of convention floor committees would be the most qualified person – not always a District President or other honorific. There was a time when the only bylaw-mandated duty for District Presidents was placement of candidates. The church was better for it. Where would the church be without all of the committee meetings? It's time to find out.

Concrete Proposal : **Return pastors to Congregations.**

A) Rostered members of synod :

All rostered members of the synod, except as noted below, must serve in a congregation at least 51% of the time. In recognition of this, they will also receive at least 51% of their salary from that congregation. To insure that the congregation, and not the district, is supplying the salary, the congregation may not be subsidized by the district. The district may make limited arrangements to pay for additional staffing (vicar, secretarial work, etc.) to make up for the time that the pastor is away from the congregation.

Those who are currently serving out side of congregations will have 24 months to either accept a call to a congregation, or have their membership in synod (and therefore any synod offices they hold) suspended. This will not apply to those who are candidates when this proposal is passed.

The only exceptions to this will be :

Full time, in the field, deployed missionaries;

Faculty at one of the synod's high schools (including association or RSO high schools), colleges, universities, or seminaries;

Anyone who is on disability, or who has emeritus status;

A person serving full time at an RSO or LCMS auxiliary. But service at one of these institutions is not of itself sufficient to fulfill the requirement for congregational service for district or synod officials. (i.e. District President can't serve as President and CEO of a local RSO. President's must serve in congregations!)

B) District Presidents :

The only collective duty of the Districts Presidents as a whole is placing candidates into their first call.

No District President will have any authority or powers over any member of the synod outside of the district in which they serve, except in the case of certification and placement of candidates into their first call.

The primary duty of the District Presidents will be the visitation (personally, or by proxy) of each congregation in the district every three years. They will be required to report to the President of the Synod their completion of this task. District Presidents who fail to do this in one triennium will be admonished. If they fail to do this in a second triennium, they will be ineligible for reelection to office.

Circuit Visitors will act in conjunction with the District President in carrying out visitation. Circuit visitors who do not visit on behalf of the District President at his request will be ineligible for reelection to office.

A committee will be formed, including representation from: Pastors, District Presidents, Circuit Visitors, Synod Vice Presidents, to propose specific bylaw changes to re-order the duties of the district and synod officials.

Councils and Authority

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. Galatians 1

Thank God, today a seven-year-old child knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd [John 10:11–16]. 3 For the children pray, “I believe in one holy Christian Church.” This holiness does not come from albs, tonsures, long gowns, and other ceremonies they made up without Holy Scripture, but from God’s Word and true faith.

Smalcald Articles 3:2

One of the objections the Reformers made to the Papal church was that the pope and councils bound consciences where the word of God was silent, and worse, bound consciences against the Word of God. In contrast, the Reformers insisted the Word of God be the only rule and norm for faith and life. The confessions themselves stand under the word of God. They guide us because they agree with the Word of God.

In the early days of the synod, when theological opinions were needed, the seminaries would offer a *Gutachten*. These were opinion papers to guide the synod, based on careful study of the Word of God, but they bound no one. In the lead up to Seminex, the synod realized that the opinions of the faculty were no longer faithful. Rather than cleanse the faculty, it was easier to set up a competing body that would offer faithful opinions. The CTCR was born. Initially, the CTCR issued study documents (non-binding). At critical moments, the synod would carefully consider these documents, and if they were found in accord with the word of God, the synod would declare this to be the case – based not on the reputation or say so of the CTCR, but based on careful study of the Word of God.

Eventually, most documents that came out of the CTCR would be “commended for study and use”. This had the effect of making them semi-binding without careful study. Then, the great leap forward was made. Instead of careful study of the Word of God deciding disputes, the CTCR would issue rulings that “must be followed.” The same power regarding bylaws was given to the CCM.

The authority to bind consciences with rulings that “must be followed” even if they violate the word of God, places the CCM and CTCR as well as the bylaws of synod above the Word of God itself. This can not continue. We have out-poped the pope, and we must repent of this transgression. The seminaries can once again be asked to issue *gutachten* when questions arise. The CCM must return to interpreting the bylaws as they exist. A separate group can handle requests to clarify the bylaws, as the Commission on Structure used to do.

But what if one of our seminaries again turns to unfaithfulness? If the seminaries are unfaithful, we have bigger problems. These men train our pastors. Making sure they are and remain faithful must be our #1 priority. (See more on this in the section on seminaries.)

Who will settle disputes? In the past, panels were appointed to make decisions case by case. Theological opinions could be sought, but the answers were always found in the Word of God alone. It can be a messy method. It can be a long and painful process. It requires great commitment to the Scriptures on the part of all. But that's what we should be aiming for anyway. It can and does work if we commit ourselves to the Word of God and our Lutheran confessions. If we need a church commission to decide matters of doctrine, instead of the Word of God and careful study, we have problems that will not be solved by instituting church councils.

Luther's standard is helpful here: if members of synod are not convinced by scripture and clear reason, it will do no good to bind them under the bylaws. If a commission errs, we must allow for others to correct the error, instead of requiring synod officers become complicit in false teaching and practice. If we are not committed first, foremost, and only to the Word of God, we will find no salvation in the bylaws and their increasing complexity. That is a god that can not save. And scripture teaches clearly that such an approach leads to legalism and pharasaism.

Concrete Proposal : **Living by the Word of God, not bylaws and procedures**

Boards and Commissions

All members of **The Commission on Constitutional Matters** will be elected by the synod in convention.

Their opinions will be binding only insofar as they do not conflict with the Word of God, and then only until the next session of the synod convention, when each decision must be ratified by the convention. This ratification may be done by means of an omnibus resolution, with the following exception : A circuit forum, District pastor's conference, District Convention, or the synod president may call for individual action on any specific decision of the CCM. Any opinions called up for review by those groups must be voted on individually by the synod in convention. The CCM may not alter opinions once called up for review. The opinion will either stand or fall as written.

Any decisions which are not ratified by a majority of delegates at the convention will be considered overturned, and may not be reissued. If a worker is removed because of a decision that is later overturned, he will have thirty days from the close of the convention to request, in writing, rehearing or reinstatement. Such a request will return the proceedings to the point where the opinion was originally sought.

The Commission On Structure will be reinstated. The CCM may forward proposed changes in the bylaws to the Commission on Structure, but may not propose any changes in the bylaws to the convention. The CCM may only interpret the bylaws as they exist. In the absence of clear bylaws, they may not rule as to what should or must happen.

The CTCR will be disbanded. Its duties will be returned to the seminaries, or to various other church officers. (In recognition of their theological work, the staff of the CTCR would be offered available teaching positions at the seminaries, if any positions are open.)

The Office of National Mission will be restructured as follows: All executives under this board must serve in a congregational or mission setting which relates to any synod office which they hold (i.e. A campus ministry for the Campus Ministry Coordinator, a small town/rural parish for Small Town & Rural Ministry, etc.) The synod position will be no more than a 1/4 time position. They may have assistants to help them fulfill their duties, provided the assistants meet the same criteria as the executive for ministry service and time commitment (1/4 time for synod, 3/4 time for congregation.)

Seminaries

Over the last 30 years, one study after another has shown an impending shortage of church worker, and a need for more seminary students. In 2010, 32 seminarians were not placed because of a lack of congregations in need of candidates. Apart from a few extraordinary years, or unusual local conditions, the percentage of vacant congregations is roughly what it has always been in our synod (between about 3.5%-7%). How could all of the studies have been so wrong?

Many of them were commissioned or supported by the seminaries. The seminaries have been given an impossible task. They are to train pastors for the LCMS, with effectively no financial support from the church, while also going into the congregations to recruit men, and then also certify them as fit for ministry following one of ten different tracks to ordination.

Obviously, seminaries exist to provide training for pastoral candidates in the church. In the 1980's and 1990's the LCMS entirely cut synod funding to the seminaries. In the years since, funding from synod has improved to what can generously be described as "a negligible part of the seminary budget" (roughly 3%).

This means that our seminaries must fund themselves with tuition dollars and donor gifts, rather than support from faithful members. Instead of honest evaluation of pastoral candidates, the seminaries must treat them as funding sources. Instead of donor gifts being a loving response to the gift of pastors which God gives the church through the seminaries, the seminaries must seek out endowments, which may or may not conflict with our confession. (One science grant available to seminaries is from a foundation seeking to weaken the scriptural doctrine of creation in six days at seminaries across the nation!)

The seminaries can not be expected to serve the church if they first must feed themselves. The church must provide for the seminary training of her pastors – only then can the church expect that calls to faithfulness will be taken seriously. Harvard and Yale started out as seminaries. They are barely Christian anymore. Our sister church in Canada had one of her colleges repudiate church doctrine because it needed too much outside funding. It is a tragic situation when that happens to a college. It is a travesty and a misuse of God's gifts if we allow it to happen to our seminaries. Without proper funding, calls for faithful theological service are impotent, and our seminaries will eventually drift and become secular institutions. The LCMS is not immune to basic rules of economics history regarding faithful service or lack thereof.

Demographic studies of the past have looked at projected retirement of pastors. They have not looked at congregational needs. Our rural and urban congregations (over 50% of the synod) are often small and in declining areas. We need to consider whether they can continue to properly care for pastors. Combining congregations is an option, I've seen it work. But it means one less

pastor needed to fill a pulpit. The same is true in many of our urban areas. I've been a pastor there as well. Small congregations are often burdened with large outdated facilities and high maintenance costs. They can not afford the building, they can not move because there is no where else to go. This pattern has been repeated hundreds of times in our synod's urban congregations, and too often the district advice is to close and donate the proceeds to the district.

We have no idea how many pastors will be needed in the future, because we have no idea how many congregations will be combining to form multi-point parishes, or sadly, closing their doors entirely.

We can not know the future. Our task is to remain faithful, and to pray that the Lord of the harvest sends laborers into the vineyard. But we can commission a study that looks at projected need for pastors, as well as ability of congregations to care for them. Then, we can begin to plan based on a realistic assessment of our needs.

And here again, the decisions will not be easy. Do we still need two seminaries? I have heard varying opinions over the years, and those opinions have become deeply ingrained on both sides of the issue.

Two seminaries were needed at one time. Thanks be to God, it provided needed help during the Seminex crisis. But only 96 resident students were certified and placed in 2020. The combined enrollment of the seminaries is slightly over half what it was a generation ago. In addition to a demographic study of congregations, we need a well considered study of the long-term viability of the two-seminary model, considering demographic, logistical, and property issues, as well as theological ones.

Concrete Proposal :

Provide the Best Training while Preparing Pastors for the Future

A study will be commissioned, looking at the cost/benefits of keeping two seminaries, combining them, or some level of joint work between separate and merged. In addition, the synod must consider ways to fund any pastoral training via direct giving from the church, or their own unencumbered endowments. We can not be stingy with support, and be surprised when outside support comes with unfaithful strings – this is too high a cost to pay.

Ten tracks to ordination are not required. The study will evaluate which tracks are not only necessary, but useful in providing proper training for pastoral candidates. Emergency programs have too long defined the basic pattern of seminary training – we do not need three different emergency programs (DELTO, EIIT, SMP). Such programs must be, by definition, for unanticipated emergencies. Once you regularize them, they cease to be emergency programs. If there is truly a need for emergency pastors in rare instances, those must be considered on a case by case basis. How can we do this? By not only funding the seminaries properly so they can have the freedom to focus on training, but by also giving them the authority to determine what

training is required for pastors. It will not be a one-size-fits all program. It will be theologically rigorous, with a regular course of thorough training as we have always done, but also allow the seminaries flexibility in training so that, working closely with District Presidents and local congregations in times of emergency need, they can provide sufficient training for men to begin ministry, and ongoing training to continue to develop the pastoral skills and theological acumen of any pastors certified for emergency service.

In exchange, the church will place responsibility for recruitment of candidates on pastors and congregations. No longer will the seminaries be required to find their own sources of funding or students. Pastors and congregations will identify qualified men to serve, and point them in the direction of the seminary. The admissions office will exist to help them through the admissions process, not to recruit church workers. That should never have been something the seminaries needed to do, and the church at large needs prayerfully to fulfill this long neglected duty.

The church will also begin to fulfill her duty of examination and certification of candidates. A rigorous examination of doctrine and practice, faith and life will be established to ensure that each candidate is ready for ministry. Those who need more training will be returned to the seminaries with specific areas of concern to be addressed. Those who are ready will be placed according to the church's usual pattern.

To accomplish this a commission on certification will be formed, consisting of parish pastors who have proven themselves by faithful service, and also including district or synod officials. A comprehensive examination will be developed, both written and oral, in which the candidate will demonstrate both mastery of the material, and aptness for teaching. The commission on certification may then certify or recommend further training in various areas. The commission will be able to appoint other pastors to assist in their work, so the task does not become overwhelming. In emergency situations, the commission on certification can allow for ordination subject to continued training in certain areas. This will allow for timely ordination in true emergencies, while also making sure that shortcomings in training in such cases can be remedied.

Once certified, candidates will be placed by the District Presidents according to our historic practice.

Higher Education

Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table. She has sent out her young women to call from the highest places in the town, "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" To him who lacks sense she says, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight." Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury. Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

Proverbs 9

If I were to list all the profit and fruit God's Word produces, where would I get enough paper and time? The devil is called the master of a thousand arts. But what shall we call God's Word, which drives away and brings to nothing this master of a thousand arts with all his arts and power? The Word must indeed be the master of more than a hundred thousand arts. And shall we easily despise such power, profit, strength, and fruit—we, especially, who claim to be pastors and preachers? If so, not only should we have nothing given us to eat, but we should also be driven out, baited with dogs, and pelted with dung. We not only need all this every day just as we need our daily bread, but we must also daily use it against the daily and unending attacks and lurking of the devil, the master of a thousand arts.

Large Catechism, Introduction

Initially, our Concordias existed for the training of church workers. Tuition was supported by the offerings of our members. In the mid-20th century, the leaders of our synod looked at the growth trends for the previous century, and noticed that we were on track to have nearly 6 million members by the year 2000. Obviously, such a large church would need a large and active system of junior and senior colleges. So they set one up. And they did this just as two things happened: 1) Immigration from Germany pretty much fell to zero, and 2) So did the rate of population growth by births in middle America. The synod never reached 3 million members. But we had structures in place for a church twice that size. What did this mean? Normally this would have meant a rapid re-thinking of the system and a consolidation of our Concordias. But we managed to expand them just as college became a way of life for every American. There was a huge market for colleges and Universities. Our Junior colleges sought senior college, and then University status. Of course, each Concordia produced a fair number of church workers, so there was always a large constituency at conventions who would fight for their alma mater. That's not bad: esprit de corps is a good thing. But it meant we didn't need to make hard decisions, and so we didn't make them. Now they are being made for us. Two Concordias have been closed. A third has been absorbed by one of her sisters, keeping only nominal independence.

One of the side-effects of the COVID crisis will be the popping of the college bubble. We can either 1) let the Concordias individually bleed to death, offering to back ruinous and unsuccessful loans that will drain our equity and make them worthless assets 2) Make a specific plan moving forward that looks at what the LCMS actually needs from her schools (programs, majors, facilities to achieve these things) and how best to provide those with the resources we have available.

We need to look at the need for various commissioned workers. How many teachers, DCE's, DPM's, Deaconesses, etc. are likely needed in the future? What sort of training is required to meet that need? How many graduates are serving in their field of training after 10 or 20 years? We don't need mirror image tracks at all of our Concordias. Specialization of smaller programs at specific schools can not only save money and make oversight easier, but also insure we are meeting the needs of our congregations.

Is there a place for a Concordia that provides a unique Lutheran education for those entering secular professions? I think there is. I think there is a place for a trade school as well, to provide young Lutherans with the ability to enter the skilled trades as an educated citizen who has a thorough grounding in Lutheran doctrine so he can teach his family.

For too long we have played the world's game of "education for education's sake" with no consensus even about what constitutes a proper education. Increasingly Marxist ideals are being taught to our children. We need to settle on a Christian model of educating our people, and offer practical and scholarly education that matches our confession, instead of conflicting with it. This will mean fewer Concordias – but Concordias that are clearly and specifically focused on the Word of God, the education of the young, and preparation specific fields of service to our neighbors. Painful decisions must be made. But we can no longer offer 8 mirrors of the local public colleges – including their secular and atheistic governing philosophies. Those days are over, and if we move forward boldly and faithfully, I say good riddance to them.

Concrete Proposal :

Distinctively Luther Education that prepares workers for the church & prepares Lutherans for other careers.

In all cases, making sure we clearly confess Christ to the world.

There will be an initial meeting of the Presidents, Board of Regent Chairmen, and CFO of each Concordia University in the system. It will also include the Presidium of Synod, the CUS Board, and the Synod Treasurer.

At this meeting each University will present a report indicating their assets and liabilities (financial and otherwise) including but not limited to long-term contracts with vendors and any stipulations that would allow renegotiation of those contracts, their long term plans, long term needs, and long term prospects. Any liabilities intentionally left out of this report will be given no

consideration by the synod or her agencies for assistance at a later date. (No hiding problems!)

Long term contracts that are detrimental to the long term health and wellbeing of the University will have an attempt at renegotiation, to hopefully prevent another sudden closure as with Portland.

After this meeting, the President of Synod, Presidium and CUS Board will meet, including the Presidents of the University as necessary and appropriate, to discuss:

Prospects for each of our schools (short and long term),

Needs of the synod (short and long term). “Needs” here means not only the need for church workers, but also the need for an educated Lutheran laity that can work in our congregations and our synod, and serve as citizen-leaders in their communities.

Availability of Lutheran Professors in secular fields – i.e. the sciences, arts, etc. – to ensure that we provide a distinctly Lutheran education, not merely Lutheran oversight of otherwise secular or generically Christian teachers.

Potential for including trade schools in the Concordia system, or converting one or more Concordias to Lutheran Trade Schools.

Actual Mission potential of our Concordias, using available historical data on number of non-Lutherans who became Lutheran from attending a Concordia.

Programs which are inimical to the Christian faith and our confession will no longer be supported. Faculty from those programs who can teach in another department, will be offered a position, with the following understanding:

All faculty will be expected to teach classes in accord with our Confessional Commitment (Scripture, Book of Concord), and live according to the Ten Commandments. We will need to provide outplacement services – even long term ones – for faculty that are not Lutheran and do not wish to abide by this. Except in cases of incompetence, financial emergency (RIF, etc.), or refusal to find new employment, faculty will not be terminated under this section. They will be peacefully released to other institutions as much as we are able.

The Concordias will be refocused as institutions of Lutheran Higher Education, and the education at all levels will be explicitly Scriptural/Lutheran.

Concordias which, in the opinion of the CUS/Presidium, in consultation with the President and Board of Regents, will not be financially viable within the next 5 years, and can not be repurposed for other use in our synod, will be offered a one-time option to exit the synod, as long as none of their debt is guaranteed by the synod, and the synod incurs no liabilities, nor continues to have any existing liabilities toward them. The only condition is that, for branding purposes, they may not use the name “Concordia”. The synod will pay reasonable costs for a study of rebranding for them.

Schools which remain open will be given an assessment regarding their administrative structure, making it as lean and adaptable as possible. This will include consideration of removing themselves from federal funding. Compliance costs with federal mandates are enormous. What options would we have if we adopted an independent funding model? (i.e. The Hillsdale Model) Is it possible or desirable for us to do this? Would losing federal funds be made up for by the increased efficiency and desirability of our institutions? We need to explore this.

Doctrinal Unity

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4

It says Church catholic, in order that we may not understand the Church to be an outward government of certain nations. Rather, the Church is people scattered throughout the whole world. They agree about the Gospel and have the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same Sacraments, whether they have the same or different human traditions. The explanation appearing in the Decrees says, “The Church in its wide sense embraces good and evil.” Likewise, it says that the wicked are in the Church only in name, not in fact. The good are in the Church both in fact and in name. To this effect there are many passages in the Fathers. For Jerome says, “The sinner, therefore, who has been soiled with any blotch cannot be called a member of Christ’s Church, neither can he be said to be subject to Christ.”

Apology 7 & 8

One of the few failures of the Harrison Administration was the Koinonia project. I sincerely wish it could have worked. There were a number of reasons for the failure. I deeply respect Vice President Mueller and his work. But there was a doctrinal decision made early on that haunted the project and pretty much guaranteed its failure.

At the end of the previous administration, a report was issued that said the disunity in our synod was because of those who prioritized doctrine above the faith we share in Christ. Unity of faith is one thing (given by God, shared by all Christians), while concord of doctrine is another (only for those who agree in every doctrinal article.) This is not only a lie, it is a diabolical one. Doctrine is the teaching(doctrine) of the same Jesus we believe in (faith). Doctrine and faith can no more be separated than can the divine and human natures of Christ. Sadly, in an effort to be conciliatory, the report was included in the Koinonia background materials. But even that was too much. The corruption of that false teaching infected every aspect of the Koinonia project.

When my district considered going to New York to speak to the pastors of the Atlantic District, VP Mueller spoke to our pastor’s conference about it. He believed that study of God’s Word would solve the issue. It was certainly the only thing that could. And then he added, “in my time as District President, if agreement could not be reached, it became obvious what needed to happen.” He wouldn’t elaborate on that, or commit to removing anyone. Nor should he have. Everything he said was correct. The Word of God was sufficient in each case.

But then, as we began to get pre-meeting materials, the corruption of the COP report started to seep into the process. By the time our flights landed, “We must look at the Word of God, come what may” was turned into “We all took the same vows and so have the same doctrine.” But this is precisely the point that the Koinonia project was supposed to discuss. Vows do not make one faithful. Adherence to them does. Claiming Unity of faith because of an outward rite (vows) was exactly the sort of popish false teaching that the Reformation tried to correct. If Vice President Mueller is to have a legacy in this church, it must be a return to the foundational principles he brought to our district, not to the false teaching that was foisted upon him, and that he did his best to work with, but ultimately, could not salvage. No one could have. It’s easy to see in retrospect, but at the time, it seemed a necessary concession. It was poison.

Doctrine is the teaching of Jesus. Anyone who is not united in that is not united with what Jesus taught. To say “doctrine divides” is to say “The things Jesus taught divide.” This is true – Jesus said so. But to then say such division is problematic, and must be ignored or passed over, is to ignore the word of Jesus himself. As an example, we can’t be united with those who deny the word of Jesus “This is my body.” It’s painful to tell a loved one they are wrong. But the other option is to deny our Lord Jesus. And the tears we will weep if we do that will be far more bitter.

The Koinonia Project was destined to fail not because of bad motives on the part of President Harrison or Vice President Mueller. It was destined to fail because they were essentially cornered into accepting a report that made doctrine – the teaching of Jesus – less than faith in him. But faith must have an object, and if there is faith there is a confession - a doctrine. Without that, the church would have fallen away from Christ in the Judaistic controversy already during the time of the apostles. Saint Paul calls those anathema that teach any other Gospel – any other doctrine – from what Paul taught. Fortunately, the church at Jerusalem, at Nicaea, at Augsburg, at Altenbrug, and even at New Orleans all stood for the proper teaching of God’s Word. We must return to such an understanding.

We are not united in doctrine. That’s a hard truth, but it must be spoken. We don’t live up to the scriptural standard. Open communion is regularly practiced, we have significant problems with the role of men and women, our seminaries allow divorced men to be certified as pastors, we have districts that continue to push the unscriptural practice of so-called lay ministry, Intinction is regularly practiced despite the clear word of our Lord “Take Drink”, and now some are claiming that video communion can replace the scriptural principle of “the assembling of ourselves together.” We need to have serious discussions about our doctrine and practice. We can no longer continue as a house divided. I’m not suggesting a witch hunt or a series of heresy trials. We’ve had a lot of years of bad catechesis, and Pastor Harrison has, in the last decade, instructed

patiently and faithfully as he has been able regarding those matters that have come before him. But at some point, we need to be honest that things are not calm. There are divisions, and we need to face those honestly from all sides. We can not limp between two opinions forever. Vice President Mueller was correct: We must submit ourselves to honest conversation under the word of God. And we must be ready to go where that word leads.

Concrete Proposal :
Confessing Christ in all we do, and looking to Scripture Alone to settle disputes.

Theological Unity

The synod will undertake a three year study of The Augsburg Confession and the other confessional documents specifically with reference to what they teach about controverted issues. At the end of that time, a statement will be developed which addresses controverted issues in our synod, following the path of the Reformers: What is at issue, what we accept, and what we reject. The pattern for this was set by Vice President Mueller and President Harrison. But the implementation failed because nothing was ever publicly presented to the church, and the discussions were always private, there was no involvement by the wider church. This meant that no statement was ever offered to the church identifying controverted issues and speaking the Word of God to those issues. We need to publicly address our differences. Pastors of the synod, as part of the study of the Book of Concord, will be asked to identify issues which are controverted at all levels. We will study those issues under the Word of God. We will hash out our differences, stating areas where we agree, areas where we disagree, what the Word of God teaches, and what it doesn't. In the end, the Word of God will be the basis for any decisions made.

For too long it has been true that we are a synod united by a common health and retirement plan. That must change. There must be unity of doctrine. But if we are to risk division by discussing those differences honestly, neither can we abandon workers who have labored in the vineyard in good faith with the promise of health and retirement plans. That would be an injustice. There must be a way – and this will be a difficult and fine line – to allow men or congregations who have departed from God's Word over the years because of *laissez faire* discipline and lax doctrinal supervision to leave peacefully without risking the health or well being of their family. We must explore options in this regard, but then we must be honest that we are not united. Other District presidents have begun recommending peaceful division of the synod into like-minded groups, with the multiple synods remaining in fellowship. The latter is obviously a wish that can not be. But we must do everything in our power to ensure that workers are not left without the ability to care for their loved ones. This will require a high degree of sensitivity and sacrifice on the part of all. In Christian love, we owe that much to each other.

I also believe that an honest study of the Word of God will in many cases result in renewed and growing unity. This has happened to a certain extent under President Harrison at the synod level. Increasing appreciation and use of the hymnal, a return to basic principles outlined in the Small Catechism, etc. Thanks to Be to God for such results! That is the goal of any conversation we have under scripture. But however it ends up, it's time to have a serious conversation under Scripture about issues which, even now, continue to divide us. We must stop kicking the can down the road, while pretending there is no can.

Synod Structure

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

2 Timothy 4

The authority of the Keys, or the authority of the bishops—according to the Gospel—is a power or commandment of God, to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer Sacraments. Christ sends out His apostles with this command, “As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you ... Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld” (John 20:21–23). And in Mark 16:15, Christ says, “Go ... proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation.” This authority is exercised only by teaching or preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments, either to many or to individuals, according to their calling. In this way are given not only bodily, but also eternal things: eternal righteousness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. These things cannot reach us except by the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments, as Paul says, “The Gospel ... is the power of God for salvation to everyone that believes” (Romans 1:16). Therefore, the Church has the authority to grant eternal things and exercises this authority only by the ministry of the Word. So it does not interfere with civil government anymore than the art of singing interferes with civil government. For civil government deals with other things than the Gospel does. Civil rulers do not defend minds, but bodies and bodily things against obvious injuries. They restrain people with the sword and physical punishment in order to preserve civil justice and peace. Therefore, the Church’s authority and the State’s authority must not be confused. The Church’s authority has its own commission to teach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments. Let it not break into the office of another

Augsburg Confession, 28

Rearranging synod structure at the International Center is a bit like rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic. It doesn’t solve the real problem, but it gives you something to do for a while before reality hits, and it makes you feel better because they really do look better this way.

What does the church really need from her national office. This is how I see it:

We don’t need “congregational services” officers (or whatever variant we are calling them these days) that do not serve a parish, and that are duplicates of what is done in most districts anyway. When a new Stewardship Director was called, he refused to leave his congregation. So did the other men that were called, because if you don’t have to plan a congregational budget each year, and

then live with it, you not only quickly fall out of touch, but its difficult to maintain credibility. The current stewardship office is the most efficient, faithful, and useful it has ever been. This is a model for synod service to congregations – taking the best and most creative from among our corps of faithful parish pastors, and connecting them to pastors who could use advice and instruction. No one is good at everything. Rather than setting up self-appointed office drones as experts, the synod works best when she brings together those who can teach on a topic with those who want instruction. The synod should serve as more of a networking center to offer resources from congregation to congregation, instead of a building filled with non-congregational experts. We can't afford it anymore, and we should stop trying. It is long past time to acknowledge that the experts are not in office buildings, but in the pulpits of our congregations. This needs to be the model for district resource officers as well. District offices should not have any full-time "expert" executives. If they won't relinquish them willingly, the new bylaws under proposal #1 will solve the problem.

We do need accountants. We do need people who know international laws about work and travel regulations for our foreign missionaries. Providing essential paperwork and red-tape support for workers in the field is necessary. I'm not convinced it takes several full-time pastors as executives to accomplish it. Find people who are good at paperwork. The same goes for accountants, etc. We need lay-people who are competent in these positions. Our synod's unrestricted dollars are in free fall. Make sure each dollar goes to a qualified and essential worker who serves a specific function in supporting workers in the field who spread the seed of the Gospel by preaching and teaching. The goal is not producing pamphlets and glossy inserts. The goal is using congregational dollars to pay for the boring but necessary parts, so the missionary dollars raised can go 100% to support the work of a missionary in the field. And if this means hiring someone to get the word out via glossy inserts, then let's do that. But again, that's not a pastoral position. Pastoral oversight (by parish pastors) of office workers who do office work can be effective. The Wyoming district puts on an annual evangelism conference with attendance that would make most larger districts envious. And we do it with only part-time help and a volunteer committee.

Concrete Proposal :

A synod that serves and supports congregations, and offers practical help for the work of the church.

Much of this is covered under proposal #1. No pastors would work in the International Center full time. Nor would they be deployed in Congregations. Congregations would provide the workers, and they would be deployed part-time for the synod. The synod offices would be used only for support personnel as needed. This would mean a significant reduction in personnel.

Because we need people to work through the administrative aspects of our various mission work (Mercy Work and Gospel Outreach) we would have qualified laity who would handle the administrative / paperwork aspects of this. But even they could be deployed into congregations – perhaps working near the ordained executives and their congregations.

An evaluation of personnel and space requirements would be undertaken. The Synod owns three major properties in the Saint Louis area: The International Center, CPH, and Concordia Seminary. How much space is really needed, and how do we best use it? Would it be beneficial to move the IC to one of the other properties, or to move those other properties to the IC? Would it be better to sell the IC and obtain a more modest building? Or is the IC right-sized for our needs? Full time employees of the synod would only be administrative and only as needed for specific and easily explained and understood reasons of Gospel outreach (in the case of International Missions) or congregational support (in the case of National Mission).

Other Challenges

Restructuring While Clearly Confessing Christ to the World Showing Compassion & Caring for all workers

There are several other areas where we have followed worldly models of operations and sought out worldly models of success. There may not be a specific scriptural mandate, but we have drifted from the wisest and most faithful practices. The time has come to evaluate the following and look to reform for leaner, more wise, and more faithful operation.

Government and the Church

The COVID crisis caught us flat footed. There had not been an actual pandemic for nearly a century. The plagues of the past had been forgotten. Little was written about what the church did then because it seemed like we had advanced past all that. It turns out that so little had been written because the church responded to previous plagues by continuing to do what the church always does: Gather to hear the Word and receive the sacrament, and then show love to our neighbor in need.

The only example we had in living memory was the flu pandemic of 1918. At that time, some churches did close – but the closures were brief, localized, and in response to widespread illness in a specific place.

The closures of 2020, in contrast, were widespread in response to localized illness. Having worked for generations with local governments to provide services to the needy, a level of trust was established, and the government bet it all on telling us to close our doors for the common good.

In retrospect, we should not have been so trusting. What we now know is that the infection rate and death toll are both lower than first predicted. The first few weeks – ostensibly to flatten the curve – stretched into months of draconian measures designed to control the uncontrollable at immense cost and with little actual evidence that the measures were necessary or effective.

Having had opportunity to study the scriptures and the history of the church in this, it is now clear that there must be basic principles of conduct going forward:

The church will continue to minister to her members, and will meet to receive the Word and Sacrament using whatever means are at our disposal to do so. It may mean less than ideal circumstances. But the church must continue to do the thing for which it was called: Preaching the Gospel of forgiveness and bringing the Sacraments of salvation to those who need them. We can not live without “every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” And we will not again “Neglect the assembling of ourselves together.”

The church needs to comply, as far as she is able, with local mandates – even when those mandates are unjust. But government oversteps her God-given

boundaries when she dictates to the church how the Gospel is to be preached or the sacraments administered. Disobedience against such ungodly laws does not violate the 4th commandment.

Recent rulings of the Supreme Court regarding male and female have made clear that the church and her members will soon “be counted worthy of suffering for the name” of Jesus. We must be prepared, if it does come to pass. It may mean losing our jobs, having our property and even our liberty taken from us. We can not deny Christ Jesus, or the word of truth which he speaks in the Holy Scriptures. We will continue to confess that truth, even as we show love to our neighbor in need as we are able. We must prepare our members for the coming trial (unless our Lord relents in his judgment), and we must be prepared to sacrifice to help those who suffer because of it, “especially those of the household of faith.” This is a need which the synod and her local districts must be ready to address in the coming years: Those who have lost all not because of flood or fire, but because of their confession of the truth. And we must stand with those who suffer unjustly for that, and offer them what support we can as they are tested and proved true.

Conventions and Bylaws of the Synod

At one time the synod met each year. We had twelve congregations. Eventually, the synod met every other year, alternating with district conventions. Now we have a three year cycle. There doesn't seem to be a reason for it, other than it is one more than 2, and they wanted to increase it a little. It has not changed in 50 years, despite constant proposals to do so. The convention costs thousands of dollars a minute. A four year cycle reduces convention costs to the national synod by 1/3 – and also reduces them at the district level. It gives a longer period of service for officers between conventions, and allows for proper implementation of proposals. Currently, with a three year cycle, there is only 18 months for discussion, implementation and evaluation of any changes before the next round of district conventions gives feedback. This isn't enough time. We're always tripping over our own schedules to accomplish anything.

The greater truth is this: We shouldn't need to review and revise our bylaws every 3 years. If that is necessary, they are too complex and too poorly written. The section on removing someone from the roster of synod is longer than the similar section of canon law for the Roman church – and men get doctorates in canon law. The tail is wagging the dog. Simplified bylaws that give direction and allow flexibility are needed. A complete review of the bylaws and their purpose is needed to operate more nimbly and with more stability.

Roster Status

For too long roster status has been unclear even as to intent. Men who were not serving were oftentimes candidates, even though they were not seeking a position. Others were seeking a position, but were “Aged out” and listed as inactive. It was simplified to three statuses, but this increased the confusion. Now all inactive pastors were listed as candidates, even those who were not seeking a call. Oftentimes, District Presidents will say a candidate member is not really eligible for a call because of various reasons. This tortures language and causes confusion for our member congregations, leaves candidates confused and often creates bitterness and resentment. It also makes it more difficult for candidates to be considered for a position.

There should be four categories of roster status, each clearly indicating the status and intentions of a member:

Active: working in a congregation.

Emeritus: Retired from service.

Inactive: Formerly active members who are not serving a congregation for a time but who plan to return to service at some point.

Candidate: Members who were actively serving at one time, and wish to return to active service, or members who are newly eligible and are not yet placed.

All four statuses would be without limitation as to time, beyond an annual review for Inactive or Candidate members, to determine whether their status has changed, and whether they still meet the requirements for eligibility.

Inactive will include those who are neither serving nor seeking a call, such as those who are continuing full time education, on disability, or are for some personal reason unable to consider a call at this time. Those who no longer meet the qualifications for ministry (as outlined in 1 Tim 2) are not included in this list.

Candidate members are those who are eligible at any time to receive and consider a call. There is no restriction for service, either explicitly or implicitly for candidate members.

An additional sub-category, “Restricted” is for those who are still on the roster, who for personal reasons do not meet the qualifications listed in 1 Tim 2, but may at some point may meet them again. “Suspended” status will be absorbed into this one. It will be a temporary status, imposed for a maximum of 6 months at a time, and subject to regular review by outside evaluation.

Regarding removal from office, the 1992 system (Dispute resolution) was unable to handle the clear lines which must be drawn between fitness and unfitness for the ministry. The current system, imposed in the wake of Dr. Benke’s unjust acquittal was designed to make removal all but impossible, not lead to either justice nor faithfulness. Reform attempts in the past few years

have only made this system more over-built, not more competent. Procedures for removal from the roster will be replaced with one modeled on the pre-1992 adjudication system. The only legitimate complaint against it was that it was costly. A new, less costly version will be developed and implemented following biblical principles.

Concordia Plans

The cost of health care is strangling our congregations. Pastors have a low-activity level / high stress job. This leads to health problems. The demographics do not help: Many pastors are older (second career pastors are more than 50% of seminary graduate, and have been for decades). This means older, less healthy people buying into the plan. And the loss of two Concordias, with potentially more on the way will only skew this further. With not enough young healthy pastors paying in, the cost of health care will spiral out of control even more than we have already seen. Government regulations have made cutting costs almost impossible. The Plans have modeled their options in the last few years after state exchange plans, making insurance more costly, and providing fewer benefits.

Something that is unsustainable won't be sustained. Our current health insurance is not sustainable long term.

There may be no good options. This may be unsolvable. But congregations can not keep paying rapidly increasing premiums, and workers can not afford increasingly expensive deductibles and copays. It's not a problem that is unique to our synod. Health Care consumes an increasing percentage of our nation's GDP. We can not expect to be the one exception to the economy around us.

But we need to look at options for long-term sustainability. What alternatives do we have, and what would that look like? What would it cost congregations? What benefits or drawbacks would there be for pastors? What about alternative models of health care, instead of offering whole insurance plans: Supplemental insurance in conjunction with state exchange plans, Good Samaritan plans, simplifying plans for coverage, increasing the benefit of healthy living options (exercise, weight loss, etc.) to encourage better use of our funds. This problem is not going to be solved easily. Federal and state regulations have made a thorough mess of things. But we need to do more than simply continue to offer lower-benefit plans that endanger our workers, providing coverage with potentially catastrophic co-pays, while slowly bankrupting congregations.

District Structure

Prior to 1971, districts of the LCMS were flexible. Boundaries changed often to meet changing needs. Since 1971, no district boundaries have changed significantly. Offices were built, and regions of influence settled in. District structure now mirrors many of the synod offerings. One of the biggest arguments against restructuring districts is real estate investments that prefer the status quo. We need to reevaluate this mindset.

Moving District Presidents back to the parish will, almost of necessity, mean reconfiguring districts so they are smaller. Growth in some areas of the nation mean we have District Presidents “overseeing” 500 congregations, pastors, teachers, etc. If you had a congregation with 500 members, you would likely have a second or even third pastor to help. Districts can cover hundreds of miles - far beyond the ability for one man to provide "Ecclesiastical Supervision". Circuit visitors can assist. But the bylaws as written place the responsibility on the District President and NO ONE ELSE. That’s too much for anyone to handle. Some districts have gotten significantly smaller over the years. Other church bodies manage to keep their officials in the parish with smaller regions of oversight – likely 50-75 congregations each. It’s time to re-asses our needs: Districts are about visitation. If a District President can not visit the congregations he serves, readjustment is needed. A district structure that is leaner, smaller, and more focused on Lutheran visitation will be implemented.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is this?

It's a reform proposal for the LCMS.

Who are you?

I'm Lincoln Winter, pastor of a tri-point parish in Southeastern Wyoming and Northern Colorado. I've been in the LCMS my whole life: graduated from LCMS grade school, high school, university, and seminary. I've served as a pastor in the LCMS for 22 years. My interest is actually NOT administration - it's catechesis. You can see my work here: teachthesethings.wordpress.com. I also have a blog, which you can look at here: predigtamt.wordpress.com. This proposal isn't about me. It's about steps our synod must take in order to move forward and stop getting blindsided by every crisis that comes our way.

Why publish this as a webpage instead of working through our synod's regular procedure?

Because any proposals for serious reform are either omnibussed into obscurity, or rewritten to encourage the status quo. The status quo can not continue. We've lost two (now three) Concordias. Another major restructuring of the International Center is in process. Does anyone seriously think that's the end of it, or that either of those things solve our problems?

Are you going to be publishing recommended resolutions?

No.

Why not write resolutions?

Because resolutions for reform go through floor committees and are converted into studies. The studies report back three years later, the committee is thanked for their work, and that is the end of it. We had a district reform committee in 2010. It resulted in no reforms to district structure. We've had committees to study the name of synod – the name did not change; the nomenclature of the synod – the nomenclature did not change; the procedure for electing delegates – that did not change, etc.

Similarly, we have had synod officers who wanted to change the election of the President – it changed. They wanted to change the election of the Vice Presidents – it changed. They wanted to change the structure of the IC. It changed. They wanted to change the synod to have regional representation on the Preasidium – and we do.

Like it or not, reform proposals from the grassroots generally fail. Reform proposals from synod officers usually succeed, insofar as any reforms have succeeded in our synod.

If the goal isn't resolutions, what is the goal?

To get our synod officers on board with major reforms before we hit a wall. Selma closed in 2018. Portland in 2020. We don't need a study commissioned by the 2022 convention, to report back with recommendations for implementation to the 2025 convention, to be implemented over a three year period ending in 2028, by which time they will have been forgotten, not implemented. How many of our schools will be left? How much more damage will there be in all areas of our Life Together by then?

We have time to fix some of these problems – maybe, and even then, only just. Unless someone in a position of authority is willing to take on the mantle of reform, any reforms will die long before they are implemented, and if they are implemented it will be long after they are useful.

I am calling on the leaders of our synod to take up these reforms now.

What if no one takes up the mantle of reform?

Unless and until a leader in our synod takes up the cause as his own, nothing will change.

I have no idea who that man is. I pray it is President Harrison. If he does nothing, there will be continued cuts to the corporate structure when the money runs out again, and there will be more closures of Concordias. The business model we currently follow will end – either because we took the initiative to do something about it and solve the problems, or because the problems overwhelmed us and stripped us of our worldly ambitions and pretensions. The synod can not be maintained as is. Cracks have begun to show, not in the walls, but in the foundations of our humanly devised structures.

Do you really think this will work?

I don't have any illusions about the chances of this being adopted or implemented at this point. I know that if we want a path forward, instead of continuing down our current unworkable path, we need to return to first principles: Scripture and the confessions. A specific structure may not be mandated in scripture, but the principles scripture sets forth have been too long neglected and ignored in favor of more worldly ideals. That can not succeed.

If you don't think this will be adopted, why bother?

I am optimistic about the word of God. It will continue. Christ's church will continue. Perhaps at some point our situation will become dire enough, or enough of our worldly practice will have been stripped away, that the synod will be amenable to considering the ideas presented here as a way to rebuild and reconstitute the synod according to the word of God and in keeping with a more scriptural understanding.

This shares a title with President Harrison's paper from 2008. Are you running for office?

I am content serving in my parish for as long as I am able. I love the people and am honored each week to bring them the Word of God.

This is not intended as a campaign platform. It is an attempt to give our synod leaders a roadmap for reform – to light a fire and see if it spreads.

Were you asked to do this by some shadow group?

No. This work is my own. I've actually recommended a lot of this over the years as I've looked at one problem or another. I've gathered that work into one place, revised and expanded it. It owes a lot of its scriptural and pastoral focus to President Harrison's original "It's Time" from 2008. But somewhere along the way, those ideas got lost. It's time to find them again.

Can I reprint some or all of this?

This is offered freely to the church. Use part/all/any of it as you see fit.