

Upon This Rock

Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord, With all your graces now outpoured On each believer's mind and heart; Your fervent love to them impart. Lord, by the brightness of Your light In holy faith Your Church unite; From ev'ry land and ev'ry tongue This to Your praise, O Lord, our God, be sung: Alleluia! Alleluia!

With those words of our Opening Service's Entrance Hymn, the delegates and guests of the 66th Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod joined together in song, celebrating the confession of Jesus Christ, on which the one holy Christian and apostolic Church is built. "Upon this rock I will build my church," Jesus said, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

Having been a Voting delegate to the Convention twice, I can tell you from experience that it's not easy. Concentrating on which names are up for election at a given moment, suddenly switching gears from one issue to another, or keeping track of 'the amendment to the amendment to the motion' is exhausting work, and I am very grateful to our circuit's delegates, Pastor Doug Schalow and Joel Garbisch, for their diligent attendance and participation.

A Synodical Conventions is different from the pep rallies we've seen put on by the RNC and the DNC. Yes, we have nominations and elections, but instead of speeches we listen to theological essays and sermons that don't focus on "us," but on Jesus Christ. We don't hammer out a 'party platform' in some back room; we look to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, and determine our direction from there. We don't unite by rallying around an individual whom we hope to elect to office; our unity is established for us by and in Jesus Christ.

While we did attend to many internal matters, such as financial reporting issues, updates and corrections to our bylaws, and modification to our dispute resolution process, we also looked outward toward the global church and the issues thrust upon us by the world. Lutherans around the world continue to look to the LC-MS for help and theological guidance, which is often provided by through our seminaries. Such work led us to enter into fellowship with confessional Lutheran church bodies in Norway and Uruguay, and to recognize Lutheran bodies in Guatemala, Venezuela, Kazakhstan, and Chile as partner churches. We also affirmed our biblical confession of marriage and human sexuality (especially in light of society's swing toward homosexual marriage), and took on topics such as persecution of Christians around the world, gender identity issues, and conscientious objection for women who do not believe it right for them to be drafted into military service. (You can see all this and more at lcms.org. Look under "convention" for more information.)

But we're not just reactive. We're also striving to be proactive. A new, distinctively Lutheran personal evangelism training program is about to be released, that more of us may learn how to make Jesus known to the people around us. Working in conjunction with the ELCA and the WELS (what a partnership that is!), we'll be releasing a new film on Martin Luther and the Reformation in time for the 500th Anniversary celebration next year.

Yes, our church body, like most of our congregations, is struggling as so many drift away from God and His Word, but that doesn't mean we simply surrender the field. The battle continues! And God has called up you and me to be His soldiers, to fight the good fight at this time in this place. We might not look like much as armies go, but the power of this fighting force is not found in us, but in the mighty weapon of God's Word. Standing firm on the rock that is Christ, we go forth in His name!

Grant then, O God, Your will be done, That, when the church bells are ringing, Many in saving faith may come Where Christ His message is bringing: "I know My own; My own know Me. You, not the world, My face shall see. My peace I leave with you. Amen." (LSB 645:5)

And Coming Soon!

*As announced at and authorized by the 2016 Synodical Convention, two important resources are in development and will soon be available to us for our use: **Every One His Witness** and **re:Vitality**. To quote from the Convention Resolutions:*

“The Synod’s Office of National Mission has initiated *Every One His Witness*, a theologically sound evangelism program designed to equip Lutherans for being more active and effective witnesses of Jesus Christ in their everyday lives. . . . The *Every One His Witness* evangelism program includes elements to develop and provide resources for witnessing to people in diverse contexts, cultures, and languages in North America, including other world religions and cults as well as de-churched and un-churched people” (2016 Resolution 1-01).

“A mission priority of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is the revitalization of Lutheran congregations . . . [because] approximately 78 percent of LCMS congregations have peaked or are declining in membership and worship attendance. . . . Congregation revitalization is centered in the new life that is found in God’s Word being proclaimed in purity and His Sacraments being rightly administered.” The Office of National Mission has therefore “undertaken the development of the *re:Vitality* program to provide resources for congregations through their districts that address revitalization from a distinctively Lutheran perspective . . . at little or no cost to congregations” (2016 Resolution 1-03).

In the meantime, the Convention put forward this challenge to all members of all our congregations:

**To Honor 500th Anniversary of the Reformation by Growing in the Word and Showing Christ to the World
RESOLUTION 15-04A**

WHEREAS, In the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 we are celebrating the triumph of the Gospel, not of Martin Luther or any other individual or church body, and that the Lutheran Reformation is “*still* all about Jesus”; and

WHEREAS, The source of renewal and reformation is always in the Word, as the Lord Jesus says, “If you abide in My word . . . you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32); and

WHEREAS, Luther’s Gospel discovery was because of his personal immersion in the Word; and

WHEREAS, As we celebrate the blessings of the Reformation . . . not something that is ours alone, but is for others as well, as Dr. Francis Pieper said in his address to the Synod in 1908: “We must not forget: God is present with His grace only among the humble. He who would be something in the Church only apparently accomplishes something. And finally God casts him aside. God’s power has the unique property that it is only powerful in the weak. Let us be so minded by God’s grace that we are nothing, and that God’s grace and God’s Word are everything. God grant that we never advocate for something that is ours, but only and always for God’s Word!”; and

WHEREAS, That witness could take such forms as witnessing in our various vocations and supporting ministries of witness and mercy in our congregations, circuits, Districts, and Synod; therefore be it

Resolved, That the members of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) to commit to grow in faith themselves, personally and corporately, by reading through the entire Scriptures in 2017; and be it further

Resolved, That as we grow in the Word ourselves we would entreat the Lord to make us humble and faithful witnesses to the power of Christ’s forgiveness and mercy in a world that badly needs it.

Since growth in faith comes only through the Word, and since daily Bible reading involves establishing a habit (which can be tough to get going), I challenge you to begin working on that habit now. Pick a book of the Bible, perhaps one of the Gospels, and begin reading at least one chapter every day. When the time comes for us to start this journey through the Bible together, more resources (such as a daily reading schedule and brief intros to each of the books) will be made available.

Pastor Roser